



Reaching Adults Age 50+ More Effectively Through Print

An Age-Friendly DC Guide for Creating Readable Material

Creating printed material with 50+ year old adults in mind is reader-friendly for all. Since we are all aging, these age-friendly tips are ways that you can ensure that everyone you are trying to reach receives your message. Following these tips will make a difference in how many people take the time to read and absorb your message.

Terminology

Use age to identify the group to whom you are referring (e.g. 50+), or just refer to “older adults.” Avoid using terms such as elder, mature or senior. Many adults 50+, even 90+, reject such labels, often due to accompanying stereotypes. Do not use “they” or “them” when referring to older adults.

Be Specific

Keep text short, direct and positive. An example of this would be to write, “Keep track of your medications,” instead of, “It is important for people to keep track of the medications they take.”

Use Examples

Use examples that help connect readers to applicable past experiences. Avoid abstract examples. Pictures can also be effective.

Font Types

Some believe serif typefaces, with tails at the end of letters, help guide the reader’s eyes across the page. The large headlines and subheads on this page are examples of serif type. And the font type used in this paragraph is an example of sans-serif.

Font Sizes

To improve readability and comprehension, emphasize size of text over amount. In general, do not use anything less than 12 point type for body text. But note that the same point size in different fonts will often produce letters of different sizes (the sans-serif type in this paragraph is 13 point for example).

The important thing is the readability. With websites, do not assume that all individuals know how to make a screen larger if need be.



Type Styles

WRITING IN ALL CAPS MAKES READING DIFFICULT. Reserve capital letters for headers.

Also generally avoid the use of italics, except for large headers. On the other hand, use of underlining and bold text can improve readability.

Color

Black letters written on a white background are the most reader-friendly. Reverse type, with white letters on black or colored backgrounds, is especially difficult to read unless very large in size (such as headers).

Using colors for text, especially light colors and particularly for body text, reduces readability. If you want to have color, use a light shade of color as a background behind black text.

References

<https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/publication/making-your-printed-health-materials-senior-friendly>

<https://www.fonts.com/content/learning/fyti/situational-typography/designing-for-seniors>

<http://www.uxmatters.com/mt/archives/2010/05/designing-for-senior-citizens-organizing-your-work-schedule.php>

<https://www.cms.gov/outreach-and-education/outreach/writtenmaterialstoolkit/downloads/toolkitpart09.pdf>

Design Tip

Note that newsprint has a gray or brown tint, while your computer screen is back-lit in bright white. When designing publications or advertisements on your computer, think about the medium on which the final product will appear.

Width of Text

Avoid wide blocks of text and extremely long paragraphs. Use indentations or break content up into two columns. Bullets and itemized lists can also improve comprehension.

Ask Questions

Reinforce points with questions. Research suggests that questions help readers remember key points. And don't forget to answer them!

Charts

Avoid complex diagrams. Keep charts and graphs simple and clearly labeled.

