# People understand plain language

Information in plain language is easier and cheaper to translate into alternate formats.

* + Know your audience.
  + Use everyday language readers are familiar with.
  + Use short, clear sentences (15–20 words).
  + One idea in a sentence is best.
  + Keep paragraphs short with one subject in one paragraph.
  + Avoid using a multi-syllable word when a shorter one will do.
  + Avoid jargon, acronyms, technical words and details. If you must use an acronym, always provide a full version the first time you mention it.
  + Use active rather than passive verbs, e.g. “All government agencies signed the Charter “rather than “the Charter was signed by all government agencies”.
  + Use “you” and “we”.
  + Give straightforward instructions, e.g. “please sign this Charter”.
  + Be helpful, human and polite.
  + It’s okay to use bulleted lists.

# Use clear print principles

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## Fonts

* + Make body size 12 point type the minimum size recommended for a general audience and 16 point the minimum size recommended for people with vision impairment/low vision, or people with learning disability.
  + Use a strong sans-serif font, such as Arial.
  + Avoid highly stylised or simulated handwriting and typefaces.
  + Typefaces are available in different weights. Avoid light options because there is less contrast between paper and text.
  + Avoid italics, which can make text difficult to read for some people.
  + Bold type can be used to emphasise text.
  + Avoid using all capital letters in words. The human eye reads by recognising the shape of words and a word in all capitals interferes with this recognition.

## Other design characteristics

* + Be consistent with numbering, generally small numbers (1–10) should be written as words and larger numbers (over 10) should be written numerically.
  + Use a typeface that makes numerals distinct.
  + Avoid underlining.
  + Line length should be about 60 characters.
  + Align text to the left-hand margin and avoid right-justified text.
  + The space between lines should be 1.5 and twice the space between words.
  + Words should be evenly spaced.
  + Make sure there is a strong contrast between the text and the background.
  + Use plenty of white space around text and images and separate the different elements of the page.
  + Avoid using text over images or patterned backgrounds.
  + Avoid using colour shading and screens that reduce the contrast between text and background.
  + To accentuate pieces of text, use white spaces or boxes.
  + Leave a space between paragraphs for ease of reading.
  + Avoid fitting text around images if this means lines of text start in different places and are difficult to find.
  + Avoid using watermarks in the background of content, such as “draft” and “confidential”. Instead, signal these clearly on the front page and include them in the running header or footer.
  + Allow extra space/widely spaced lines on forms for people to write on or for signatures.
  + Consistency is important, for example make sure page numbers are in the same place on each page.

## Paper

* + Use matt or satin paper rather than glossy paper.
  + Use paper of enough weight so the print does not show through on the other side.

## Binding

* + Print documents should open flat.

1. Round Table on Information Access for People with Print Disabilities Inc:  
   <http://printdisability.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/round_table_-clear_print_guidelines-PDF.pdf> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)