

Why inclusion?

People with disabilities, people whose first language is not English, and people with limited education are often excluded from public discussions. This includes discussions and meetings about themselves.

Inclusion is not just a nice idea. It is an approach that ensures all people, regardless of ability or background, can participate in all aspects of life.

It is important to understand that everybody has unique needs and abilities. People may need additional accommodations. The Iowa Developmental Disabilities Council can provide additional resources and training.

Here are a few tips to help make meetings and public discussions more inclusive for all.

1. USE PEOPLE-FIRST LANGUAGE

WHY? People-first language focuses on the person and does not use disability as a defining trait. Unless it is related to the conversation, you do not need to mention the disability.

Examples of people-first language:

| INSTEAD OF | USE |
|-------------------------|------------------------------|
| Disabled people | People with disabilities |
| Wheelchair-bound person | Person who uses a wheelchair |
| Non-disabled person | Person without a disability |

Exception to the rule. Not everyone prefers people-first language. Some people use identity-first language. For example, people with autism may prefer to be referred to as autistic. A person who is deaf may prefer to be referred to as deaf.

It is the person's choice so ask them what their choice is.

2. USE PLAIN LANGUAGE

WHY? We want people to understand what we are saying and writing. Sometimes we create barriers instead of bridges when we communicate. Plain language is a style that uses simple sentences, everyday vocabulary, and clear structure. Plain language tries to remove those barriers. **Plain language = access for all.**

Tips:

- Keep sentences short.
- Give each fact or idea its own sentence.
- Use bullets or lists.
- Explain acronyms and/or provide a glossary for long documents.
- Avoid sarcasm and subtle humor.
- Stay clear of slang.
- Use an active tone, not a passive tone.
 - Passive tone:
Your email will be answered.
 - Active tone:
I will answer your email.
 - Passive tone:
The bill was advocated by John.
 - Active tone:
John advocated for the bill.

Examples of simple words:

| INSTEAD OF | USE |
|--------------|--------|
| Stakeholders | Groups |
| Access | Get |
| Manage | Do |
| Finance | Pay |
| Facilitate | Lead |
| Utilize | Use |

3. USE A READING LEVEL FOR ALL

WHY? According to recent data from the U.S. Department of Education, more than half of Americans between the ages of 16 and 74 read below a sixth-grade level. Written material should be at a level most of the population can understand.

Tools to help check the reading levels of what you are writing:

<https://www.readabilityformulas.com/freetests/six-readability-formulas.php>

<https://readable.com/>

When using Word for Microsoft 365, you can see your readability level.

1. **OPEN** your Word document.
2. Select **HOME** tab.
3. Choose **REVIEW** tab.
4. Choose **EDITOR** tab. Go to **Document Stats** on the right under **Insights**.
5. A dialogue box will appear letting you know it is calculating. Chose **OK**.
6. Your stats should appear.

4. USE RESPECTFUL COMMUNICATION

- Do not assume a person who has limited, or no speech cannot understand what is being said.
- Always speak to the person, not a companion, interpreter, or support person.

4. USE RESPECTFUL COMMUNICATION *(Continued)*

- Speak slowly and clearly.
- Do not pretend you understand what a person with limited speech is saying when you do not.
 - Ask the person to tell you again what was said. Repeat what you understand.
- Allow people to finish their sentences. It may take time for them to communicate their thought.
- When asking questions of a group:
 - Ask one question at a time.
 - Avoid yes or no questions.
 - Ask why, how, and what questions.
 - Take time and wait for a response.
 - Respond to any attempt the person makes to communicate.

5. PREPARE FOR YOUR MEETINGS

- Meetings should always be held in an accessible location. Avoid meeting rooms with background noise.
- Consider having a person responsible for welcoming people, directing them to the right location, and sharing where exits and restrooms are.
- Provide agendas and materials ahead of the meeting.
- Offer support before the meetings. Offer pre-meeting preparation to go over what is being discussed. Offer that same support after the meeting.
- Summarize complex documents.
- Offer alternative formats for material (large print, braille, and audio). All handouts should use a 14-point font.
- A screen reader can only read text. For people who use a screen reader, pictures and graphs need to be described.
- Speakers should describe themselves to the audience. During the discussion, people should state who they are before talking.
- At the beginning of the meeting let everyone know that they can take a break whenever they may need one.