

Writing inclusively

Guidelines for inclusive writing and formatting of print and digital instructional material

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1 Background

- Queen Mary University of London has a legal duty to anticipate the requirements of its disabled staff and students under the terms of the Equality Act (2010).
- From September 2019, the university also has a duty to ensure that its digital content is as accessible as its physical estate.
- The following guidelines have been produced to enable colleagues to prepare and produce written instructional materials that allow all our students to learn at a level commensurate with their ability.
- The guidelines will help the university comply with accessibility legislation and to realise its stated strategic objectives of being 'truly inclusive'.
- We have produced these guidelines with reference to best practice in the Higher Education sector, including guidance from the British Dyslexia Association.
- They have also been produced with reference to the [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\) 2.1AA](#) accessibility standards.
- For more information, see the 'Accessibility' tab on any Queen Mary webpage (<https://www.qmul.ac.uk/site/accessibility/>).

2 Scope of guidelines

- The Cambridge Dictionary defines guidelines as "information intended to advise people on how something should be done or what something should be." <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/guideline>.
- The guidance can be used in the preparation of all written documents including, but not limited to:
 - Course handbooks (print or digital).
 - Lecture presentations.
 - Seminar material.
- We have prepared the guidance for use by **all** schools at QMUL.

3 Guidelines

3.1 Documents

3.1.1 Documents: Media

- Paper should be thick enough to prevent the other side showing through when placed on a desk or table surface.
- Use matt paper rather than glossy except for photographs.
- Avoid digital print processing, which tends to leave paper shiny.
- All text must be black on a light (not white) background.
- Avoid white backgrounds for paper, computer and visual aids. White can appear too dazzling. Use cream or a soft pastel colour.
- Some dyslexic people (as well as other specific learning differences) will have their own colour preference. The Disability and Dyslexia Service may recommend that students use transparent overlays.

3.1.2 Documents: Font

- Use a plain, evenly spaced sans serif font such as Arial and Comic Sans.
Alternatives include Verdana, Tahoma, Century Gothic, or Trebuchet.
- Font size should be 12-14 point including headers and footers.
- Some dyslexic readers may request a larger font.
- Avoid green and red/pink backgrounds, as these are difficult for colour-blind individuals.

3.1.3 Documents: Headings and Emphasis

- Avoid underlining and *italics*: these tend to make the text appear to run together. **Use bold instead.**
- AVOID TEXT IN BLOCK CAPITALS: this is much harder to read.
- Use **bold** to emphasise in the body of a text.
- For electronic documents, use the Headings function in MS Word's **Home** ribbon. This provides structure that helps a text-reader read.

3.1.4 Documents: Layout

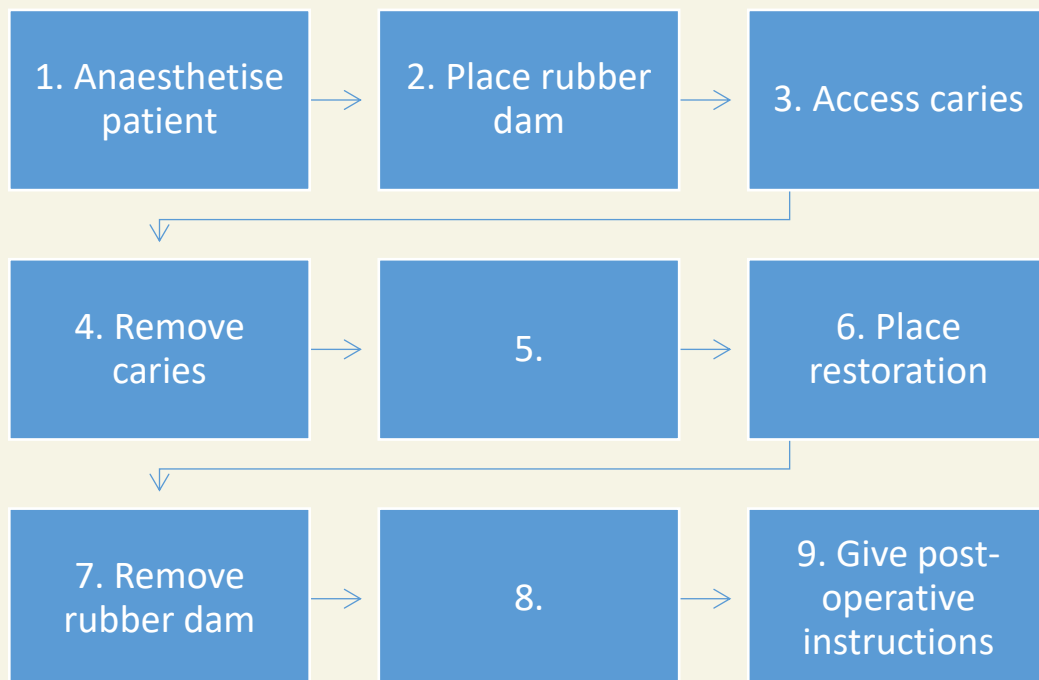
- Text should be left justified with a ragged right edge.
- Avoid narrow columns (as used in newspapers).
- Lines should not be too long: 60 to 70 characters.
- Avoid cramping material and using long, dense paragraphs: space it out.
- Line spacing should be 1.5 to 2.0 throughout.
- Avoid starting a sentence at the end of a line.
- Use bullet points and numbering rather than continuous prose.
- Avoid using text boxes for formatting.
- Use clear, concise sentences separated by full stops.
- Maintain consistency of formatting throughout.
- All pages should show the page number in the footers.

3.1.5 Documents: Writing Style

- Use short, simple sentences in a direct style.
- Give instructions clearly.
- Avoid long sentences of explanation.
- Use active rather than passive voice. (See appendix for examples.)

3.1.6 Documents: Increasing accessibility

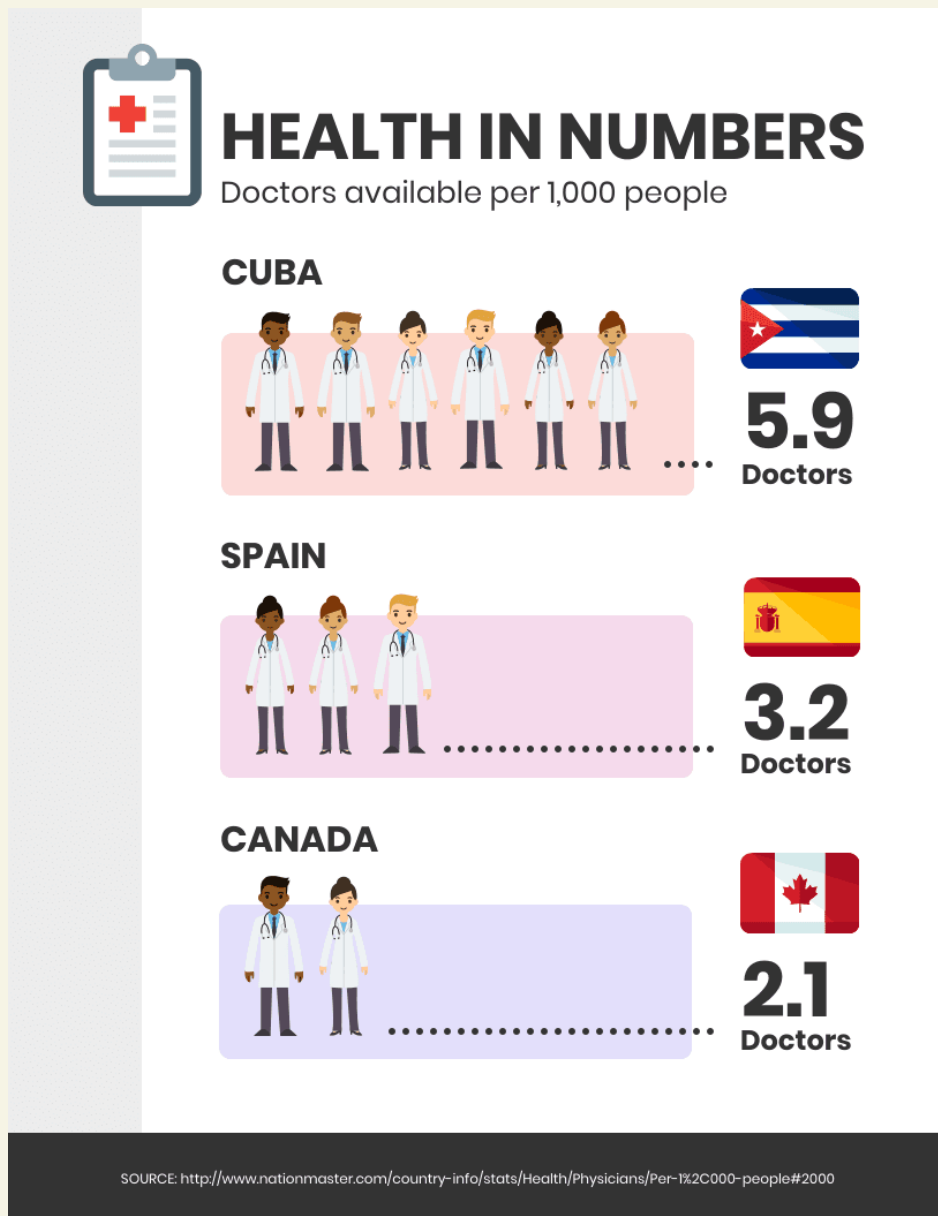
- Flow charts are ideal for explaining procedures.
- A linear explanation should accompany the flow chart to improve accessibility for anyone with a visual impairment.



- For example, a linear explanation for the flowchart above might be:

"The flow chart shows nine steps involved in restoring a tooth. The steps are: one, anaesthetise patient; two, place rubber dam; three, access caries; four, remove caries; five, blank; six, place the restoration; seven, remove the rubber dam; eight, blank; and, nine, give post-operative instructions."

- Pictograms and graphics help to locate information.
- A linear explanation should accompany the pictogram or graphic to improve accessibility for anyone with a visual impairment.



- For example, a linear explanation for the pictogram above might be:

“The pictogram above is titled, “Health in numbers”. It shows the number of doctors available per one thousand people in Cuba, Spain and Canada. In Cuba, the number is 5.9 doctors per 1,000. In Spain it is 3.2 doctors per 1,000. In Canada it is 2.1 doctors per 1,000.”.
- Lists of "dos" and "don'ts" are more useful than continuous text to highlight aspects of good practice.
- Avoid abbreviations if possible.
- When using abbreviations, ensure the full term is used first, followed by the abbreviation in brackets.
- Alternatively, provide a glossary of abbreviations.

3.1.7 Documents: Checking Readability

- Readability is a measure of how easy a piece of text is to read.
- It can include elements of complexity, familiarity, legibility and typography.
- Readability formulas usually look at factors like sentence length, syllable density and word familiarity as part of their calculations.
- Readability scores measure whether content is likely to be understood by your intended reader.
- Learn how to check the readability of your documents [here](#).
- One readability scale is the Flesch Reading Ease score. This rates text on a 100-point scale. The higher the score, the easier it is to understand the document.
- A score of around 30-50 would be appropriate for most undergraduates.
- See Rudolf Flesch's explanation of the scale [here](#).
- The Flesch Reading Ease score for this document is 48.
- Check long documents in sections, so that you know which parts are too hard.

3.1.8 Documents: Preparing for text-reading software

- Listening to a document using a text reader will take longer than visual reading.
- Put semi-colons, commas, or full stops after bullet points to make a pause.
- Use Styles in Word to organise headings and formatting.
- Styles provide a structure that text-reading software can discern.
- Contents page listings should be hyperlinked to the relevant section to aid navigation.
- Number items in the contents page.
- Use internal and external hyperlinks for ease of navigation.
- Include as few signs and symbols as possible, e.g. asterisks or dashes (both short and long). These will be spoken.
- Avoid long dashes to make the voice pause. Use colons instead.
- Use straight quotation marks instead of curly or smart marks. Some screen readers may read out curly or slanting ones as "back quote".

“These are curly quotes”

"These are straight quotes"

- Avoid Roman Numerals and "No." for number.
- Consider whether abbreviations and acronyms need full stops.
- Avoid text in images. Listeners cannot hear it. Repeat the text from the image in the main text.
- Include an [alt-text description](#) for images.
- Use hyphens in compound words to aid text-reading pronunciation.

3.2 PowerPoint

3.2.1 PowerPoint: General

- Dim lighting in the room to reduce glare.
- Make the slides available beforehand on QMPlus.
- Print slides three to a page on pastel or cream paper.
- Leave slides up long enough for slower readers to process the content.
- Make the presentation as multi-sensory as possible. Use audio-visual elements to reinforce information.
- Microsoft have produced a [short video](#) called, "Designing slides for people with dyslexia".
- A QMUL and IoD-branded PowerPoint template is available to download [[link to webpage](#)].

3.2.2 PowerPoint: Media

- Dark text on a pastel background works best.
- Dark blue text on cream suits many students with dyslexia.
- Be consistent in your use of font, colour and background.
- Include an alt-text description for images.
- Use images to break up text.

3.2.3 PowerPoint: Text

- Use a sans-serif font, such as Tahoma, Arial or Verdana.
- Use a large font size. **22-26**pt is ideal.
- Avoid too much variation in font style and size.
- Use **bold** for emphasis, rather than **highlighting**, underlining or *italicising*.
- Align text to the left or centrally.
- Do not justify both sides.
- Avoid text which is angled or uses special effects, such as shadows.

3.2.4 PowerPoint: Colour & visuals

- Avoid colour combinations which may cause visual stress, such as green and red.
- Present information diagrammatically. SmartArt can be useful for this.
- Avoid slide designs with patterned backgrounds.
- Place images alongside text, rather than behind it.

3.2.5 PowerPoint: Effects

- Stagger the release of complex information by using the **Appear** function to gradually reveal bullet points or elements in SmartArt.
- Avoid complex visual effects.
- Moving, flashing or dissolving images and graphics are distracting and cause visual distortion.
- Keep slide transitions consistent and simple.

3.2.6 PowerPoint: Layout

- Keep slides clear, simple and uncrowded.
- Use minimal text by:
 - Covering one subject per slide.
 - Using the 6x7 rule: no more than six words per line and seven bullet points per slide.
- Use visual structuring instead of tables.
- Below is an example of visual structuring from the [Microsoft video](#) mentioned at the start of this section.

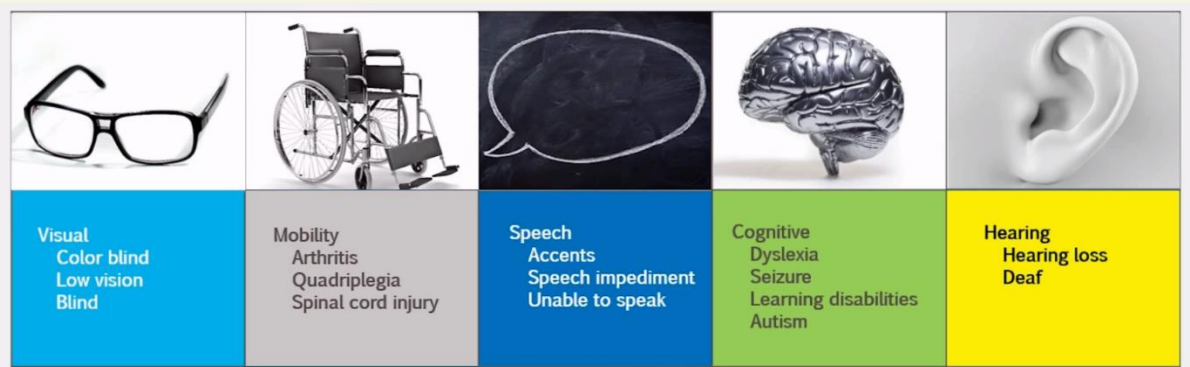


Figure 1 An example of visual structuring.

4 Accessibility Regulations 2018

- The Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) Accessibility Regulations 2018 came into force in September 2018.
- These apply to public sector organisations' websites, including Higher Education Providers (HEP).
- The regulations state that an HEP's website must be "accessible by making it 'perceivable, operable, understandable and robust'".
- We have acquired a subscription to an online tool that Queen Mary staff and students can use to make their documents more accessible. It is called SensusAccess.
- SensusAccess is a great tool for enhancing readability in general.
- It may also help teachers improve their documents.
- Please access SensusAccess via this link:
<http://www.dds.qmul.ac.uk/disability/sensusaccess/convert-a-document/>
- SensusAccess have also produced several online learning modules about digital documents.
- Module six is called "Designing and creating accessible documents". It is particularly relevant to this guidance.

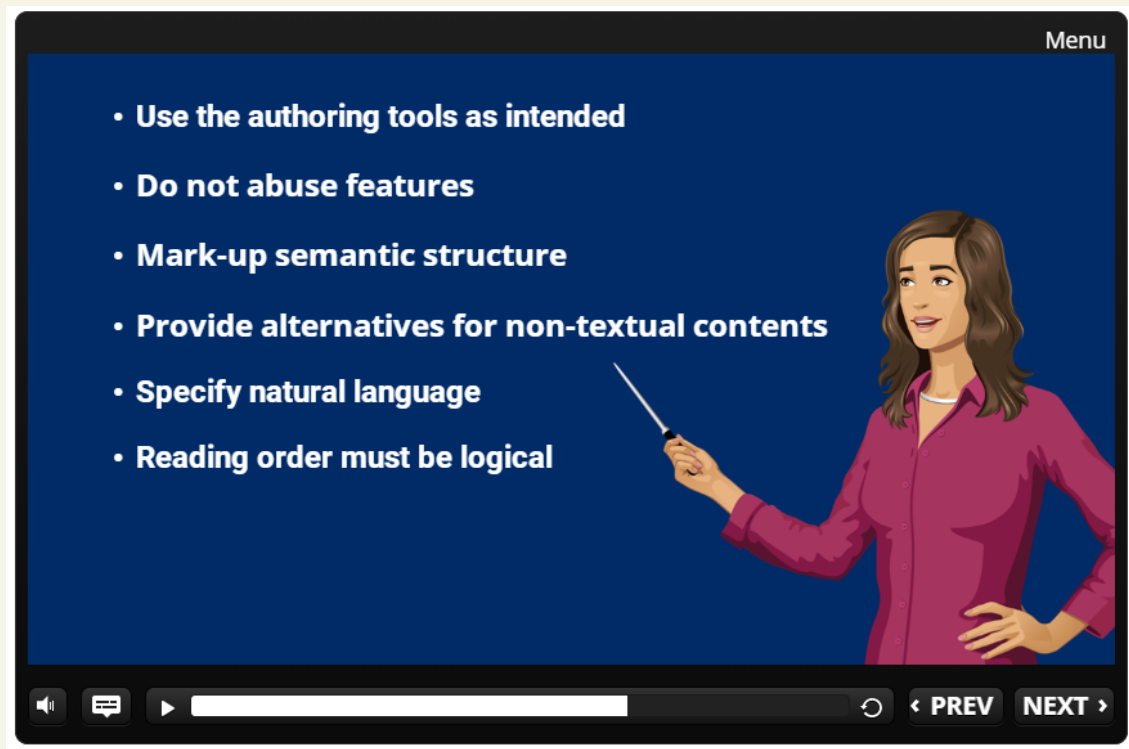


Figure 2 A screenshot from the SensusAccess module, “Designing and creating accessible documents”.

Appendix 1: Avoiding the passive voice

- The passive voice tells us **something is being done**, rather than that **someone is doing something**.
- It can be a difficult sentence structure for some readers.
- Those with language differences (e.g. non-native speakers) often do not comprehend this structure.

Table 1 Examples of passive and active sentences.

Passive	Active
The house was sold by an estate agent	An estate agent sold the house
The show was watched by a large audience	A large audience watched the show