



Accessibility Standards
Canada

Normes d'accessibilité
Canada

CAN/ASC-3.1

Plain language



Note: This draft is under development and subject to change; it should not be used for reference purposes.



About Accessibility Standards Canada

Accessibility Standards Canada, under whose auspices this draft standard has been produced, is a Government of Canada departmental corporation mandated through the *Accessible Canada Act*. Accessibility Standards Canada's Standards contribute to the purpose of the *Accessible Canada Act*, which is to benefit all persons, especially persons with disabilities, through the realization of a Canada without barriers through the identification, removal, and prevention of accessibility barriers.

Disability, as defined by the *Accessible Canada Act*, means any impairment, including a physical, mental, intellectual, cognitive, learning, communication or sensory impairment — or a functional limitation — whether permanent, temporary, or episodic in nature, or evident or not, that, in interaction with a barrier, hinders a person's full and equal participation in society.

All of Accessibility Standards Canada's standards development work, including the work of our technical committees, is carried out in recognition of, and in accordance with, the following principles in the *Accessible Canada Act*:

- all persons must be treated with dignity regardless of their disabilities;
- all persons must have the same opportunity to make for themselves the lives that they are able and wish to have regardless of their disabilities;
- all persons must have barrier-free access to full and equal participation in society, regardless of their disabilities;

- all persons must have meaningful options and be free to make their own choices, with support if they desire, regardless of their disabilities;
- laws, policies, programs, services, and structures must take into account the disabilities of persons, the different ways that persons interact with their environments and the multiple and intersecting forms of marginalization and discrimination faced by persons;
- persons with disabilities must be involved in the development and design of laws, policies, programs, services, and structures; and
- the development and revision of accessibility standards and the making of regulations must be done with the objective of achieving the highest level of accessibility for persons with disabilities.

These principles align with the principles of the United Nations' *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, ratified by the Government of Canada in 2010 to recognize the importance of promoting, protecting, and upholding the human rights of persons with disabilities to participate fully in their communities.

Accessibility Standards Canada seeks to create standards that are aligned with its vision. This includes commitments to break down barriers to accessibility and abide by the principle of “nothing without us” in our standards development process, where everyone, including persons with disabilities, can expect a Canada without barriers.

Standards developed by Accessibility Standards Canada are designed to achieve the highest levels of accessibility. This means that Accessibility Standards Canada standards create equity-based technical requirements while taking into consideration national and international best practices, as opposed to focusing on minimum technical requirements.

Accessibility Standards Canada applies an intersectional framework to capture the experiences of people with disabilities who also identify as LGBTQ2+, Indigenous Peoples, women, and visible minorities. Its standards development process requires that technical committees apply a

cross-disability perspective to ensure that no new barriers to accessibility are unintentionally created. In addition, standards developed by Accessibility Standards Canada align with 14 of the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, which were adopted by Canada in 2015 to promote partnership, peace and prosperity for all people and the planet by 2030.

Accessibility Standards Canada is engaged in the production of voluntary accessibility standards, which are developed by technical committees using a consensus-based approach. Each technical committee is composed of a balanced group of experts who develop the technical content of a standard. At least 30% of these technical experts are people with disabilities and lived experience and 30% are from equity seeking groups including LGBTQ2+, indigenous peoples, women and visible minorities. These technical experts also include consumers and other users, government and authorities, labour and unions, other standards development organizations, businesses and industry, academic and research bodies, and non-governmental organizations.

All Accessibility Standards Canada standards also incorporate related findings from research reports conducted through Accessibility Standards Canada's Advancing Accessibility Grants and Contributions program. This program involves persons with disabilities, experts, and organizations to advance accessibility standards research and supports research projects that help with the identification, removal, and prevention of new barriers to accessibility.

Accessibility Standards Canada standards are subject to review and revision to ensure that they reflect current trends and best practices. Accessibility Standards Canada will initiate the review of this standard within four years of the dates of publication. Suggestions for improvement, which are always welcome, should be brought to the notice of the respective technical committee. Changes to standards are issued either as separate amendments or in new editions of standards.

As a Standards Council of Canada accredited standards development organization, all Accessibility Standards Canada standards are developed

through an accredited standards development process. These voluntary standards apply to federally regulated entities and can be recommended to the Minister responsible for the *Accessible Canada Act* (i.e., the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion).

In addition to its focus on developing accessibility standards, Accessibility Standards Canada has been a leader amongst Canadian federal organizations for promoting and adopting accessibility internal to government. Accessibility Standards Canada is the first organization in the federal government to have a Board of Directors majority-led by persons with disabilities. Accessibility Standards Canada has a state-of-the-art accessible office space for its employees, Board of Directors, and Technical Committee Members. The carefully designed accessible workspace aligns with the organization's belief in the importance of universal accessibility.

To obtain additional information on Accessibility Standards Canada, its standards or publications, please contact us:

Web site: <https://accessible.canada.ca/>

E-mail: Info.Accessibility.Standards-Normes.Accessibilite.Info@canada.gc.ca

Mail: Accessibility Standards Canada
320, St-Joseph Boulevard
Suite 246
Gatineau, QC K1A 0H3

Note: Please read the Legal Notice in [Annex D](#) before using the draft Standard. The Legal Notice has important information, including

- information relating to exclusions of liability, and
- licensing of user-contributed content.



Preface

This is the first edition of CAN/ASC-3.1, *Plain Language Standard*.

This Plain Language Standard is a mandatory (normative) Standard. It uses conventional regulatory language. Standards Council of Canada, as governed by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) guidelines, requires that standards use regulatory language so that this Standard may be classified as a National Standard of Canada.

The Plain Language Technical Committee acknowledges this regulatory language does not follow some plain language principles in this Standard. The Technical Committee is working towards a time when all standards are presented in plain language to achieve accessibility, clarity, usability, and overall effectiveness.

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0 Introduction

0.1 What is plain language?

This standard on plain language uses the [International Plain Language Federation definition](#):

“A communication is in plain language if its wording, structure, and design are so clear that the intended audience can:

- easily find what they need
- understand what they find, and
- use that information.”

0.2 Benefits of plain language

Plain language has many benefits for organizations and the diverse audiences who need and want to use their information. People in Canada and around the world access information for many reasons, including to:

- Follow instructions or fill out forms.
- Access important information and services.
- Buy products and services.

Millions of people with a broad range of disabilities face unnecessary barriers to accessing information. This standard puts audiences first by working toward removing barriers and preventing new ones.

Applying this standard has practical benefits and adds value.

Using plain language helps organizations to:

- communicate effectively and efficiently with their entire, diverse audiences, which include more than 22% of people in Canada who identify as having a disability;
- recognize the diversity of audiences across Canada and around the world, and promote inclusion;
- improve customer and client satisfaction;
- become a trusted source of useful and accurate information;
- lower the risk of accidents, injuries, complaints, and damages;

- save time and money organizations may otherwise spend to answer questions, repeat instructions, make follow-up calls, or issue new messages.

These and other benefits are documented in the References section.

0.3 Values support accessibility

The Accessibility Standards Canada (ASC) technical committee on plain language honours the obligations and applies the principles and values in these documents:

- the *Accessible Canada Act*;
- the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms;
- the Canadian Human Rights Commission;
- the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Calls to Action;
- the ISO 24495-1 Standard for Plain Language;
- the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

0.4 Principles guiding this standard

This standard incorporates principles of plain language, accessibility, inclusion, and diversity. It provides guiding principles here and guidance throughout.

People in Canada have the same fundamental right to accurate information that is easy to find, understand, and use.

Only the intended audience can say whether a communication is in plain language for them.

This standard aims to achieve the highest level of accessibility for people with disabilities, while recognizing plain language will also help language learners, people with lower literacy, Deaf people, and other audiences in Canada.

This standard counters ableism in communication. Countering ableism requires a deliberate effort to identify and eliminate barriers at both individual and organizational levels.

This standard adopts an intersectional approach to identify and address barriers to information access which are mutually reinforcing and shall be addressed to prevent one form of inequality from reinforcing another.

This standard promotes person-centred communication, putting information needs and dignity at the forefront, speaking of the person first and not the disability.

Organizations should learn from, with, and about the audiences who need information and not make any assumptions.

Plain language is an ongoing process that involves developing and revising communications based on audience needs and feedback.

1 Scope

1.1 Who will use this standard?

This standard was developed for all levels and bodies of the federal government of Canada and federally regulated industries. This standard refers to them collectively as “organizations” and talks to them directly.

1.1.1 Adoption is voluntary

This standard applies to organizations in addition to their other obligations or duties. Organizations using this standard should discover other relevant provincial and federal legislation, regulations, and standards that address accessibility issues related to different forms of communication.

1.1.2 Applies for the benefit of all people

The audiences for the communications under this standard include all people in Canada and others outside Canada who communicate with or receive communications from the organizations or federal government offices.

1.2 Plain language is variable

This standard recognizes that plain language is different from one audience to another and varies according to the form or platform of communication or language.

1.3 Applies to all natural languages

This standard applies to all natural languages and specifically refers to, but is not limited to, these languages:

- English;
- French;
- Sign languages: American Sign Language, Langue des signes québécoise, Indigenous sign languages.

1.4 Terms have consequences

In this standard, shall expresses a requirement that the user must satisfy.

Should expresses a recommendation or advice that is not a requirement.

May expresses a choice within the limits of this standard.

Can expresses permission, possibility, capability, or statement of fact.

Notes in text do not include requirements or alternative; a note separates explanations, definitions, or other information from the main text.

Notes to tables and figures that are part of the table or figure may be written as requirements.

Annexes shall be identified as normative, meaning required, or informative, so not required in use.

1.5 Use of headings to describe contents

In this standard, headings are meant to describe the content and aid in understanding the content.

1.6 Standard does not apply to all forms of communication

This standard does not apply to all possible forms or platforms of communication, or to informal conversations, works of art, or constructed languages, including mathematical languages or computer code. The organization shall track constantly evolving technologies that require adapting to meet the goal of this standard.

2 Reference publications

The following documents are referred to in the text in a way that some or all of their content are requirements of this standard. For dated references, only the edition cited applies. For undated references, the latest edition of the referenced document (including any amendments) applies.

Government of Canada

Writing Tips Plus

Language Portal

<https://www.noslangues-ourlanguages.gc.ca/en/writing-tips-plus/index-eng>

Standards Council of Canada (SCC)

Requirements and Guidance — Approval of National Standards of Canada Designation (October 2015)

International Organization for Standardization (ISO)

ISO Guide 71: *Guide for addressing accessibility in Standards, Reference*

ISO/IEC Guide 71:2014, *Guide for addressing accessibility in standards*

ISO 24495-1, *Standard for Plain Language*

World Wide Web Consortium (W3C3)

WCAG 2.0 and 2.1 (2018)

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines

For more publications, including standards and other resources that might be complementary or of interest, see [Annex C](#) or [Bibliography](#).

3 Definitions, symbols and abbreviations

For this standard, the following definitions apply:

Accessible — complying with WCAG 2.1 level AA requirements.

Alternate formats — different ways of presenting information, so everyone has equal access to the information.

Assistive technology or assistive device — a piece of equipment, product, system, hardware, software, or service used to improve access to information.

Primary audience — people who are readers, users, or visitors.

Secondary audience — other people affected by the information or interested in it.

Communication — any information intended to be shared.

Annex - informative — providing additional information to help the understanding or use of a standard.

Annex - normative — stating requirements for claiming compliance with a standard.

Note: Consult the ISO and IEC terminology databases for standardization at these addresses: [ISO Online browsing platform](#), [IEC Electropedia](#).

4 Part 1: Identify audiences and their requirements

4.1 Know the audience for a communication

4.1.1 Create plain language for the intended audience

The organization shall create communication that is clear, timely, accurate, and accessible in plain language for anyone who might need it.

4.1.2 Meet information needs

The organization shall:

- a) meet the information needs of the audience;
- b) consult with members of the audience to identify their barriers to finding, understanding, and using communications, and
- c) identify the primary audience of the communication.

Notes:

- 1) The organization might achieve this by consulting existing studies, research data, or new data to identify the intended audience's comfort and skills with types and levels of literacy relevant to the communication.
- 2) People in your audience have different communication skills and you might need to adjust the choice of words in your content or the format of your communication to meet their needs.

4.1.3 Identify audiences

- a) The organization shall identify the audiences:
 - i. a primary audience: the main people who need to find, understand, and use the communication;
 - ii. one or more secondary audiences, affected or concerned, such as intermediaries who deliver the message to the primary audience or other people who might be affected by the communication.
- b) The organization shall determine whether more than one format of communication is required to deliver the message to intended audiences.

Notes:

- 1) Communications usually have a primary audience and one or more secondary audiences made up of people with different needs, knowledge levels, and abilities, as well as members of different social, economic, geographic, or ethnic groups. The organization's communication should meet the information needs of the different people it is trying to reach. Secondary audiences might be intermediaries involved in sending the communication to the primary audience.
- 2) Primary and secondary audiences might have conflicting interests. Where this conflict cannot be reconciled, consider creating separate communications.

4.1.3.1 Update audience information

The organization shall regularly update the information to learn about audiences, their requirements, and evolving technologies to revise communications.

Note: Regularly reassess the understanding of the audiences as they might change. Consider who else might benefit from the information.

4.1.3.2 Maintain an audience focus

The organization shall create a communication for the primary audience, but consider how a secondary audience might

- a) interact with the communication, or
- b) have different concerns that require a separate communication, and
- c) need to request individualization.

4.1.3.3 Discover the audience diversity

The organization shall identify the geographic, demographic, psychographic, and behavioural features of the intended audience using reliable sources and consultations.

4.1.3.4 Use plain language in all languages

The organization shall deliver any information needed by the intended audience in plain language and, if needed, shall:

- a) deliver information in languages other than the official and priority languages of Canada;
- b) make communication available in other languages, and
- c) identify in a communication the languages that are available.

Notes:

- 1) Indicate where the communication is indexed or available.
- 2) Canada's *Official Languages Act*, s. 23 of the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, and other policies or guidance specific to the organization might govern the languages in which the communications are offered.
- 3) Provide information in the languages the intended audience best understands.

- 4) Learn which languages the intended audience best understands by consulting representative members of the intended audience and using reliable sources, like Statistics Canada census data.

4.1.4 Engage with the intended audience

Notes: Communicating in plain language involves considering the variety of ways people might engage with the material, format, and design of the communication or how people are not able to engage with it because of barriers.

Researching, consulting with, and engaging with intended audiences are aids in the process of evaluating content and communications in the development stage, before publication, and after publication.

4.1.4.1 Learn about the intended audience

The organization should consult representative members of the intended audience to

- a) identify their abilities, their preferences, their literacy levels, and their level of comfort and skills with written, spoken, and signed languages, or numeracy;
- b) learn the following features of the audience:
 - i. how much background information they need included in the communication, and
 - ii. if different content or material is needed for audience members with different levels of knowledge.

4.1.5 Consult the audience

- a) The organization should consult representative members of the intended audience to learn:
 - i. the situation and physical or digital environment in which the audience will receive the communication, and
 - ii. the likely way the audience will feel or respond when they use the information.

Note: The context in which the members of the audience interact with a communication influences their stress levels and attention, which affects how well they receive and process information.

- b) The organization should consult representative members of the intended audience while developing a communication to
 - i. confirm they can find, understand, and use the communication, and
 - ii. determine the structure, wording, and design.

Note: The representatives of the audience might engage in participation in planning and creating the communication or through surveys, questionnaires, or focus groups.

- c) If it is not possible or feasible to consult representative members of the intended audience, or if the information is confidential, the organization shall use methods and information from consultations on other communications.

5 Part 2: Make information relevant, easy to find, and organized

5.1 Design the material for ease of use

5.1.1 The organization shall make the information findable

The organization shall use document design principles to make the information easy to find, considering priority, similarities and differences.

Note: Refer to the following:

- ISO 24495-1 standard;
- W3C's WCAG2ICT documentation;
- W3C's COGA documentation and other sources for document design ideas.

5.1.1.1 Make information findable

The organization shall format and distribute the material so the audience is able to easily find and use the information.

Note: Consider line length in text, font size, and open space around text as they affect legibility.

5.1.1.2 Maintain logical sequence

The organization shall:

- a) group content elements into logical, topical parts, and
- b) consider the logical order and sequencing that the audience perceives for the topics.

Note: The audience often perceives the relationship of elements differently than is perceived by the organization. People have different perspectives on logical order.

5.1.1.3 Make information easy to follow

The organization shall structure the material to be easy to follow:

- a) using descriptive headings;
- b) making the structure obvious by using an outline, menu, or table of contents, and
- c) providing an index for material of over 10,000 words.

5.1.2 Assess material for consistency and adequacy

The organization shall ensure that:

- a) the message is consistent across all delivery formats;
- b) the length of the material is adequate and appropriate for the complexity of the information;
- c) all essential information is included in the communication, and
- d) complex information is accurately expressed, well structured, and organized for the intended audience.

Note: It is best to have longer material that is explained to and easily understood by the audience than to have too little information.

5.1.3 Make information accessible

In accordance with this standard, the organization shall prioritize information in a way that:

- a) summarizes key information at the beginning and at the end of the material;
- b) puts the main message near the beginning (clarifies the purpose of the communication);
- c) places cautions or warnings early in the material;
- d) makes the structural plan clear and prominent to the audience by using an outline, menu, or table of contents;
- e) includes an index for content over 100 pages;
- f) repetition help emphasize important information to remember:
 - i. use repetition when the audience will only read, listen to, or view parts of the content;
 - ii. repeat instructions;
 - iii. repeat key points in longer content;
- g) places conditions and exceptions at the end of a sentence or paragraph.

5.1.4 Use colour to help organize

The organization should use colour in visual communications to make organization, structure, and priority visible. It should otherwise use contrast and colour to compare, identify, and differentiate.

The organization should avoid using colours as the sole way to communicate emphasis.

5.1.4.1 Consider both colour and contrast

- a) Opt for a plain, clear background to gain the most effect from using colour.
- b) All information should be legible without the need for colour.
- c) Reinforce colour meaning with a shape, image, or text.
- d) Make sure that colours are
 - i. not the only way of differentiating important information, and
 - ii. easily distinguishable from each other.

5.2 Plan content for audience and purpose

5.2.1 Make the purpose clear

The organization shall clarify the purpose of the communication and tell the audience:

- a) the information that the audience wants or needs;
- b) why the content is necessary for the task or activity;
- c) how the organization intends the information to be used;
- d) what the organization expects or needs the audience to do with the information, and
- e) what the goal of the organization is for the communication.

Notes:

- 1) Content is created for many purposes. It can be to inform, instruct, persuade, reassure, or issue a call to action. Identifying the audience of the content helps identify the purpose for the content. Using plain language increases the likelihood the intended audience is able to find, understand, and use the communication.
- 2) Examples of clear purposes include persuading someone to change behaviour, explaining a process, instructing someone to apply for a benefit, making people aware of something, helping someone make an informed decision, or collecting information.

5.2.2 Focus the content on essentials

- a) The organization shall focus the communication on necessary and essential information with enough context to complete the task or activity.
- b) The organization shall use content that is appropriate:
 - i. for the audience to understand the purpose of the material, and
 - ii. to address the beliefs and concerns identified by the audience, the details the audience needs to understand to satisfy the organization's goals, within the time and effort the audience has available.

- c) The organization shall structure material according to the needs, abilities, limitations, and requirements of the intended audience, to best serve the:
 - i. needs and perspectives of the audience,
 - ii. expression of the information the organization wants to share, and
 - iii. formats in which the information will be shared: printed document, online document, video, audio file, prepared speech, and others.

5.2.3 Identify the organization and how it communicates

The organization shall give identifying and explanatory information:

- a) who creates, owns, and publishes the material;
- b) on which dates the material was created, published, revised, or updated;
- c) where and how the audience will find the information in different formats or languages, and
- d) the purpose or goal of providing the information.

5.2.3.1 Tell the audience how to contact the organization

The organization shall tell the audience, in the communication:

- a) how to access more information;
- b) how to contact the organization;
- c) how to get alternate formats, platform, or languages;
- d) how to give feedback, and
- e) how to inform the organization when the audience cannot access the material because of some barrier.

5.2.3.2 Give supplementary information

The organization shall inform the audience how to get more information:

- a) on accessible ways to contact the organization.

Note: These could include telephone, telecommunications for deaf people (TTY/AST), video relay service (VRS), text, email, social media, and postal mail.

- b) Identify where the audience goes to get supplementary plain language information about the subject, including other documents, videos, web sites, or movies.
- c) Give the exact title of any supplementary information.

6 Part 3: Make the information understandable

6.1 Use clear language

6.1.1 Make information clear and understandable

The organization shall develop communications with clear and understandable language, including using language for the nature of the material and the intended audience.

Note: See the Resources of the Language Portal of Canada for modern writing guidelines and its accessibility glossary. Other resources are provided in [Annex C](#).

6.1.2 Consider all aspects of communication

The organization shall use a style and tone in language appropriate to the audience, the purpose, the genre, the context, and the medium of communication, and

- a) Use familiar language unless a topic is unfamiliar and requires knowing technical terms, then those must be defined.
- b) Prefer positive language, instead of negative.
- c) Avoid the negatives, like not and don't, except to give warnings or communicate danger or to correct information or inaccuracies.
- d) Use respectful language always. and
- e) Use a conversational tone if it is appropriate and if it will increase clarity.

Notes:

- 1) For example, a positive tone could be: "We are used to working more autonomously." A negative tone could be: "We are not used to such constant supervision."
- 2) Tell the audience what it is able to do rather than what it is not able to do.
- 3) Serious or urgent subjects should be discussed with a proper tone and style, such as brevity for urgent action or compassion in trauma.

6.1.3 Use personal language to talk to the audience directly

The organization shall use pronouns to direct the message to the audience, and:

- a) Use first-person pronouns ("we, us, our") to refer to the organization.
- b) Use second-person pronouns ("you, your") for the audience.
- c) Use first-person singular ("I") when using the audience's voice.

Note: For example "By signing this document, I understand and agree to the terms of the application" and "When do I have to return the application?"

- d) Use gender-neutral, or gender-free, pronouns, nouns, and phrases that are culturally appropriate.

Note: Examples of language:

- 1) parent or people with children, not mother or father,
- 2) they, them, theirs as a singular, 3rd person pronoun,
- 3) the plural form of noun and pronoun, and
- 4) when possible, avoid the pronoun and restructure the sentence.

6.1.4 Be sensitive to audience preferences for self-identity

The organization shall consult audience members so that, when referring to race, ethnic group, or a disability, it uses the term the audience prefers.

Note: Advocacy groups and people with lived experience often publish a style guide showing preferences. Resources are in [Annex C](#) and the [Bibliography](#).

6.2 Choose appropriate wording

6.2.1 Use common and familiar words

The organization shall choose wording (words, phrases, sentences, or sign language gestures) that are appropriate to the audience, purpose, and genre of the communication:

- a) Use words that are culturally appropriate and respectful.
- b) Use the same word consistently to mean the same thing throughout the material.
- c) Use the simplest form of a word familiar to the audience to express meaning, unless another, more specific word is also known to the audience.

Notes:

- 1) Use simple conjunctions like “and”, “or”, and “but” instead of “in addition” or “however”.
- 2) When a name is long, consider using an acronym, or abbreviation, referenced after the first use, or simpler words, like “the union” instead of “CUPE”, “the association” instead of “CMA”, “the Commission” instead of “CRTC” can also be used.

Annex A - Accessible forms

(informative)

In accordance with this standard, the organization will consider the following guidelines.

A.1 Developing forms

Follow all plain language practices when creating forms.

A.2 Structure of forms

- Use a title and an introduction to explain to the audience the purpose of the form and why it needs to be completed.
- Include a table of contents, a list of essential abbreviations or a lexicon.
- Group the content or questions by themes.
- Give each group a unique title.
- Follow a structure the audience is most accustomed to.
- Identify the sections of the form the audience does not need to complete.
- Make mandatory sections of the form obvious for the audience.
- Include an explanatory guide, if needed, such as in an appendix or incorporate a hyperlink that opens in a new window.

A.3 Questions and answers

- Use the same structure for all questions and answers but closed-ended questions are preferred.
- Label each form field in a clear manner, for example "Name as it appears on your birth certificate" instead of "Name".
- Number each question.
- Allow for a "don't know" or "other" response.

- Leave enough space for text answers and enough space between each item or question.

A.4 Help the audience complete the form

- Plan alternative formats according to the needs of the audiences: audio, video, etc.
- Make sure forms are compatible with all browsers.
- Alert the audience to any items needed at hand before completing the form. A good example is: "Gather your documents before completing this form."
- Give the audience the choice to complete the form either on paper or electronically.
- Place instructions where the audience needs them, instead of at the top or bottom of the page.

Annex B - Using numbers

(informative)

B.1 Expressing numbers

Numbers should be given context in text, expressed consistently and in parallel form within a sentence or paragraph. Do not switch between or compare numerals and percentages.

Express numbers in a consistent format throughout the material:

- a) Express numbers as digits (2, 3, 4) rather than words (two, three, four).
 - i. Use digits for numbers 2 through 999.
Note: Exceptionally, use words if the number is the first word in a sentence.
 - ii. Use hyphens inside the digits of a telephone number instead of periods or spaces.

Notes:

- 1) For example “There were 359 vaccine appointments and only one cancellation.”
- 2) This requirement does not apply to figures of speech. For example, one-time payment, a two-piece suit, a three-ring circus, a four-leaf clover, a five-star hotel, the seven seas, a figure eight, on cloud nine, a top-ten list, etc.

Choose a font that lets the audience differentiate between the digits when the document has many numerals.

Note: Prefer fonts which will align the numbers so that they are easily differentiated from others.

Use words when they are easier to understand than figures, for example:

- a) Use words to express numbers one, thousand, million, billion, and trillion.

- b) In non-technical material, express simple fractions like "one-half", "one-quarter", "two-thirds", and "three-quarters".

Note: There is an exception for imperial units of measure (e.g., ½ cup).

- 1) For each metric unit of measurement, provide the equivalent imperial units in brackets according to the audience (pounds – kilograms).
- 2) Express dates using standard word format: March 22, 1963 (English)/22 mars 1963 (French)” to avoid confusion.
- 3) Number formats are interpreted differently depending on the language and culture.

For examples, see 4.4.6.5 in the following document:

<https://www.w3.org/TR/coga-usable/#examples-16>.

Express dates using the standard number format or words in printed documents: yyyy-mm-dd or March 22, 1963 (English)/dd-mm-yyyy or 22 mars 1963 (French).

Express a number in word form when it appears at the beginning of the sentence.

Note: A good example is “Twenty-nine children received their vaccine.”

Use simple prose captions or explanatory phrases with numbers to improve clarity.

Note: Here is an example: Only a few people are affected by this, or 1 in 1,000 people.

Decide whether numerals or words are clearer following these practices:

- a) Only use complicated fractions in number format or spelled out in technical material.
- b) Only use decimals when it is essential, as in medicine dosage, or when the number is too large to round up or down, such as a budget number of \$1.7 billion.
- c) Only use Roman numerals when:

- i. They are part of the proper name of a person, place, or things, such as Charles IV or Bluenose II.
 - ii. They are used in existing publications, such as books or laws.
- d) Situate an event in time using simple benchmarks known to the audience. For example. "A long time ago..." instead of "In 1835...", "After the Second World War..." instead of "In 1952...".

B.2 Use the simplest math to explain the idea

- a) Use frequency rather than percentages (9 out of 10 instead of 90%).
- b) Use numbers that are more easily comparable. For example, "1 out of 10" or "1 out of 100".
- c) Use visual images, such as tables, graphs, pictures and pictograms to enhance understanding of numbers.
 - i. People understand familiar, visual, or spatial metaphors, like saying a food serving is the size of a deck of cards.
 - ii. Use a visual of things that people use for the task or activity: a clock, calendar, thermometer, or phone.
- d) Make numbers represent people. Avoid, if possible, abstraction or decimals. For example, "The average family has 1.4 children." should be avoided. Use 1 in 4 people instead of 25% of the population.

Annex C - Resources

(informative)

C.1 Web accessibility checklist, guidelines, and monitors

- WCAG. *Accessibility by Design*, wcag2.com/accessible-plain-language/
- The Must-Have WCAG Checklist, LevelAccess.com, 2023: s42509.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/08-Aug-MRKT_WP-WCAG-Checklist-2.2_QA-APPROVED.pdf
- Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 Comprehensive guidelines for accessibility of digital documents: w3.org/TR/WCAG20/
- Web Accessibility Monitor: chromewebstore.google.com/
- Microsoft Inclusivity Monitor: inclusive.microsoft.design/

C.2 Accessible design and production

- Check PDF accessibility and create accessible PDFs (Acrobat Pro DC): helpx.adobe.com/acrobat/using/create-verify-pdf-accessibility.html
- Colour Oracle, colour-blindness simulator: colouroracle.org/
- DAISYpedia, “Making publications accessible for all”: daisy.org/daisypedia/making-publications-accessible-all
- Dos and don'ts on designing for accessibility: Six posters designed by the UK's Home Office Digital and Karwai Pun illustrate how to approach accessibility from a design perspective: accessibility.blog.gov.uk/2016/09/02/dos-and-donts-on-designing-for-accessibility/ and hodigital.blog.gov.uk/category/accessibility/
- Government Design Principles, UK Government: gov.uk/guidance/government-design-principles
- How screen readers read typographic symbols: <http://www.deque.com/blog/dont-screen-readers-read-whats-screen-part-1-punctuation-typographic-symbols/>

- Nemeth MathSpeak system for accessible math: <http://www.gh-mathspeak.com/examples/grammar-rules/>
- Nielsen Norman Group. (n.d.) NN/g World Leaders in Research-Based User Experience: nngroup.com
- PDF Association, “PDF/UA: The ISO Standard for universal accessibility”: <https://www.pdfa.org/resource/pdfua-in-a-nutshell/>
- Recite Me. (2015) *Choosing an accessible font*. reciteme.com/uploads/articles/accessible_fonts_guide.pdf

C.3 Universal design and inclusive language

- Association of Registered Graphic Designers (RGD), *AccessAbility handbook*: rgd.ca/resources/accessibility.php
- BC Open Textbook Accessibility Toolkit: opentextbc.ca/accessibilitytoolkit/
- *Conscious Style Guide*: consciousstyleguide.com/
- Government of Canada, *Inclusive writing – Guidelines and resources*: noslangues-ourlanguages.gc.ca/en/writing-tips-plus/inclusive-writing-guidelines-resources.html
- “Inclusive: A Microsoft design toolkit”: <https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/design/inclusiveus/design/inclusive>

C.4 Accessible images and other non-text content

- Adding alt text to images on X: <https://help.twitter.com/en/using-x/picture-descriptions>
- Canadian National Institute for the Blind. (2018). *Clear Print Accessibility Guidelines*. cnib.ca/sites/default/files/2018-07/CNIB%20Clear%20Print%20Guide.pdf
- Portland Community College, “Complex image accessibility”: <https://www.pcc.edu/resources/instructional-support/access/complex-images.html>
- WebAIM, “Alternative text”: webaim.org/techniques/alttext/

C.5 Legislation

- *Accessibility for Manitobans Act*: accessibilitymb.ca/
- *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)*: ontario.ca/laws/statute/05a11
- “Canada’s accession to Marrakesh Treaty brings treaty into force”: wipo.int/pressroom/en/articles/2016/article_0007.html
- “Creating new national accessibility legislation: What we learned”: <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/accessible-canada/reports/consultations-what-we-learned.html>
- Nova Scotia’s *Accessibility Act*: novascotia.ca/coms/accessibility/
- U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, Disability Rights Section, “Effective communication”: ada.gov/effective-comm.htm

C.6 Libraries for works in alternative formats

- Centre for Equitable Library Access (CELA), through CNIB: celalibrary.ca/
- National Network for Equitable Library Service (NNELS): nnels.ca/

C.7 Relevant blog posts

- Christine Albert, “Promoting accessibility in editorial businesses,” *BoldFace: The official blog of Editors Toronto*, March 8, 2017: <http://editorstorontoblog.com/2017/03/08/promoting-accessibility-in-editorial-businesses/>
- Iva Cheung, “Four levels to accessible communications,” September 17, 2016: <http://www.ivacheung.com/2016/09/four-levels-to-accessible-communications/>
- Iva Cheung, “Grey matters: Why NGOs should start thinking like self-publishers,” November 4, 2015: <http://www.ivacheung.com/2014/11/grey-matters-why-ngos-should-start-thinking-like-self-publishers>

C.8 Screen readers

- Activating TalkBack: support.google.com/accessibility/android/answer/6007100?hl=en
- Activating VoiceOver on Apple mobile: <https://support.apple.com/en-us/HT204390>
- JAWS screen reader for PC: freedomscientific.com/Products/Blindness/JAWS
- NVDA screen reader for PC: nvaccess.org/
- Read Out Loud and other accessibility features in Adobe Acrobat (Reader): helpx.adobe.com/reader/using/accessibility-features.html
- Using VoiceOver on a Mac: apple.com/voiceover/info/guide/_1124.html

Annex D - Legal notice for standards

(normative)

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