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# Form design standards

Our customers must be able complete any online transaction easily. It is important that any online forms are high quality, accessible, easy to use and built around customer needs.

This guidance outlines the standards to use when designing a new form, 3rd party applications or updating an existing form.

Forms should follow [Gov Digital Service recommendations](#) and new forms must meet level AA of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.2).

Forms should be operable across different browsers and devices.

## Writing style and tone of voice

Follow the writing for the [web style guidance](#).

### Capitalisation

Use sentence case everywhere, except for proper nouns.

Examples:

Incorrect	Correct
First Name	First name
Report an Adult Safeguarding Concern	Report an adult safeguarding concern
Report a Parking Issue	Report a parking issue

### Punctuation

Do not use punctuation in headings and input field labels.

Do not use colons at the end of labels.

Write all other copy in full sentences, with a full stop at the end.

### Tone

Do not be over familiar, avoid 'please', 'sorry' and 'thank you'.

Use non-technical terms the user would understand, 'question' instead of 'field'

## Pronouns

Use 'you' or 'your' and the service is 'we', 'us', 'our'.

If it's the user 'speaking', use 'I', 'me' or 'my'.

Example:

"You will need your reference number"

"I have forgotten my password"

## Contractions, abbreviations and acronyms

Don't use 'ie'. Use 'for example' instead of 'eg'.

Use simple contractions like "you're" and "we'll".

## Headings

Use heading structure correctly. The page title must be a heading 1.

Use headings to break up long forms into sections.

Example:

H1 - Apply for a school bus pass

H2 - About your child

H2 - Your address

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## Accessibility

Forms and applications:

- Must comply with [Public Sector Bodies \(Websites and Mobile Applications\) \(No. 2\) Accessibility Regulations 2018](#)
- Must meet level AA of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.2) as a minimum
- Must work on the most commonly used assistive technologies - including screen magnifiers, screen readers and speech recognition tools

### Accessibility examples:

Blind or partially sighted.	May require a screen reader or magnifier.	Use labels and ARIA attributes correctly. Allow the form to be operable at higher magnifications. Use headings correctly to help the user understand each section of the form.
Cognitive, language and learning disability, people with low digital literacy.	May find answering questions difficult.	Use closed questions. Give examples of required information and formatting.

Cognitive impairment or memory loss.	May find remembering information difficult.	Use autocomplete. Do not ask for information more than once.
Motor impaired.	Clicking or tapping on form fields can be difficult. May not be able to use a mouse and may use an assistive device or speech recognition.	Associate labels with fields. Allow the form to be complete without the use of a mouse. Do not use 'click here' in buttons and links.
Mobility impaired.	May find inputting difficult. May use an assistive device or speech recognition.	Use autocomplete. Do not ask for information more than once.

Where possible include disabled people in user research and user acceptance testing.

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## Start pages

Start pages contain user guidance and instructions.

Start pages should be used for complex forms or forms requiring a user to create an account.

Start page should be provided on the council website and maintained in the website CMS and not added to the first page of a form.

The start page should indicate how long a form might take a user to complete.

The start page list the information the user requires to complete the form.

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## Title and introduction

### Title

The title should describe what the form is for, not who the service is.

#### **Correct**

"Report an adult safeguarding concern"

#### **Incorrect**

"Safeguarding service referral form"

Exceptions can be made for internal only use forms, where the service name is required, for example:

"CAS transfer to waste service"

### Introduction

An introduction should only be used where a set of instructions is required.

Example:

"Only complete this form if you have been referred by a social worker. You will find your reference number at the top of your letter."

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## Questions

Only ask for the information you absolutely need to deliver the service. Do not ask the user to enter the same information more than once.

Make the question easy to understand and use closed questions.

Example:

### **Closed**

"Do you need assistance walking?"

### **Open**

"Tell us how you walk about"

## Lists

When using lists of options, default to the common options first.

Example:

Do you own any other property?

**No**

Yes

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## Help text and validation

Only add help text where required, for example:

"12 digit number at the top of your letter"

Keep the text short and direct and avoid using unnecessary words.

Do not add help text to users how to use the form - this means the form is over complicated

Do not use place holders for help text.

Ensure help text can be read by screen readers.

Do not use instructions based on the design of the form, for example 'click on the button' or 'complete the box below'.

Do not clear any form fields when adding error messages.

Do not repeat or reword the field title.

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## Labels

All form fields should have labels.

Do not hide labels, except where the surrounding context makes them unnecessary.

If the system allows, labels should be aligned above their fields.

Label text should be short and direct.

Labels should be associated with form fields using the form attribute.

If the system allows, do not mark mandatory fields with asterisks.

Rather than repetitive use of the word 'required' or red asterisks, mark the optional questions, using '(optional)' in the question label.

Use consistency across different forms.

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## Fields

Do not use placeholders.

Allow the user to use the browser auto fill where possible.

Make field widths proportional to the input they take.

Ensure that users can enter the information they need at smaller screen sizes and make form fields to 100% width at smaller screen sizes. When designing forms for external users, design for mobile devices first.

Ensure there is sufficient spacing between form elements.

Use radio buttons or checkboxes for 5 or fewer options instead of a dropdown list.

Use free text field for dates where possible.

Use the [GOV.UK design patterns](#) where possible.

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## Confirmation pages

Use a confirmation page to detail what happens next.

Include a reference number if required.

Include a link back to the service start page.

Include optional links to relevant information pages.

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## Resources

- [Understanding WCAG 2.2](#) (GOV.UK)
- [Writing for user interfaces](#) (GOV.UK)
- [Designing good questions](#) (GOV.UK)
- [Structuring forms](#) (GOV.UK)
- [LCC writing style guide](#)
- [GOV.UK style guide](#) (GOV.UK)
- [Best practices for form design](#)