

# Inclusive and Accessible Communications



In Ireland there are 643,141 people living with a disability, or put simply, 1 in 7 people.

People with a disability experience a number of barriers to employment and education. As a result they are half as likely to be employed compared to their non-disabled peers. Developing policies which are intentionally inclusive and work to remove barriers to employment is an important step in creating equitable employment opportunities.

The way in which colleagues and employees with a disability access communications may be different to their non-disabled peers; and people with different disabilities have different needs and experience different 'barriers' when accessing information.

Accessibility is ensuring that disabled people can access your communications (website, promotions, venue materials, social media marketing etc.) and that there are no barriers that prevent this. A barrier to access might be only providing materials in hardcopy, font size 10 – or only offering one type of communication route e.g. telephone contact details but no email or post address.

Making something accessible means providing alternative means (formats or options) to access what's on offer if the 'standard' offer is not accessible.

Inclusive communications are designed to reach as broad and diverse an audience as possible with accessibility for different groups built in at the core and not an afterthought.

The best way to embed inclusive communications across your organisation is to develop an inclusive communications policy that clearly sets out your commitment to inclusion and include internal and external stakeholders in the creation process.

When thinking about developing such a policy you might ask yourself and colleagues or customers some of the following:

1. What type of communications do we issue and how frequently?
2. Who do we usually reach with our communications?
3. Who do we want to reach with our communications?
4. How do we reach our stakeholders? Which channels do we use?
5. How do we anticipate the communication needs of disabled people and other diverse groups?
6. Do we provide our communications in a range of formats?
7. Are our messages clear?
8. Do we use plain English?
9. Do we monitor the impact of our communications?

## Medical vs. Social Model

In 2021, Ireland published its Draft Initial Report under The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). This is underpinned by the social model of disability.

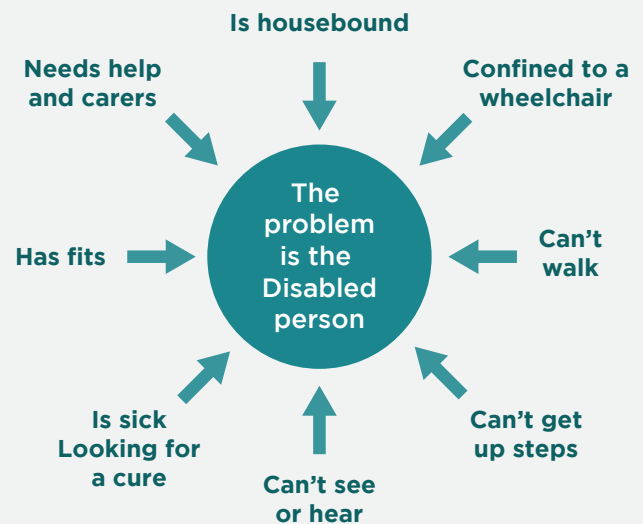
On the right we have the **Medical Model of Disability** – this model rests on the assumption of what a disabled person ‘cannot do’. For example: “She cannot walk, therefore she will never be able to work” or “He has a visual impairment, he’s unable to be an academic.”

The Medical Model of Disability will then focus on trying to “fix” the individual. This model locates the source of the ‘problem’ as the disabled person and, in doing so, places responsibility for the situation onto the disabled person and away from society and how it is run and organised. The medical model looks at what is ‘wrong’ with the person and not what the person needs

On the right is a diagram of the **Social Model of Disability** that shows some of the thinking and assumptions of this model.

The Social Model of Disability holds that people with disabilities are ‘disabled’ by the barriers operating in society that exclude and discriminate against them. Instead of focusing on the individual, under this model we must look at the barriers that exist within our systems and procedures.

### The Medical Model of Disability



This is a diagram of the traditional Medical Model of Disability, which the Social Model was developed to challenge.

### The Social Model of Disability



The Social Model of Disability states that the oppression and exclusion people with impairments face is caused by the way society is run and organised.

If a person with sight loss or low vision is using a screen reader to access social media and a promotional post does not include alt text to describe the image – the problem to fix is not the individual but steps we have missed when posting the image.

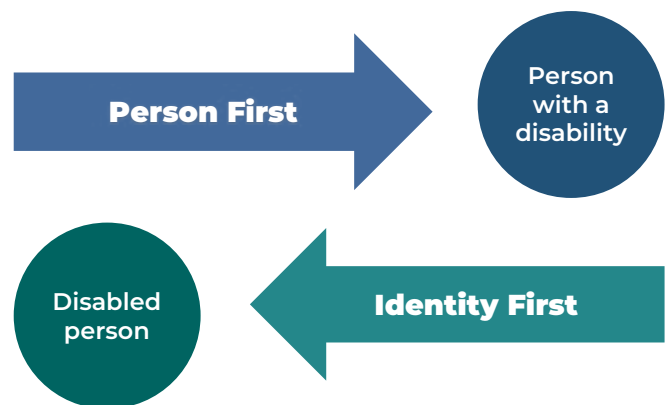
This encourages us to look at our attitudes and the structures around us as opposed to assuming the individual has any limitations.

This Inclusive and Accessible Toolkit is underpinned by the social model of disability.

## Language Matters

Language is one of the first queries that is always raised with us. People are often afraid to cause offense and worry about what language they should use around disability. Language matters and should always be respectful of others and their feelings.

When it comes to disability, some people advocate for the use of ‘people first’ language, which places emphasis on the person first and the disability second i.e. a person with a disability.



On the other hand, some disabled people prefer identity first language and say that they are not a ‘person with a disability,’ but rather they are a ‘disabled person.’ This ties in with the social model of disability where we see societal barriers and attitudes disabling the person.

Irrespective of which language is used, the person is central and should not be objectified by using language such as ‘the disabled.’ For example, you would say a wheelchair user or a person using a wheelchair. You should not say wheelchair bound. Avoid words such as sufferer or suffers from, again these all have negative connotations and place limitations on the individual.

## Communication Barriers



### Visual

- Printed documents & publications
- Inaccessible websites
- Images without descriptions
- Electronic documents (PDF, PPT, email)



### Auditory

- Face-to-face meetings, presentations, speeches
- Video or video call without captions or ISL interpreter
- Loudspeaker announcements
- People speaking with mouth covered



### Physical

- Website layout and accessibility
- Position of signage, posters and flyers
- Weight/format of printed documents



### Neurodiversity

- Complex use of language, figures of speech, idioms
- Data visualisation
- Complicated layout of websites or documents
- Lengthy communications

Creating content with a focus on accessibility and inclusivity will not just benefit those who have a disability, it will make your communications clearer for your entire audience.

## Colour

Colour is comprised of two values:

### Hue

The particular colour itself, for instance, blue, red or yellow.



### Tone

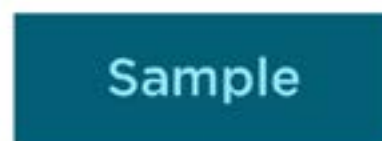
The relative lightness or darkness of a colour, for instance, pale baby blue vs navy blue.



## Contrast

The key component of legibility in communications is adequate contrast in tonal value as well as hue. Keep in mind as much as 7-8% of the population is affected by colour blindness to some degree. The example on the right uses an orange background with blue text in a similar tonal value, making it challenging to read for those with colour acuity, but very difficult or nearly impossible for those with colour blindness.

Using light colours on a dark background can work fine, the key is to choose shades with enough tonal contrast to make sure they read clearly. In the examples on the right, both are blue text on a dark blue background, however the one on the top lacks adequate tonal contrast to be read clearly so the one on the bottom would be a better choice for communication purposes.



When considering colours, we need to think about both of these elements. If preparing a document, we could use blue text on a white background, but the specific shade or tonal value of that colour will make a big difference in the legibility.

### Blue text that's easy to read

### Blue text that's difficult to read

### Blue text that's only clearly legible for some people

## Images

Visual imagery has a lot of power. In business documents, websites, online or printed promotions and social media marketing, it can draw attention, illustrate concepts and add greater depth of meaning or context to a written piece. Therefore it is critical that we communicate the full meaning of any visual element to users with visual impairments, so that we aren't leaving out an important part of the story.

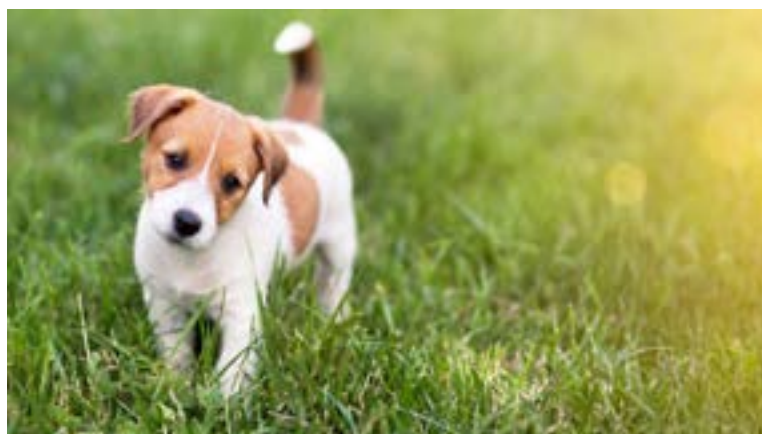
### Alt Text

Alternative descriptive text, better known as alt text, is the best way to ensure all communication is accurately conveyed for all users. Begun as an HTML function in website development, it is now a common feature of almost all business software programmes as well as social media platforms.

Twitter recently introduced a feature where a small symbol reading ALT is shown on every image or gif on twitter, drawing attention to accessibility, and reminding users to include a full written description of everything that they tweet. Each programme or application has a slightly different way to access their alt text capacity, so once we familiarise ourselves with these, we can build good habits of including text descriptions in all communications.

Example alt text:

A small brown and white puppy stands on a grassy lawn, bright yellow light shines from the right-hand side



If you are producing graphics that include text for sharing as a jpg image online, keep in mind that the full text and description of the image need to be included in the alt tag. This means that your descriptive text might become quite long, so it is advisable to keep promotional images with text as simple and brief as possible, including other critical details in the actual text of the post accompanying the image.

## Text

### Fonts

Choose a simple, clean san-serif font such as Arial, Calibri, Verdana or Tahoma for body copy, lists, and the majority of your text content. More fanciful fonts, often called display fonts, should only be used sparingly for headlines and very short amounts of text.

#### Font styles to avoid

- *Script fonts*
- **Bubble fonts**
- **DISTRESSED FONTS**
- **NOVELTY FONTS**
- *Handwritten fonts*

### Size

For screen usage, a minimum 12pt font size is recommended. It is advisable to keep a consistent font size throughout a document or presentation.

### Structure

Programmes such as Microsoft Word come with pre-set structural options called Headings, which allow text to be arranged by hierarchy of information. So Heading 1 is for your most important title information to be read first, then Heading 2 for subtitles and so on. The size of each element is larger to give visual emphasis as headings, rather than selecting the text and just increasing the point size manually. This is based on HTML5 and has been brought from web development into other programmes as it allows screen readers to structure information so that users know which elements are headings, as visual changes such as larger font size and bold text aren't identified by screen readers.

### Styling

It is generally best to avoid styling options like italic or all CAPS, as these can be harder to read and are not picked up by screen readers as mentioned above. Underlining text should also be avoided as it can be mistaken for a link in the text. The use of bulleted and numbered lists is a good way to separate information into smaller sections and will be read as such by a screen reader. Maintain consistent text alignment throughout a document and avoid justified text, as it causes odd gaps between words that disrupt the flow of reading, especially for anyone with dyslexia.



## Accessible Formats

### Printed Documents

- Consider font size, style and colour contrast
- Clear headings and structure, creating a hierarchy of information
- Use plain English, with active rather than passive voice
- Provide accessible digital versions of documents that can be used with a screen reader

### Digital Documents

- Use Accessibility checker (available with most software)
- Style with preset headings
- Check reading order and correct any items that are in the wrong order
- Alt text for photos, graphics, charts and all important visual elements
- Descriptive links, for instance: 'contact us' vs. 'click here'
- Use a clear, logical layout

### Presentations and Meetings

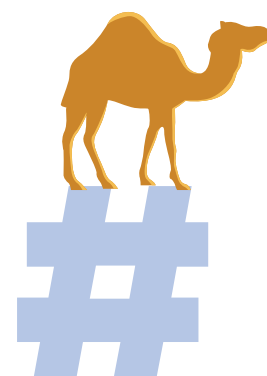
- Provide visual description of speaker at the beginning
- Create accessible Powerpoint if using slides, send file to participants afterwards
- Online: use live captions, avoid covering mouth of speaker with hands, include an ISL interpreter
- In person: consider an ISL interpreter

### Email

- Clear and consistent font use
- Descriptive link text to provide context, avoid writing 'click here'
- Alt text for images and logos
- Check attached documents for accessibility
- Offer plain text version for e-newsletters
- Provide alternative contact options such as a phone number

### Social Media

- Use hashtags in #CamelCase, so the first letter of each word is capitalised, allowing a screen reader to read each word in the hashtag correctly
- Social platforms have built in options for descriptive alt text
- All videos should include captions
- Be mindful of flashing images and animated gifs
- Keep text in online graphics minimal or split into multiple images
- Ensure shared links are accessible



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## Accessible Websites






- 1. Alternative Text used for all images, graphics and logos:** also called alt tags and alt descriptions, is the description that appears in place of an image on a webpage if the image fails to load. This text helps screen-reading tools describe images to visually impaired readers.
- 2. Colour contrast between foreground and background is sufficiently strong.** Website users who have low vision will require colour choices that adhere to the [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\)](#) standards in order to read content. In general, essential graphical objects and user interface components must have a contrast ratio of at least 4.5:1
- 3. Text re-sizes** according to user preference and users can zoom in on content up to a width of at least 320 pixels without losing functionality.
- 4. Headings are correctly used in the stylesheets,** rather than just ordinary text made to look big and bold. If the underlying code for a page's headings is correct, screen reader users can navigate a page according to its headings. They can listen to a list of all headings, and skip to a heading they are searching for to begin reading at that point. When headings are used correctly, repeated blocks of content like headers, menus, and sidebars can be skipped.
- 5. Descriptive Link Texts** are important in making a website accessible and improves SEO. For example, if you are pointing visitors to a page called "About Us": Avoid saying: "Click here to read about our company." Instead try: "To learn more about our company, read About Us."
- 6. Tables are only used for laying out tabular information** and have proper headings and summaries. This ensures that someone who is using assistive technology can access the data that is being shared.
- 7. Inclusion Statement** on the website with details of the organisation's commitment to DEI, particularly important on your careers page. This sets out the values of the organisation and ensures potential and existing employees feel they belong.
- 8. Accessibility Statement** detailing the organisation's commitment and approach to maintaining an accessible website. The organisation should include the contact details here for any accessibility issues a user might experience on their website.

## About Employers for Change

Employers for Change works with employers, providing information and advice on recruiting, employing and supporting staff with disabilities. Employers for Change is a project of the Open Doors Initiative, funded by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. To learn more about the available resources and training available through Employers for Change please visit our website [www.employersforchange.ie](http://www.employersforchange.ie), call or text us on 085 1579603 or email us at [info@employersforchange.ie](mailto:info@employersforchange.ie)






Employers for Change is part of the Open Doors Initiative network, providing pathways to employment and education for people from marginalised communities including refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, people with disabilities and disadvantaged youth, Travellers, LGBTIQI+ people, those with a criminal past and any intersectionality therein.



-  [www.employersforchange.ie](http://www.employersforchange.ie)
-  [info@employersforchange.ie](mailto:info@employersforchange.ie)
-  call/text 085 1579603
-  /EmployersForChange
-  @EmployForChange

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