

Communicating with the world in mind

The power of inclusive communication

A quick reference guide

Feb 2026 | Version 2.0



Introduction

Communication brings us together. Most of us communicate with other people daily, whether it be online, over the phone, or in person. This can take place directly, through conversation, and indirectly, through our webpages, blogs and social media platforms. Ensuring our communication routes are accessible and inclusive means we reach more people and enables them to engage with what we're saying.

For example, are you familiar with gender inclusive terms and pronouns? Can your online communications be read using a screen reader? Are your webpages accessible for someone with colour-blindness? These are all considerations to be made when crafting successful communications that can reach the largest audience.

This quick reference guide highlights key accessibility considerations and supports you in utilising inclusive language and design in your communications.



Format

Considering the format or channel you're using to communicate content plays a huge part in how inclusive it is and who it reaches. It is important to consider if your content is enabling engagement from a diverse audience or whether you are excluding anyone by the chosen format. You must always consider the needs of the audience and remember that needs may stem from characteristics that you cannot see or identify with.

Top tips:

- Write in clear and concise language, avoiding metaphors and unnecessary details.
- Design material to be as legible as possible, for example, is the font you've chosen easy to read for someone with restricted sight? Is the text very small or the colour contrasts too low?
- Consider that some people use assistive technology; for example, screen readers and magnifiers.
- Where possible, publish online content as web pages rather than (or alongside) embedded PDFs. This can be more accessible for those who use screen-readers and also allows users to alter font, colour and contrast to suit their individual needs.
- On social media, do not rely on images to share content; include important information within the post itself and a link to more details where necessary.
- Use alt text for social media images and images in downloadable documents. More information can be found on the last page of this guide on how to add alt text in LinkedIn, Instagram and Facebook.
- Use clear and descriptive text labels for hyperlinks, for example, "click here to learn more about X" rather than "click here" or "read more".
- Ensure all visual information in a video is also communicated on an audio track, for example, by including audio description. Video and audio communications should always include captions or a transcript.
- If using printed material choose matte rather than glossy paper and use dark text on a light background.
- Consider using alternative formats or channels for example Braille, radio or podcast.
- Avoid any strobing or flashing effects in videos or animated images.
- Avoid setting videos to auto play, as this can be distracting or disruptive for some people.

Did you know?

Alt text is a short description of what your image displays, and can make content more accessible to people with restricted sight.

[Click here to find out more](#)



Language

The words we use are fundamental to the story we are trying to tell. It's important to remember that written text can be interpreted differently, so using simple language with clear intentions helps to ensure you are communicating effectively. Things to consider are:

Am I using inclusive language for a diverse audience, and does it reflect the intention?



Top tips:

- Avoid exclusionary language that may reflect discriminatory, prejudiced or stereotyped views. For more guidance on this, you can take a look at our [Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Glossary](#).
- Consider if the language is inclusive in terms of age, disability, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, body image, socio-economic status and beyond.
- Avoid sayings and idioms (for example, raining cats and dogs) that may not be easily understood or translatable to anyone whose first language is not English or some neurodivergent individuals.
- Use alternatives for generic pronouns and avoid using binary statements to refer to gender.

Some alternative, inclusive ways to refer to a group or individual include:

Instead of	Use
'he' or 'she'	'the committee member'
'mankind'	'humanity' or 'people'
'chairman'	'chairperson' or 'chair'
'he' or 'she'	'they'
'husband' or 'wife'	'spouse' or 'partner'
'mother' or 'father'	'parent' or 'carer'

Imagery

"A picture is worth a thousand words."

It is important to think about the images we use. Are the images chosen accessible and appropriate for a diverse audience? Do they reflect diversity in society?



Top tips:

- Choose images carefully to ensure that they are clear and support the text.
- Consider what the image may suggest to a wide audience; could it perpetuate harmful stereotypes, or reflect a lack of diversity?
- Provide image descriptions for digital media, either as alt text or in the caption, so that images remain accessible to screen readers and those on slower internet connections.
- Maintain high contrast against the background when overlaying text over images, for example using dark coloured text on a white or light pastel background.
- Avoid using images with excessive text on them. This can be hard for some to read and could exclude important information for those using a screen reader. Any text used in images should be included in your alt text.
- Avoid being tokenistic with image choice, it's great to display diversity, but it could seem performative if the image has been chosen only for this purpose and not for its relevance in context.

Typeface

The type and size of a font can play a huge role in making something accessible. Plain and simple is often better when considering whether the typeface is easily readable for all users.

Top tips:

- Use a plain and evenly spaced font. Some good examples include Arial, Verdana or Tahoma.
- Consider using 12-14pt font in Word and PowerPoint documents (14pt is preferable) and 1.5 line spacing where possible.
- Avoid underlining or italics for emphasis, instead use bold. Bold text is clearer and more accessible for people with sight impairments.
- Avoid using block capitals as these are harder to read and may not be read properly by screen-readers.
- In written communications, write in sentence case. Sentence case involves capitalising only the first letter of the first word of a new sentence.
- Ensure high contrast between text and background. An off-white or pastel background with black text can be preferable to black on white for some.
- Avoid colour combinations that are difficult to distinguish for those with colour blindness, such as green and red.
- Websites or software to check for colour and contrast are available, for example, a [colour blindness simulator](#) can be used to check the colour accessibility.



Social Media

85% of videos on social media are watched without sound, as people often browse while doing other things. Therefore, it's important that content can be easily and silently engaged with.

Accessibility features not only help more people to see or hear your content, they're essential for helping web crawlers, AI and algorithms understand your content. So including these elements can lead to better performance.



Alt text example:

Alt text for the image on the left might read: Two women sit together looking towards a computer screen. One of the women is pointing towards something on the screen that is out of shot. Further along beside them, a black man in a yellow shirt is sat at a computer.

Alt text

Most social media platforms offer the opportunity to add alt text when generating a new post. Here are a few tips on how to get it right:

- Be succinct. Under 200 characters is good; under 125 characters is better.
- Communicate the key information; ensure someone using a screen reader gains the same information (or as close as possible) as anyone else.
- Consider the context - alt text should reflect the intended purpose of the image and take account of the text around it; an example of alt text is at the top of the page.
- Use punctuation - it will help screen readers sound more human, so your text is easier to comprehend. Finish alt text with a full stop.
- Separate acronyms with hyphens to ensure screen readers process them correctly.
- Don't start with "image of" - the screen reader will say "image" by default - and avoid repeating text that's available elsewhere in the post.

Social Media

Further resources:

- [WebAIM: Alternative Text](#)
- [An alt Decision Tree • Images • WAI Web Accessibility Tutorials \(w3.org\)](#)
- [Considerations when writing alt text | by Scott Vinkle | Shopify UX](#)
- [Poet Image Description - How to Describe \(diagramcenter.org\)](#)

When and how to use alt text:

- If there's text in an image that's not repeated in the post caption, or on a linked page, the alt text should ideally replicate that text exactly. If the text is well over 200 characters, summarise the key points in your alt text.
- On the website, purely decorative images should have the alt attribute left blank (alt="", not alt="image").
- For simple images, provide a brief description that communicates the essential information presented in the image, but you do not need to go into great detail. For more information, visit:
[Informative Images • Images • WAI Web Accessibility Tutorials \(w3.org\)](#)
- For complex images (for example data visualisation), the best approach for social media is to briefly describe what's shown and then ensure a more detailed description is available in a linked webpage. For more information, visit:
[Complex Images • Images • WAI Web Accessibility Tutorials \(w3.org\)](#)

Subtitles

It's important to add subtitles to our videos for accessibility.

- Subtitle font size should be a minimum of 24pt but this can vary significantly - always test legibility by checking your content on a phone held at arm's length.
- Subtitles should be placed in the lower third of the screen and kept within the safe zones.
- Hard-coded subtitles should appear as white text on a black content box.
- If this isn't visible over the background video or graphic, the opposite may be used (black on white).

[See the social media brand guidelines for more details.](#)



Communicating with the world in mind

Contact information

London, UK

T +44 (0)20 7344 8460

E faradaycentre@ietvenues.co.uk

Stevenage, UK

T +44 333 049 9123

E postmaster@theiet.org

Beijing, China*

T +86 10 6566 4687

E china@theiet.org

W theiet.org.cn

Hong Kong SAR

T +852 2521 2140

E infoAP@theiet.org

Bengaluru, India

E india@theiet.in

W theiet.in

New Jersey, USA

T +1 (732) 321 5575

E ietusa@theiet.org

W americas.theiet.org

Find us on:      IET EngX®

theiet.org

The Institution of Engineering and Technology is registered as a Charity in England and Wales (No. 211014) and Scotland (No. SC038698). The Institution of Engineering and Technology, Futures Place, Kings Way, Stevenage, Hertfordshire, SG1 2UA, United Kingdom.

*A subsidiary of IET Services Ltd.

