A Style Guide for Age-friendly Communication

Lifespan *Take it on!*

More of us are living longer, so this is a good time to give extra thought to how we talk and write about aging and even how we use images. Ageism, which is stereotyping based on age, is harmful to both the individual and our society. By communicating in ways which take on ageism, we are contributing to making our community more age-inclusive, more age-friendly.

We hope you will use this style guide in your communications for and about older adults.

Our words matter.

🚫 **Outdated terminology** that promotes assumptions and stereotypes based on age:	✅ **These words are preferred.** (See AP Stylebook)
Seniors (and "our seniors")	Older adult or older person/older people
Senior citizens	People 60 (65, 70…) and older
The aged, old person, elderly, spry, grandmotherly	Elder

Is age relevant in the examples below?

A 73-year-old man was in a car accident…

Ask yourself: Does is matter that the man is 73? What if he is 43? Would you mention his age?

A 75-year-old grandmother was appointed to the Supreme Court today.

Ask yourself: Does it matter that she is 75? Does it matter that she is a grandmother?

Is the description relevant, or correct?

A man attacked a 64-year-old elderly woman…

Ask yourself: What is the connotation of the word "elderly?" Elderly implies frail, incapacitated, diminished.

🚫 Writing 69 years young is considered ageist because it infers that being old is in inherently bad.

✅ People living in nursing homes are residents, not patients, because where they are living is their home.

🚫 Avoid writing ageist storylines using words like silver tsunami, demographic cliff/time bomb. They imply disaster.

🚫 Avoid using the word "still" before a verb. E.g. Still working. Still water skiing. It suggests that doing so is remarkable.

In print: fonts and images matter.

✅ Use at least a 12 pt. font. Fonts with smaller characters may need to be 14 pt. Consider using serif fonts for text and sans serif for headlines.

Serif text example, Times Roman, 12 pt.:
Older adult housing options are numerous

Serif text example, Garamond, 14 pt.:
Older adult housing options are numerous

Sans Serif text example, Arial, 12 pt.:
Older adult housing options are numerous

Sans Serif text example, Calibri, 14 pt.:
Older adult housing options are numerous

🚫 Avoid using all caps.
ALL CAPS ARE HARDER TO READ.

🚫 Avoid using more than two or three typefaces in one document.

🚫 Avoid difficult-to-read colors.
Our community, like the rest of the nation, is aging.
Our community, like the rest of the nation, is aging.
Our community, like the rest of the nation, is aging.

🚫 Avoid designing materials with text in front of photos or patterned background images.

🚫 Avoid designing materials with text on a shaded background or keep the background color as light as possible. Use contrast.

🚫 Avoid using glossy or colored paper.

✅ To enhance readability, add extra space, called leading, between lines of text.

Single line or automatic leading:
A greater percentage of the population is 55-plus than ever before.

1 ½ line or increased leading:
A greater percentage of the population is 55-plus than ever before.

✅ Use left-aligned (or flush left) text rather than using justified text.

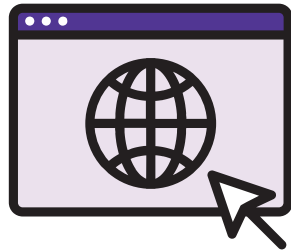✅ Use "sentence case" for titles, headlines and headings rather than capitalizing each word.

✅ Use *italics* and **bold** sparingly.

✅ Use inclusive images of people ages 60 to 100. According to research, most adults think of themselves as younger than their chronological age.

Website design matters.

Users of all ages read just 28% of the words on a webpage. Avoid crowding and lengthy pages.

New tools make websites more accessible. E.g. The Accessibility Tool for WordPress allows visitors to increase text size, change to gray scale, add contrast or change a background.

Provide a text enlargement option on the site and keep contrast high between the text and its background.

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Fonts should be a minimum of 16px.

The research regarding the on-screen readability of serif or sans serif fonts is inconclusive.

Many standard and widely available fonts score highly for web accessibility. Choose common fonts or font families that have strong and unique characters/letters.

AaBbCcDdEeFfGgHhIiJjKk
AaBbCcDdEeFfGgHhIiJjKk

Include a simple description of every image for those who use text-to-speech technology.

smiling man

Add subtitles to videos.

Use large button sizes and include text on the buttons.

Visit our contact page

Make key information such as address and phone number easy to locate.

Avoid complicated menus.

Avoid using captcha.

CaPTCHA

Lifespan
Take it on!

www.lifespanrochester.org

To learn more about the age-friendly movement, visit websites such as:

Changing the Narrative
https://changingthenarrativeco.org

Old School
https://oldschool.info

Frameworks Institute
https://encorenetwork.org
/downloads/frameworks-institute-a-communications-toolkit

Age Without Ageism
https://oldschool.info/resource
/age-without-ageism

Ageism is All Around Us
https://oldschool.info/resource
/ageism-is-all-around-us

Booming Encore
https://boomingencore.com/en

To learn about Monroe County's Age-friendly initiative, visit:
https://monroeagingalliance.org
/our-work

Sources for this guide:

Lifespan of Greater Rochester

Changing the Narrative

California Assisted Living

AP Stylebook

Santa Clara County Communication Guide

Age-friendly DC Reaching Older Adults More Effectively Through Print

Age-friendly Business Resource Guide/ Age-Friendly NYC

Broome County Age-friendly

The National Center to Reframe Aging
https://www.reframingaging.org

SiteImprove
https://www.siteimprove.com/glossary
/accessible-fonts

NetGuru
https://www.netguru.com/blog/accessible-design-senior-users

People over Forty Feel 20% Younger than their Age: Subjective Age across the Lifespan
https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc
/articles/PMC3969748

How to Avoid Ageist Language in Aging Research? An Overview and Guidelines, Carmen Bowman & Weng Marc Limm, Sept. 2021
https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.10
80/01924788.2021.1992712

Lifespan is a regional nonprofit providing information, guidance and services that help older adults and caregivers take on the challenges and opportunities of our longer lives.