

Canada

Guidance on the Accessible Canada Regulations



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Employment and Social Development Canada

Guidance on the Accessible Canada Regulations: Simple, clear and concise language Large print, Braille, MP3 [audio], e-text and DAISY formats are available on demand by <u>ordering online</u> or calling 1 800 O-Canada [1-800-622-6232]. If you use a teletypewriter [TTY], call 1-800-926-9105.

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1. Information

Overview

The <u>Accessible Canada Act</u> (ACA) and the <u>Accessible Canada Regulations</u> (regulations) require federally regulated entities (organizations) to prepare and publish:

- · accessibility plans
- · progress reports on the implementation of their accessibility plans
- · descriptions of their feedback processes

The regulations also require organizations to write these documents in simple, clear and concise language. This guidance provides resources to help them do so. These resources may also inspire organizations to use simple, clear and concise language in other communications and documents, when feasible.

In line with the principles set out in the ACA, this guidance reflects input from the disability community.

This guidance is **not** legally binding. The non-binding advice, recommendations, tips and best practices in this guidance use the words "recommend," "suggest," "should," "may," and "could." When referring to legally binding requirements in the ACA and the regulations, the guidance uses the words "must" and "require."

This guidance is a toolbox, not a set of hard-and-fast rules to follow at any cost. Your focus should be on flexible application, depending on your organization's context and the specific needs of your audience. Strategies that help simplify a text change according to the situation.

Language is a flexible tool, and offers many options and solutions for you to explore!

You can also read our guidance on:

- accessibility plans
- consulting persons with disabilities
- feedback process descriptions
- <u>Alternate formats</u>

Guidance on alternate formats and progress reports will be available in 2022.

Note that all federally regulated organizations must follow the *Accessible Canada Regulations*. Some organizations must also follow other ACA regulations made by the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) or the Canadian Transportation Agency (CTA).

Other language-related guidance

Using accessible language is not limited to writing in a simple, clear and concise way. There are language considerations to keep in mind when you talk about disability and accessibility. In addition, recognizing that multiple identity factors can intersect or overlap with disability is important. People's backgrounds, religions, socio-economic status, languages and genders are examples of identity factors to take into consideration.

You can find more tips and ideas in our annexes on <u>cultural considerations</u> and <u>inclusive language</u>.

Disclaimers

This guidance does not replace any guidance developed by the <u>Accessibility Commissioner</u>'s Office at the Canadian Human Rights Commission (CHRC).

The sole purpose of the examples in this guidance is to show possibilities for making text simple, clear and concise. Nothing in these examples constitutes a requirement or recommendation relating to the content of accessibility plans, progress reports or descriptions of feedback processes.

This guidance includes links to Government of Canada and external resources that provide useful tips and information about simple, clear and concise language. By providing links, Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) is pointing to possibly helpful information, but not endorsing it.

Please note that external websites are not subject to the <u>Privacy Act</u> or the <u>Official Languages Act</u>. The information may be available only in the language(s) of the sites in question. They also may not be fully accessible to persons with disabilities.

2. Before you write

Preface

Writing in simple, clear and concise language is not limited to practical writing tips. Above all else, you should focus on meeting the needs of readers and on your expected results. Use the tips that suit the readers' needs the best. After all, the reader comes first.

Before you start writing accessibility plans, progress reports or feedback process descriptions, ask yourself a few questions. What is your idea of simple, clear and concise writing? Have you clearly identified what you want to say to your target audience? How do you want to organize your thoughts? Have you considered the layout and visual design? This section will help you answer these questions.

Simple, clear and concise language: misconceptions and realities

There are several misconceptions about simple, clear and concise language. Some may equate writing clearly, simply and concisely with writing in a boring way¹. Others may think technical terms or specialized language are essential to expressing their message and fear having to sacrifice accuracy for simplicity.

However, writers sometimes underestimate the challenges that the public faces when reading texts. A number of disabilities can affect a person's ability to perceive, understand or retain written information. Some disabilities have an impact on the reader's ability to focus long enough to absorb information. Literacy levels and knowledge of official languages can also vary widely in the general population.

Some writers overestimate the time readers will spend trying to find what they need in a text. They may also assume their readers are just as familiar with a topic as they are.

Simple, clear and concise language is a way to communicate that is easy for people to read and understand. It is direct, succinct, and easy to follow. It focuses on meeting readers' needs and uses:

- · everyday language instead of technical terms
- short words, sentences and paragraphs
- simple sentence structures

Simple, clear and concise language helps reduce barriers in communication. It makes writing more accessible for everyone, including people with different types of disabilities and readers with different language and literacy levels.

Choose your words and content carefully when preparing your accessibility plans, feedback process descriptions, and progress reports. Use concrete words, with an engaging and readable style. The general public should be able to read and understand these documents. Do not assume that readers are already familiar with your organization's work. Give them all the essential information, but do not distract them with unnecessary details. Break down complex ideas to make them easier to digest. Present your ideas in a straightforward and logical way.

Simple, clear and concise writing is not an exact science. There are many different ways of expressing ideas. You may not be able to apply the tips in this guidance all the time or all at once. Use your judgment. Adapt this advice to meet your organization's goals and your readers' needs.

Additional resources

For more information on misconceptions about clear, simple and concise language:

¹ GOVERNMENT OF CANADA. <u>*Putting It Plainly*</u> (online, consulted on April 28, 2022), "Myth 1: Plain language equals dull writing".

- Government of Canada
 - <u>Putting it plainly</u> (Resources of the Language Portal of Canada, sections "What plain language isn't" and "What plain language is")
 - o Other sources
 - Why are some people reluctant to use clear writing? (Government of Ontario)
- For information on this topic that applies to French
 - o Government of Canada
 - <u>Langue claire et simple : surmonter les obstacles à la littératie</u> (Translation Bureau, sections "La solution : la langue claire et simple" and "Les avantages de la langue claire et simple", in French)

Know your readers

Think about your target audience and your text's purpose. Before you start writing, you should determine:

- who your readers are
- what their reading or literacy level is
- the barriers they may encounter when reading
- the information they will be looking for when reading your documents
- the issues they are most interested in and what language they use when discussing them
- whether they are familiar with your organization and its work (do not assume they have the same level of knowledge as you)

You can learn about your readers in various ways. For example, you could contact clients, disability organizations or people with lived experience directly to ask about their needs and interests. You can also follow their discussions on the Internet and social media.

This will help you tailor your vocabulary and writing style to your audience.

- To help you better understand your readers and their needs:
 - o Government of Canada
 - <u>Clear communication: overview of the writing process and techniques (Resources of the Language Portal of Canada, section "Step 1: Analyse"</u>)
 - <u>Putting it plainly</u> (Resources of the Language Portal of Canada, section "What plain language is")

- <u>Putting it (even more) plainly</u> (Resources of the Language Portal of Canada, section "Remember the reader")
- <u>Guidance of consulting persons with disabilities</u>
- Other sources
 - <u>How to write clearly (PDF format)</u> (European Commission, section "Focus on the reader")
- o Other sources
 - How to make information accessible for persons with learning disabilities (PDF format) (CHANGE, UK, section "Involving people with learning disabilities," p. 11)
 - <u>N'écrivez pas pour nous sans nous! Impliquer les personnes handicapées</u> <u>intellectuelles dans l'écriture de textes faciles à lire (PDF format)</u> (Unapei, France, in French)
- For information on this topic that applies to French
 - o Government of Canada
 - Adapter le texte aux destinataires (Translation Bureau)

Plan your content

Think about the purpose of your accessibility plans, feedback process descriptions and progress reports. Ideally, you should be able to summarize their purpose in one sentence.

For example:

Our accessibility plan explains the steps we are taking to improve our organization's accessibility.

Our feedback process description explains the way we want people to send us feedback.

Consider your accessibility plans, progress reports, and feedback process descriptions from your readers' perspective. What do they want to find out? The Editing Unit in the European Commission's Directorate-General for Translation has established that, generally, readers are looking for answers to 7 basic questions:

- what? (What is this about? What is the message, essentially?)
- who? (Who is involved? For whom is this document written?)
- when? (Is there a schedule? Are there time limitations?)
- where? (Are there specific places or sites involved?)
- how? (What actions will take place? How will your organization take them?)

- why? (What are the objectives? What are the causes?)
- how much? (Are resources required? Time or money?)²

Keep the answers to these questions in mind as you write your document.

For example, instead of writing a broad and vague statement like this:

We invested significant funds and took all necessary steps within the time limits set out in the Act to address accessibility issues for our users at our railway station.

Try to be more specific and concrete, like this:

Since December 2023, we have invested \$1,400,000 to install two new ramps, an elevator and a platform lift. Users with reduced mobility now have access to every level of our railway station.

Organize your ideas

Create an outline for your accessibility plans, feedback process descriptions and progress reports. Mapping out your ideas ahead of time will help you stay on track.

Organize your ideas and present them in a logical way. Putting the most important information up front can help readers find and absorb it more easily.

Break your document into sections. Each section should address a different topic or audience. Give each section a short and clear heading. That will help readers browse for key words or information. Remember to include all the headings that the regulations require. (<u>Read section 5 of the regulations for accessibility plans</u>, and <u>section 14 for progress reports</u>.)

Additional resources

- For information of how to develop a plan:
 - o Government of Canada
 - <u>Clear communication: overview of the writing process and techniques</u> (Resources of the Language Portal of Canada, sections "Step 2: Plan" and "Step 3: Write")
 - <u>Text organization</u> (Translation Bureau)
 - <u>Plain language: Making your message intelligible</u> (Translation Bureau, sections "Relevance" and "Structure")
 - <u>Write useful page titles and headings</u> (Treasury Board Secretariat)

²EUROPEAN COMMISSION. <u>*Claire's Clear Writing Tips* (PDF format)</u> (consulted on April 4, 2022), p. 3, "Seven key questions," Publications Office of the European Union.

- <u>Clear and effective communication: Make your readers' task easier</u> (Resources of the Language Portal of Canada, section "Previewing")
- o Other sources
 - <u>How to write clearly (PDF format)</u> (European Commission, sections "Think before you write" and "Get your document into shape")

Design and visual presentation

The layout and design of your document are also important. Do not clutter your document with too much text. Remove unnecessary information so readers can find what they need quickly and easily.

Choices about font style, font size, diagrams, or background colours can help you highlight your message. Even white space can make some information stand out more by decluttering your pages.

However, remember that your document's design and visual presentation may have a different impact on different target audiences.

For example:

People using assistive devices such as screen readers or synthesized voice software will not have access to diagrams or images. Ensure that you provide descriptions in text format.

People with vision disabilities may find it difficult to read text on a coloured background, Use high contrast between text and background colours. Black text on a white background is best. However, you can use an <u>online contrast analysis</u> tool to check if your colours have a strong enough contrast.

People with learning disabilities may find it difficult to read certain font styles, such as italics. Avoid using italics for design purposes.

Never rely on font style, font size, texture or colour to relay important information. For more information on this topic, see our <u>guidance</u> on creating accessible documents.

- For information on visual presentation:
 - o Government of Canada
 - <u>Content structure</u> and <u>images and videos</u> (Treasury Board Secretariat, sections of the <u>Canada.ca Content Style Guide</u>, a document which focuses on web content, but much of the information applies to other formats)
 - <u>Plain language: Creating readable documents</u> (Resources of the Language Portal of Canada, sections "Visual readability," "Layout," "White space")
 - o Other sources

- <u>Concrete examples for redesigning visual presentation to facilitate comprehension</u> (<u>PDF format</u>) (Simplification Centre, UK)
- To adapt the design and visual presentation to the specific needs of certain readers
 - o Government of Canada
 - <u>Designing documents and web pages for users with cognitive disabilities (PDF format)</u> (Shared Services Canada)
 - <u>Designing documents and web pages for users on the autism spectrum (PDF format)</u> (Shared Services Canada)
 - <u>Designing documents and web pages for users who are deaf or hard of hearing (PDF format)</u> (Shared Services Canada)
 - <u>Designing documents and web pages for users with low vision (PDF format)</u> (Shared Services Canada)
 - <u>Designing documents and web pages for users of screen readers (PDF format)</u> (Shared Services Canada)
 - <u>Designing documents and web pages for users with physical or motor disabilities</u> (<u>PDF format</u>) (Shared Services Canada)
 - o Other sources
 - <u>How to make information accessible for persons with learning disabilities (PDF format)</u> (CHANGE, UK, sections "Practical advice," pp. 12-17; "Preparing your document," pp. 18-25; "Adding pictures," pp. 32-35)
 - <u>Règles européennes pour une information facile à lire et à comprendre par les</u> personnes en situation de handicap intellectuel (Unapei, France, in French, sections "La mise en page et le format," pp. 13-17; "À quoi devrait ressembler votre texte," pp. 21-23; "Les images," pp. 24-25)
 - <u>Designing for accessibility (PDF format)</u> (United Kingdom Government, UK)

3. Writing

Use everyday language rather than specialized language

Everyday language

Carefully choosing your words is critical. When we write, even in everyday language, we sometimes use words in ways that do not mean what we intend.

For example, instead of writing:

We will consult members of the accessibility counsel.

Write:

We will consult members of the accessibility council.

When in doubt about the accuracy of a word, consult a standard dictionary.

Whenever possible, use everyday language in your accessibility plans, progress reports and feedback process descriptions. Avoid using technical terms and jargon. Tailor your vocabulary to your target audience.

For example, instead of writing:

Notwithstanding budget reductions, we will still allocate resources to ameliorating our accessibility this year.

Try:

Even if we **cut our** budget, we will still **find the money** to **improve** accessibility this year.

Use the shortest and simplest wording possible. Here are some examples:

- request, demand, inquire = ask
- aspiration, objective = goal
- obtain, procure, acquire = get
- quarterly = every three months
- ameliorate, enhance = improve
- demonstrate, present, display = show
- of a scientific nature = scientific
- utilize = use

Additional resources

· For information on how to choose words

- o Government of Canada
 - <u>Use simple words and phrases</u> (Resources of the Language Portal of Canada)
 - <u>Avoid jargon and unfamiliar acronyms or expressions</u> (Resources of the Language Portal of Canada)
 - <u>Use simple and common words</u> (Treasury Board Secretariat)
 - Less is more: Eliminating on a... basis (Resources of the Language Portal of Canada)
 - <u>Putting it plainly</u>: (sections "Be concise" and "Use simple words")
- For information on this topic that applies to French
 - o Government of Canada
 - <u>Choisissez des mots simples</u> (Resources of the Language Portal of Canada, in French)
 - <u>Choisissez des mots concrets</u> (Resources of the Language Portal of Canada, in French)
 - <u>Utiliser des mots simples et courants</u> (Treasury Board Secretariat, in French)
 - <u>Langue claire et simple : rédiger des documents lisibles</u> (Translation Bureau, sections "Mots courants" and "Mots concrets", in French)

Specialized language

You may sometimes need to use technical or specialized terms. If you do, make sure to use the correct and most common term by checking in a terminology bank. These banks are directories of terms that people use in specialized fields (such as finance, transportation, or mining).

The Government of Canada has its own terminology bank, <u>Termium Plus</u>. The Office québécois de la langue française has <u>Grand dictionnaire terminologique</u> or GDT. Termium Plus and the GDT are multilingual banks that extend to fields beyond the federal or provincial public service.

To help readers understand the technical terms you use, you have different options:

You can send along an explanation.

For example:

Our changes make it easier for people with vision loss to make **mobile payments**. Mobile payments are **purchases you make using an app on your smartphone**.

We've added more accessible parking spots to the **Click and Collect** section of our parking lot. Click and Collect allows customers to purchase products on our website and pick them up from us at their convenience.

Or you can offer examples, such as:

All sectors of the organization must eliminate **discriminatory practices** from their policies within one year. For **example**, a practice is discriminatory **if it allows an employee or customer to be treated differently because of their**:

- religion
- gender or sexual orientation
- disability
- race or colour

Additionally, you can follow the term with a more familiar word in brackets.

For example:

Employees don't need to submit their lab, X-ray or scintigraphy (scan) results to get accommodations.

You can define the terms you used in a glossary at the end of the text.

Lastly, keep in mind that the abbreviations for certain technical terms are better known than the terms themselves. Few people know the meaning of deoxyribonucleic acid, but many have heard of DNA, its abbreviation.

You have to decide which form of the word is most familiar to your readers. For more information about abbreviations, see <u>4.1.3 Beware of abbreviations</u>.

- To learn how to avoid, define, or explain complex terms
 - o Government of Canada
 - Explain complex terms and ideas (Resources of the Language Portal of Canada)
 - <u>Use concrete examples</u> (Resources of the Language Portal of Canada)
 - <u>Use comparisons</u> (Resources of the Language Portal of Canada)
 - <u>Avoid jargon, idioms and expressions</u> (Treasury Board Secretariat)
- For information on this topic that applies to French
 - o Government of Canada
 - <u>Évitez ou expliquez les termes complexes</u> (Resources of the Language Portal of Canada)
 - <u>Donnez des exemples</u> (Resources of the Language Portal of Canada)
 - <u>Utilisez la comparaison</u> (Resources of the Language Portal of Canada)
 - Éviter le jargon et les expressions familières ou imagées (Treasury Board Secretariat)

Beware of abbreviations

Abbreviations are shorter ways of referring to words or terms. Acronyms are one example. They are usually made up of the first letter of each word in a name or term. As a general rule, it is better to avoid abbreviations since they can be hard for readers to understand. However, you may want to use abbreviations if repeating a long term many times makes your text harder to read.

Write out the full name or term the first time you mention it in your text, followed by the abbreviation in brackets. The next time it occurs, use the abbreviation only.

For example:

American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation will be available at all committee meetings. Languages other than the **ASL** will also be available upon request.

The *Accessible Canada Regulations* (regulations) operationalize the planning and reporting requirements in the *Accessible Canada Act*. The **regulations** apply to entities under federal jurisdiction.

You can also include a list of abbreviations at the beginning of the document.

Some terms have abbreviated forms that readers are more likely to know. For example, people commonly refer to software on their smartphones and tablets as apps rather than applications. The same goes for acronyms like ATMs (automated teller machines), EI (employment insurance) and the RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police). It is up to your organization to determine which form will allow your readers to understand your terms easily.

- For information on acronyms and abbreviations
 - o Government of Canada
 - <u>Avoid jargon and unfamiliar acronyms or expressions</u> (Resources of the Language Portal of Canada)
 - <u>Abbreviations and acronyms</u> (Treasury Board Secretariat)
- · For information on this topic that applies to French
 - o Government of Canada
 - <u>Faites attention aux sigles et aux abréviations</u> (Resources of the Language Portal of Canada)
 - <u>Abréviations, acronymes et références</u> (Treasury Board Secretariat)

Simplify your verbs

Verbs offer great opportunities to simplify. Sometimes, you can simply switch to the infinitive or imperative form to address the reader directly. Examples of the infinitive form are "to run," or "to write." Examples of the imperative form are "run!" or "write that down."

For example, instead of writing:

If there is a fire alarm, **all employees must take the stairs** to evacuate the building. **Employees with disabilities who cannot** use the stairs **must follow** the instructions written below.

Try:

If there is a fire alarm, **take** the stairs to evacuate immediately. **If you cannot** take the stairs because of a disability, **follow** the instructions written below.

If possible, use positive rather than negative language.

For example, instead of writing:

You **may not use** a telephone equipped with a telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD) if you **are not** hard of hearing.

Try:

Only people who are hard of hearing **may** use a telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD).

- · For information on positive and negative phrasing
 - o Government of Canada
 - <u>Choose positive over negative phrasing</u> (Resources of the Language Portal of Canada)
- For information on imperative and infinitive
 - o Other sources
 - <u>Impératif et infinitif</u> (Office québécois de la langue française, in French)
- For information on this topic that applies to French
 - o Government of Canada
 - Forme positive ou négative (Treasury Board Secretariat)
 - Évitez la double négation (Resources of the Language Portal of Canada)

Contractions

A contraction is when you combine words by removing some letters and adding an apostrophe. For example, when "we will" becomes "we'll."

Contractions can give your writing a more natural and familiar tone. After all, we are used to hearing and using contractions in everyday conversations. Contractions can also make sentences shorter and easier to read.

Consider how formal you want your text to be. For more formal writing, you may want to avoid contractions.

Here are a few common contractions:

- we will = we'll
- they are = they're
- let us = let's
- that/it is = that's/it's
- do not = don't
- will not = won't
- are not = aren't
- have not = haven't
- were not = weren't

Additional resources

- · For information on contractions
 - o Government of Canada
 - <u>Contractions</u> (Treasury Board Secretariat)
 - o Other sources
 - <u>Use contractions</u> (United States Government)

Build sentences with care

Choosing words is important, but it is only one part of the process. The next step is to combine those words to form simple, clear, and concise sentences.

Shorten your sentences

Not everyone agrees on what a short, long, or too long sentence is. However, most people would agree that short, simple, well-built sentences are the easiest to understand.

Here are a few tips to shorten and simplify your sentences:

- · break up your ideas into different sentences
- try to present one idea per sentence
- if you combine two ideas in one sentence, use logical linking words like but, or, and, so, if, for or because

Still, reading a series very short sentences can become tedious. You risk losing your reader's attention.

Use short and simple sentences when it suits the ideas they convey. Consider using a few longer sentences in between them to vary the rhythm.

Additional resources

- For tips on how to construct simple, clear and concise sentences
 - o Government of Canada
 - <u>Clear communication: simplify your sentences</u> (Resources of the Language Portal of Canada)
 - <u>Sentences</u> (Translation Bureau)
 - <u>Plain language: Creating readable documents</u> (Resources of the Language Portal of Canada, section "Short and logical sentences")
- For information on the recommended length of sentences in English
 - o Government of Canada
 - <u>Use short sentences and paragraphs</u> (Resources of the Language Portal of Canada)
- For information on this topic that applies to French
 - o Government of Canada
 - <u>Construire des phrases de longueur moyenne</u> (Translation Bureau)
 - <u>Utiliser des phrases et des paragraphes courts</u> (Treasury Board Secretariat)
 - <u>Communication claire : Clarifiez vos phrases</u> (Resources of the Language Portal of Canada)

Build simple sentences

When possible, use a sentence structure that is simple and easy to follow. For example, put your subject first, your verb next, and your object last. (The subject is the person or thing doing the action. The verb is the action they are taking. The object is the person or thing they are doing the action to or for.)

In this sentence: "The employee wrote the document," "the employee" is the subject, "wrote" is the verb, and "the document" is the object.

For example, instead of writing:

Below are the requirements of the *Accessible Canada Act* that the Canada Post Corporation must meet by December 31, 2021.

Try:

The Canada Post Corporation must meet the following requirements of the *Accessible Canada Act* by December 31, 2021.

Instead of writing:

In collaboration with the Director of Human Resources, the Employees with Disabilities Committee is directly involved in developing the accessibility plan.

Try:

The Employees with Disabilities Committee develops the accessibility plan with the Human Resources Director.

Put the subject and the verb close together in the sentence. Don't separate them with clauses or unnecessary words

For example, instead of writing:

Rapid Transit, as the national leader in road transportation, wants its buses to be fully accessible by December 2026.

Try:

As the national leader in road transportation, Rapid Transit wants its buses to be fully accessible by December 2026.

Instead of writing:

The CEO, following extensive consultations with disability groups, decided to make some recommendations.

Try:

The CEO made recommendations after consulting many disability groups.

Some complex sentences can be perfectly understandable when you build them well. Reread or have someone else proofread your sentences to ensure they are readable and clear. The following is an example of a poorly built sentence that creates confusion, and two possible clarifications.

Instead of writing:

By drafting this accessibility plan, our customers with disabilities will gain a better understanding of the measures in place to make our bank accessible. (Here, it looks like customers are the ones writing the plan, which is not the case.)

Try:

This accessibility plan will help our customers with disabilities understand how we are making our bank accessible.

Additional resources

- For more information on how to construct simple sentences
 - o Government of Canada
 - <u>Put things in subject-verb-object order</u> (Resources of the Language Portal of Canada)
 - <u>Use simple sentences</u> (Treasury Board Secretariat)
 - <u>Simple sentence</u> (Resources of the Language Portal of Canada)
 - <u>Plain language: Making your message intelligible</u> (Resources of the Language Portal of Canada, section "Eliminating ambiguity")
- For information on this topic that applies to French
 - o Government of Canada
 - <u>Construisez vos phrases selon l'ordre le plus facile à lire et à comprendre (sujet, verbe, complément)</u> (Resources of the Language Portal of Canada)
 - <u>Utiliser des phrases simples</u> (Treasury Board Secretariat)
 - <u>Communication claire : Éliminez les ambiguïtés</u> (Resources of the Language Portal of Canada)
 - <u>Langue claire et simple : rédiger des documents lisibles</u> (Translation Bureau, sections "Phrases courtes et logiques" et "Phrases claires")

Use the active voice

When building a sentence, you can choose the active or passive voice. With the active voice, the subject **does** the action.

For example:

Management sought input from all teams in our organization before approving the accessibility plan.

With the passive voice, the subject undergoes the action, and it is difficult to know who is doing the action.

For example:

All teams in our organization were consulted before the accessibility plan was approved. (Note: who consulted all teams and who approved the plan is not clear.)

Using the active voice will make your accessibility plans, progress reports and feedback process descriptions clearer and easier to read. Even so, you may sometimes decide to use the passive voice in certain situations. It is not always possible or useful to know who is responsible for an action³.

Be careful not to change the meaning of a sentence when you try to switch it from passive to active.

Additional resources

- For more information on the active and the passive voice
 - o Government of Canada
 - <u>Clear communication: Use the active voice</u> (Resources of the Language Portal of Canada)
 - <u>Active or passive voice</u> (Treasury Board Secretariat)
- For information on this topic that applies to French
 - o Government of Canada
 - <u>Communication claire : Privilégiez la voix active</u> (Resources of the Language Portal of Canada)
 - <u>Voix active ou passive</u> (Treasury Board Secretariat)

Use verbs instead of nouns

To make your sentences clearer, use short and direct verbs, whenever possible. Avoid turning verbs into nouns.

For example, instead of writing:

You must **perform an analysis of** all your documents to identify unnecessary repetitions.

Try:

You must **analyze** all your documents to identify unnecessary repetitions.

Instead of writing:

Before we can **proceed with the release of** our progress report, senior management must **give their approval**.

Try:

³ EUROPEAN COMMISSION. *How to write clearly* (PDF format) (consulted on April 4, 2022), p. 9, "Prefer active verbs to passive ones" Publications Office of the European Union.

Before we can release our progress report, senior management must approve it.

Remember that language is a flexible tool. Sometimes, it can be more natural to use a noun.

For example, instead of writing:

To write our accessibility plan, we consulted the regulations to ensure **that we complied** with sections 5, 10 and 14.

Try:

To write our accessibility plan, we consulted the regulations to ensure our **compliance** with sections 5, 10 and 14.

Simply remember that:

- some nouns and verbs can be interchangeable
- it's generally better to use verbs rather than nouns when writing in simple, clear and concise language

Additional resources

- For more information on the use of verbs
 - o Government of Canada
 - <u>Clear communications: turn nouns into verbs</u> (Resources of the Language Portal of Canada)
 - <u>Use verbs instead of nouns formed from verbs</u> (Treasury Board Secretariat)
- For information on this topic that applies to French
 - o Government of Canada
 - <u>Communication claire : Remplacez les noms par des verbes</u> (Resources of the Language Portal of Canada)
 - <u>Utiliser des verbes plutôt que des noms formés à partir de verbes</u> (Treasury Board Secretariat)

Create paragraphs

By breaking down your text into paragraphs, you give your plans and reports structure. This will make your documents easier to follow.

In general, each paragraph should focus on one main idea and only include 5 or 6 sentences.

Use relevant transition words to link your paragraphs and ideas.

Additional resources

• For more information on writing paragraphs

- o Government of Canada
 - <u>Clear communication: Polish your paragraphs</u> (Resources of the Language Portal of Canada)
- For information on this topic that applies to French
 - Government of Canada
 - <u>Communication claire : Rédigez des paragraphes clairs et efficaces</u> (Resources of the Language Portal of Canada)

Review the entire text

Once you have finished writing, reread your entire text to confirm that it is consistent, concise, and readable.

Be consistent

Be consistent with your key words and terms. If you change the words you use to refer to important concepts, you risk confusing your readers⁴.

For example, if you talk about your accessibility plan, always call it a plan. Do not call it a "strategy," "project" or "program" later in your text to switch up your vocabulary. Also avoid calling anything else "a plan" in that document.

This advice does not always apply to the repetition of less important words such as verbs, expressions or linking words. For example, you might not always want to use "however" to indicate contrast. You could add variety with words like, "but," "yet," and "nevertheless," as appropriate.

Using repetition well involves deliberately using the same key terms to help the reader follow the text⁵.

Be concise

Edit your document to remove unnecessary words, sentences, information and repetition.⁶ Keep only deliberate repetitions that you use to emphasize a point or to keep using consistent key words.

⁴ MATSUNE, Heather. <u>Plain Language: Creating Readable Documents</u> (online, consulted on April 4, 2022), "Consistent vocabulary". *Language Update*, vol. 4, n° 2 (2007), p. 14.

⁵ GOVERNMENT OF CANADA. <u>Style Myths</u> (online, consulted on April 4, 2022), "MYTH: Use synonyms wherever possible to avoid the monotony of repetition".

⁶ EUROPEAN COMMISSION. <u>*How to write clearly* (PDF format)</u> (consulted on April 4, 2022), p. 6, "KISS: keep it short and simple" Publications Office of the European Union.

Take out anything that does not add new or important information. Provide all the information that is directly relevant to your target audience, and nothing more. Your message will be clearer if you stick to essential information and drop unnecessary details.⁷

There is no need to state the obvious, as demonstrated in the two examples that follow.

Instead of writing:

Please submit your comments on our updated accessibility plan **within a period of** 30 days.

Try:

Please submit your comments on our updated accessibility plan within 30 days.

Instead of writing:

We have prepared our progress report, and if you would like a copy, please contact us directly.

Try:

To obtain a copy of our progress report, please contact us directly. (It is obvious that you prepared a report if you are offering to provide a copy.)

Shorten some passages through effective word choices.

For example, instead of writing:

We have changed the signage leading to the area of the bank where we offer advice **on income tax**.

Try:

We have changed the signage leading to the area of the bank where we offer **tax** advice.

Some articles or adjectives can help shorten a text and making it more cohesive.

For example, instead of writing:

Any member of the public can request a description of the feedback process. **The feedback process description** will be provided to such persons in simple, clear and concise language.

Try:

⁷MATSUNE, Heather. <u>Plain Language: Making Your Message Intelligible</u> (online, consulted on April 4, 2022), "Relevance". *Language Update*, vol. 4, nº 3 (2007), p. 12.

Any member of the public can request a description of the feedback process. **This** description will be provided in simple, clear and concise language.

Use pronouns to avoid repetition.

For example, instead of writing:

Accessibility plans must be clear. **Accessibility plans** must also include all the headings that the regulations require.

Try:

Accessibility plans must be clear. **They** must also include all the headings that the regulations require.

However, ensure that the pronoun does not create doubt or confusion.

For example:

The representative of employees with disabilities will attend the ceremony to meet with the Director. She must return to the office at 3 p.m. (Who should return to the office at 3 p.m.? The representative or the Director?)

Organizations writing accessibility plans should ensure clarity. **They** must also be representative. (What needs to be representative? The organizations? The plans?)

Never sacrifice clarity for concision.

Check your content's readability and usability

First, reread your text carefully. Make sure your accessibility plans, feedback process descriptions and progress reports are readable and usable.

Some statistical tools are available online to test a document's readability. However, these tools only check features like average sentence and paragraph length, or number of syllables per word.

- Some word processing programs, like Microsoft Word, include tools to run <u>Flesh-Kincaid</u> <u>tests</u> on an English document. Flesh-Kincaid tests present results as a grade level equivalent.
- Scolarius is a free online tool that conducts similar analysis on French texts

Keep in mind that these tools have important limitations. Simplicity, clarity and concision cannot be reduced to mathematical considerations. The message comes first, not the number of words or the length of sentences and paragraphs.

You can ask your readers to assess the readability of your documents. Ask someone from your target audience to read your accessibility plan, feedback process description and progress reports. And, more specifically, ask persons with disabilities to read them. Ask them if they:

found them clear and easy to understand

- found their structure easy to follow
- could easily find important information

There are many ways to test usability with your readers. <u>How to test the usability of documents</u> offers information on 3 methods:

- Tell me in your own words
- Mark positives and negatives
- Find an answer or do something (for example: ask readers to find out how they could submit feedback anonymously to your organization, using your feedback process description)

Langue claire et simple : évaluer l'utilisabilité des documents (in French) offers information on 3 other methods:

- Discussion groups
- Written questionnaires
- Individual interviews

The Simplification Center in the United Kingdom conducted an in-depth review of criteria published by many organizations to assess document clarity. The article, <u>criteria for clear documents: a survey</u> (<u>PDF format</u>), contains a long list of criteria for testing the clarity and readability of your documents.

- · For more information on the limitations of statistical readability tools
 - o Government of Canada
 - <u>Readability formulas, programs and tools: Do they work for plain language?</u> (Resources of the Language Portal of Canada)
 - o Other sources
 - <u>Readability formulas: seven reasons to avoid them and what to do instead</u> (Effortmark, UK)
 - Ce que les tests de lisibilité ne vous disent pas (En clair, Canada, in French only).