

# CAN-ASC-3.1: Plain Language Standard

## Executive Summary

The purpose of the Plain Language standard is to foster clear, accessible, and inclusive communication. This will ensure that information is easily understood by everyone, including people with disabilities.

This standard is based on the principle of universal accessibility. It also adheres to the disability community's philosophy "Nothing without us." This means that people with disabilities need to be involved in decisions that affect them.

The standard provides guidelines for creating and presenting content that is comprehensible and that can be easily found and used by diverse audiences. Such content is crucial to promoting barrier-free communication. It is also key to supporting the goals of the [Accessible Canada Act](#) and [Accessibility Standards Canada's mandate](#).

This is the first version of the standard. It was developed by the [Technical Committee on Plain Language](#), which includes experts with disabilities. The committee operates under the supervision of Accessibility Standards Canada.

The standard's requirements are organized into 9 categories. Each category addresses a vital aspect of effective communication.

## Requirements

### 1. Audience Focus

This section:

- recognizes the importance of meeting the diverse needs and preferences of the primary and secondary audiences
- recommends tailoring content for audiences with different demographic and behavioural characteristics and other traits

## **2. Content Organization**

This section focuses on:

- ensuring that content is relevant, easy to find, and well organized
- structuring content logically, using descriptive headings and providing indexes for longer documents

## **3. Content Clarity**

This section stresses the need to:

- communicate using clear and simple language
- make complex ideas more accessible by:
  - using straightforward language
  - avoiding jargon
  - using a conversational tone, where appropriate

## **4. Inclusivity and Accessibility**

This section:

- prioritizes making content accessible to people with disabilities
- promotes inclusive communication practices
- supports adhering to other guidance documents, such as the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG). That document focuses on digital content. It also recommends different formats to meet various accessibility needs.

## **5. Engagement and Feedback**

This section encourages ongoing engagement with audiences by:

- consulting with others during content development
- improving content by incorporating feedback

## **6. Language and Tone**

This section:

- provides guidelines on how to choose appropriate words and suitable sentence structure and tone
- stresses the need to communicate directly using familiar language and positive phrasing

## **7. Visual and Structural Elements**

This section:

- recommends the use of images, clear punctuation, and effective document design
- covers elements such as line length, font size, and creating alternative text for images

## **8. Digital Accessibility**

This section provides guidelines for:

- creating accessible digital content that complies with WCAG standards
- structuring and formatting accessible digital documents and websites

## **9. Evaluation and Revision**

This section emphasizes the importance of:

- regularly assessing and updating content to ensure it remains relevant and clear
- involving audiences in evaluating whether a communication meets the standard's definition of plain language

## **Other Information**

CAN-ASC-3.1 also includes additional information on various aspects of plain language communication. This information can be a valuable resource for organizations seeking to improve their communications.

This standard is a voluntary guideline. It is a major step toward helping organizations across Canada communicate more clearly and in a way that is accessible to all. It also contributes to the broader goal of achieving a Canada without barriers by 2040.