

Scottish Accessible Information Forum (SAIF)

A Brief Guide to Making Your Information Accessible

When thinking about accessible information you should consider:

1. [Hard print and electronic formats](#)
2. [Source documents and styling](#)
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4. [Email](#)
5. [Social media](#)
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1. Hard print and electronic formats

There are well recognised standards for the layout of printed information to make it as visually accessible as possible. These standards include SAIF's own standards for [Making Information Accessible](#) and the [RNIB's clear print](#) standards (Royal National Institute of Blind People).

These standards include a minimum point size of 12 (preferably 14), a sans serif font such as Arial and left aligned text. Laying your text out in this way will mean that most people will be able to read it and should reduce your requests for alternative formats.

The standards are common sense tips on how your document should look to those reading it in the traditional manner, i.e. without the aid of assistive technology. The document needs to be visually appealing and easy to understand.

There are no such readily recognised standards for documents which are sent electronically. However, if you prepare your source document properly, people receiving it electronically will be able to open it and read it in their preferred method, such as by using a screen reader or by sending the text to a braille printer.

2. Source documents and styling

A source document is the main document which you have prepared before saving it as another format, such as PDF. The principles around structure and style apply to all source documents including Excel, Access, PowerPoint and Email.

You need to consider not only the visual impact of your document but also the hidden impact, as it may be used by people using assistive technology such as a screen reader or exported to other formats, e.g. saved as a PDF, or sent to a braille translator.

Your source document will more than likely be saved as a PDF, a format which more and more organisations are relying on as the only method of providing their information, without realising the implications for those who use screen readers. PDFs can be inaccessible if not formatted properly, i.e. if the source document has not been set up using a consistent style structure.

Formatting your document means applying styles to the different types of text throughout your document, such as main title, headings, normal text, bullet list etc, by using the built-in styles menu in Microsoft Word. So, for example, in this document we use Heading 1, Heading 2, body text and bullet lists to identify the text.

The RNIB state that the application of styles to word processed documents is one of the biggest contributions you can make towards making information accessible for all. More detailed information on how to use styles can be found by following the links at the end of this section.

Additionally, screen reader users may wish to print their documents using a braille printer, which is cost effective for the organisation, but will work only if the source document is structured correctly. If you prepare all your documents well, the recipient may be able to print it him/herself or alternatively the braille translating organisation will need less time to restructure the original document.

It is good practice to keep a styled, electronic version of the original text to ensure additional copies or accessible formats can be created when required.

[SAIF's Factsheet Creating Accessible Documents](#)

[RNIB Styling](#)

[RNIB Layout](#)

[RNIB Design](#)

[RNIB Tables](#)

3. PDFs

If using Adobe to create your PDFs, it has many accessibility features - you just need to learn how to use them! For example, you can run their built-in accessibility checker on any PDF and it will highlight any potential accessibility issues and explain how to correct them. To do this in Adobe Acrobat Pro 9 click on Advanced, Accessibility and Full Check.

For example, before saving this document as a PDF in Adobe Acrobat Pro 9, the Adobe Accessibility checker advised setting the language and the link order on the pages, with a step-by-step account of how to do this.

[SAIF's Converting Word Documents into Accessible PDFs](#)

[RNIB on PDFs](#)

4. Email

An email formatted as plain text is the only style you can guarantee will look the same when it is received as when it was sent. There is a standard for this called the Text Email Newsletter Standard, or [TENS](#).

However, with sophisticated enewsletters and exposure to highly designed websites, experience shows that people do not like the look of plain text. Therefore, if emailing in HTML, you should use the same [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines](#) as would apply to websites.

You should keep in mind how your audience could be accessing its email, e.g. mobile phone, screen reader, PC.

[SAIF's Factsheet Good Practice for Emails](#)

[RNIB Formats](#)

5. Social media

A wealth of information is now also being published on social networking sites. You should be aware of some accessibility issues on these sites and make sure alternative channels are available.

It is essential to remember that not everyone can get online.

[SAIF's What about Social Networks and Accessibility?](#)

6. Websites

Having an accessible website is essential. There are many free online accessibility checkers available such as [Cynthia Says](#) and [WAVE](#) and the [WCAG](#) guidelines are well known. It is good practice to carry out regular accessibility audits and to get regular feedback from groups who use assistive technology.

[GAWDS – the Guild of Accessible Web Designers](#)

[SAIF's Making Websites Accessible](#)

[RNIB Web Access Centre](#)

7. Other formats

Along with making your main document as accessible as possible from the start, you should always be able to provide other formats on request, if reasonable, and at the same time as you would provide your main format. For example, British Sign Language, braille, audio formats and an easy read version.

[SAIF's Brief Guide to Easy read](#)

8. Good practice

Making your information accessible needs more than a well structured or laid out document. It also means a commitment to:

- raising awareness of the issues,
- promoting the social model of disability,
- encouraging co-production and user-involvement from the start,
- adopting a flexible approach and going the extra mile to get it right.

For example:

- consider having an Accessible Information lead in every department,
- ask people how they want their information and do not make assumptions,
- review your equality scheme in light of how your information should be produced,
- don't forget about all the other services you provide and how accessible they are.

[SAIF's Making Services Accessible](#)

[SAIF's Social Model of Disability](#)

All SAIF publications are available free of charge and can be downloaded from the website in Word or PDF or read online in HTML. Hard print copies, electronic copies and alternative formats are also available by getting in touch with SAIF staff.

About SAIF

SAIF is funded by the Scottish Government and employs two part-time project workers. SAIF's work plan is driven by its advisory body, made up of 18 volunteers from disability-led organisations and information providers.

SAIF works to promote and improve the provision of accessible information for disabled people. SAIF is committed to the social model of disability and to promoting user-led services.

Sources of further information

[Sources of further information and useful contacts](#)

Get in touch with SAIF

SAIF can offer quick feedback on documents and advice on issues relating to accessible information.

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