Best Practices for Printed Materials

Printed materials like bulletins, newsletters, ballots, and flyers should follow these guidelines to maximize the readability for people with low vision, color discrimination problems, dyslexia, and other vision limitations. All printed materials should be made available in both regular and large print format.

Text

Font

- Use sans-serif font, such as Arial, Tahoma, or Helvetica.

- Avoid italics. Instead, use **bold** or <u>underlined</u> text for emphasis.

Sizing

- For general documents:
    - 12 pt font for normal text
    - 14 pt font for subheadings
    - 16 pt font for headings
- For large-print documents:
    - 18 pt font for normal text
    - 20 pt font for subheadings
    - 22 pt font for headings

Specialty Formatting

- Use lower case letters with initial capitals rather than all capitals.

- Avoid columns if possible. When columns are necessary, use narrow columns, not wide ones.

- Do not use "dot leaders."

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- Example --- Page 1
- Example --- Page 2
- Example --- Page 3

Instead, use an alternating pastel background.

- Example   Page 1
- Example   Page 2
- Example   Page 3

Alignment

- Other than titles, text should be left-aligned.
- Centered text is more difficult to read.
- Right margins should be ragged, not justified, so words are spaced consistently throughout the document.

Spacing

- Do not indent paragraphs. Add a space after paragraphs instead.
- Line spacing should be 1.25-1.5.
- Letters should be spaced normally (no kerning).

Color

- Text should be black or dark blue.
- For people with color discrimination problems (color blind):
  - Greens, reds, and oranges will look brown or gold.
  - Purples will look blue.
  - Differing grays will be indistinguishable.
- If color is being used for contrast, these color combinations should be avoided:
  - Green and red
  - Dark green and black
  - Red and black
  - Navy and black
  - Orange and brown
  - Green and brown

- o Red and brown
- o Red and orange
- o Green and orange
- o Purple and blue
- o White and yellow
- o Gray and any color

Illustrations & Graphics

- Patterns can be used instead of color. (ex: dots and stripes on a graph)
- Enlarged graphics should maintain clear resolution.
- Text should never be overlayed on top of graphics or illustrations.

Paper Size and Color

- Use matte white, ivory, eggshell, light beige, pastel yellow, or pastel pink paper.
- Paper should be no larger than 8.5x11".
- Margins should be 1".

Technology in Print

A growing number of people who are blind or have low vision prefer to receive materials in electronic format (with a link, USB drive, or by email). Some people listen to the material using voice output hardware and software on their personal computers or mobile devices. Others read the documents on their device screens by using hardware or software that simply enlarges the display. Still others convert the electronic information into Braille using refreshable Braille display devices.

A text file of the worship bulletin or meeting agenda sent in advance can be read on an iPad or other electronic device. This enables people with low vision to make the text as large as needed. It is also useful in low light conditions like candlelight services. Add a notice in standard-format materials stating that alternate formats are available.

Not all PDF files are accessible. Those created with design software, MS Word, Excel, or PowerPoint are usually accessible. Those created by copying or scanning a picture of a printed page into a PDF format are NOT accessible.

An easy way to make documents compatible with screen readers is to use Styles in Microsoft Word. When creating a document in Word, use Styles to create headings, subheadings, and the body of the text. This adds important information to screen readers that enables users to scroll between topics and to easily navigate the document. For more information on creating accessible documents, visit Northeastern University's page on Digital Accessibility.

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