

Forestry Commission Print Accessibility Guidance

We are fully committed to making our publications as accessible as possible, whilst at the same time producing engaging and effective design solutions. There is a fine balance to be struck between the need to communicate to target audiences in a memorable way and the need to make this as accessible as possible and this guidance lays out some simple approaches to help achieve this.

Clear print is a design approach which considers the needs of people with sight problems. Put simply, a clear print document will find a wider audience. The guidance here is straightforward, focusing on some basic design elements, for example font, type size, contrast and page navigation.

This guidance is based on best practice recommended by Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB).

Type size

The size of the type (known as point size) is a fundamental factor in legibility. A type size between 11 and 14 point is recommended, although because point sizes aren't consistent across fonts (i.e. 11 point Times will be different to 11 point Verdana) designers prefer to work from an x-height size and the minimum recommended is 2mm. The larger the minimum type size, the more people you will reach.

Contrast

The better the contrast between the background and the text, the more legible the text will be. Note that the contrast will be affected by the size and weight of the type. Black or dark coloured text on a light background provides best contrast.

Typeface

Where possible avoid highly stylised typefaces, such as those with ornamental, decorative or handwriting styles, especially for core information and body copy.

Type styles

Blocks of capital letters, underlined or italicised text are all harder to read. A word or two in capitals is fine but avoid the use of capitals for continuous text. Underlining text should always be avoided if possible and an alternative method of emphasis used. Italics are a standard method of emphasis and part of the publishing convention in some areas so their use may be unavoidable. In other areas of publishing care should be taken not to over use italics and alternative methods of emphasis considered.

Leading

The space between one line of type and the next (known as leading) is important. As a general rule, the space should be 1.5 to 2 times the space between words on a line.

Type weight

People with sight problems often prefer a heavier type weight (medium or bold) to normal ones. Avoid extra light type weights.

Numbers

If you print documents with numbers in them, choose a typeface in which the numbers are clear. Readers with sight problems can easily misread 3, 5, 8 and 0.

Word spacing and alignment

Keep to the same amount of space between each word. Try and avoid condensing or stretching lines of type in body or core text. Aligning text to the left is recommended as it is easy to find the start of the next line and keeps the spaces even between words. Justified text with uneven word spacing can be more difficult to read so try and avoid it or use it carefully.

Columns

Make sure the margin between columns clearly separates them. If space is limited, consider using a vertical rule.

Reversing type

If using white type, make sure the background colour is dark enough to provide sufficient contrast.

Setting text

Avoid fitting text around images if this means that lines of text start in a different place, and are therefore difficult to find. Set text horizontally as text set vertically is extremely difficult for a partially sighted reader to follow. Try and avoid setting text over images or textures as this will affect the contrast.

Forms

Partially sighted people tend to have handwriting that is larger than average, so allow enough space on forms. This will also benefit people with conditions that affect the use of their hands, such as arthritis.

Navigational aids

It is helpful if recurring features, such as headings and page numbers, are always in the same place. A contents list and rules to separate different sections are also useful. Leave a space between paragraphs as dividing the text up gives the eye a break and makes reading easier.

Printing

Avoid high gloss papers because glare makes it difficult to read. Choose matts, silks or uncoated papers that weigh over 90gsm. As a general rule, if the text is showing through from the reverse side, then the paper is too thin.