

Guide to inclusive communications

Oxygen

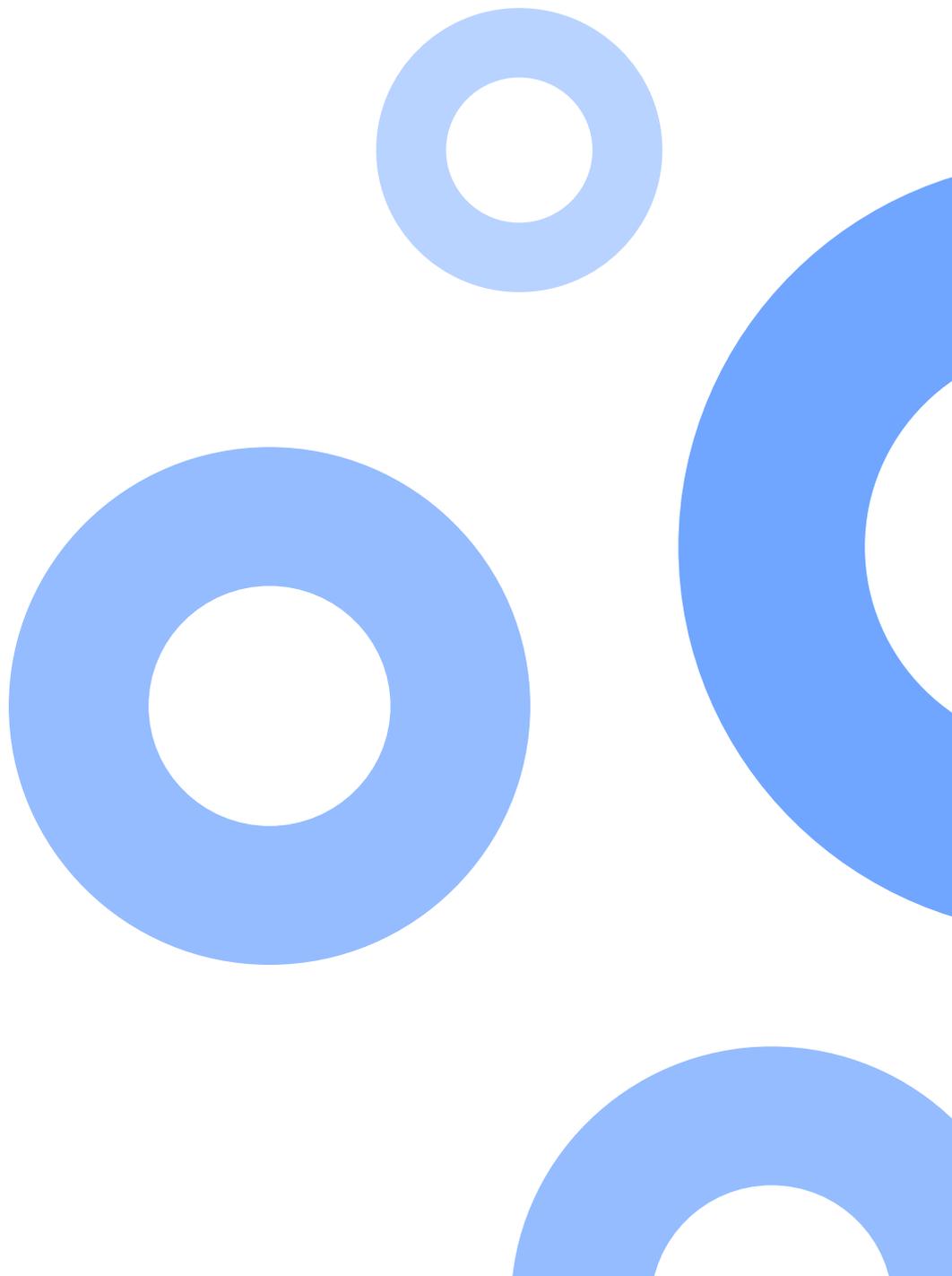
July 2023



Introduction

This guide has been put together by the OXYgen team to support organisations and individuals in being inclusive in their communications across platforms.

Language is always evolving, so be aware that language considered inclusive today may not be accepted tomorrow. It's our responsibility to keep our knowledge and practice up to date to meet the inclusion needs of our audiences. This guide is designed as a starting point; we've included resources at the end for up-to-date information.



What is inclusive communication?

Inclusive communication is effective communication – respectful, accurate and accessible to all – that enables everyone to contribute their perspectives and feel like they belong.

Inclusive communication:

- Is a means sharing information in a way that everybody can understand
- Is a means of storytelling that includes the person the story is centred on – the storytelling is participatory
- Is a two-way process of understanding others and expressing yourself
- Involves inclusive or active listening (listening to understand rather than listening with the intent to reply)
- Involves various communications tools - verbal and non verbal language, writing, images

Why is it important?

Inclusive communication enables everyone to understand and be understood, and limits unhelpful assumptions, stereotypes and biases that can affect our decision making (and by extension, our performance).

Internally, it's key to building a workplace culture in which people

feel valued, can contribute their perspectives, and feel like they belong. Inclusive communications promote respectful relationships between staff, as well as engagement, productivity, innovation, and wellbeing.

Externally, communicating inclusively makes your services and resources accessible and welcoming to customers, partner organisations, and other stakeholders.



Where to use inclusive communications

- Departmental documents (internal or external)
- Branding – business cards, websites, brochures, etc
- Visual communications - animations, videos, images or other visual content
- Teamwork
- Presentations
- Meetings
- Decision-making
- Design



Including different groups

Be Inclusive Of Culture, Race, and Ethnicity

- Monitor use of regional phrases and words.
- Be careful of cultural references that not everyone will understand due to age or geography.
- Use the respective person's preferred choice when referring to races, ethnicities and nationalities.
- In certain contexts, it may be appropriate to recognise First Nations people as original custodians of the land where you are meeting.

Be Inclusive Of Gender, Sex, and Sexuality

- Ask for and use people's preferred pronouns. If you are unsure of the subject's preferred pronoun, stick to gender-neutral pronouns like they.
- Refer to 'all genders' and avoid binary language such as 'ladies and gentlemen'.

- Use gender-neutral job titles (firefighter instead of fireman).
- Don't assume all people are heterosexual. For example, if asking about a person's personal relationships use the word partner rather than girlfriend, boyfriend, husband, or wife.

Be Inclusive Of Education and Non-Native Speakers

- Improve readability by using shorter sentences, cutting unnecessary words and making paragraphs smaller.
- Improve comprehension with simpler words and writing at a lower reading level.
- Avoid jargon the average person won't understand.
- Include a glossary if you use lots of unknown words.

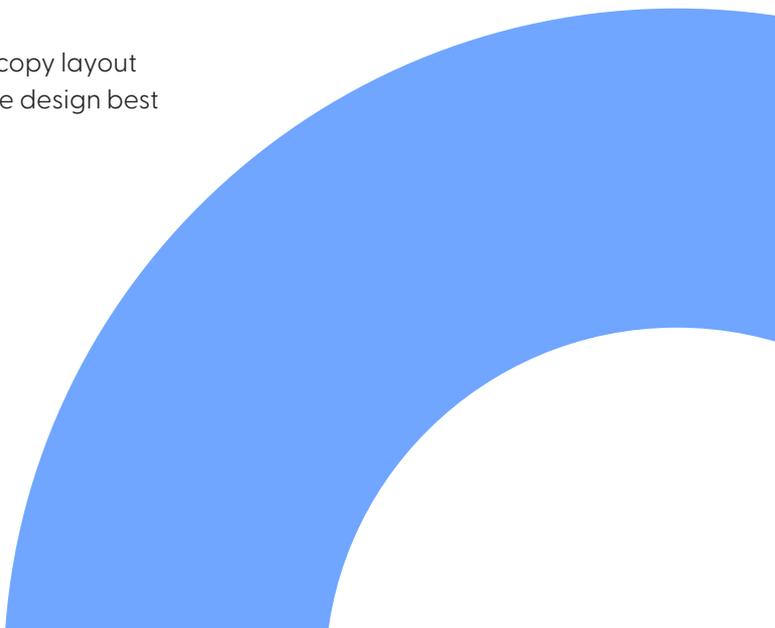
Be Inclusive Of Disabilities

- Ensure that your copy layout follows accessible design best

practices such as structure, space and contrast (see the inclusive design section below).

- Person-first language (e.g. "person with disability" instead of "disabled person") is usually preferred. Be aware, however, that the Deaf and Autistic communities often prefer identity-first language (e.g. deaf person or autistic person).
- Avoid ableist language (e.g., dumb or lame).
- Include accurate, detailed alt text for accessibility.
- Be inclusive of readers' different needs and goals by using information architecture that is skimmable, including hierarchies, headers and bullet points.

NB: Different disabilities call for different adaptations - be aware of your audience, but try to keep accessibility as wide as possible.



Inclusive design

Readability

Be inclusive of readers' different needs and goals by using information architecture that is skimmable, including hierarchies, headers and bullet points.

Providing structure, space & contrast improves readability for people with sight impairment or dyslexia and for screenreading software.

Current best practice recommends:

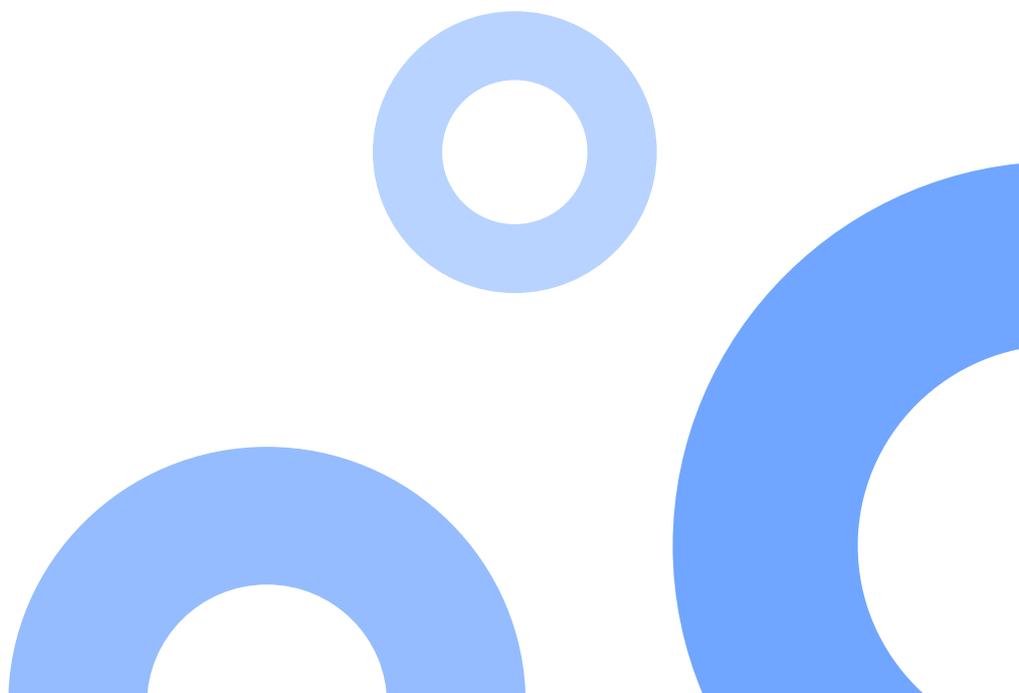
- Left-aligned text
- Sans-serif fonts
- Font sizes over 10pt, with line spacing of at least 1.2x that of the font size
- Using heading tags to provide clear information hierarchy
- Suitable clearspace around content to ensure it is clear and easy to read
- Avoiding acronyms. If you do use them, expand them on first use and at the start of new sections.

- Avoiding using text embedded within images, as screen readers will be unable to read the content. If this is unavoidable, use appropriate alt text as described below.
- Colour contrast between text, graphics or icons and their backgrounds ensures that content is legible for those with visual impairments and for persons who are colourblind. Selections should be guided by the WCAG ratio of at least 4.5:1, or 3:1 for large text and graphics, or an APCA ratio of 60 or above, however these are not hard and fast rules and discretion should be used when selecting combinations. Don't use colour alone to convey information.

Link text

Thoughtful link text allows people using screen readers to quickly find the link they want to follow.

- Links should be underlined and in a colour that stands out
- Links need to make sense when read out of context (i.e. without reading the surrounding text). The link text should describe where the link leads to
- Front-load with the most important words, e.g. Use "barriers to inclusion in the workplace", instead of "learn more about barriers to inclusion in the workplace"
- For download links, include the type and size of what will be downloaded, e.g. "We all belong' workforce diversity and inclusion framework (PDF, 903KB)"



Inclusive design

Image descriptions

For digital publications, on websites and on social media, you'll need to add image descriptions (also known as alternative text or alt text) for each visual element: shape, picture, chart, SmartArt graphic, graphic, diagram or table.

Image descriptions need to:

- Concisely and accurately reflect the content or function of the image
- If the image contains text, replicate the text in the description
- If the image is used as a link, describe the link destination in the description or use real text overlaid on the image
- If the image is purely decorative, describe as “decorative” or a null alt (“” in HTML)

How to add image descriptions in Microsoft Office:

1. Right-click the object, click Format Object, Format Picture, Format Chart Area, or other, and then click Alt Text
2. In the Description box, enter an explanation of the shape, picture, chart, SmartArt graphic, or other object. This box should always be filled in

3. If you want, in the Title box, enter a brief summary. This box should only be filled in if you are entering a detailed or long explanation in the Description box

How to add image descriptions on WordPress:

1. Upload image to media library
2. Select image, and locate “Alt Text” field in the top right of the pop up
3. Insert alt text

Videos

To improve accessibility to video content:

- Include captions and audio-descriptions – an equivalent, synchronised, textual version of what is spoken throughout the video. (Closed captions can be turned on or off, whereas open captions are always visible)
- Include transcripts – a textual version of what is said during the video, and may include descriptions, explanations or comments
- If videos cannot be captioned or audio described, supply any visual information that a person with low vision may not be able to access.

Alternative formats

Wherever possible, make written material available in alternative formats, as required, before and after the event. Consider providing Braille, large print, audio, electronic, plain English/Easy English versions.

Always supply a plain text version of candidate packs and brochures, and take note of any requirements of clients when preparing proposals.

How we represent people in our communications

Inclusive storytelling

We are more likely to remember a fact that is wrapped in a story. Storytelling should be at the core of what we do and what we share, connecting our readers and viewers to personal narratives that present change and impact.

Every story should:

- have a clear point and describe a specific issue
- show how we have a direct impact on that issue
- credit any other partner's role in supporting that work

Worked example:

Aide et Action wrote a story about a girl in a rural area who received a radio from them to access radio distance learning broadcasts.

Instead of a headline like "Aide et Action supports distance learning during Covid", they chose "Armed with a radio, Cambodian girl climbs tree to access education"

This made the story about the person involved - not the help they were given.

Inclusive photography

Each piece of communication is different and will have different intended audiences and outcomes. Despite this, we need to remember the images we use are real individuals and as such should be treated with respect and never deprived of agency or dignity.

When choosing a picture, consider:

- Context (what does the area look like)
- Action (what activities are happening)
- Detail (a close-up of an object, environment, or person)
- Emotion (what emotions are shown and what emotions is this image likely to inspire in others)

Individuals should never be depicted as helpless or passive: they should be shown actively solving their problems.

Use these questions to help you decide if the image you're using is appropriate:

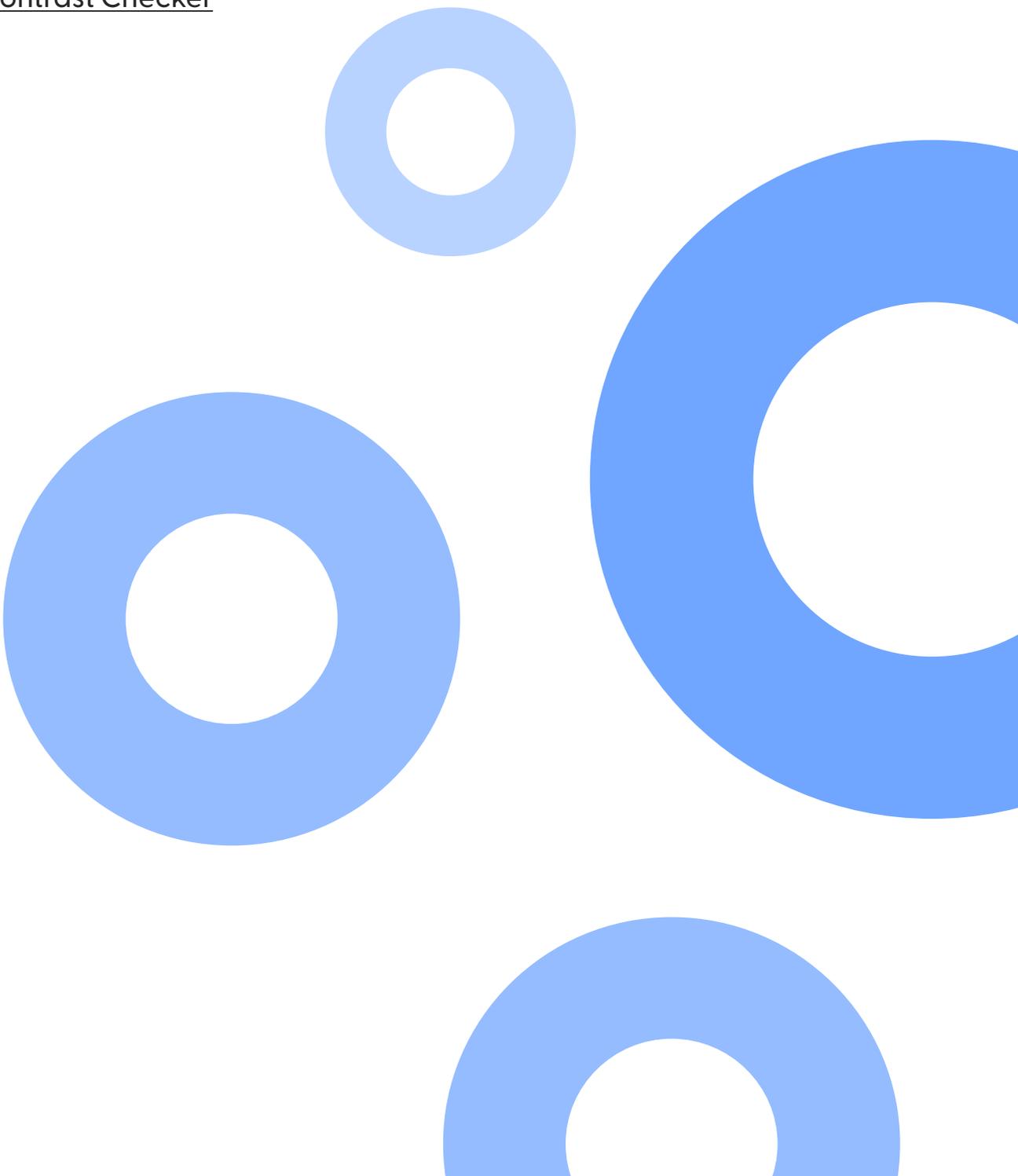
- Does the image and/or the message it's illustrating fit with the core value of respect for the dignity of others?

- Would the people featured feel that it is a fair and true representation?
- Have all the people featured agreed to this use of their image/story?
- Would the use of this image and/or message cause offence or hurt?
- Might the use of this image and/or message contribute to cultural or racial stereotyping of people, places and situations?

If you're not confident the individual would be happy with how they have been portrayed, it's time to find an alternative image or storyline. Remember, the internet and our communications materials are increasingly available to all, so it is possible they will see it.

Resources

- [Conscious Style Guide](#)
- [Diversity Style Guide](#)
- [Colour Contrast Checker](#)





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Washington

Opening Soon!