



**Scottish Accessible  
Information Forum**

# **Making Information Accessible**

**Guidelines for producing accessible printed and  
electronic information**

**June 2010**



## Making Information Accessible

The requirement for information to be accessible to disabled people is included in anti-discrimination legislation. To some people this will mean making information available in alternative formats such as braille, large print, audio or British Sign Language (BSL). Other people may also think of the accessibility of information services, for example, access into and within buildings and staff receiving disability awareness training.

These things are important. They are particularly effective if they are part of a wider strategy that includes the message:

**all written information should be as accessible as possible.**

The Scottish Accessible Information Forum (SAIF) has produced Standards advising organisations about all aspects of improving the accessibility of information. The Standards are based on a belief that everyone, not just disabled people, will benefit from making information more accessible. A copy of the Standards can be obtained from SAIF in a range of formats or downloaded from the SAIF website at [www.saifscotland.org.uk](http://www.saifscotland.org.uk)

These guidelines, based on the SAIF Standards, provide practical guidance on making printed and electronic information more accessible. Following them will benefit most people. They will be of particular benefit to disabled people who rely on assistive technology (hardware or software that helps a disabled person access information using a computer). They will reduce the demand for information in other formats.

They include general principles for all written information and specific guidance on writing and producing:

- ◆ Word documents
- ◆ PDF (Portable Document Format) documents
- ◆ PowerPoint Presentations
- ◆ Emails
- ◆ Websites.

# Making Written Information Accessible

## General Guidelines

These guidelines for accessibility apply to written information. They can be applied to all types of computer-produced information (including word processing, presentations, emails and websites). They can be applied to any software package (Microsoft, Open Office, MacOS iWork).

- ◆ Use clear plain language.
- ◆ Think of your intended audience and use terms they will understand. Explain the meaning of technical terms, unavoidable jargon and acronyms.
- ◆ Use correct punctuation.
- ◆ Use a clear plain font. Non-serif fonts like Arial are preferable.
- ◆ Avoid using a small size of text (see Specific Guidelines).
- ◆ Use left alignment for all text. Justified and centred alignment should be avoided.
- ◆ Break text up using bullet points and white-space between paragraphs.
- ◆ Avoid blocks of text in italics, underlining or uppercase.
- ◆ Provide alternative text for all non-text elements such as pictures, graphs and charts.
- ◆ Ensure good contrast between text and background.
- ◆ Do not put text over pictures.
- ◆ Avoid animated or flashing/blinking text.
- ◆ Provide a text transcript for embedded sound files.

## Specific Guidelines

The sections below cover some common types of electronic communication. The guidelines for the first 3 sections are applicable to Microsoft Word, Adobe Acrobat Professional and Microsoft PowerPoint respectively. They may be applicable to other software packages.

The guidelines for the remaining sections can be applied universally.

### Making Word Documents Accessible

- ◆ If using Arial font, use Point 12 as a minimum. Point 14 is preferable.
- ◆ If using any other font, find a Point size equal in size to Arial 12 or 14, for example Verdana Point 11 or 13.
- ◆ Structure your document using Styles.
- ◆ Use Styles to create blank space around paragraphs.
- ◆ Use the built-in table tools when creating columns of text.
- ◆ Provide Meta (extra) Information about your document.
- ◆ Keep a plain text version of documents for braille transcription and screen-readers.
- ◆ Print on a matt paper to avoid glare caused by some gloss papers.
- ◆ The text used for Hyperlinks should be specific, for example “SAIF’s website” rather than “Click here”.

## **Converting Word Documents into Accessible PDFs (Portable Document Formats)**

- ◆ Use an accessible Word document as your source document.
- ◆ Use Adobe Acrobat Professional 8 (or above) or the built-in facility in Word 2007. Earlier versions or other PDF makers may not produce accessible documents.
- ◆ Ensure 'enable accessibility and reflow with tagged PDF' is checked in the document conversion settings.
- ◆ After conversion, use the Adobe Accessibility Checker to check for possible problems.
- ◆ If available, use a screen reader to check the reading order and to check that all the content is accessible.
- ◆ When posting PDFs on the web, add a link to Adobe Acrobat reader [www.adobe.com/uk/products/reader](http://www.adobe.com/uk/products/reader) and post an alternative version in Word or Plain Text. Ideally also provide the information as an HTML webpage.

For tutorials on these 2 sections go to:

[www.adobe.com/accessibility/products/acrobat/training.html](http://www.adobe.com/accessibility/products/acrobat/training.html)

## Accessible PowerPoint for Presentation and Web

- ◆ Use the Slide Master to create the basic layout, repeated elements such as headers and footers, and the background design.
- ◆ Use the Slide Master to ensure consistent formatting. Text should be no smaller than 24 point. A non-serif font is preferable.
- ◆ Use inbuilt slide layouts or add content using 'Outline View' on the left hand panel of the Screen. Text not shown in 'Outline View' will not be picked up by assistive technology. Text in manually added text boxes will not be displayed in 'Outline View'.
- ◆ Choose a background that prints or photocopies well in greyscale. Otherwise handouts may be illegible.
- ◆ If using a gradated background, check the contrast between text and background across all parts of the slide. Note that backgrounds are lighter when projected.
- ◆ Do not put the "whole story" on the slide. Instead use bullet points and short statements. Use the notes page to expand on these. These can be used by the speaker making the presentation or by readers accessing it online.
- ◆ Only use simple graphs, charts and tables that are big enough to be read. The notes page can be used to expand on their meaning. Complex graphs should be made available as full size handouts.
- ◆ Keep graphics and pictures separate from the text.
- ◆ Keep animations and transitions as simple as possible. Avoid flickering or distracting sounds.
- ◆ Provide a link to download the PowerPoint Viewer  
<http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/downloads/default.aspx>
- ◆ If possible, provide an accessible HTML version of your presentation in addition to, or instead of, your PowerPoint presentation.
- ◆ Prior to a presentation and on request, provide a text version to people who only use screen readers to access Word or Plain Text documents. You can use the "Outline Tab" version to cut and paste into Word or Notepad.
- ◆ On request, provide full size copies of the slides, rather than the handout version.

## Good Practice for Emails

### General Guidelines

- ◆ Always clearly state who the email is from and give your contact details.
- ◆ Include your Company Registration Number or Charity Number, if relevant, and an email Privacy Policy and Disclaimer.
- ◆ Keep your subject line of between 20 - 50 characters and avoid uppercase, multiple characters or signs for money (£,\$).
- ◆ Set the line length of your emails to a maximum of 65 characters.
- ◆ Use lowercase for links and avoid breaking them over 2 lines

### Plain Text Emails

- ◆ Plain Text emails are more accessible to assistive technology.
- ◆ The layout will not change when opened by the recipient.
- ◆ Plain Text emails will only accept 'safe' characters, i.e. letters, numbers, common punctuation marks.
- ◆ Web addresses (URLs) should be written in full, i.e. [http://www....](http://www...)

### HTML emails

- ◆ HTML emails can be more visually attractive than plain text emails. However, they may not be displayed in the same way in the recipient's mailbox.
- ◆ They should comply with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) version 1.0 AA or the WCAG 2 equivalent.

### Group emails and Newsletters

- ◆ If using an Address Book or Contact List, use the BCC field (an email copy whose recipients do not know the identity of other recipients).
- ◆ A Plain Text Newsletter is usually easier to read by assistive technology than a HTML version. However, some people prefer to read a visually attractive HTML Newsletter or the same content on a webpage.
- ◆ For Plain Text Newsletters, use the Text Email Newsletter (TEN) Standard – see [www.headstar.com/ten](http://www.headstar.com/ten).

- ◆ For HTML Newsletters use the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) version 1.0 AA or the WCAG 2 equivalent – see [www.w3.org/WAI](http://www.w3.org/WAI) (Web Accessibility Initiative).
- ◆ If you use HTML, offer a Plain Text version as well.
- ◆ Do not send Newsletters to people who have not requested them.
- ◆ Always offer your recipients an opportunity to opt out.
- ◆ Include a link to a webpage with the same content as the HTML Newsletter.

## **Making Websites Accessible**

- ◆ Comply with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) version 1.0 AA or the WCAG 2 equivalent. Find out more at [www.w3.org/WAI](http://www.w3.org/WAI) (Web Accessibility Initiative).
- ◆ When tendering for a website ensure that accessibility is built-in from the start. SAIF recommends WCAG version 1.0 AA compliance as a minimum. Use “The guide to good practice in commissioning accessible websites” developed by the Disability Rights Commission and the British Standards Institute. It is also known as PAS78: 2006. [www.equalityhumanrights.com](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com) (Search: Web Accessibility).
- ◆ Create a website design that is flexible so that users can change colours, font and font size to meet their individual requirements.
- ◆ Give links a meaningful name describing what they link to. e.g. “SAIF’s Publication Page”. Do not use “Link to”.
- ◆ Add alternative text labels to all non-text elements, like photographs and graphics.
- ◆ Do regular accessibility checks on your site using the automated tools provided by the Worldwide Web Consortium (W3C) [www.W3.org](http://www.W3.org)
- ◆ Involve disabled people in the planning and testing of your site.
- ◆ Get regular and organised feedback from disabled people about the accessibility and usability of your site.

## About SAIF

The Scottish Accessible Information Forum (SAIF) works to promote and improve the provision of accessible information to disabled people across Scotland.

SAIF is funded by the Scottish Government and is based at Consumer Focus Scotland. SAIF has 2 part-time project workers and an advisory body made up of 21 people drawn from disability-led organisations and information providers.

SAIF supports the right of disabled people to have access to timely and accurate information to meet their needs. Rather than being forced to rely on others, disabled people should, as much as possible, receive information directly and in their preferred format.

SAIF has produced several guidance documents on topics relevant to accessible information. These can be downloaded from the SAIF website. They are also available, on request, in other formats - printed documents, braille, large print.

SAIF offers advice and consultancy to organisations wishing to improve the accessibility of their information. SAIF also offers in-house training on the following topics:

- ◆ Accessible Information Awareness
- ◆ Making Word Documents Accessible
- ◆ Sending Accessible Emails
- ◆ Testing the Accessibility of Websites.



**For more information contact:**

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