National Screening Service

Communications toolkit
First edition

This is a living document. We will continue to improve it to meet everyone's needs.

Your feedback will help us. Email your suggestions and questions to communications@screeningservice.ie

Contents

Introduction

We've developed this toolkit to support us to use a consistent voice and tone across our written communications.

Consistency builds trust.

Using a consistent voice reminds people that we are a trusted HSE service.

We publish information with care. Everything we publish goes through our agreed approvals processes to make sure it is accurate, consistent, balanced and of the highest quality.

This toolkit will help us to:
- work together and write content that meets the needs of the people we're writing for
- improve consistency across our written content
- increase efficiency when working with our colleagues writing content
- align our written communications with our guiding principles, tone of voice, style and terminology guides
- make sure that our digital content is in line with HSE digital guidelines.

Our communications are guided by:
- our Strategic Plan 2023-2027: Choose Screening - Together we can make a difference
- our strategic vision "to work together to save lives and improve people's health"
- the HSE Communications Strategy 2023-2025 and its aim "to secure people's trust and confidence in our health service, and its future".

We use these symbols to show examples in this toolkit.

✅ Good example
❌ Bad example

We use this symbol ℹ️ when we provide more information about a topic or to help us understand the information better.

Our guiding principles

Our guiding principles reflect our organisational values of care, compassion, trust and learning; and are based on quality and respect. They promote choice, equality, equity, harm reduction and increased health literacy.

These are our guiding principles of communication.

When we communicate we are…

- ✓ human
- ✓ person-centred
- ✓ trusted
- ✓ inclusive
- ✓ transparent
- ✓ open and impartial
- ✓ rights-based
- ✓ health-positive

When we develop content and information we are…

- ✓ proactive
- ✓ collaborative
- ✓ consistent and reliable
- ✓ accurate and up-to-date
- ✓ evidence-based
- ✓ relevant
- ✓ creative
- ✓ balanced
- ✓ reflective
- ✓ responsive

Our tone of voice

Our tone of voice reflects our values and our guiding principles.

Our tone of voice is…

- ✓ confident
- ✓ clear
- ✓ positive
- ✓ professional
- ✓ human
- ✓ caring
- ✓ encouraging
- ✓ supportive
- ✓ reassuring
- ✓ engaging

Applying our principles and our tone of voice

We are reasonable and sensible when applying our guiding principles and tone of voice.

- We keep it in context – our communications are reflective of our principles and we'll use them as a guide.
- We are practical – for example, up-to-date can mean the latest and most accurate information we have available.
- We are vigilant – we will remain aligned with our core strategic messages, with the latest evidence, and with our governance, decision-making and sign-off processes.
- We are supportive - we implement our principles and tone of voice by consulting, leading by example, celebrating the positives, and evaluating the impact.

Examples of applying our principles and tone of voice

Before	After	What did we do?
If you have access needs, you can let us know. We will do our best to support you to take part in screening.	We can support you to take part in screening. Please let us know if you have access needs and we will do our best to help you.	We've made it more **person-centred**.
You can update your contact details here or by calling us on Freephone 1800 45 45 55.	You can update your contact details on our register or call us on Freephone 1800 45 45 55.	We've provided **clarity**.
If you're not on the register, you won't get an invite to screening.	You need to be on our register to get your invitation to screening.	We've made this a **positive** sentence.
Without a strong focus on data literacy and awareness, people can struggle to understand what can and should be done with data.	With a strong focus on data literacy and awareness, we can better understand our data and how we can use it.	We've made this a **positive** sentence. We are being more **confident** in what we are saying and in ourselves.
We know that some people find it difficult to come for cervical screening. You can talk to one of our doctors or nurses about this to see if we can help to make it easier for you.	We know that some people find it difficult to come for cervical screening. We can help make it easier for you. Talk to one of our doctors or nurses about how we can help.	We've made it more **person-centred**. We are **reassuring** the person, and being more **caring, supportive** and **encouraging**. We are being more **confident** in what we are saying and in ourselves.
Unfortunately screening will not pick up every sign that could develop into cancer.	Screening will not pick up every sign that could develop into cancer.	We've removed negative and unnecessary words. We are being more **confident** about what we are saying – it's a scientific fact.
Sadly, some people will develop cancer between screening tests	Some people will develop cancer between screening tests.	

Plain language

We write using plain language so that everyone can understand us. Plain language is clear and easy-to-read writing. It uses simple words, logical order, and direct sentences so more people can understand the information. Using everyday words is an important step towards clearer writing.

Research shows that everyone prefers plain language.

It benefits everyone, including people:
- with cognitive disabilities
- with low reading literacy
- whose first language is not English
- who are trying to understand a topic for the first time.

Plain language principles

Plain language is a style of writing that helps everyone to understand our information the first time they read it. We use simple language and formatting with short, clear sentences and paragraphs.

To do this, we:
- use short, simple words
- write short, clear sentences
- write positive sentences
- use the active voice
- write in a personal and engaging way
- explain medical terms
- do not use jargon
- check the reading age of our content.

Use short, simple words

We use the shorter word over the longer word. For more examples, see our terminology guidelines: plain language – simple words.

✅ use
❌ utilise

We use everyday words. They are easy for people to understand.

✅ Phone your GP.
❌ Visit a medical professional.

Write short, clear sentences

- Be clear. Get to the point.
- Use necessary words only.
- Be specific.
- If a sentence gets too long (above 25 words), break it into 2 sentences if possible.

Examples of unnecessary words
We've removed unnecessary words from these examples. It does not change what we're saying and the sentences are easier to read.

Before	After
We've used current examples that are very relevant.	We've used examples that are relevant.
We, the communications team, have developed a toolkit to improve consistency.	We've developed a toolkit to improve consistency.
The new toolkit worked really well to support consistency.	The toolkit worked well to support consistency.
We want to make sure all our staff in the NSS have access to the training.	We want to make sure all our staff have access to the training.
We're currently screening 500,000 people every year.	We're screening 500,000 people every year.
You should consider registering for screening.	Register for screening.

Write positive sentences

Positive sentences are easier to read. Positive language creates a positive tone. Negative sentences, when writing about health, can cause unnecessary anxiety and stress.

✅ You need to be on our register to get your invite to screening.
❌ You cannot get your invite to screening if you're not on our register.

✅ We'll send your results to you within 4 weeks.
❌ You won't get your results for at least 4 weeks.

We remove words such as 'but', 'however', and 'unfortunately' when they are not necessary.

Use the active voice

The active voice is clearer than the passive voice and uses fewer words.

✅ We've published our 2024 end of year report.
❌ Our 2024 end of year report has been published.

This style also helps to make our content person-centred.

✅ We'll send you a letter.
❌ A letter will be sent to you.

Write in a personal and engaging way

- We address people directly and use personal pronouns - we, you, our, your.
- We do not refer to ourselves in the third person, unless it's unavoidable.

When to use 'we'
We use 'we' when it's obvious and clear who the 'we' is.

Examples of when we lead with 'we':
- on our corporate website
- in our end of year report
- in our programme reports
- in our news reports and blogs

When it's not obvious and clear who 'we' is in content, we explain it. We use the name of the screening programme, for example 'BreastCheck', or we use 'the National Screening Service' or 'the HSE National Screening Service'.

Examples of when to use 'we'

Before	After
The NSS has published its 5-year strategic plan.	We've published our 5-year strategy.
Our BreastCheck programme has published its 2022 statistical report.	We've published our 2022 BreastCheck statistical report.
Since the establishment of BowelScreen in 2012, the NSS has made significant progress in developing the programme.	Since the establishment of BowelScreen in 2012, we've made significant progress in developing the programme.
The NSS has worked closely with a team of experts to develop the action plan.	We've worked closely with a team of experts to develop the action plan.

Explain medical terms

Medical terms are not jargon. It's okay to use them when we explain what they mean the first time we use them. We use plain language alternatives for medical terms when they are available.

✅ A colonoscopy can help to rule out or confirm that you have a polyp (an abnormal tissue growth).

Check that the term is necessary before you use it. For examples, see our terminology guidelines: Medical terms – plain language alternatives and explanations.

Do not use jargon

Jargon is specialised language used by a specific group, profession, or industry that can be difficult for people outside of those groups to understand. It often includes technical terms, acronyms, or complex phrases. While jargon can be useful among experts, it can be confusing for general audiences.

It's easy for jargon to slip into our content, because we know the subject well. We replace jargon with simpler words whenever possible.

Look out for and remove:
- words, acronyms and abbreviations that we use internally and might not be understood outside of the organisation
- nominalisation – this means turning verbs into nouns. Use the verb instead, for example, 'We will consider' instead of 'We will take into consideration'.

- Business jargon
- Medical jargon
- Legal jargon

✅ We pay the GPs and clinics who are registered with CervicalCheck to provide free cervical screening to women and people with a cervix aged 25 to 65.

❌ We support the delivery of cervical screening in primary healthcare settings by providing reimbursement services to primary care contractors for the provision of free cervical screening to the eligible population.

Check the reading age of content

We use 'readability' tests to measure how easy it is to understand our content.

Readability tests check written content to predict what level of 'reading age' (level of educational reading ability) someone will need to understand it.

We aim for a reading age of about 9. For technical, medical and professional content, we aim for a reading age of about 12.

Use any of these tools to check reading age:
- the Hemingway app
- Microsoft Word
- NHS medical document readability tool

Style guide

Our style guide will help us to write content in a consistent way. We use it for writing any content including letters, news reports and blogs, programme reports, digital content and other documents.

Styles are divided into four sections, with links to each for quick access.

1. **Punctuation and Formatting**

- Acronyms
- Apostrophes
- Bold
- Capital letters
- Commas
- Forward slash

- Hyphens and dashes
- Italics
- Plurals rule for organisations
- Quotation marks
- References
- Semi-colons

2. **Numbers, dates and time**

- Numerals
- Ordinal numbers 1st, 2nd, 3rd
- Per cent %
- Fractions
- Statistics

- Years and months
- Dates and time
- Ages
- Age ranges
- Distance

3. **Bullet points and lists**

- Bullets with a lead-in sentence
- Bullets with a title

- Using 'and' in bullet points
- Numbered lists

4. **Contact details**

- Postal addresses
- Titles

- Phone and WhatsApp numbers
- Email addresses and websites

1. Punctuation and formatting

Acronyms

We use the full name the first time we write an acronym and we put the acronym in brackets. We then use the acronym for the rest of the content.

✅ Our Patient and Public Partnership (PPP) committee meets four times a year.

ℹ️ For longer documents, it's okay to use phrases such as 'the organisation', 'the committee', 'the group', instead of repeating an acronym several times.

Apostrophes

Use apostrophes to show contractions
A contraction is a word made by shortening and combining two words, such as it's (it is), we'll (we will), we've (we have).

✅ We'll send your results by post.

We avoid using negative contractions if we can, such as don't, can't, wouldn't.
If we use them we say 'do not', 'cannot', and 'would not'.

ℹ️ Research shows that some people rely on reading the word 'not' to understand what is being said. This is important to them in understanding instructions such as health warnings. 'Do not eat before your surgery.'

Use apostrophes to show possession with nouns
To correctly use an apostrophe to show possession, first ask 'who or what is doing the possessing?' The apostrophe will go straight after the noun that is the answer.

Example: Whose report is it? ✅ It's the committee's report.

Do not use apostrophes to make words plural
This rule also applies to plurals of acronyms, abbreviations and figures.

✅ There are many GPs in the area.
❌ There are many GP's in the area.

✅ We started screening in the 1990s.
❌ We started screening in the 1990's.

When to use it's and its
- Use an apostrophe (it's) to show the shortened version of 'it is' or 'it has' – as a contraction.
- Do not use an apostrophe with 'its' when it shows that 'it' owns something (possession).
- Never use an apostrophe after 'its' (its').

✅ It's a free service. ❌ Its a free service.
✅ BowelScreen extended its age range. ❌ BowelScreen extended its' age range.

Bold

We do not use bold to emphasise text (except for headings). It can make it difficult for users to know which parts of our content they need to pay most attention to.

It's okay to use bold in technical instructions to tell users which option to select. For example: Select **Account**, then select **Profile**.

ℹ️ Screen readers and some assistive technologies do not communicate bold, so if important content is in bold, it might get lost for these users.

Capital letters (upper case letters)

We use capital letters for the first word of a sentence and for all proper nouns - a specific person, place, organisation, or thing.

Avoid overuse of capitals in headings
In report titles and paragraph headings, we only use a capital letter for the first word, unless there is a proper noun in the title.

✅ Improving health literacy in screening   ❌ Improving Health Literacy In Screening

ℹ️ We never use ALL CAPS for report titles or to highlight or define a word in a sentence. It makes content more difficult to read for people with dyslexia and for people with other language difficulties. Screen readers can read ALL CAPS as acronyms, misinterpreting content. ALL CAPS is sometimes misinterpreted as shouting.

Commas

We use commas to indicate a pause. We avoid using too many commas in one sentence as this can make it difficult to read. Instead, we try to use shorter sentences or bullet points.

Oxford comma
The Oxford comma is the comma that comes before the last 'and' in a sentence that has a list of items. We only use it when a sentence is confusing or could be misinterpreted without it.

We use the Oxford comma in this sentence to avoid misinterpretation:
✅ The survey responses captured views on accessibility and awareness of HPV vaccinations, cervical screening, and treatment.

We do not need to use the Oxford comma in this sentence:
✅ We have breast screening units in Dublin, Cork and Galway.

Forward slash

We avoid using forward slashes '/' when possible, particularly when it refers to an either/or in a sentence.

✅ When you are fully informed about what screening can and cannot do, you can decide whether or not to choose screening.

❌ When you are fully informed about what screening can / cannot do, you can decide whether or not to choose screening.

ℹ️ Screen readers often do not read forward slashes correctly.
We can use forward slashes in website addresses, for example hse.ie/bowelscreen.

Hyphens and dashes

ℹ️ People with limited literacy can find hyphens and dashes confusing. Screen readers can read them out in different ways so they can cause accessibility issues.

Hyphens
In general, we only use a hyphen if a word or sentence is confusing without it. Try to rewrite the content to remove the need for a hyphen. For example, 'has no sugar' instead of 'sugar-free'. There are some exceptions, such as 'check-up'.

Hyphens are often needed when two identical vowels would otherwise meet, such as 'pre-empt' or 'co-operate'.

When two words come together, but are generally used as one word, a hyphen is not needed.
✅ nationwide
✅ underestimate

Use hyphens, not em or en dashes
Em and en dashes look similar to hyphens but they are different lengths.

- Em dash (—)
- En dash (–)
- Hyphen (-)

Use hyphens for compound adjectives
We use hyphens when two words are being used as an adjective. This is called a compound adjective. We do not use a hyphen when the words are being used as a verb.

✅ follow-up appointment
✅ out-of-date technology

✅ We will follow up with you.
❌ We will follow-up with you.

Use hyphens for fractions
Fractions are hyphenated.
✅ two-thirds, four-fifths

Dashes
In general, we only use a dash if a sentence is confusing without it. When possible, avoid using a dash to indicate a pause in a sentence. Instead, use a comma, or write shorter sentences.

Do not use a dash in dates and times
When writing dates and times, use 'to' instead of a dash.

✅ We are open from 9am to 5pm.
✅ The conference will take place from 15 to 17 March.

Do not use a dash in age ranges
✅ BreastCheck is for women aged 50 to 69.

Italics

We do not use italics to emphasise important text or content.

ℹ️ Screen readers and some assistive technologies do not communicate italics, so if important content is in italics it might get lost for these users.

Plurals rule for organisations

Companies, state bodies and other organisations are singular, not plural.
✅ The Department of Health **is** encouraging people to come for screening.

Quotation marks

Double quotes
Use double quotes for direct quotations only.
ℹ️ A direct quote is when we use someone else's exact words in our content. We mainly do this in press releases, news reports and blogs.

When quoting a full sentence:
- introduce it with a colon
- start the sentence using double quotation marks
- start the sentence with an upper-case letter
- put the full stop or question mark inside the quotation marks.

✅ Chief Executive Fiona Murphy said: "I am pleased to announce this initiative."

When using part of a quote at the end of a sentence:
- put the double quotation marks at the start and end of the words quoted
- place the full stop after the quotation marks.

✅ The Chief Executive said the policy would be introduced "next year".

When using part of a quote in the middle of a sentence:
- put the double quotation marks at the start and end of the words quoted and continue your sentence.

✅ The WHO's elimination initiative "is one of the best global advocacy messages for cervical cancer prevention" with a very clear target, Dr Basu explained.

Single quotes
Use single quotes for any unusual terms or to highlight a word or a phrase that is being discussed or defined. Use single quotes for the first mention of it in the document or report only.

✅ Bowel screening is a free, simple, at-home test called a 'FIT kit'.

References

- For academic and research papers: referencing style is usually guided by the journal we are submitting to.
- For programme reports: we use the Harvard referencing style.
- For news reports and blogs: we usually do not use referencing as these are more informal than academic papers and reports. Instead, we link to cited research and reports.

Semi-colon

- A semi-colon is used for a pause that is longer than a comma.

✅ There will be 1,500 participants from the BowelScreen programme at the Mater and St Vincent's hospitals in Dublin, and the Mercy hospital in Cork; and 2,500 participants in France.

- Semi colons are used to break up longer phrases where commas might be confusing.

  ✅ Speakers at the conference included Advanced Nurse Practitioner Orla Loftus; Randy Henderson, National Laboratory Operations Director with Quest Diagnostics; and CervicalCheck Programme Manager Gráinne Gleeson.

- Semi-colons are used to separate items in more complex lists - and introduced with a colon.

✅ Open disclosure needs careful planning: ensure all stakeholders are involved in planning patient meetings; establish clear links between HSE management and frontline staff; ensure staff are trained and supported.

2. Numbers, dates and time

Numerals

Digital content for the public
When we are writing digital content for the public, we use numerals for all numbers (including 1 to 9). People find numbers easier to read and they scan for them.

For numbers over 999, we use a comma for clarity.
✅ 1,000

For numbers less than 1, we use 0 before the decimal point.
✅ 0.25

Use numerals unless writing out the number makes more sense.
✅ We'll send your test results to you within 4 weeks.

Write out numbers in common phrases where it would be odd to use a numeral.
✅ one or two people
✅ one in a million

One or 1
We spell out 'one' when it means 'a' or to avoid repeating a word.

✅ If you need another test kit, we'll send you a new one.
✅ Phone us to ask for one.

We also use 'one' in phrases like these:
- one of the most common
- one at a time

At the start of a sentence
We use 'One' (not 1) at the beginning of a sentence.

It's okay to use other numerals at the start of a sentence. If it looks confusing, reword the sentence or write out the number.

Writing for a professional audience
We write out the numbers one to nine when we are writing for a professional audience, for example in a programme report. We use numbers for 10 and higher.

✅ We published one newsletter every month for 12 months.

When a sentence starts with a number, write it in words.
✅ Fourteen people said they recalled seeing the BreastCheck advert.
❌ 14 people said they recalled seeing the BreastCheck advert.

Ordinal numbers (1st, 2nd, 3rd …)

For numbers 1 to 9, we spell out the word:
✅ first, second, third…

For numbers 10 and higher, we use ordinal numbers. These are easier to read.
✅ 10th
❌ Tenth
✅ 50th
❌ Fiftieth

Per cent %

We use the % symbol when we are writing digital content for the public
✅ 50%

We use words in programme reports. Use two words.
✅ per cent
❌ percent.

It's okay to use % in tables.

Sometimes it can be better not to use a percentage. For example, instead of 50%, say '1 in 2' or 'half'.

ℹ️ When using percentages, be consistent. We do not mix fractions and percentages in one article as it can confuse our readers.

Fractions

We spell out common fractions like two-thirds.

Statistics

Consider the style of writing and the target audience when using statistics.

Use the clearest, most meaningful format to explain what we're illustrating.

✅ 1 in 7 people
❌ 14.3% of people

Avoid mixing different number formats. Use one or the other.

✅ Around 7 in every 10 people live at least a year after diagnosis and around 5 in 10 people live at least 10 years.
❌ Around 7 in every 10 people live at least a year after diagnosis and around 50% of people live at least 10 years.

Balancing statistics
Research completed by the ESRI (the Economic and Social Research Institute) around communicating cervical screening suggests it's best to balance the number of people affected by something with the number of people who will not be affected.

✅
If 1,000 people are screened, about 20 people will have abnormal cervical cells:
- 18 of these 20 people will have these cells found through screening
- 2 of these 20 people will not have these cells found through screening and could develop cervical cancer.

Years and months

Over a year
For anything over a year, we use years and months not just months. Writing the year followed by the month is clearer for most audiences.

✅ 1 year and 6 months
❌ a year and a half
❌ 1.5 years

It's okay to use months if it makes more sense.
✅ It can take 18 to 24 months for HPV to clear itself from the body.
❌ It can take 1 year and 6 months to 2 years for HPV to clear itself from the body.

Below a year
For anything below 1 year, use months.

✅ 6 months
❌ half a year
❌ 0.5 years

Dates and time

- For dates, we use this format: 6 August 2024
- For time, we use am and pm, with no space.

If times are included with a date, use a comma to split the sentence.
✅ Wednesday 1 June, 10am to 4pm

If only the day and date are included, no comma is needed.
✅ Wednesday 1 June 2024

Months
We spell out months in full.

ℹ️ Screen readers read out shortened months in inconsistent and sometimes confusing ways.

We can use shortened months in tables and excel spreadsheets when needed.

Today
When using 'today' in a news report or blog, we add the date in brackets.

✅ The HSE announced today [12 May 2024] that…
✅ Today [12 May 2024] we launched a new report…

Ages

We do not reference a person's age unless it's relevant to what we're writing.

Ages are given between commas.

✅ John Smith, 32, a doctor…
❌ John Smith, age 32, a doctor…

Age ranges

We use 'to' instead of a dash '-' when describing age ranges.

✅ BreastCheck is for women aged 50 to 69.
❌ BreastCheck is for women aged 50-69.

Use 'and' for a group of people.

✅ People aged 12 and over can register for Diabetic RetinaScreen.

Use 'or' for individuals.
✅ If you are aged 12 or over, you can register for Diabetic RetinaScreen.

Back to contents page

We do not use 'between' or 'in between' when describing age ranges for our screening programmes. This can cause confusion.

✅ CervicalCheck is for women and people with a cervix aged 25 to 65.
❌ CervicalCheck is for women and people with a cervix aged between 25 and 65.
❌ CervicalCheck is for women and people with a cervix in between the ages of 25 and 65.

These are the HSE digital agreed age ranges and how to reference them:
- baby = 0 to 12 months
- child = 1 to 12 years
- young person = 13 to 19 years – do not use pubescent or adolescent people
- adults = 20 to 59 years
- older people = 60+ years – do not use old age pensioner, pensioner or OAP

Instead of using 'middle-aged', we try to be more specific. It's okay if the information is not available. We limit the use of 'of age' and avoid saying 'years old', except in cases such as '6 months to 4 years old'.

Distance

When we refer to distance, we use 'km' for kilometres.

✅ 54% of women said they had to travel less than 10km to their appointment in a BreastCheck unit.

3. Bullet points and lists

Bullet points are a great way to make content easier to read. They can be used to break up long paragraphs and complex content.

- Make bullets short.
- Use only one sentence per bullet, when possible.
- When all the bullets start with the same word(s), build the word(s) into the lead-in sentence instead. *An exception to this is using 'do not'.

✅ People like bullets because they:
  - are easy to read
  - grab attention
  - break up complex paragraphs.

❌ People like bullets because:
  - they are easy to read
  - they grab attention
  - they break up complex paragraphs.

Bullets with a lead-in sentence

- Introduce the bullets with a colon.
- Use lower-case at the start of each bullet point (unless the first word is the name of a place, person or a proper noun that is usually capitalised).

- We do not use any punctuation at the end of the bullet points.
- We use a full stop at the end of the last bullet point only.

✅ People like bullets because they:
- are easy to read
- grab attention
- break up complex paragraphs.

Lead-in sentences where there are options
Where there is only one option, we can say 'one of the following' or 'one of these'. We do this to avoid adding 'or' at the end of the bullet points in a list, or adding the word 'either' in the lead-in sentence.

Separate lead-in sentence from paragraph
If the lead-in sentence is part of a paragraph, separate them.

✅

We've been working closely with disability inclusion experts at Ability Focus to develop and deliver the training.

The training aims to improve how we can:
- support disabled people to take part in screening
- communicate effectively with disabled people
- provide reasonable accommodations for disabled people.

Bullets with a title

We can use bullet points with a title rather than a lead-in sentence.
- Start each bullet point with a capital letter and end each one with a full stop.
- Use only one sentence for each bullet and keep them short when possible.

✅
Uptake rates
- 155,916 women attended their screening appointment.
- The uptake rate was 70.3 per cent.
- Uptake was highest in women aged 50 to 54.

Using 'and' in bullet points

We do not use 'and' within bullet points. When bullet points indicate two or more items that are required, try to rework the lead-in sentence to show this.

✅
You can only request a review if you have cervical cancer and:
- had a CervicalCheck screening test in the 10 years before your diagnosis
- have not had a previous review related to the CervicalCheck programme.

❌
You can only request a review if you:
- have cervical cancer, and
- had a CervicalCheck screening test in the 10 years before your diagnosis, and
- have not had a previous review related to the CervicalCheck programme.

Numbered lists

We only use numbered lists for sequential steps. If steps are not sequential, use a bulleted list.

✅
1. Complete the form.
2. Print and sign the form.
3. Post the form to [address].

4. Contact details

Postal addresses

For addresses, we use:
- the full word for 'County', 'Road' and 'Street'
- 'St' (no dot) instead of 'Saint'

Format of addresses
Addresses will either be written:
- on one line (horizontal)
- across several lines (vertical)

In vertical addresses, use commas at the end of each line

✅ King's Inns House, 200 Parnell Street, Dublin 1, D01 A3Y8

✅
King's Inns House,
200 Parnell Street,
Dublin 1,
D01 A3Y8

Eircodes
Always add an Eircode to an address. Find or check an Eircode.

The style we use is:
- 3 characters, a space, 4 characters
- capital letters

✅ D01 A3Y8

Titles

Usually, we will only need to use titles for medical professionals. Sometimes, we may be asked to use general titles also.

We use abbreviations for common titles such as:
- Mr
- Ms
- Mrs

- Dr
- Prof

We do not use full stops in these abbreviations.

Phone and WhatsApp numbers

Write out 'freephone' and 'phone' to clarify the difference.

We format phone numbers and WhatsApp numbers the same way.

The format is:
- area code or prefix
- 3 numbers
- remaining numbers

This number structure is easier to read.

✅ Phone: 041 685 0300 (+35341 685 0300)
✅ Phone: 01 809 3000 (+3531 809 3000)
✅ WhatsApp message: 087 685 0300

There is an exception to this rule. If a number is formatted so it is easy to remember, keep the layout.

✅ 1800 45 45 55
❌ 1800 454 555

Hyperlinking phone numbers
When we include phone numbers in digital content, we add hyperlinks, except for WhatsApp numbers or emergency numbers (112 or 999).

✅ Freephone 1800 45 45 55

Phone line opening hours
We tell our service users when our phone line or service is open and closed, for example:
- Monday to Friday, 10am to 2pm
- Saturday and Sunday, closed

Email addresses and websites

When we add an email address or website address as contact details, we:
- add 'Email:' or 'Website:' before it
- use lowercase letters
- hyperlink the email or website address
- do not include 'www.' in the website address

✅ Website: screeningservice.ie
✅ Email: info@screeningservice.ie

We use a generic email address where we can. Generic email addresses are easier to maintain than personal email addresses in public content, reducing the need to update information when personal email addresses change.

Back to contents page

We use this format for our public-facing programme website addresses:

- hse.ie/bowelscreen
- hse.ie/breastcheck
- hse.ie/cervicalcheck
- hse.ie/diabeticretinascreen

Writing digital content

We must make sure our websites and apps are accessible to people with disabilities. This is enforceable in Ireland, by law, through the European Union (Accessibility of Websites and Mobile Applications of Public Sector Bodies) Regulations 2020.

Under this law, all content published on our websites has to meet the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines version 2.1 AA standard.

Our toolkit is aligned with the HSE digital guidance on accessible content.

We use the following guidance from this toolkit to make sure our digital content is accessible:
- Plain language
- Style guide
- Links
- PDF documents

Links

We use links in our digital content to direct people to more information about a topic.

Links should describe where they are taking the user. When we can, we use the same words as the title of the page or document we're linking to, so that the user will know what to expect.

We do not use link text such as 'click here', 'more' or anything that does not make sense when read out of context. It does not meet accessibility guidelines as users of assistive technology can move between links without reading the surrounding content.

We do not use acronyms in links. For example, say 'emergency department' and not 'ED'. This is better for screen readers.

✅ Register with BowelScreen
❌ To register for BowelScreen, click here

✅ Symptoms of cervical cancer
❌ Get more information about cervical cancer symptoms.

Standalone links
We do not include punctuation in standalone links (links on their own line).

✅ How to qualify for the CBD scheme
❌ How to qualify for the CBD scheme.

We avoid using 'read more', 'learn about', 'advice on', 'find out about', 'visit'', or other similar terms, in link text.

✅ How to self-isolate
❌ Read more about how to self-isolate

Back to contents page

When you can bend this rule: it's okay to use 'Read more' or similar words if you think it's important for tone or flow in a particular context. If we use it, we do not hyperlink the words 'read more'. Include a full stop but do not hyperlink the full stop.

We also avoid using the word 'online' in link text unless we think it is needed to help users understand the information, such as this example:

✅ To register for bowel screening:
- Freephone: 1800 45 45 55
- Email: info@bowelscreen.ie
- register online

Links in a sentence
When a link is part of a sentence in running copy, we try to put the link at the end of the sentence. Put a full stop at the end of the sentence. Do not hyperlink the full stop.

✅ Talk to your GP if you're worried about the symptoms of breast cancer.

Mid-sentence links can be distracting. They can slow down users who scan read, as they need to stop and read text on both sides of the link. They may cause readability challenges for autistic users.

❌ if you're worried about the symptoms of breast cancer, talk to your GP.

External links
We use these formats when linking to external websites or webpages.

Linking to a home page of an external website
Link the name of the organisation to the website. Do not include the URL.

✅ Support is available from the National Screening Service.

Linking to a specific page on another website
- Match the title of the page in the link text. It's okay to edit the title of the page in the link if it helps to make it clearer or more concise.
- Include spaces before and after the dash to make sure it works well with screen readers.
- Always write the URL in lower case (the only exception to this is HSE.ie to follow the HSE brand guidelines). Do not include 'www' in the URL.

✅ Apply for illness benefit - welfare.ie
❌ Visit www.Welfare.ie to apply for illness benefit.

Internal links
This is when we're linking to a HSE.ie webpage from another HSE.ie web page.
Use the page title only – there is no need to include the web address.

✅ Mental health supports and services
❌ Mental health supports and services - HSE.ie

✅ Get help to quit smoking
❌ Visit Quit.ie for advice on quitting smoking

25

❌ Get help to quit smoking - Quit.ie

If the web page is not on HSE.ie
If the webpage is a HSE brand that has an external website (for example, sexualwellbeing.ie), follow the rule for external links.

✅ Your choices of contraception - sexualwellbeing.ie

PDF documents

Content on HSE websites must be published as HTML web pages and not in PDF format, where possible. This means our content can be used by as many people as possible, including people with disabilities. It also means we can update information easily and quickly on HTML web pages, without the need to create new revisions of a PDF document.

When it is okay to use a PDF
PDFs are useful when we need to share large documents that are unlikely to change or need updating regularly, such as our programme reports.

Linking to PDFs
We only link to a PDF when there is a clear need for it.

We use this format when we link to a PDF:
Equity Action Plan 2024-2025 (PDF, 6 KB, 10 pages).

- Hyperlink all information except the full stop (if there is a full stop).
- Round up values over 1 MB to 1 decimal place. For example, round up 2.58 MB to 2.6 MB.
- Round up values under 1 MB to the nearest KB. For example, round up 835.74KB to 836 KB.
- include a space between MB or KB and make them uppercase, for example, 1.5 MB.

Translated PDFs
We use this format when we link to translated PDFs:

Language: Translated file name (file type, file size, page number)
✅ Irish: Seirbhís Uainn Tuairim Uait - bileog aiseolais (PDF, 725 KB, 4 pages)

We do not include the name of the file in English too. It makes the link too long. We do not hyperlink the language and colon before the translated file name.

Writing a news report or blog

We write short news reports and blogs to tell people about our work. We publish these on our corporate website – screeningservice.ie.

We post our news reports and blogs to our social media platforms (X, Linked In and Bluesky). We also include them in our staff newsletters and our monthly updates to our stakeholders. When it's relevant, we include links to blogs in our responses to Parliamentary Questions (PQs) or queries from the media and members of the public. Our blogs demonstrate that we are publishing information about our work that is of interest to our stakeholders.

When we write blogs, we use all the resources in our toolkit to help us.

Blogs are a great way to give our users a summary of the work we do. They are also a great way to tell small stories about a project over time – and the bigger story will tell itself.

We write blogs about all the work we publish on our corporate website, such as our:
- programme reports
- quality assurance standards
- strategies, frameworks and policies
- end of year report.

We write blogs to give people more information and answer questions about our screening programmes. Some examples include answering questions about:
- breast density
- going for a colonoscopy
- eye screening for people with diabetes
- what happens to your sample after cervical screening.

We write news reports and blogs about our conferences and events, projects and partnerships, and to mark awareness days and months, including:
- Cervical Cancer Prevention Week
- Bowel Cancer Awareness Month
- Breast Cancer Awareness Month
- World Diabetes Day
- Cervical Cancer Elimination Day of Action.

Blog and news report examples

We've lots of examples that we can use to help us write a blog.

Blogs about:
- research we published
- a programme report we published
- a conference we held
- an event we hosted
- a project we completed
- a patient advocate story.

27

Tips for writing blogs

Plan your blog

- Know your audience and make your blog relevant and accessible to them – who are you writing for and what do they care about. It might be more than one audience.
- Do your research – make sure your content is accurate.
- Outline your structure – keep it simple and logical.
  - ➢ Opening sentence(s) – get to the point. Put the most important information first to capture the attention of the reader and tell them what the blog is about.
  - ➢ Main points: what do you want the reader to know more about and why does it matter.
  - ➢ Conclusion: what do you want the reader to do now and how can you make it easier for them to do it.
- Keep it short – about 750 words is the recommended length (about a 3-minute read). It can be shorter or longer if needed. Think about what information the reader needs versus how much you want to give.
- Do not include visuals like graphs or infographics in blogs – we cannot publish them. We can only publish photos as a decorative image.

Write your blog

- Use a friendly, conversational tone – write like you're talking to a friend, and yet stay professional.
- Stick to the facts – avoid editorialising and adding your own opinion.
- Use our plain language principles.
- Be consistent with any terms you use. For example, if you call something a 'review', use this term throughout the blog.
- Use subheadings to break up long pieces of information – it makes it easier to read and scan.
- Use bullet points to break up long paragraphs to make it easier to read.
- Include links where relevant – connect the blog to other blogs and useful resources.
- Remember the evidence – back up what you say. Use links instead of references.
- Apply meaning – our research shows x. This means y.
- Consider including a quote from yourself or someone else involved in the work you are writing about.
- Create a title.
- Include a byline – By Joan Smith, Social Crew, National Screening Service.

Proofread and edit your blog

- Check grammar and spelling.
- Read your blog aloud – if you trip over saying it, chances are your reader will too.
- Cut out the repetition – you only need to say it once.
- Remove any unnecessary words.
- Check the readability of the blog.
- Get a second opinion – fresh eyes can help.

Blog writing checklist	
Tick as many as are relevant to you and what you're writing	✔
I've used plain language	
I've used the active voice	
I've used positive language and sentences	
I've kept it factual (and did not editorialise)	
I've used short sentences	
I've used bullet points to break up long paragraphs	
I've used sub-headings	
I've removed jargon	
I've explained medical terms	
I've checked the readability of the blog	

Tone of Voice checklist
(tick as many as are relevant to you and what you're writing)

My tone of voice is…	✔	My tone of voice is…	✔
confident		caring	
clear		encouraging	
positive		supportive	
professional		reassuring	
human		engaging	

Terminology guides

Our terminology guides help us to use plain language, explain medical terms, use inclusive language and use existing content to improve consistency.

- Plain language – simple words
- Plain language – making phrases simpler
- Medical terms – plain language alternatives and explanations
- Using existing content to improve consistency
- Inclusive language guides

Plain language – simple words	
Instead of…	Consider…
accompany	go with
accordingly	so, or in line with this
additional	more, extra
adjustment	change
afforded	given
agenda (unless it's for a meeting)	plan
alternatively	or, on the other hand
anticipate	expect
apparent	clear, plain, obvious
appropriate	proper, right, suitable
approximately	about
ascertain	find out
assistance	help
avail of	take up, take
beneficial	helpful, useful
calculate	work out
clarification	explanation, help
cohort	group
collaborate	work with
combined	together
commence	start, began
complete	fill in, finish
completion	end
comply with	keep to, meet
(it is) compulsory	(you) must
considerable	great, important
comprises	is made up of, includes
consequently	So
correct	put right
counter	prevent
deliver	make, create, provide
demonstrate	show, prove
determine	decide, work out
discuss	talk about
disincentivise	discourage or deter
disseminate	share
duration	time
endeavour	try

Plain language – simple words

Instead of…	Consider…
ensure	make sure
establish	show, find out, set up
evaluate	test, check
exclude	leave out
facilitate	help, make possible, make easier
facilitate (a workshop)	run
finalise	end, finish
focus	work on, concentrate on
following	after
foster	encourage, help
frequently	often
furthermore	then, also, and
generate	make, produce
ie	We try not to use 'ie'. We usually write the sentence in another way or start a new sentence with 'This means…'
illustrate	show, explain
impact	have an effect on
implement	carry out, do
incorporating	which includes
indicate	show, suggest
inform	tell
initially	at first
initiate	start, begin
insert	put in
instances	cases
intend to	will
irrespective	regardless
issue	give, send
key	important
liaise	work with
(it is) mandatory	(you) must
modification	change
monitor	keep track of
moreover	and, also, as well
moving forward	from now on
normally	usually
notify	tell, let us (or you) know
notwithstanding	even if, still, yet
objective	aim, goal
occur	happen
opportunity	chance
on request	if you ask
operate	run, work
operational	working
optimum	best, greatest, most
option	choice
ordinarily	normally, usually
partially	partly
participate	take part

Back to contents page

Plain language – simple words

Instead of…	Consider…
particulars	details, facts
per annum	a year
perform	do
place	put
potentially	may, might
practically	almost, nearly
previous	earlier, before, last
principal	main
prior to	before
proceed	go ahead
procure	get
projected	estimated
promptly	quickly, at once
proportion	part
provide	give
provided that	as long as
purchase	buy
quarterly	every three months
receive	get
refers to	talks about, mentions
regarding	about
represents	shows, stands for, is
request	ask, question
require	need, want
required	needed
requirements	needs
reside	live
resident, residing	living
review	look at (again)
revised	new, changed, updated
robust	well thought out, comprehensive
similarly	also, in the same way
solely	only
state	write down, say, tell us
statutory	legal, by law
streamline	simplify, remove unnecessary administration
subject to	depending on
submit	send, give
subsequently	later
substantial	large, great, a lot of
substantially	more or less
sufficient	enough
supply	give, deliver
tackle	stop, solve, or deal with
thereafter	then, afterwards
to date	so far, up to now
ultimately	in the end, finally
unavailability	lack of
utilise	use

Plain language – making phrases simpler

Instead of…	Consider…
adequate number of	enough
adjacent to	beside
as a consequence of	because
as a result of	because
at the present time	now
by means of	by, with
come to the conclusion	conclude
despite the fact that	though, although
draw your attention to	point out, show
during which time	while
due to the fact that	because, as
excessive number of	too many
for the duration of	during, until the end of…
for the purpose of	To
further to	after, following
give an indication	indicate
give consideration to	consider, think about
hold discussions, meetings	discuss, meet
in a number of cases	some (or say how many)
in accordance with	in line with, because of
in addition	and, as well as, also
in advance	before
in conjunction with	with
In order that	so
in relation to	about
in the majority of cases	most, mostly
in view of the fact	as, because
may in the future	may, might, could
may -v- might	The general rule is use 'might' for possibility and reserve 'may' for permission
referred to as	called
relating to	about
subsequent to	after
until such time as	until
whether or not	whether
with a view to	to, so that
with effect from	from
with reference to	about
with regard to	about
with the minimum of delay	quickly (or say when)
you are requested	please
your attention is drawn to	please see, please note

Medical terms – plain language alternatives and explanations

When we use a medical term, we explain it, or we use a plain language alternative.

Medical term	Plain language alternative or explanation
acute	sudden, in a short period of time
asymptomatic	has no symptoms
biopsy	taking a small sample of tissue to be looked at more closely and tested in the laboratory
blood glucose levels	blood glucose levels We do not use the plain language alternative 'blood sugar levels' if possible. It can lead to confusion that only sugary foods raise glucose levels when, in fact, all carbohydrates can contribute to glucose levels.
bowel preparation	a strong laxative that you drink that helps to clean out your bowels before a colonoscopy
cervical cancer elimination	make cervical cancer rare The World Health Organization defines elimination of cervical cancer as fewer than 4 cases per 100,000 women. This would make cervical cancer rare. Ireland's incidence rate is 10.1 per 100,000.
cervical screening	a test to check for HPV – the virus that causes most cervical cancers. If HPV is found, the sample is looked at to see if HPV has caused any cell changes that could turn into cancer.
cervix	the neck of the womb
CIN (Cervical Intraepithelial Neoplasia)	a way to classify abnormal cells in the cervix based on how severe it is (CIN 1, 2, 3)
clinician	a doctor, nurse or other healthcare professional
colonoscope	a thin flexible tube with a camera
colonoscopy	a test to take a closer look at your bowel using a small camera Use colonoscopy when referring to the test, for example 'Your colonoscopy can take about 20 minutes.'
colorectal cancer	bowel cancer
colposcopy	a test to take a closer look at your cervix using a small camera
diabetic retina screening	eye screening for people with type 1 or type 2 diabetes
diabetic retinopathy	an eye condition caused by diabetes that damages the small blood vessels in the back of the eye, sometimes leading to sight loss
Ductal carcinoma in situ (DCIS)	an early form of breast cancer that affects the cells of the milk ducts in the breast. The cells turn cancerous but stay in place (in situ). Some, but not all, cases will go on to become an invasive cancer, so it is often considered a pre-cancer. DCIS is medically graded as either low, intermediate, or high grade.
endoscopist	the colonoscopy is done by a doctor or an advanced nurse practitioner, called an endoscopist.
faeces	poo

Medical terms – plain language alternatives and explanations

When we use a medical term, we explain it, or we use a plain language alternative.

FIT (Faecal Immunochemical Test)	a bowel screening test used to take a small sample of your poo. It is sent to a laboratory to check for tiny amounts of blood
GP	We mostly use GP. We use 'doctor' when someone might see a GP, a specialist or consultant in a surgery, hospital or clinic setting.
Human papillomavirus (HPV)	a common virus that most people get through close skin-to-skin sexual contact. HPV causes most cases of cervical cancer.
HPV test	a test that checks for the presence of high-risk types of HPV that could cause cervical cancer
immunisation	vaccination
immunise	protect
interval cancer	a cancer developed after taking part in screening
mammogram	breast X-ray
medication	tablets, injection (be specific)
nausea	feeling sick
negative (test results)	You do not have… or you are not…
ophthalmologist	a medical doctor who can diagnose and treat eye conditions and perform eye surgery
ophthalmic medical practitioner	a doctor who specialises in eye care
pre-cancer (cervical screening)	changes to cells in the cervix that are not cancer. These abnormal cells can often be treated early to prevent cancer from developing.
physician	doctor
polyp	an abnormal tissue growth that can sometimes turn into cancer
positive (test results)	You have… you are…
radiographers or radiologists	Radiographers take X-rays. Radiologists read them.
retina	the back of the eye
risk	chance – when writing for the public It's okay to use 'risk' and 'risk factors' when we're writing for a specialist or professional audience.
sample taker	A doctor or nurse will take your sample. It's okay to use sample taker when writing to sample takers and to a medical professional audience. We use two words - sample taker. We do not use 'smear' taker. It's a dated term.
service user	people or patients people who use our services
smear test	We do not use 'smear test'. It's a dated term. Use 'cervical screening' or 'HPV cervical screening'
stool (sample)	poo (sample)
swab	a small piece of cotton wool used by a doctor or nurse to take a sample (of something)
ultrasound (in breast screening)	a scan to create images of the breast, often used to check lumps found on a mammogram

Using existing content to improve consistency

We re-use content that we've already published, which has been through our agreed approvals processes.

This helps us to be consistent when we are writing about our screening programmes. When we use multiple different terms or phrases when referring to the same thing, it can cause confusion.

It also helps us to be more efficient as we do not need to re-write content that is already available.

We can get 'approved' content from our public-facing screening programme websites and from our published news reports and blogs.

- hse.ie/bowelscreen
- hse.ie/breastcheck
- hse.ie/cervicalcheck
- hse.ie/diabeticretinascreen
- news reports and blogs

When we re-use content, we still check that it is accurate and up-to-date, and we still follow our governance and approvals process. Some older news reports and blogs may not have the most up-to-date information, for example the BowelScreen age range changed in October 2023, so blogs published before this time may not have the most up-to-date age range.

We use common phrases to explain the main messages about our screening programmes.

Phrases we use about our screening programmes	BowelScreen	BreastCheck	CervicalCheck	Diabetic RetinaScreen
Who is screening for	BowelScreen is for men and women aged 59 to 69 who have no symptoms of bowel cancer.	BreastCheck is for women aged 50 to 69 who have no symptoms of breast cancer.	CervicalCheck is for women and people with a cervix aged 25 to 65 who have no symptoms of cervical cancer.	Diabetic RetinaScreen is for everyone with type 1 or type 2 diabetes aged 12 and over.

Phrases we use about our screening programmes	BowelScreen	BreastCheck	CervicalCheck	Diabetic RetinaScreen
What can screening do	Bowel screening can save lives. It can prevent cancer from developing by finding and removing early signs of disease (polyps); and it can help to find bowel cancer at an early stage when it can be easier to treat.	Breast screening can save lives. It aims to find breast cancer at an early stage when it can be easier to treat.	Cervical screening can save lives. It aims to prevent cervical cancer or find it at an early stage when it can be easier to treat. [Cervical screening can help to find and treat changes to the cells in the cervix to prevent them from turning into cancer.]	Diabetic eye screening can prevent sight loss. It looks for signs of an eye disease called retinopathy. When diabetic retinopathy is found early, treatment can reduce or prevent damage to your eyesight.
What does screening involve	Bowel screening is a simple, test that you do at home at a time that suits you. It's called a FIT kit.	Breast screening is an X-ray of your breasts, called a mammogram.	Cervical screening is a test that checks for the human papillomavirus (HPV). It's done by taking a small sample of cells from your cervix and sending it to one of our quality-assured laboratories to be tested.	Diabetic eye screening looks for changes to the back of your eyes – the retina - that could be a sign of an eye disease called retinopathy.

Phrases we use about our screening programmes	BowelScreen	BreastCheck	CervicalCheck	Diabetic RetinaScreen
When to go for screening	We'll invite you to do the test every 2 years if you're aged 59 to 70, and you're on our register.	We'll invite you to a breast screening appointment if you're aged 50 to 69 and you're on our register. We'll send you an appointment letter: • for your first screening test by age 52 - in some cases 53 • every 2 to 3 years after that, up to the age of 69.	Going for cervical screening every time you're invited is the best way to get the most from it. • We'll invite you for cervical screening every 3 years if you're aged 25 to 29. • We'll invite you every 5 years, if you're aged 30 to 65.	We'll invite you for diabetic eye screening when you're due. You must be on our register to get your invitation to screening.
The benefits of screening	Bowel screening can prevent bowel cancer and reduce the chance of cancer developing. BowelScreen is free of charge and if follow-up tests or treatment is needed, this is also free.	Breast screening can find breast cancer at an early stage when it can be easier to treat. BreastCheck is free of charge and if treatment is needed, this is also free.	Cervical screening can prevent cervical cancer and reduce the chance of cancer developing. It can find cervical cancer at an early stage when it can be easier to treat. CervicalCheck is free of charge and if follow-up tests or treatment is needed, this is also free.	When diabetic retinopathy is found early, treatment can reduce or prevent damage to your eyesight. Diabetic RetinaScreen is free of charge and if treatment is needed, this is also free.

Phrases we use about our screening programmes	BowelScreen	BreastCheck	CervicalCheck	Diabetic RetinaScreen
The limitations of screening	Screening will not prevent all cases of bowel cancer and some people will still develop bowel cancer after taking part in screening. Talk to your GP if you're concerned about symptoms. Do not wait until your next screening is due.	Screening will not find all cases of breast cancer and some people will still develop breast cancer even if they go for regular screening. Talk to your GP if you're concerned about symptoms. Do not wait until your next screening appointment.	Screening will not prevent all cases of cervical cancer, and a small number of women who have regular cervical screening will still develop cervical cancer, even after a normal screening result or after a normal colposcopy. Talk to your GP if you're concerned about symptoms. Do not wait until your next screening is due.	Screening will not pick up every sign of disease. Talk to your GP, optician or eye doctor if you notice any changes to your sight. Do not wait until your next screening appointment.

Inclusive language

We use positive, inclusive and respectful language when we write about people.

We use people-first language unless otherwise specified by an individual, a group of people within a specific population, or by an advocacy group on behalf of a specific population. We emphasise the person, not their condition, for example, people with diabetes.

We do not use passive, victim words such as 'suffers from,' 'victim of' or 'handicapped'.

We use language that is free of bias and is inclusive and respectful when we talk about socioeconomic status.

Inclusive language guides	
National Disability Authority (NDA) - advice paper on disability language and terminology	NDA Advice Paper on Disability Language and Terminology - National Disability Authority – nda.ie
As I Am - Autism and Language	Talking about autism – A language guide – asiam.ie
Voice of Vision Impairment (VVI) - Manual on accessible communications	The VVI Manual on Accessible Communications (VVI MAC) – vvi.ie See section 3 - Language and Terminology – vvi.ie
Irish Deaf Society – preferred terminology	Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Deafened, Hearing Loss - irishdeafsociety.ie
The United Nations Office of Geneva – Disability inclusive language guidelines	Disability Inclusive Language Guidelines – ungeneva.org
HSE Social Inclusion - LGBTQI+ terminology	LGBTQI+ terminology – hse.ie
BeLonG To – LGBTQ+ terminology and language resources	LGBTQ+ terminology and language resources – belongto.org
Transgender Equality Network Ireland – helpful terms and definitions	Helpful trans terms and definitions – teni.ie
NHS digital service manual – Inclusive content guide	Inclusive content – NHS.uk
Oxfam Inclusive Language Guide	Inclusive Language Guide – oxfam.org
Diabetes Ireland and HSE – Talking about diabetes	Talking about Diabetes: Language Matters - Diabetes Ireland – diabetes.ie
UNAIDS – HIV terminology guidelines	UNAIDS Terminology Guidelines – unaids.org
American Medical Association – Advancing health equity: A guide to language, narrative and concepts	Advancing health equity: A guide to language, narrative and concepts

Visual identity guidelines

We follow the HSE's visual identity guidelines.

This helps us to deliver communications in a clear, consistent and standardised way for everyone. The HSE's visual identity is instantly recognisable and associated with trust and confidence.

The guidelines include information about:
- how to use the HSE logo
- using secondary logos, such as our NSS logo and our screening programme logos
- what fonts to use and where to use them
- stationery, such as letterheads, compliment slips and signage
- presentation and report templates
- email signatures.

More resources

Plain language	• Guidelines for communicating clearly using plain English – HSE.ie • Plain English writing and design tips - nala.ie • Simply Put – NALA's plain English website – simplyput.ie • The A to Z of alternative words - plainenglish.co.uk • Plain English Lexicon, Plain Language Commission - clearest.co.uk • Content Design London - Readability guidelines – readabilityguidelines.co.uk • NHS A-Z of writing – nhs.uk • A to Z of NHS health writing - nhs.uk
Videos	• HSE video guidelines - from production to publication
Health literacy e-Learning courses	• Let's talk about health literacy – adultliteracyforlife.ie • Let's talk about a literacy friendly approach in healthcare - adultliteracyforlife.ie

References

We've used content in our toolkit from the following sources:

- HSE Communications and Public Affairs guidance on:
  - Plain English
  - Punctuation and formatting
  - Numbers, measurements, dates and times
  - Contact details
  - Accessible content

- National Adult Literary Agency (NALA)
  - Plain English writing and design tips - nala.ie

Back to contents page

Implementation

Our aim is for the application of our toolkit to become common and best practice across our written communications. We'll integrate the toolkit into our communications and information development processes.

Training and support
- We'll provide training to staff to introduce the toolkit and how we can apply it to our work.
- We'll provide ongoing support to staff to apply the toolkit to our written communications.
- We'll work with and support project teams to apply the toolkit to specific information development projects.

Ongoing improvement
- We'll review the toolkit annually to keep it relevant and effective, and aligned with guidance from HSE Communications and Public Affairs.
- We'll share updates through our internal communications channels.
- We'll encourage feedback from staff which we will use to improve the toolkit over time.

We're here to help.

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Back to contents page