# Format text legibly

## Accessibility Basics Tutorial Series

Literacy Minnesota

## Contents

## Font

- Use a simple font. Many recommend sans serif over serif for digital text, but this is debated.

- Use absolutely the simplest possible font for body text. The font for titles and headings may be a little more ornate.

- Some typically safe choices are **Arial**, **Veranda**, **Tahoma**, Helvetica, and Times New Roman.

- Dyslexic readers may benefit from specialized fonts like the free font OpenDyslexic. The benefits of these fonts are attested more through anecdote than research. *Comic Sans* is also sometimes recommended for dyslexic readers.

## Size

- For documents and handouts, use 12 pt or larger.
- For slides projected onto personal computer screens, use 18 pt or larger.
- For slides projected in person, use 24 pt or larger.

## Color

- Use text in a color that contrasts highly with the background. Make the text dark and the background light, not vice versa.
- Check contrast online using [WebAIM: Contrast Checker](#).
- Use black text whenever possible. Consider adding color to your design through non-text elements instead of changing the text color.
- Dyslexic readers can be sensitive to color contrast that is too high. Use a pale cream or gray background.
- Low vision readers benefit from maximum contrast. Use a pure white background.

## Formatting

- Minimize use of all-caps, italics, and underline.

- If you use all-caps, don't use caps lock or individually type capital letters using shift, which will cause screen readers to read the words letter by letter or try to interpret them as acronyms. Instead, use the built-in all-caps font effect.

- Avoid bolding long stretches of text.

- 1.5 or double line spacing is best. It is crucial to preserve a healthy cushion of white space and not cram text in.

## Placement

- Left align text. This is especially important for text of any substantial length.

- Keep the text alignment consistent so readers' eyes don't have to bounce around the page to pick up where the text starts.

- Keep spacing between words consistent. Don't justify text, as this creates disorienting gaps.

Screen reader users will follow a single linear path through the text. This is different from the experience of sighted users, who will scan ahead both horizontally and vertically (in two directions) while reading. If your layout

does not allow you to define a linear path through the content that makes sense, consider offering an alternative resource in the form of a linear content outline.

Sighted readers generally scan ahead horizontally and vertically across the page while reading. A layout that requires scanning in a more complicated pattern (for example, a circle or a spiral) is less accessible for sighted readers and assistive technologies.

## Customization

Optimally accessible text formatting varies from person to person. Something that enhances accessibility for one person may even impede accessibility for another (for example, different background colors).

For this reason, publish and share text in a format that the reader can customize on their own device whenever possible.

- Microsoft Office files allow for easy customization of text display.
- Web pages allow for easy display customization without easy editing of text. Publish and share resources on the web—including directly from Google Docs using the "publish to the web" feature—and inform your audience about customization options like Helperbird.

- The purpose of PDFs is to preserve the visual display of a document across any device. They are an anti-customizable format by design. Some apps do allow for PDF customization. I am not aware of any good free options, but for Apple users I recommend [Voice Dream Reader.](#)