Making visual information accessible

Visual cues and graphics can provide the reader with important information in a document. However, many of these visual cues and clues are not accessible to everyone, especially those with a vision impairment who use a screen reader. Making a document accessible can be done by providing a text alternative to the visual information featured. It is also important that this information is made available to all readers of your document at the same time. This guide offers you examples of how to make documents accessible to ensure **all** the information is available to **all** readers.

There are a number of ways to provide alternative text to make documents accessible. These include:

- adding Alt Text—right-click on the image, click on 'Size' in the pop-up menu, then type the description in the 'Alt Text' tab box

- offering the information as a text alternative and adding this as an appendix in the document or immediately following the graphic; and

- thinking of a different way—sometimes it's a matter of thinking outside the square.

Of course, there is no one size fits all—being aware of the importance of making documents accessible to everyone is an excellent first step.

Examples

Example 1: Cartoon

When describing a cartoon you don't interpret it, instead you should describe it in a way that the reader can arrive at his/her own conclusion.

This cartoon is used in disability awareness training exercises.
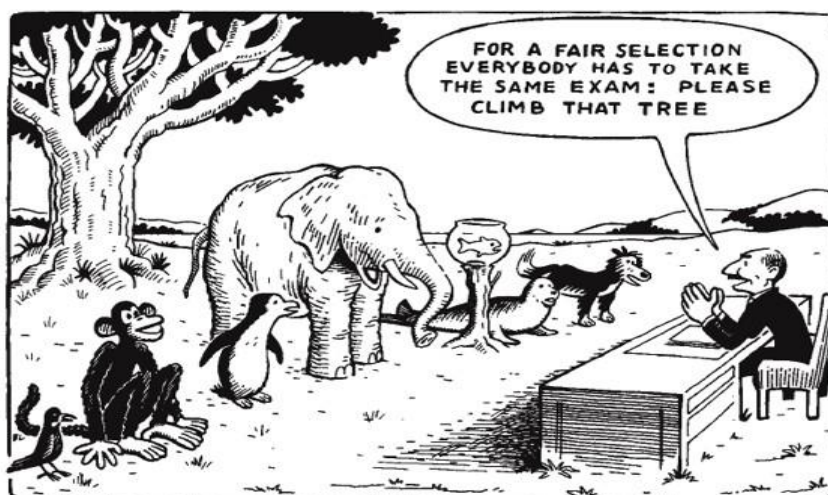
Alt text (added to the Alt Text box)

This is a cartoon image.

A man is sitting behind a desk with his elbows resting on the top and his hands are pushed together. The desk is outside.

Standing in a line in front of the desk is a bird, a monkey, a penguin, an elephant, a goldfish in a bowl, a seal, and a dog. There is a large tree in the background.

The man is talking to all the creatures in front of him, "For a fair selection everybody has to take the same exam: please climb that tree."

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Example 2: Photograph

Photograph of a church from 'Welcoming Churches'

Alt text (added to the Alt Text box)

A photograph of a Victorian wooden church which has a steep roof and wooden bell tower. The church has been modified to allow better accessibility. There is a ramp with rails approaching the entrance. The steps leading to the entrance of the church also have rails.

Example 3: Graph

If an Excel graph has been inserted into a document ([taken from the Office of the Ombudsman's Annual Report 2015/2016](#)), insert the information/data into a table below the graph. If the graph has been inserted as an image file (JPG) include the title of the diagram, a brief description (eg; a bar graph, line graph etc) and advise in the Alt Text box that the information is also available in the table below.

The graph below was placed in a document as an image file. To make it accessible, it was a matter of adding Alt Text to the image, and adding an accessible table below it. If you're unable to place the information below the graph, it can be added as an appendix.
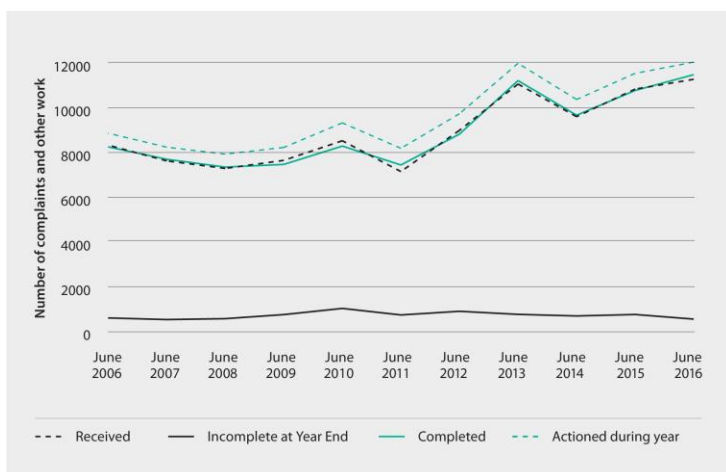

Figure 4: OA complaints and other contacts received and actioned over the past 10 years

Information in the Figure 4 diagram is repeated in the table below:

Date	Received	Completed	On Hand at Year End	Under Action in the Year
Jun-06	8293	8216	608	8824
Jun-07	7593	7665	536	8201
Jun-08	7257	7317	576	7893
Jun-09	7615	7435	757	8191
Jun-10	8488	8250	1032	9282
Jun-11	7118	7410	741	8151
Jun-12	8,950	8784	904	9688
Jun-13	11,009	11,162	767	11,930
Jun-14	9,559	9,622	697	10,324

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Example 4: Poster
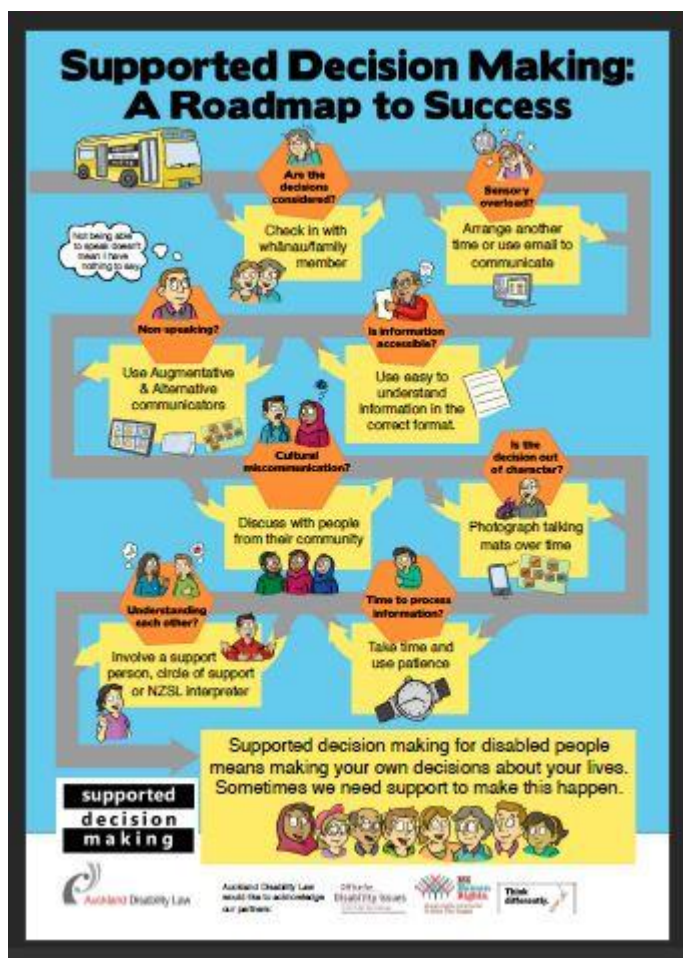
Text Alternative version to Supported Decision Making: A Roadmap to Success
This is a text alternative to the Supported Decision Making: A Roadmap to Success poster.

Auckland Disability Law produced an A3 sized, full colour poster to raise awareness around supported decision making.

The poster is especially for those who provide services and support to disabled people when they are making decisions. This includes medical and disability support workers.

General description

The poster depicts a roadmap of a successful journey to supported decision making.

A purple road snakes down the page ending at a text box at the bottom that reads: "Supported decision making for disabled people means making your own decisions about your lives. Sometimes we need support to make this happen."

Along the road there are 8 road signs, each representing reasons that might impact someone being able to make their own decision. For each road sign there is a detour around the reason with a suggested solution.

ADL's partners' are acknowledged in the Supported Decision Making project at the bottom of the poster with text reading "Auckland Disability Law would like to acknowledge our partners". This text is followed by the logos: Auckland Disability Law, Office for Disability Issues, the Human Rights Commission and Think Differently.

Reasons impacting decision making and solutions

1. Road sign: Are decisions considered?
   Solution: Check in with whānau/family member.

2. Road sign: Sensory overload?
   Solution: Arrange another time or use email to communicate.

3. Road sign: Is information accessible?
   Solution: Use easy to understand information in the correct format.

4. Road sign: Non-speaking?
   Solution: Use Augmentative & Alternative communicators.
   To illustrate this, there is an image of a computer screen, a smart phone, and a talking mat[1]. There is also an image of a man thinking: "Not being able to speak doesn't mean I have nothing to say".

5. Road sign: Cultural miscommunication
   Solution: Discuss with people from their community.

6. Road sign: Is the decision out of character?
   Solution: Photograph talking mats over time.
   To illustrate this there are images of a smart phone (to be used to take photos) and a talking mat.

7. Road sign: Time to process information?
   Solution: Take time and use patience.

8. Road sign: Understanding each other?
   Solution: Involve a support person, circle of support or NZSL interpreter.

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[1] "A Talking Mat is a simple system using a **mat**, such as a nylon doormat or carpet tile, to which symbols and pictures can be attached by Velcro. Symbols representing emotions are placed along the top to form a visual rating scale. A relevant topic is discussed." https://sheffield.gov.uk

Resources and links

NZ Government Web Toolkit

https://webtoolkit.govt.nz/

UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities-2.html

Article 9 – Accessibility

1. To enable persons with disabilities to live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life, States Parties shall take appropriate measures to ensure to persons with disabilities access, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment, to transportation, to information and communications, including information and communications technologies and systems, and to other facilities and services open or provided to the public, both in urban and in rural areas. These measures, which shall include the identification and elimination of obstacles and barriers to accessibility, shall apply to, inter alia:

a) Buildings, roads, transportation and other indoor and outdoor facilities, including schools, housing, medical facilities and workplaces;
b) Information, communications and other services, including electronic services and emergency services.

2. States Parties shall also take appropriate measures:

a) To develop, promulgate and monitor the implementation of minimum standards and guidelines for the accessibility of facilities and services open or provided to the public;
b) To ensure that private entities that offer facilities and services which are open or provided to the public take into account all aspects of accessibility for persons with disabilities;
c) To provide training for stakeholders on accessibility issues facing persons with disabilities;
d) To provide in buildings and other facilities open to the public signage in Braille and in easy to read and understand forms;
e) To provide forms of live assistance and intermediaries, including guides, readers and professional sign language interpreters, to facilitate accessibility to buildings and other facilities open to the public;
f) To promote other appropriate forms of assistance and support to persons with disabilities to ensure their access to information;
g) To promote access for persons with disabilities to new information and communications technologies and systems, including the Internet;
h) To promote the design, development, production and distribution of accessible information and communications technologies and systems at an early stage, so that these technologies and systems become accessible at minimum cost.

Article 21 – Freedom of expression and opinion, and access to information

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that persons with disabilities can exercise the right to freedom of expression and opinion, including the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas on an equal basis with others and through all forms of communication of their choice, as defined in article 2 of the present Convention, including by:

a) Providing information intended for the general public to persons with disabilities in accessible formats and technologies appropriate to different kinds of disabilities in a timely manner and without additional cost;
b) Accepting and facilitating the use of sign languages, Braille, augmentative and alternative communication, and all other accessible means, modes and formats of communication of their choice by persons with disabilities in official interactions;
c) Urging private entities that provide services to the general public, including through the Internet, to provide information and services in accessible and usable formats for persons with disabilities;
d) Encouraging the mass media, including providers of information through the Internet, to make their services accessible to persons with disabilities;
e) Recognizing and promoting the use of sign languages.

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