

# Why yes, our print is accessible

*Taryn Ozorio* explains that accessibility cannot be measured in absolutes

**M**aking your print accessible is an ongoing challenge. Here at Shape we are constantly monitoring, asking, and trying to improve. As marketers, we know that accessibility is not optional. We know that making our print accessible can mean reaching out to a wider audience; letting disabled and deaf people know that this is an organisation for them. Why, then, do we equate accessibility with ugly design?

## Accessibility is a continuum

The Disability Discrimination Act has been around for over twelve years. We know we need to be accessible – to make ‘reasonable adjustments’ to our marketing material. What we all need to do is cast a critical eye over our material, our print and design policies, and see where we can do better.

## Keep a dialogue open with your audience

Your audience may not tell you what they need from you in terms of accessibility, but if you do get requests for alternative formats, ask for feedback and how you can improve them. Audience and visitor needs change over time; as you develop relationships, keep asking them for their access requirements and general wants and needs.

Remember disabled and deaf

people\* are a wide and disparate group that often don’t even identify as disabled.

Include disabled and deaf people as a key audience in your print and design briefs.

## Start with your copy

Many people have difficulty reading a standard print document. This might be because of learning difficulties, education, English as a second language (deaf people and non-English speakers). Many disabled people have been denied educational opportunities and so have lower-than-average reading ages.

- 1. Put the most important information first.** Always put the ‘who’, ‘what’, ‘when’, ‘where’ and ‘why’ in the first paragraph. Get straight to the point, so readers get the most important information first.
- 2. Make copy easy to scan.** Make your copy ‘scannable’ by putting keywords in bold and using bullet points, headings and tables. This will make your key copy stand out to readers.
- 3. Write short sentences and paragraphs.** To ensure sentences are easy to read, make them about 25 words long. Write short, simple paragraphs and have each paragraph discuss a single idea.

- 4. Write no more than 300 words per page (depending on your page and font size of course).**

Don’t write too much – you’ll bore readers. You need to be succinct and get straight to the point. A long page of text will only overwhelm your readers.

- 6. Use short, clear headings.** Headings break up text into manageable chunks so readers are not overwhelmed by volume. Because of this, you should make your headings short and meaningful.
- 7. Personalise your copy.** You can engage your readers by speaking to them directly. Use ‘you’ throughout your content, so readers get involved in the topic, rather than feel removed from it.
- 8. Use ‘inclusive’, easy-to-read language.** Don’t use jargon terms or colloquialisms. Colloquialisms such as ‘24/7’, and phrases such as ‘upping the ante’, may confuse. Words such as ‘client’ and ‘people with disabilities’ may alienate.

Keep your language plain – write to a twelve-year-old’s reading level. This is the level that a majority of newspapers target. It ensures language is simple, not simplistic, and that more people will understand your message.

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## Ask your designers for . . .

### FONTS

Use a decent size font: 12–14 point is recommended for paragraph text. Avoid handwritten fonts or long running capitals. Also leave enough (size 14–16) writing space for filling out forms. Always have your ‘Ask us for this in other formats’ in a large font size, around 18–22.

### TEXT

Provide good spacing for text – leave enough space between paragraphs, columns and characters. Don’t overlay your text over your images, fit text around images too tightly or right justify or fully justify your text.

### FINISH

Avoid glossy papers (they reflect too much light), low paper weights (text can show through), and folds or creases that obscure text.

### COLOUR

Use high contrast between colours – avoid pale and clashing colours. Think about this for images, text and design elements.

### IMAGES AND SYMBOLS

Include access and easy-read symbols where appropriate. Try to use positive images of disabled and deaf people; be aware of stereotypes.



\* The definition of ‘disabled’ can include anyone with a long-term physical or mental impairment. That includes blind, partially sighted, deaf or hard-of-hearing people, as well as people with mental illnesses, learning disabilities, HIV/AIDS, etc.

### Further information and resources:

- **Shape’s Accessible Marketing and Publicity Seminar** – mention this article when you book and get two seminars for £120 ([openthedoor@shapearts.org.uk](mailto:openthedoor@shapearts.org.uk)).
- **RNIB’s See It Right**, book and CD-Rom [www.rnib.org.uk](http://www.rnib.org.uk)
- **Disability Rights Commission, Easy Read Guidelines** [www.equalityhumanrights.com](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com)
- **Shape’s online access forum:** [www.shapearts.org.uk/openthedoor](http://www.shapearts.org.uk/openthedoor)
- **Plain English Campaign** [www.plainenglish.co.uk](http://www.plainenglish.co.uk)
- **London Development Agency, Disability Equality Scheme, Easy Read Version** [www.lda.gov.uk/](http://www.lda.gov.uk/)

This year Shape celebrates 30 years of pioneering the active involvement of disabled and deaf people in all aspects of the arts and creative industries. Its Open the Door campaign has supported over 400 arts and cultural organisations across the UK to address and improve the accessibility of their organisations, venues, marketing and staff attitudes. ■



disabled and deaf people  
and the arts

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