

BAB's communication network regularly brings together people from across the sector in Bristol to discuss all things communications - their experiences, challenges, frustrations, solutions and learning.

Some of these people are communications professionals with overall responsibility for communications within their organisation. Most, however, are not communications experts; they are project officers, outreach workers, service coordinators and many others, whose job involves communication in some way.

In March 2018, the network discussed inclusive communications and received training from Big Voice Communications. Here we share the key learning from this event and provide you with tips on how to make your communication more inclusive.

**Step 1:** Get into the habit of asking yourself "is this accessible?" every time you do a piece of work. This may seem like common sense for posters and leaflets, but it also applies to emails, letters, reports, powerpoint presentations, website announcements and social media activity. Don't assume that everyone in that group email has the same communication needs as you.

**Step 2:** Remember that we are all individuals, with different communication needs and preferences. No form of communication is ever 100% accessible for everyone, but there are things you can do to make it as accessible as possible.

**Step 3:** Think about your writing style. [The average reading age of the UK population is 9 years old.](#) Using shorter sentences and short, everyday words can help your message be understood. It is also useful to avoid jargon, abbreviations, cultural references and generational references.

Outlook and Word can both allow you to check the reading age, [just follow this guide.](#) You can also get training in how to write in Plain English, or there are some [free guides here.](#) By writing in Plain English, it also helps those who do not have English as their first language.

**Step 4:** Consider the use of colour. **What is the easiest to read? What is the easiest to read? What is the easiest to read? What is the easiest to read?**

There are free online tools to help you check whether the colour contrast (for example the colour of the text against the colour of the background) meets minimum standards. [Try this one for starters.](#)

**Step 5:** Think about your images. Putting text directly over an image will make it very difficult to read. Similarly, if you use colour as the only way to convey meaning it can be confusing for those who are colour blind or have low vision.

It is also useful to think about the message an image is sending. Is it a positive portrayal of old age? Do you have a diverse range of people in terms of gender, ethnicity, age, disability or sexual orientation? If somebody looks at your leaflet, will they think “that’s not for me” based on the images used?

**Step 6:** How does it look on the page? Think about the overall layout. Is the page too busy? Do you have enough blank space so that it is not overwhelming to look at? If you are using columns, it is best practice to have a maximum of two columns per page.

Is the text a suitable size? Using a font with clear, distinguishable letters is easier to read than one which looks like handwriting. Similarly, vertical text going up the side of a page can be difficult for many people to read.

**Step 7:** Is your website accessible? There are [global web accessibility guidelines](#) to help you make your organisation’s website more accessible. These are, however, very technical and primarily aimed at those with knowledge of website design. [This short summary](#) might be more useful for those who are short on time and are looking for a quicker fix. To give you an idea of how your website holds up, [you can check it here.](#)

**Step 8:** Ask for feedback and respond to it. It can be valuable to ask the people you are trying to communicate with what they think of your communication and how it can be improved. However, there is no point gathering feedback if you are not going to act on it, so be willing to make changes.

That said, people might not always be honest due to fear of what might happen if they give negative feedback, for example they may fear the service will be taken away. Also be aware of feedback fatigue - nowadays we are asked for feedback about almost everything, so only ask for feedback if it is meaningful and you are going to use it!

***Remember: if a piece of communications is not accessible then it is not doing its job.***

***Are you getting the right message to the right audience in the right way?***