# Monroe One Guide for Inclusive Forms and Publications

# INTRODUCTION

Monroe One is in the process of reviewing and updating its forms and communications sent to families, students, and staff. Starting in the 2022-23 school year, every department - instructional and non-instructional - will begin looking at its documents and forms through an equitable and accessibility lens.

This guide can be used in conjunction with the Monroe One Style Guide for Inclusive Communication.

This guide is a starting point for us to all pause and consider the words and documents we use and the reasoning behind them. It provides an overview and is not all-encompassing. As language and the needs of our school community evolve and change, so too will the guidance within this form.

To suggest updates or to provide recommendations, please contact Communications@BOCES.monroe.edu

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

# Quick checklist

## Readibility

- Easy to understand language
- Highlight important points
- Spell out acronyms
- Ensure the document can be translated
- Consider visual aides

## Accessibility

- Avoid using script or hard-to-read fonts
- Aim for 12-point font
- Keep color and contrast in mind
  - Do not use color alone to convey meaning
- Do not scan PDFs, always start with original
- Add alt text to any images on digital forms/documents

## Titles

- Consider formal vs. informal communication
- Remove gender-specific terms
- Ask how someone would like to be addressed before assuming
- Use person-centered language

## Content

- Consider what information can be eliminated
- Identify software and reporting limitations, consider if they can be changed

## Visuals

- Are you using images that accurately reflect the full diversity of your department or program?
  - Diversity includes different ages, national origins, gender identities, physical and developmental abilities and more.
- Who is missing or excluded?
- Are any stereotypes being perpetuated? Avoid reinforcing stereotypes.

# READABILITY

## Monroe One aims to have all forms and publications written in a 3-5 grade reading level.

- This may require technical documents to have two versions, including one in 'plain speak'.
- Accessible forms are easy to understand, to complete, and to submit.
- Not only does this include clear instructions, it also means using language that is easy for everyone to understand.

## Communicate to a wide range of audiences

- Use words familiar to the reader.
- If possible, keep words to 3 syllables or fewer.
- Write short, simple, and direct sentences. Divide sentences into two when necessary.
- Keep paragraphs short and limited to one idea.
- Write in the active voice, using clear and direct language.
- Highlight important points; use underline, bold, or boxes.
- Spell out acronyms when first used. Explain their meaning and put other technical terms in plain language.
- Avoid using jargon.
- If a document is printed, ensure there are translated versions available.
- If a document is digital, ensure a translation button is accessible.

**Visuals can support comprehension for all literacy levels.**
- When possible, include an image that demonstrates your point. This can include screenshots of the step-by-step process to fill out a form.
- Any images on a digital document must have alternative text (alt text) associated with them. Additional information can be found in the section for Accessibility on page 6.

# RESOURCES TO USE

The Hemingway Editor provides a readability index and word count for any text. Microsoft also has a built-in readability feature: Microsoft: Get your document's readability and level statistics

# Structure information clearly.

- Provide "sign posts" in your writing
- Use these "sign posts" consistently throughout your content so that their significance can clearly be understood.

**Example:**
Include subheadings, bullet points, and other structural cues that allow readers to clearly follow the information being presented.

- Avoid complex presentations of information if a plain text version would be enough.
  - Complex presentations include tables and complicated flow charts.
  - If a visual diagram is necessary, provide a written description of the information.

- For digital content, use descriptive link text that clearly indicates where the user will be taken when they click the link.

**Example:**
If linking to a document titled "Health History Form," use the words "Health History Form" as your link text, rather than "click here" or simply "Form").

## Use accessible formats.

Present information as plain text (rather than as an attachment or download) where possible so that readers can scan and/or scale the content as needed on their device. Audiences may not be able to open, read, or understand attachments such as PDFs, Powerpoints, and Excel spreadsheets, depending on their ability, device, and software access. Provide alt text for all images.

ⓘ **For more guidance:** *Visit Digital.gov or WC3's Introduction to Web Accessibility.*

> **ALT TEXT ON IMAGES**
> Alternative text, or text equivalents, are a text description of an image or graphic that will enable a user with a vision disability to understand what is included in the image/graphic. The words in the tag should be more than a description. They should provide a text equivalent of the image, providing the same meaningful information that users obtain by looking at the image.

# ACCESSIBILITY

## Font type, color, photos, and format all make a difference.

Our inclusive school environment extends into our digital presence. This means creating forms, documents, and publications that are accessible to every individual.

Many people with varying needs use assistive technology when using a computer and when viewing digital documents. This includes screen readers, text enlargement software, and computer programs that enable people to control the computer with their voice.

### To improve accessibility through technology, consider the following:

### Font type
Avoid using script or hard-to-read fonts. Sans serif fonts are typically easier to read on a screen.
Monroe One's official font is Century Gothic.
Arial is often recommended for many forms for its readability and flexibility in design.

### Font size
Aim for a font size that is 12-point or larger. Never go smaller than 9-point font.

### Tables should be avoided
Tables can be difficult for screen readers to interpret. If one is necessary for data, use a simple structure with headers and no blank cells.

### Color and contrast
It is important to always choose colors that are in high contrast to one another to improve readability.
Stay away from hard-to-read colors like yellow.
Do not use color alone to convey information (ex. color coding details).

### Working with PDFs
Always start with the original file when making edits.
Stay away from scanning a PDF as that creates a flat document that is not accessible.
PDFs should not be flattened, or scanned, as it will not allow screen readers to access the text on the document.

## RESOURCES TO USE

ADA Tool Kit: Website Accessibility Under Title II of the ADA
Microsoft: Make your Word documents accessible to people with disabilities
Microsoft: Accessibility Checker

# TITLES AND PRONOUNS

## Everyone deserves to be referred to correctly.

It is our goal to make every staff, student, and family member feel represented in our communications. This includes properly identifying every individual.

While school settings may traditionally label teachers and instructional staff with Mr/Mrs/Ms, Monroe One recognizes that those titles may not accurately represent a person's identity.

**Ask how they prefer to be addressed before making assumptions.**
If you are unable to ask, consider using Ms. when referring to a teacher who identifies as female, no matter their marital status or Mx. as a gender-neutral title.

## Legal forms versus informal communication

In many cases, the program or department will need to consider when specific information is necessary to include.

Specific titles may need to be used for legal documents, such as Individualized Education Plans (IEPs).
- In these instances, you may need to use the term 'parent/legal guardian'
- Names and pronouns may need to reflect legal paperwork

For informal communication, such as school letters and events, try to be mindful of the words you use.
- Change 'parents/guardians' to "families and caretakers"
- Instead of hosting a Parent Night, host a Family Night

# Avoid the use of gender-specific terms unless relevant.

Seek out terms and titles that do not specify gender.

Replace the use of 'he/she, him/her' with 'they/them' to be more inclusive. Use 'student' or 'child' instead of 'daughter/son' or 'boys/girls'.

**Examples:**

- "**People**" (instead of "women and men")
- "**Children**" or "**students**" (instead of "boys and girls")
- "**Siblings**" or "**relatives**" (instead of "brothers and sisters")
- "**Partner**" or "**spouse**" (instead of "husband or wife")
- "**Firefighter**" and "**council member**" (instead of "fireman" or "councilman")
- When addressing a group: "**Folks**," "**guests**" or "**friends**" (instead of "you guys" or "ladies and gentlemen")

When presenting a generalization or speaking in the abstract, use "they," including as a singular pronoun, rather than choosing a masculine or feminine term.

**Examples:**

- **"**When a student enters our school, they are welcomed …" (instead of "he is welcomed" or "he or she is welcomed").
- "Once our new teacher is in place, we will introduce them to the school community" (instead of "introduce him/her").

    **For more guidance:** *consult [GLAAD Media Reference Guide](#), 10th Edition.*

# Use person-centered language unless otherwise indicated.

Always place emphasis on the individual as a human first.
Refer to "people with disabilities" instead of "the disabled;" "a person who uses a wheelchair" instead of "wheelchair-bound", etc. However, if someone self-identifies differently, follow their lead. For example, as "deaf" rather than "a deaf person".

Similarly, use racial and religious identification as an adjective, rather than a noun, unless an individual or group identifies that way.

# Use language that is mindful of the pressures families may face outside of school.

For many households, time off from school can be stressful rather than fun or relaxing. Take these circumstances into consideration when you are referring to assignments, weekends, and breaks.

**Examples:**

- A homework assignment can direct a student to read a book "outside of school with an adult," rather than "Read this book in your room at bedtime with your Mom or Dad."
- An end-of-year newsletter can wish families "a safe and healthy summer," rather than saying, "I'm sure we are all looking forward to some rest and relaxation."

# CONTENT

## Ask yourself: is this information relevant?

As we review our forms, it is important to consider the content on each document and whether or not it is necessary.

This can often be the easiest way to eliminate unnecessary language that may not be inclusive or welcoming.

- Is all of the information necessary to know?
- Do you need to know the individual's legal name?
  - If so, is there a field that allows them to identify with their chosen name?
- Do you need to know the individual's pronouns?
- Are you able to change any reference to 'son or daughter' to 'child' or 'student'?
- Does the field have to be labeled as 'mother's name' or can it be replaced with a different term?

### Processing paperwork

Often, the biggest challenge in changing language on a form is the disconnect between our intent and the software programs we use.

When reviewing forms, consider:

- What are the limitations on the software you are using when entering the paperwork?
  - For example, does the software allow for non-binary answers to gender? Does it limit you to put F or M for the student or staff member?
- Can those limitations be changed?
  - This work is ongoing. If you identify a program or process you think could be changed, bring it up to administrators so the organization can begin a review process.

# Choose visuals that accurately reflect the full diversity of your community.

Diversity encompasses far more than race. Your school community contains people of diverse ages, national origins, gender identities, sexual orientations, physical and developmental abilities, socioeconomic statuses, religious beliefs, parental and marital statuses, educational backgrounds, veteran status, citizenship, income, and employment.
Within your school community, you have educators and students with varied interests, tastes, fashions, personalities, and identities.

*While no single image can capture the full range of diversity within your school community, each image becomes part of a larger story about the district.*

The imagery you select should not overstate or misrepresent what that diversity looks like. Avoid tokenism and misrepresentation, when a small number of people are repeatedly or prominently featured in such a way that suggests the district is more diverse in some areas than it may truly be.

When selecting images to use in your communications, consider the following questions:

- **Who is missing or excluded?** Can everyone see someone like themselves represented in these photos?
- **Would I want to be portrayed this way?** If this was a photo of me or someone I love, would I be okay with how they are represented?
- **Are any stereotypes being perpetuated in the photo I am using?** Am I depicting someone in the role our culture typically puts them in? Avoid reinforcing stereotypes and harmful microaggressions.
- **Do these images accurately represent our community?** Does this look like a picture of my district? Does this combination of images truly showcase the types of diversity that are found in this community?