

Getting Your Message Across

A guide to the provision of inclusive information



South Dublin County Council



INCLUSIVE INFORMATION PROVISION

Social exclusion is where certain individuals or groups do not feel they belong to their community, because of their poverty, lack of education, training or life skills. This distances them from jobs, income and educational opportunities as well as involvement in social and community networks, leaving them with little access to power and decision-making bodies. While financial poverty excludes people, so too does information poverty. This leaflet aims to assist agencies to bridge this gap.

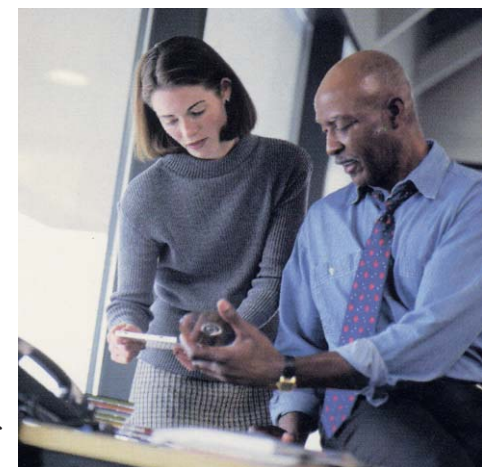
The most important thing to bear in mind when compiling information is to consider your audience. This should impact on the content of your message and on your method of communication. Before writing anything, you should be clear about:

- ▶ Who will be reading this?
- ▶ What do they need to know?
- ▶ How much do they already know?

The following facts and figures illustrate the importance of considering your audience.

Literacy

According to the OECD's last International Adult Literacy Survey (1997), about 25% of Irish adults scored at the lowest level of literacy. That is, they could only perform tasks that 'involved locating a simple piece of information in a fairly short written passage, with no distracting information and when the structure of the passage assisted the task'. Early school leavers, unemployed people, people whose first language is not English and older adults are most at risk of having literacy difficulties.



Disability

According to Census 2002, 8.3% of the population are disabled people. Over 78,000 people or nearly 2% of the population are blind, deaf or have a significant visual or hearing impairment. 2.7% of the population experience difficulty in learning, remembering or concentrating.

The corresponding figures for South Dublin County are as follows. 6.8% of the population of the County are disabled people. Over 3,600 people or over 1.5% of the population are blind, deaf or have a significant visual or hearing impairment. Nearly 2.3% of the population experience difficulty in learning, remembering or concentrating.

Non-Irish nationals

According to Census 2002, about 7% of the residents of Ireland are non-Irish nationals. For Dublin City and County, this proportion is approximately 9%. For the country as a whole and for Dublin City and County, a large proportion of these residents are UK and other European Union nationals. Nationals of other European countries are another significant group, followed by Asian nationals and then African nationals.

Irish speakers

According to Census 2002, nearly 43% of the population nationally can speak Irish. About 38% of the population of South Dublin County can speak Irish. For the country overall and for South Dublin County, about one third of Irish speakers speak the language daily or weekly.

PLAIN ENGLISH

What is plain English?

We define plain English as something that the intended audience can read, understand and act upon the first time they read it. Plain English takes into account design and layout as well as language.

Where should plain English be used?

Plain English is needed in all kinds of public information, such as forms, leaflets, agreements and contracts. The golden rule is that plain English should be used in any information that ordinary people rely on when they make decisions.

5 Writing Tips

The following 'Writing and Design Tips' have been adapted from the NALA booklet of the same name. For more 'plain English' tips, see www.nala.ie and www.plainenglish.co.uk

(1) WORDS

There's nothing wrong with long words, but why use one when a short word will do. If possible use 'every-day words'. For example, try to use the alternatives we suggest in brackets: complete (fill in), forward (send), particulars (details).

If you have to use specialised language, give definitions. When using abbreviations, define each one the first time you use it. Some organisations find it useful to print a list of abbreviations.

(2) USE 'YOU' AND 'WE'

Try to call the reader 'you', even if the reader is only one of many people you are talking about generally. If this feels wrong at first, remember that you wouldn't use words like 'the applicant' and 'the supplier' if you were speaking to somebody sitting across a desk from you. Similarly, always call your organisation 'we'.

(3) SENTENCES

We advise an average sentence length of up to 15 to 20 words. Use full stops rather than semi-colons as people are more familiar with full stops.

(4) USE PLENTY OF SIGN-POSTS

In a long document, you should consider using a table of contents. When sections are very long it is worthwhile using an introductory paragraph. Headings and subheadings also help people work their way around a page. Lists are great for breaking up information and they make the task of finding the main ideas easier. Using a 'questions and answers' format is a great way to get information across.

(5) TEST YOUR DOCUMENT

You should test your document with some of the people who are likely to use it. Individuals who know nothing about your area are sometimes the best people to pick up on unclear text. Testing may save you time and energy in answering questions later.



DESIGN AND LAYOUT

Page layouts consist of text, illustrations, and white space. It is important that you are aware how these different elements relate to each other. Many people work hard on their writing style yet pay little attention to how their words appear on the page. They don't realise, for example, that pages dense with body text are very off-putting. Use design to attract your readers and to help them find their way around your documents.

5 Design & Layout Tips

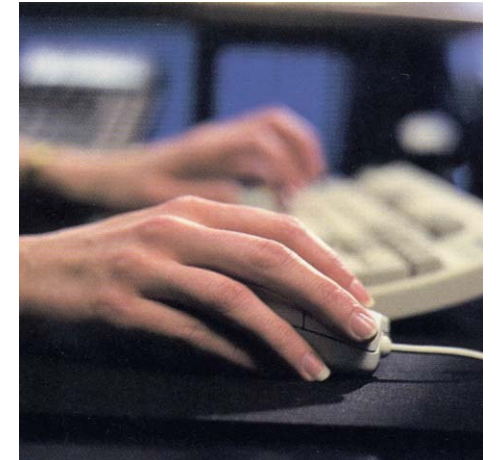
(1) TYPEFACE

Use a minimum of 12-point text. Choose a readable typeface. Two of the most popular typefaces are 'Times New Roman' and 'Courier New'. Use only one or two typefaces when you design your document.

For emphasis, capital letters or uppercase letters can be used. However, mixing upper and lower case is easier to read than upper case only.

(2) BE GENEROUS WITH MARGINS

Think about margin and column widths. Try to aim, for example, for a margin of about 25mm both at the top and bottom, and at the sides, of each page. Try not to justify text as this can lead to gaps in sentences. It is best to use left justified and right ragged margins.



(3) WHITE IS BEST

White is the best paper colour to use to maximise legibility. However a light coloured paper or a solid printed background colour can be used in an effort to make a publication more colourful. For best results heighten the contrast between the text and background.

A lot of groups use illustrations such as their logo as a background image with text printed on top of this image. As this can make text harder to read, it should be avoided.

(4) USE GOOD QUALITY PAPER

There are many different types of paper used for printing and each one reacts differently to ink. Make sure your paper is heavy enough to avoid 'shadowing', which happens when images or text on one side of a page can be seen through the paper. This makes reading difficult.

(5) GRAPHS CAN HELP YOU

Graphs and images can compliment text and offer a break from large amounts of text. Try to place all graphs near the relevant text. They can be a great way of emphasising important facts and figures. Be aware however that some individuals are not familiar with piecharts and barcharts and may not understand how they work.

WEB ACCESSIBILITY

According to Census 2002, about 44% of households nationally had a personal computer while about 34% had access to the Internet. Government departments and agencies are moving more and more towards the online delivery of public services.

For this reason, web accessibility is becoming increasingly important. Web accessibility is about ensuring that information or services delivered through websites are available to and usable by the widest possible audience.

This requires that all users can:

- ▶ **Perceive and understand the information provided**
- ▶ **Perceive, understand and operate the website navigation**
- ▶ **Perceive, understand and operate the controls and inputs**

To achieve this, the design must take into account the fact that the ability to see, hear, make inputs, read text or process information varies from user to user, across time and across situations of use.

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines are available on the dedicated National Disability Authority I.T. accessibility website www.accessIT.nda.ie

PARTICULAR TARGET GROUPS

You should consider tailoring your mode of communication to reach your desired audience. For example, it might be worth contacting representative organisations (for example, Forum of People with Disabilities) to distribute your information to all people on their distribution lists. The National Anti-Poverty Strategy regards the following target groups as vulnerable: Children and Young People; Women; Older People; Travellers; Disabled People, and Migrants and Members of Ethnic Minority Groups. See the 'useful websites' section below for some representative organisations for all target groups.

INFORMATION ACCESS FOR ALL

It is important to use clear language and illustrations so that your document is accessible to all people, including those with literacy difficulties, people whose first language is not English, young people and people with learning difficulties.

In addition to your main document, consideration should be given to the provision of information in Alternative Formats such as:

- ▶ Languages other than English (French, Russian and Arabic are key alternatives to English);
- ▶ Large print;
- ▶ For people who have Dyslexia, printing on paper that is not white is helpful;
- ▶ Braille;
- ▶ Providing information on Audio Tape (accessible to people with learning difficulties or who are blind);
- ▶ For people who are blind/visually impaired, providing information electronically in Word documents is helpful. PDF documents are very popular and suitable for many audiences. However, they are not accessible to people who are blind/visually impaired.
- ▶ Finally, under the provisions of the Official Languages Act 2003, public bodies are statutorily obliged to improve the availability and standard of public services through the Irish language. The Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs has begun to call upon individual organisations to do so. More information on this Act can be found on www.pobail.ie

LOCAL CONTACTS

- ▶ **Clondalkin Partnership** - Mari Elina Laukkanen, Equality Officer Tel: 01 4576433
- ▶ **Community Platform** - Nyamwenda Massamba Tel: 01 4623222
- ▶ **FÁS** - Harry Toher, Senior Community Development Officer Tel: 01 4045291
- ▶ **Irish Congress of Trade Unions** C/o Tallaght Centre for the Unemployed - Margaret Deaton Tel: 01 4512983
- ▶ **South Dublin County Childcare Committee** - Julia Hackett Tel: 01 4585295
- ▶ **South Dublin County Council** - Selina Bonnie, Social Inclusion Officer Tel: 01 4149000
- ▶ **South Western Area Health Board** - Pdraig Rehill, Social Inclusion Manager Tel: 01 6206300 and Julie Cruickshank, Social Inclusion Manager Tel: 01 4154700
- ▶ **Tallaght Partnership** - Clement Esebamen, Equality Officer Tel: 01 4664280

SERVICE DIRECTORY

Assistive Technology

Assistive technology includes technology that enables people to participate in the home, at work, in school and in the community. It offers alternative access to technology through e.g. the use of specialised software, switches or voice recognition systems.

Client Technical Services, Central Remedial Clinic, Tel: 01 8332206
Email: lmccormack@crc.ie Website: www.crc.ie

Audio recording of Publications

The Workhouse, Tel: 071 9134735
Email: kearnsp@eircom.net

Braille

National Council for the Blind of Ireland (NCBI),
Tel: 01 8307033
Email: ncbi@iol.ie Website: www.ncbi.ie

They need approximately one month's notice but are willing to take rush jobs in an emergency.

South Dublin County Council Library Services

* Kurzweil 3000 and optical scanning- Laura Ó Broin,
Tel: 01 4597834
Email: lobroin@sdblincoco.ie Website: www.southdublinlibraries.ie

The Kurzweil 3000 package is for those with learning or literacy difficulties and the optical scanning service is for those who are blind or have visual impairments. This service is available in County Library Tallaght, Lucan Library and Ballyroan Library.

Irish Sign Language

Irish Sign Link, Tel: 01 6080437 Email: signlink@indigo.ie

Book at least one month in advance. There are usually two interpreters per event as signing accuracy decreases after about 20 minutes



Loop Systems

When using a PA system at public meetings, ensure that a loop system is connected to the PA system. A loop system facilitates hearing at large meetings for people who use hearing aids.

- ▶ **The National Association for Deaf People (NAD),**
Tel: 01 8723800 Email: nad@iol.ie Website: www.nadp.ie

Language Interpreters and text translation

- ▶ **Bassia Bannister Language Bureau,**
Tel: 01 4950092
Email: bannister@eircom.net

Translators and interpreters for French, Spanish, Russian, and all other European languages.

- ▶ **Bowne Global Solutions,** Tel: 01 2021234
Email: jack.scott@bowneglobal.ie
Website: www.bowneglobal.com



All languages covered. Bowne provide a 24-hour, 7-day service.

- ▶ **Rhoda O'Connor & Associates,** Tel: 01 4570904
Email: raoc@iol.ie

Irish language translation service provided.

Plain English Proofing

The National Adult Literacy Association (NALA), Tel: 01 8554332
Email: literacy@nala.ie Website: www.nala.ie

Translating documents into text aimed at Children and Young People

National Children's Office, Tel: 01 2420000
Email: nco@health.gov.ie Website: www.nco.ie

The National Children's Office do not translate documents but can advise of authors who do.

USEFUL WEBSITES

- ▶ **Age and Opportunity** Tel: 01 8057709
Email: info@olderinireland.ie Website: www.olderinireland.ie
- ▶ **Combat Poverty Agency** Tel: 01 6706746
Email: info@cpa.ie Website: www.combatpoverty.ie
- ▶ **Comhairle Citizens Information** Tel: 01 6059000
Email: info@comhairle.ie Website: www.comhairle.ie
- ▶ **Equality Authority** Tel: 01 4173333
Email: info@equality.ie Website: www.equality.ie
- ▶ **Forum of People with Disabilities** Tel: 01 8786077
Email: inforum@indigo.ie Website: www.inforum.ie
- ▶ **Irish Traveller Movement** Tel: 01 6796577
Email: itmtrav@indigo.ie Website: www.itmtrav.com
- ▶ **National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism** Tel: 01 4785777
Email: nccri@eircom.net Website: www.nccri.com
- ▶ **National Disability Authority** Tel: 01 6080400
Email: nda@nda.ie Website: www.nda.ie
- ▶ **National Women's Council of Ireland** Tel: 01 8787248
Email: info@nwci.ie Website: www.nwci.ie
- ▶ **Pavee Point** Tel: 01 8780255
Email: pavee@iol.ie Website: www.paveepoint.ie
- ▶ **South Dublin County Development Board** Tel: 01 4149000
Email: sdcdb@sdblincoco.ie Website: www.southdublin.ie

MEDIA

- ▶ **Advertising Standards Authority for Ireland** Tel: 01 6608766
Email: info@asai.ie Website: www.asai.ie
- ▶ **Broadcasting Commission of Ireland** Tel: 01 6760966
Email: info@bci.ie Website: www.bci.ie
- ▶ **Broadcasting Complaints Commission** Tel: 01 6761097
Email: info@bcc.ie Website: www.bcc.ie
- ▶ **National Union of Journalists** Tel: 01 8053258
Email: liberty.hall@nuj.ie Website: www.nuj.org.uk
- ▶ **Radio Telefís Éireann** Tel: 01 2083111
Email: press@rte.ie Website: www.rte.ie