

Accessible and inclusive communication

Refer to this resource:

- ▶ to prepare information, and communicate face-to-face, in ways that are inclusive to all Queenslanders.

Access to information is a fundamental right for all people so they can make informed decisions on matters that are important to them. The following information provides details on how to ensure written and verbal communication are accessible and inclusive.

Written information

Cognitive accessibility

Preparing information in an Easy English format, also known as Easy Read, can make written information more accessible for people with intellectual disability. This format uses images to support larger text and a lot of white space in the layout. For people with neurodiversity, the Easy Read format can reduce sensory overload in avoiding visual ‘clutter’ and highly patterned documents.

The Accessible Written Information (AWI) Practice Guide is an initiative of National Disability Services and includes common features of accessible written information. It assists people and organisations with preparing information in accessible formats, particularly for people with intellectual disability¹. It is also helpful to readers for whom English is not their first language.

Visual accessibility

To help ensure written information is accessible to people who have visual impairments, text needs to conform to accessibility requirements, especially in relation to minimum font size, font type, layout and contrast colour.

For people who use text-to-audio software, which reads out documents, check for screen reader accessibility by:

- ▶ showing paragraph marks and other hidden formatting symbols (Ctrl+Shift+8) or click ¶
- ▶ removing all additional line spacings ‘¶’
- ▶ using ‘Ctrl-Enter’ to create page breaks if needed
- ▶ using ‘Styles’ and ‘Headings’
- ▶ ensuring all images, text boxes and tables have ‘alt-text’ (see below)
- ▶ checking all documents using the Check Accessibility function in Microsoft Office.

Alternative text (alt-text)

Without alternative text, known as alt-text, text-to-audio software will tell the user the size of the image or text box rather than what is in the image. Use alt-text to describe the meaning or purpose of images or text boxes. Restate any words from the image or text box. This also assists people for whom English is not their first language who may use translation software.

Do not include words such as ‘image’, ‘picture’ or ‘icon’ in the alt-text as these words do not describe the image.



An example of alt-text for this image might read:

Disability Awareness: Inclusion is within everyone's ability

Close-up on the face of young woman with a disability. She is smiling with her face rested on thumb and forefinger. It is on an orange background with white font.

For a text box, such as the example below, copy the same wording into the alt-text.

Please note: this document has been optimised for screen reader accessibility and contains alt-text descriptions

Use the internet search term, 'alt-text', for more information on alternative text.

Online standards, policies and legislation

The Queensland Government online standards may assist non-government organisations to create accessible websites. Visit: www.forgov.qld.gov.au/online-standards-policies-and-legislation

Face-to-face communication

When communicating with a person with disability, treat everyone individually, with respect and consideration for their needs. While many disabilities are invisible, other people with disability require supports to meet complex communication needs.

For some people with disability, English may not be their first language, whether they are from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, or have Auslan as their first language.

Communicating with people with disability

Some general tips for successful communication:

- ▶ identify yourself and speak naturally and clearly² using a normal tone of voice — do not raise your voice unless asked to

- ▶ acknowledge them with a smile and a spoken greeting³
- ▶ avoid grasping people by the elbow. Offer your own elbow. If a person who is vision impaired or blind has accepted your offer of assistance, contact the back of their hand with the back of yours. They can then hold your arm just above the elbow⁴
- ▶ be polite and patient — do not rush the conversation
- ▶ speak directly to the person, rather than to the person with them
- ▶ ask the person what will help with communication — there are different ways to communicate
- ▶ do not pretend to understand — let the person know you are having difficulty; try asking yes or no questions
- ▶ be flexible — reword rather than repeat anything that is not understood
- ▶ only refer to the person's disability if necessary or relevant
- ▶ do not be afraid to use everyday terms like 'see', 'look', 'go for a walk', 'take a stand'⁵
- ▶ offer assistance if it appears necessary, but respect the person's wishes if they do not accept your offer
- ▶ avoid saying anything that implies the person with disability is superhuman, courageous or special for doing the same daily things that people without disability do. For example, it is okay to be inspired if they have been abseiling, but not okay to be inspired if they have made it to work today
- ▶ relax and be yourself — everyone makes mistakes; apologise if you believe you have embarrassed someone.⁶

Communicating with someone who has a guide, hearing or assistance dog

When you meet a person with a guide, hearing or assistance dog, it is important to remember the dog is working. Even if it appears the team is not performing a task, the dog is still on call and must give their full attention to the person they are accompanying.

Here are a few tips:

- ▶ speak to the person first
- ▶ keep in mind the dog has an important job to do
- ▶ know the dog loves to work and is well treated
- ▶ remember the dog is highly trained
- ▶ teach others that the dog is working
- ▶ be aware that guide, hearing and assistance dogs are allowed in public places and on public passenger vehicles
- ▶ do not talk to, call, or make sounds at the dog
- ▶ do not touch the dog without asking – and receiving – permission
- ▶ do not be offended if asked not to pat the dog
- ▶ do not feed the dog
- ▶ do not give commands to the dog – this is the owner’s job
- ▶ do not ask personal questions about the person’s disability or intrude on their privacy
- ▶ do not be offended if the person declines to chat about the dog⁷.

Under Queensland legislation, handlers and their certified dogs have access rights to public places (such as restaurants and shops), public passenger vehicles (such as trains or taxis used to transport members of the public), and places of accommodation (such as hotels and campgrounds). Certified dogs can be almost any breed and will be easily recognised by the badge on their coat or harness⁸.

Venues, transport providers and building owners must comply with their obligations under the legislation. For more information on guide, hearing and assistance dogs visit: www.communities.qld.gov.au/industry-partners/guide-hearing-assistance-dogs

References

1. Centre for Applied Disability Research. The Accessible Written Information Practice Guide: www.cadr.org.au/search-clearinghouse/research-to-action-sheets/accessible-written-information
2. Communicating effectively | Vision Australia. Blindness and low vision services: www.visionaustralia.org/information/family-friends-carers/communicating-effectively
3. Disability etiquette: www.and.org.au/pages/etiquette.html
4. Guiding a person who is blind or has low vision: www.visionaustralia.org/information/family-friends-carers/guiding
5. Communicating effectively | Vision Australia. Blindness and low vision services: www.visionaustralia.org/information/family-friends-carers/communicating-effectively
6. Better communication: www.qld.gov.au/disability/community/communicating
7. Better communication: www.qld.gov.au/disability/community/communicating
8. Guide, hearing and assistance dogs: www.communities.qld.gov.au/industry-partners/guide-hearing-assistance-dogs

For further information

All Abilities Queensland: Opportunities for all, is the state disability plan for a welcoming and inclusive Queensland. A state where people with disability are respected for their abilities and have equal access to opportunities and to contribute and participate in all that Queensland has to offer.

For more information and resources, visit: www.allabilities.qld.gov.au

Resources in this series include:

1. Creating inclusive and accessible events
2. Accessible and inclusive communication
3. Employing people with disability
4. Increasing disability awareness
5. Disability action plans and legislation
6. Increasing participation of people with disability on boards and committees
7. Accessible places and spaces