



National Technical Assistance Center
for Voting and Cognitive Access

GUIDE FOR CREATING Cognitively Accessible Language

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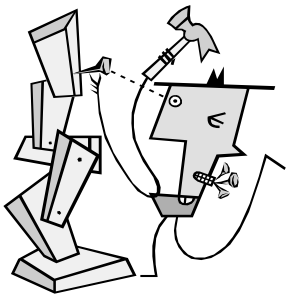
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Why It's Important to Use Accessible Language

Did you know that nearly 25% of adults in the US, with and without disabilities, have a hard time reading basic signs and labels? Nearly 30% of all adults in the US have difficulty reading a local newspaper.

Language can be the most welcoming or the most excluding form of communication. When we make language accessible to people with cognitive disabilities, we make it accessible to everyone.



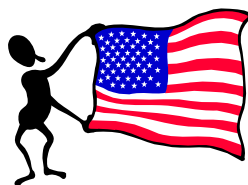
enigami, uoy era gniyrt ot
tup a esackoob rehtegot
dna eht snoitcurtsni era
sdrawkcab.



Imagine you are trying to put a bookcase together and the instructions are backwards. The material that is meant to help you is not provided in a way that is useful.

You may still be able to put the bookcase together but it takes longer and it makes it a bad experience.

Using accessible language is your chance to provide material in a way that welcomes people with cognitive disabilities into a positive voting experience.



"One vote does make a difference... We all have the right to vote"

- Chester Finn (Project Vote Video)

What Should Be Included To Make A Document Cognitively Accessible

- ★ **Make your point quickly.** The fewer words the better.
- ★ **Make a personal connection.** Clearly state why your information is important to the reader and what you want them to do.
- ★ **Use short words and sentences.**
For example, “show” instead of “demonstrate.”
- ★ **Include lots of white space.**
- ★ **Follow big words or acronyms with a definition in brackets.** Sometimes you have to use big words or “lingo”. Remember to include the definition every time even if you have already explained the word.
For example, the statement was bipartisan (not favoring either side of an issue).
- ★ **Use People First Language.** Language can really hurt people when used the wrong way. Nobody likes to be labeled! People First Language refers to an individual as a person before their label.
For example, use “she is a person with a disability” instead of “she is disabled.”
- ★ **Use pictures that go with the subject you are discussing.** Graphics can be a great tool for understanding difficult ideas and concepts.
For example, include a picture of money when talking about budgets.



Making An Accessible Document Step-By-Step Directions



Step one: Partner with a Self-Advocacy Group

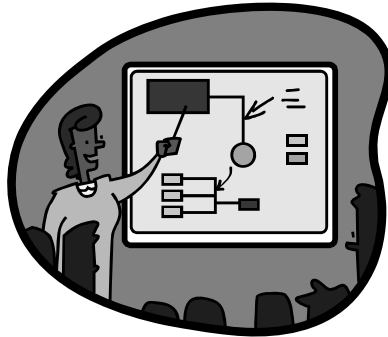
- ★ **Partner with a self-advocacy group** who is an expert at knowing what language is cognitively accessible. They can help you plan what your document should look like. For more information about partnering with a self-advocacy group, see our *Guidelines for Building Partnerships with Self-Advocacy Organizations*.

- ★ Make sure that the self-advocacy leaders who are working with you are comfortable telling you the hard truth.



- ★ **Share each draft of your document with your partnering group.**

Making An Accessible Document: Step-By-Step Directions



Step two: Plan and Organize the Text

- ★ As you write, **keep in mind whom you are writing for** and why the subject is important to them.



- ★ **Make your point quickly.** Use only the “need to know” information and remove the “nice to know” information.

- ★ **Organize the topics in an order that makes sense** from the reader’s point of view. Talk about the most important point first then discuss the background information.



Making An Accessible Document

Step-By-Step Directions



Step three: Write the Text

- ★ **Avoid technical and legal lingo.** Follow big words or acronyms with a definition in brackets. Remember to do this every time even if you have already explained the word.
For example, ADD (Administration on Developmental Disabilities)

- ★ **Use people first language.** People First language refers to an individual as a person before their disability. A disability is something that a person has, not what he or she is.
For example, state “Ann has a cognitive disability” **or** “We are a group of people with disabilities.”

- ★ **Use short words and sentences.** Check the grade level of what you write - aim for a 4th - 5th grade reading level.
First, to set-up the “Flesch-Kincaid grade level” tool, go to Microsoft Word→Tools→Options→Spelling and Grammar→Show readability statistics→OK.
Second, to check the reading level on a word document, go to Microsoft Word→Tools →Spelling and Grammar. The “Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level” will be shown at the end of the report.

Making An Accessible Document

Step-By-Step Directions



Step four: Format the Text

- ★ **Add pictures and graphics that go with your subject.** To find clipart, go to Microsoft Word → Insert → Picture → Clip Art or search the internet for images. For example, include a picture of the candidates & party symbols on the ballot.



- ★ **Use 14 or 16 point type in a large block font** (like Arial)

- ★ **Use sub-headings, bulleted lists, and bold typeface** to help the reader navigate (get through) through the document.



Making An Accessible Document Step-By-Step Directions



Step five: Do a Bipartisan Check: Make sure that you are not favoring one side of an issue.

- ★ **Ballot Measures:** Send a draft of your document to the Pro & Anti campaigns. Make sure that you have their written approval before distributing it*.
- ★ **Candidate Statements:** Send a draft of your document to the candidate's office. Make sure that you have their written approval before distributing it*. Under Federal Election Commission regulations, you cannot distribute information on just one candidate in any given race (you must have at least two candidates).

* From "Voting Advocacy" presented by Julie Anderson of Oregon Advocacy Center and Mark Phinney of Full Access Brokerage at the July 2004 Oregon Conference on Direct Supports

Example of Non-Accessible Language For a Voter's Guide

Original Language...

AMENDS CONSTITUTION: LIMITS NONECONOMIC DAMAGES (DEFINED) RECOVERABLE FOR PATIENT INJURIES CAUSED BY HEALTHCARE PROVIDER'S NEGLIGENCE OR RECKLESSNESS

RESULT OF "YES" VOTE: "Yes" vote limits recovery of noneconomic damages (defined) for negligent or reckless injury to patient by healthcare provider to \$500,000 (adjusted annually for inflation).

RESULT OF "NO" VOTE: "No" vote retains current law, which places no limit on jury award of noneconomic damages (defined) for injury caused by negligence, recklessness of healthcare provider.

SUMMARY: Amends constitution. Under current law, there is generally no limit on jury's award of noneconomic damages to patient, patient's legal representative, or patient's spouse for injury caused by healthcare provider. Measure limits recovery of noneconomic damages for negligent or reckless injury caused by an Oregon licensed healthcare provider or healthcare entity to \$500,000. Defines noneconomic damages to include pain; mental suffering; emotional distress; loss of society, companionship, services; loss of sexual relations; inconvenience; interference with normal and usual activities apart from employment. Specifies formula to adjust for inflation annually. Limitation applies regardless of extent of injuries, number of people entitled to damages, or number of defendants sued. Does not apply to wrongful death claims. Applies to suits filed after January 1, 2005. Other provisions.

ESTIMATE OF FINANCIAL IMPACT: There is no financial effect on state or local government expenditures or revenues.

Example of Accessible Language For a Voter's Guide

Created by Oregon Advocacy Center
(www.oradvocacy.org/voting)

Ballot Measure 35

Limits the money doctors must pay if they are sued for accidentally hurting a patient

What this means:

This measure would change Oregon's Constitution, our most powerful set of laws. Right now, a patient can sue a doctor if the doctor hurts him or her. A doctor who hurts a patient has to pay for things like doctor bills. A doctor also has to pay if the patient misses work and loses money because they are hurt. This will not change. But, this measure would limit the money the doctor has to pay for other things. For example, the patient could sue the doctor for pain. Or the patient could sue if he or she could no longer have sex. For these things, this measure says the doctor will not have to pay more than half a million dollars, even if a jury says the doctor should pay more.

A "Yes" vote means: Limit the money a doctor has to pay in a lawsuit for hurting a patient.

A "No" vote means: Do not limit the amount of money in the lawsuit.

How much would it cost?

There would be no cost to the state or cities for passing this measure.

Election Day is November 2, 2004