

# Keep it Simple and Make it Accessible

## The Challenge

### Vision

- 6.4% of non-institutionalized U.S. residents age 65+ report a visual disability (blind or serious difficulty seeing even when wearing glasses).
- 25.66% of U.S. residents age 80+ report visual impairment.

### Hearing

- Approximately 15% of American adults (37.5 million) aged 18 and over report some trouble hearing.
- About one-third of adults over age 60 experience some hearing loss.
- About 28.8 million U.S. adults could benefit from using hearing aids.
- Among adults age 70+ with hearing loss who could benefit from hearing aids, only 30% have ever used them.

### Chronic Conditions

- As many as 80% of older Americans have at least one chronic health condition.
- The likelihood of developing memory loss increases with age.
- Many people process information more slowly as they age.

### Language Barriers

- Almost 15% of U.S. residents age 60 or older speak a language other than English in their homes.

### Health Literacy

- Health literacy is affected by far more than reading literacy and numeracy. Consider the effects of stress, fatigue, depression, medication, and nutrition.
- Writing and speaking in plain language boosts understanding for people with health literacy problems.
- The health literacy “onus” is on health and human services professionals to convey information in a way that patients and clients can process and understand it, and the services needed, and make appropriate health decisions.

## Keep It Simple!

- AVOID ALL CAPS, ESPECIALLY IN LONG LINES OF TEXT
- **Avoid boldface, especially in long lines of text**
- *Avoid italics, especially in long lines of text*
- Avoid underlining, especially in long lines of text
- **Avoid reverse type, especially in long lines of text**
- Use subheadings, bulleted lists, and sidebar boxes to break up long blocks of text.
- Leave ample white space to reduce eye fatigue (e.g., wider margins, space around images, and 1.5 spacing, when possible).
- Maintain high contrast (e.g., black or dark gray type on white).
- If you “break the rules,” it helps to increase leading (space between lines).

## Type Size & Font Choice



Anything smaller than 12-point type is nearly impossible for older eyes to read.

Use 14-point sized fonts for presenting online text to older readers. 14-point fonts are more legible, promote faster reading, and are preferred to 12-point fonts.

A compromise must be made in deciding which font type to use. At 14-point, serif fonts support faster reading; however, sans serif fonts are generally preferred. If speed of reading is paramount, then serif fonts are recommended. If font preference is important, then sans serif fonts are recommended.

—Determining the Best Online Font for Older Adults (Michael Bernard, Corrina Liao, & Melissa Mills, 2001)

## Plain Language

Plain language is clear, succinct writing designed to ensure the reader understands as quickly and completely as possible. Plain language strives to be easy to read, understand, translate (if necessary), and use. It avoids verbose, convoluted language and jargon. For more information, visit [www.PlainLanguage.gov](http://www.PlainLanguage.gov).

## Respectful Language

Use “person first” language that recognizes a person before his or her age, disability, or condition:



- “Person with a disability”
- “Visitor who uses a wheelchair”



- “Disabled person”
- “Wheelchair user”

## Make It Accessible!

Websites are required to be accessible under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Let your webmaster know that ...

### Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 Level AA

<http://bit.ly/2blKahy>

... is the Department of Justice’s standard for ensuring that online information is perceivable, operable, understandable, and robust for all readers.

Many web designers are simply unaware that the standards exist and don’t know that easy reference tools are available. WCAG strategies include:

- Use styles (e.g., Heading1, Heading2) for meaningful sequence
- Use “alt-text” to describe photos and graphics
- Provide user options such as text size and high-contrast adjustment
- Create accessible Word docs, PDFs, PowerPoint slidedecks, and more

These strategies make web content accessible by screen readers (assistive technology) as well as emerging voice-activated technologies.

Digital communications that meet ADA requirements for individuals with disabilities are easier for all people to read and understand.

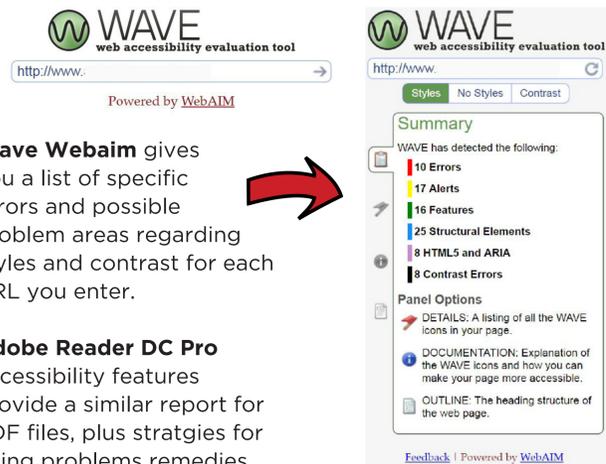
## Captions



All videos should have captioning for people with hearing loss. **Tip:** While far from perfect, videos uploaded to YouTube are auto-captioned.

## Test Your Website

There are lots of services that can check your website for you but you can also check it yourself using a free online app. One example is the WAVE web accessibility evaluation tool ([wave.webaim.org](http://wave.webaim.org)):



Wave Webaim gives you a list of specific errors and possible problem areas regarding styles and contrast for each URL you enter.

Adobe Reader DC Pro accessibility features provide a similar report for PDF files, plus strategies for fixing problems remedies.

## More Resources

**ADA Requirements: Effective Communication, U.S. DOJ**  
(<http://bit.ly/1Pu56w6>)

**CDC Health Literacy**  
(<http://bit.ly/233ugl0>)

**Quick Guide to Health Literacy and Older Adults, U.S. DHHS**  
(<http://bit.ly/2mG7W90>)

**Tips for Making Print More Readable, AFB** (<http://bit.ly/2c2NwrA>)

**University of Washington Accessibility Website**  
[www.washington.edu/accessibility/](http://www.washington.edu/accessibility/)

## Commitment

Aging and Disability Services (ADS) strives to provide information and access to services to all visitors, including those with disabilities.

**Aging and Disability Services**  
[www.agingkingcounty.org](http://www.agingkingcounty.org)

**AgeWise King County**  
[www.agewisekingcounty.org](http://www.agewisekingcounty.org)

We welcome your feedback regarding accessibility and age-friendly content:

[AgingInfo@seattle.gov](mailto:AgingInfo@seattle.gov)



Aging and Disability Services—the Area Agency on Aging for King County, WA—plans, coordinates, and advocates for a comprehensive service delivery system for older adults, family caregivers and people with disabilities in King County.

Aging and Disability Services is hosted by the City of Seattle, an Age-Friendly City.

[www.agingkingcounty.org](http://www.agingkingcounty.org)

# Best Practices in Elder-Friendly Print and Digital Communications