Communicating effectively

A guide to accessible drafting

As a people business and a consultancy, we know how important clear and accessible communications are. We have recently put together an internal guide to support those within LCP when drafting communications and advice.

When we mentioned this guidance to some of our clients and contacts, they were interested to learn more, so we created this document to share our internal drafting tips with others.

Although a lot of the information in this guide may seem common sense and consistent with what many people consider to be good drafting practice, we have found that often small adjustments can really help build upon existing good practices.

My own area of focus within our DEI Group is that of neurodiversity and neuroinclusion, within which it's important to understand that all of us have diverse ways of experiencing the world and in communicating those experiences. The feedback we have had so far is that many of the adjustments described in this guide make communication more accessible to everyone, whether they are neurodivergent or neurotypical. I've left in some information boxes from our internal guide that provide further contextual background on various neurodivergent conditions.

We do not intend to present ourselves as experts; rather, we hope that some of our own experiences and research will be useful for others. We are still learning and are in the process of adopting these practices ourselves, both within our internal communications and our advice.

We recognise that it can be difficult to balance the demands of layout, content and the messaging that we want to "fit in" to our documents – we have found it valuable to focus on trying to make our key messages as inclusive and accessible as possible.

Different people will have different requirements and preferences. Importantly, we strongly believe that you should engage with your intended audience and seek feedback on the accessibility of your communications.

I'd like to thank my colleague Maisie Borrows, who worked on our internal guide with me, and everyone at LCP who provided input on this guide. If there are any additional tips or suggestions that you would like to share, then we'd love to hear them.

Paul Meredith, on behalf LCP's DEI Group

LCP is committed to being an inclusive and equitable firm that supports a diverse workforce and that provides excellent and accessible services to our clients.

Key topics

We've organised our tips around four sections.

Adopting **a consistent and appropriate layout and typography**, which will particularly benefit dyslexic individuals.

Choosing **an effective, limited colour palette**, avoiding combinations that individuals with colour vision deficiency, eg colour blindness, may find difficult.

Writing in **clear and direct language** and **summarising key points**.

Providing information in multiple formats, which increases the chance that an individual can access the information that we are trying to present.

These tips can apply to all mediums of communication, eg Word Documents, PowerPoint, web pages and email.

Often, it can be the last 5% of background images, extra colour or clever formatting that can make your document less accessible to someone – if in doubt, keep it clear and simple.

Neurodivergence is an umbrella term for conditions including **autism**, **dyslexia**, **dyspraxia, dyscalculia, dysgraphia** and **ADHD**.

Being **neurodivergent** means having a brain that works differently from the average or "**neurotypical**" person.

It is estimated that around **one in seven people are neurodivergent**, and many may not have a formal diagnosis, or may receive a diagnosis later in life.

It is important to communicate our advice in an inclusive manner and to ensure it is accessible to a **neurodiverse** audience.

More information is given on later pages.

Layout and typography

1. Use sufficient contrast levels between background and text and **dark coloured text** on a **light (not white) background** (as is the case for this document). White can appear too dazzling to an individual with dyslexia.

2. Only use pictures and diagrams if they provide additional information to support your communication.

3. The choice of font type, size, spacing, and alignment impacts readability.

4. **Left align text, without justification** to make it easier to find the start and finish of each line and to ensure even spacing between words.

> As an example, an information box like this is better…

> …than an information box formatted like this.

5. **Avoid multiple columns** as these can cause difficulty for individuals with dyslexia.

6. Break up the text with **regular section headings,** particularly in long documents.

7. **Avoid large blocks of uninterrupted text**.

   - Consider adding diagrams or tables to break up large blocks of text.
   - Use blank space to remove clutter near text.
   - Don't reduce spacing or font size solely to "fit" a document on to a few pages.

8. Ensure **hyperlinks** look different from headings and normal text.

Choosing the right font

- Choose **simple sans-serif fonts** such as **Arial**, **Calibri**, or **Verdana** as they are easier to read for many individuals.

- The **font size should be at least 12 points** for regular text. Individuals with dyslexia or ADHD, may find this larger font beneficial.

- **Headings should be larger than the body text** to clearly indicate the document structure.

- Aim for **line spacing of at least 1.25 lines**, ideally 1.5. This reduces visual crowding and can benefit individuals with dyslexia or ADHD.

Dyslexia primarily affects reading and writing skills. However, it does not only affect these skills; dyslexia is about information processing.

It is estimated that 10-15% of the population have dyslexia.

There are ready stylistic adjustments that we can make to improve the accessibility of our communication.

In addition, dyslexic people tend to be "big picture thinkers" but may be less adept at processing and remembering detail. As such, they may also benefit from executive summaries and highlighted key points.

See **here** for more information.

Colour choices

1. Choose a **limited colour palette** for your slides and presentation.

2. When using colours in your document, please be mindful of the needs of colour-blind readers: **Colour should not be the only method to convey important information, as this may not be accessible to readers with colour vision deficiency, eg colour blindness.**

3. **Contrast:** Ensure there is sufficient contrast between text and background colours. Dark text on a light background is usually the most readable.

4. **Colour coding:** If you are using colours to convey information (e.g., in charts, graphs, or text), always provide an alternative method of distinguishing the information, such as patterns or labels.

5. **Avoid pairing the following combinations** particularly within the same box or chart

Red and green	
Green and brown	
Green and blue	
Blue and grey	
Blue and purple	
Green and grey	
Light green and yellow	

Using colour to enhance your advice

- Colour can be used as **a secondary signpost to reinforce the focus of the advice**.

  - For example, when presenting on issues affecting two categories of members (eg staff and executives), use consistent, differently bordered boxes to highlight the specific issues affecting each category.

- Remember that colour should not be the only method of indicating focus and that multiple different cues can increase accessibility.

Colour blindness affects approximately **1 in 12 men and 1 in 200 women**.

There are different types of colour blindness, but most colour blind people are unable to fully 'see' red, green or blue light.

Being 'red/green colour blind' means **people can easily confuse any colours which have some red or green as part of the whole colour**.

For example, someone with red/green colour blindness is likely to confuse blue and purple because they can't 'see' the red in the colour purple.

See **here** for more information.

Structure and language

1. A lot of potential language issues can be addressed by what we would already consider to be "good drafting practice" – free from jargon, clear and concise.

2. **Include a clear introductory summary** (even to emails) and consider providing section summaries within larger documents and a glossary of terms.

3. **If complex information is needed, break it down** into simpler, single concept parts. Bullet points and numbered lists can also help to identify these key concepts.

4. Aim for **a consistent simple structure within each section**. Predictable structures are beneficial for individuals who may struggle with comprehension or attention.

5. Use headings and subheadings to **divide content into short, well-defined sections**.

6. **Use the active voice rather than passive voice**, to make sentences easier to understand. *For example, "You should contribute …" instead of "Contributions should be made …".*

7. **Avoid long paragraphs** and **make the key point in your first sentence**. If you take all of your first sentences in isolation, they should provide your key advice. The same principle can be applied to **slide titles** if working on a PowerPoint deck.

8. **Avoid metaphors and idioms** that could confuse readers who interpret language literally, such as "saving for a rainy day", and **clearly explain jargon and acronyms**.

9. **Ensure that sentences cannot be interpreted in more than one way** and avoid words or phrases that have multiple meanings, or different implications in different cultures.

10. Use **gender-neutral language** and avoid language that excludes\stereotypes a group.

11. Provide **direct, explicit and detailed instructions**.

ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) is a condition that affects people's behaviour. It is estimated that 2-3% of UK adults have ADHD.

Individuals with ADHD can seem restless, may have difficulty concentrating for prolonged periods and may act on impulse. However, individuals with ADHD can also experience periods of intense focus on specific tasks.

Ensuring key messages are delivered clearly, concisely and up front may make our advice easier for individuals with ADHD to access.

See **here** for more information.

Autism affects how people perceive the world and others around them.

It is a spectrum condition and affects people in different ways. Autistic people have their own strengths and weaknesses and there is no more an "average" autistic person than there is an "average" non-autistic person.

It is estimated that 1% of the UK population are autistic.

Some autistic individuals may find consistently structured advice with direct language more accessible.

See **here** for more information.

Diagrams and charts

1. Providing advice in more than one format increases the chance that an individual can access the information that we are trying to present.

2. **Include alternative illustrations or methods of conveying numerical information** within your advice. Individuals with dyscalculia can have difficulty in interpreting numbers presented in isolation and can benefit from supporting visual representations.

3. **Share key results in multiple formats** – for example, as a chart along with a table of key figures and a clear explanation within the text of the results.

4. Consider using **data visualisation tools.**

   For example, we use LCP eXcYte, a simple and powerful data visualistion and exploration tool.
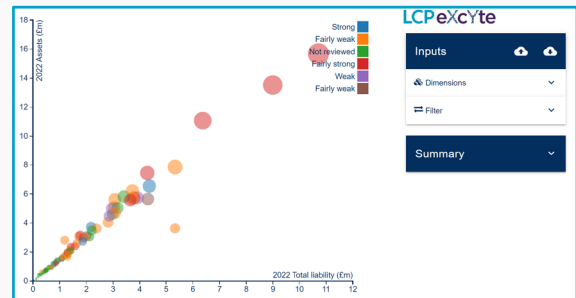
5. Ensure illustrations, explanatory text or tables remain together and aren't split across pages.

6. **Be mindful of your colour choice** in illustrations, using a consistent and limited palette.

7. **Add alt-text to your tables and charts**, to assist screen reader technology.

8. **Infographics** can be an excellent way of showing a process or logical steps – but ensure that accompanying explanatory text provides the same level of information.

9. **Be mindful of the cognitive load** when presenting information; balance text with visuals and leave some white space to break it up.

Tools to help you check your advice

- There are a lot of tools readily available to you to test the accessibility of your documents.

  - Within **Word** and **PowerPoint**, if you go to **File->Info->Check for issues**, content that people with disabilities may find difficult to read will be highlighted.

  - **Proof-listen to your documents in Word using Immersive Reader**, if you know your clients will be using reader technology.

  - You can also request to **receive accessible content** in emails on Outlook.

Dyscalculia is a specific and persistent difficulty in understanding and interpreting numbers, which can lead to a diverse range of difficulties with mathematics.

It is estimated that about 6% of people have dyscalculia.

See here for more information.

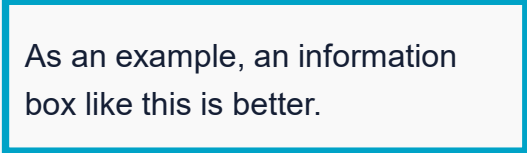Other neurodivergent conditions include:

- **Dysgraphia**, which affects the ability to write, but also coherence; and

- **Dyspraxia**, which affects motor skill development and can also impact cognitive skills, such as organization.

Individuals with either condition may also benefit from clear, well-structured advice.

Don't know where to start?
Here are four simple changes you can incorporate today.

1. Stop using coloured boxes with centred white text and left align your content consistently.

> As an example, an information box like this is better.

2. Break up large blocks of text with visuals that support your advice.

3. If a visual, image or wording is not adding to or supporting information provided in your advice, then don't include it.

4. When finalizing a document, remember to check the built-in Microsoft 'Accessibility Checker' to learn how to make your document more inclusive.

Often, it can be the last 5% of background images, extra colour or clever formatting that can make your document less accessible to someone – if in doubt, keep it clear and simple.