



Appendix 4.8

*Written
Communication
Guidance*

Effective communication involves all aspects of patient care. This document provides examples and resources for effective communication in written materials.

NOTE: This document is not comprehensive. It provides a high-level overview of considerations for ensuring written communications are accessible. Keep in mind that effective written communications and materials *supplement* necessary auxiliary aids and services—they do not replace them. Work with an expert, such as an advisory committee or accessibility professional, to evaluate whether your materials are accessible.

Disabilities

Accessible written communication materials should be considered for individuals with the following disabilities:

- **Hearing disabilities:** Deafness, hearing loss
- **Visual disabilities:** Blind, low vision
- **Physical disabilities:** Upper extremity weakness from a high-level spinal cord injury, ALS, Parkinson’s Disease, Multiple Sclerosis (MS)
- **Cognitive and learning disabilities:** Intellectual and developmental disability, dementia, dyslexia
- **Language disabilities:** Aphasia, developmental language delays, Autism

Examples of Written Communication

Written communication can be found throughout the healthcare encounter. Consider both patient reading and patient writing. The following are a few examples of where written communication can appear in a patient’s healthcare experience:

- After-visit summaries
- Consent forms
- Medication or treatment instructions
- Notices for upcoming appointments
- Notification of policies and patient rights
- Billing statements
- Signs throughout a facility

Visual Accessibility Suggestions for Print Materials

There are a range of guidelines and suggestions for ensuring print materials are visually accessible. We highly recommend consulting with your organization’s design team, an accessibility professional, and/or an advisory committee. Below are a few tips for accessible print materials:

- Use sans serif font (Arial, Helvetica, or Verdana)
- Avoid bold or italics

- Use font that is at least 14 point
- Use 1.5 or more line spacing
- High contrast colors (Black writing on white paper)
- Don't rely on color alone to convey meaning

It is not enough to simply enlarge documents. When a document's font is enlarged, the formatting must still be readable and comprehensive.

Here are a few other resources for creating accessible print materials:

- [Section 508 Compliance Guidance: Accessible Fonts and Typography](#)
- [National Disability Rights Network: Accessibility Guidelines](#)
- [American Council of the Blind: Large Print Guidelines](#)

Visual Accessibility Accommodations

In addition to ensuring print materials are written in accessible fonts, sizing, and contrasts, patients with visual disabilities may need accommodations to access your written communications. Consider having common documents, such as HIPAA forms, readily available in large print and other accessible formats.

Patients with visual disabilities may require print or written materials in:

- Large print versions
- Recorded spoken audio versions
- Braille versions
- Electronic versions

The following are additional accommodations that can support patients with visual disabilities:

- Auditory pill bottles
- Signature guides
- Magnifiers, including full page magnifiers
- Staff to orient blind or low vision patient to the room
- Staff to assist with navigating to and within a facility
- Staff to read written information aloud in private rooms
- Light dimmers/brighteners

Accessible or Plain Language

People with cognitive, communication, and/or learning disabilities often benefit from accessible or plain language documents. The following are some tips for creating accessible or plain language documents:

- Aim for materials to be at 3rd-5th grade reading level
- Use active voice
- Keep language simple and direct
- Limit one sentence to one idea
- Use bullet points or simplified tables
- Avoid jargon or acronyms
 - **NOTE:** While you may remove medical jargon, using plain language does not mean leaving out medical content or the meaning of the information. Technical terms are replaced with everyday words, communicating the same information in clear, digestible language.

For some patients, consider adding graphics or pictures to illustrate written information. For example, when providing a patient with directions for a new medication, include a picture of the bottle and pills, as well as graphics indicating when to take the medication.

To learn more about accessible and plain language document recommendations, navigate to [the UCEDD Resource Center](#).

Web and Electronic Communication Accessibility

Communication in healthcare happens virtually via websites, patient portals, emails, and telehealth. Healthcare organizations are required to ensure all communication platforms are accessible, including items such as images and test results that are uploaded to a patient's chart. All patients should have equitable access to these virtual options via accessibility features like Alt text, screen reader compatible PDF documents, captioned videos, and more. Additionally, it is important to provide patients choices. For example, patients should not be required to only communicate with their provider's office via the patient portal.

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to provide comprehensive guidance on how to ensure that your electronic communication channels and platforms are accessible. As these technologies evolve, so do the standards. We recommend reviewing the latest Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) standards for websites and web-based content from the [World Wide Web Consortium \(W3C\)](#), and work closely with your organization's IT team(s).