

Get Started

Summary

Clear words guideline uses research-based strategies to improve the experience of individuals with cognitive and learning disabilities. Clear words help create more accessible content. Writing and editing in plain language means using:

- Common words
- Define words
- Simple tense
- Literal language
- Avoid double negatives
- Nested clauses
- Diacritical marks

Why

- Clear words benefit individuals who live with cognitive and learning disabilities, language impairments, memory impairments, and autism.
- People with language impairments often have a reduced vocabulary and learning new terms is a very slow difficult process. For other groups, such as people living with dementia, learning new terms is not realistic or possible. Using common words that they already know will make the content understandable and usable.
- Simple tense, literal language, and active voice makes it clear what needs to be done for individuals who struggle to interpret implicit information.
- Clear words improves everyone's reading success and allows for a broader audience.

Who it helps

There are many types of disabilities that can make it harder to read, including a large range of cognitive and learning disabilities, mental health conditions, aging-related conditions, print disabilities¹, and cognitive impacts of some chronic or other health conditions. It also helps people who are non-native language speakers.

Not all individuals with cognitive and learning disabilities have the same needs. Difficulties with reading vary by disability but also by individual. It's important not to make assumptions. Many people with disabilities can understand specialized or complex information, but they may benefit from the same principles of clear words.

Clear words generally help everyone, especially people who may have difficulty reading due to disability. Reading may also be more difficult when tired, distracted, under stress, with low-literacy, when working outside one's first language (such as with some sign language users), or when vision is impaired.

How

- Write clearly and edit your content.
- Follow principles for plain language².
- Use a professional editor when possible.
- Refer to the Write tab for more instructions.

Plan

Planning Responsibilities

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Print_disability

² Link to resources for plain language internationally
<https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/c2dab20c-0414-408d-87b5-dd3c6e5dd9a5>

1. Prior to finalizing the project budget, consider possible costs associated with developing accessible content, written in clear language.
2. During project planning, coordinate efforts with the project team to organize and schedule the approach to creating content written in clear words . Considerations to discuss:
 - If possible, secure content authors or editors with experience writing in plain language
 - Direct content authors to the clear words guideline
 - Provide training on how to develop content that uses plain language principles. Determine if you will create a style guide to clearly communicate the unique needs of your content. Plan and schedule iterative plain language quality assurance checks throughout the project cycle. Schedule time for cycles of editing.
 - If your content requires legal review, bring in legal experts early so they agree with using plain language.
 - If your content uses a lot of technical terms, idioms, jargon, metaphors or sarcasm, plan the time to write clear words summaries.
 - You may need a glossary section to define terms. This will need to be designed and coded.

Tips for Collaboration

- Work with the design team to include visually and semantically distinct heading structure (see Headings) and ability to display definitions of terms and summaries.
- Decide if you will do studies to gather end user feedback that includes people with disabilities. If so, develop a schedule and process for obtaining and integrating the feedback.

- Decide which approach will be used to evaluate clear words . For example, one or more of the following approaches could be used:
 - Use an professional editor
 - If a style guide exists, use this to evaluate clear language
 - Use the rubric in the method: [Use Clear Words](#)

Design

1. Ensure that...
 - Style the definitions of complex or uncommon words so they are visually prominent
 - Design glossary
 - Make it easy to find definitions and summaries.
 - If possible, use in-line definitions so the user can get to the definition in one click and return to their place in one click. Usually this is done with a modal (popup) with a close button, which can be an X in upper right.

HOW - Guide:

[W3C WAI Perceptions Video on Understandable Content](#)

TBD

Develop

Technical Responsibilities

1. Ensure that inline definitions are accessible by:
 - Make inline definitions keyboard accessible
 - Once activated (either by keyboard or hover), ensure definitions remain open until the user closes them.(EDNOTE: Look at [BBC Mobile Accessibility Guidelines: Actionable Elements](#) added to resources.

- Make definitions visually distinct from a link.
- able the background text (use a modal display) and ensure tDesign one click to the definition and one click return.
- When inline definition are displayed in a modal, all the accessibility requirements of a modal should be included, such as: dishat background text is covered or blurred so people aren't confused between foreground and background text, and that the keyboard focus remains in the modal until it is closed.

2. Examples & Demo:

Video (Embedded or Links) (TBD)

Functional Outcomes

1. Use clear words. (**Guideline**)
 - a. **Common Clear Words:** Uses common and clear words in all content.
 - b. **Define Words:** Avoids undefined polysyllabic words, jargon, and technical terms (Functional Outcome)
 - c. **Simple Tense:** Use a simple tense and voice. (Functional Outcome)
 - d. **Literal Language:** Use literal language
 - i. Use literal language. (or-Method)
 - ii. Explain implied content. (or-Method)
 - e. **Double Negatives:** Avoid double negatives
 - f. **Nested Clauses:** Avoid Nested clauses (Functional Outcome)
 - g. **Diacritical Marks:** Include symbols and letters necessary to decipher the words (and-Method - for languages that require diacriticals over letters to understand the meaning of the word) - like Arabic and Hebrew (Functional Outcome)