Best Practices for

Designing Effective Voter Education Materials

Introduction

Effective voter education materials help empower people to take part in democracy. Easy-to-understand materials provide voters with the knowledge to make informed decisions. These best practices will guide you in creating materials that center the voter's experience using guidelines in plain language, information design, and user testing.

This set of best practices is the result of a decade of research conducted by civic design experts in collaboration with election offices across the nation. The five sections in this guide each work together to support election officials in building voter education materials that are effective and engaging.

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Principles that drive these best practices

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Center the voter experience

Ability, attitude, and aptitude

Different voters have different needs and capacities. Thinking about their abilities, attitudes, and aptitudes helps you understand your audience and how to best engage with them.

Ability	Attitude	Aptitude
The skill or power required to complete a task.	This includes mindsets, outlooks, feelings, and opinions about voting.	A natural tendency or inclination to participate in the electoral process.
Examples: Digital literacy, physical capabilities, language proficiency	Examples: A strong sense of civic responsibility or a mistrust in the electoral process	Examples: Volunteering for campaigns, grassroots activism, active political news consumption

Voters and their needs

There are **three main types of voters** to consider in your communication strategy: non-voters and new voters, infrequent voters, and regular voters.

- Non-voters and new voters need general information on how to participate in an election and to understand the value of their participation.

- Infrequent voters need simple and clear information about what is on the ballot and more details about voting options.

- Regular voters need quick access to complete information about voting, plus information about other ways to engage with the election process, like how to be a poll worker.

To learn more about the voter journey, read "[The epic journey of American voters](#)".

Voter engagement

Effective voter engagement materials can turn non-voters, new voters and infrequent voters into regular voters. To effectively center the voter experience, you must consider factors affecting voter engagement including:

- Socioeconomic status
- Education level
- Cultural and ethnic background
- Language barriers

- Historical and systemic factors
- Age/generation
- Trust in political institutions
- Political awareness and interest

Break information down into bite, snack, and meal
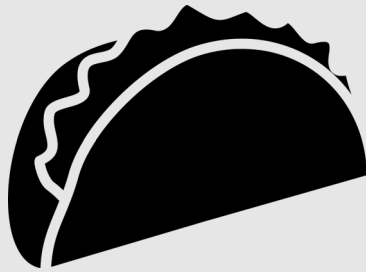
Break down information to bite, snack, and meal

Bite-snack-meal framework

Despite varying information needs, all voters need information that is clear, accessible, well-organized, and cleanly presented in an easy-to-read format. The bite-snack-meal content framework breaks down how to provide the appropriate amount of information at the right time.

A content framework is a repeatable, structured blueprint for creating, organizing, and distributing information in formats that allow the audience to understand and navigate topics effectively.

Bite-snack-meal framework

Bite

The "Bite" is the smallest piece of information that tells voters the critical steps they need to take action.

E.g., registration deadline and where to register

Snack

The "Snack" adds more context around that smallest essential piece of information. A "Snack" is usually just enough information for experienced voters.

E.g., what you need to have to register to vote

Meal

The "Meal" has everything, including information about particular cases/circumstances that only apply to some. It's usually a website or a written voter guide.

E.g., detailed instructions on how & where to register, eligibility, etc.

The **Editable Content document** in this toolkit shows how you can break down voter education topics into bite, snack, and meal.

Make it easy to understand

Plain language

Writing in plain language helps you clearly communicate complicated ideas to a wide audience. According to the Center of Plain Language, "plain language is communication with clear wording, structure, and design for the intended audience to easily:

- Find what they need
- Understand what they find
- Use that information

Plain language minimizes jargon and uses sentence structure, strong verbs, word choice, and other similar techniques to make sure that the audience can read, understand, and use the information.

Best practices in plain language

- **Write for your audience.** Use words that they use instead of jargon or technical terms.
- **Use simple words.** Short and common words are often best.
- **Use simple sentences.** 1 idea per sentence. Use bullet points for lists, and numbered lists for steps.
- **Use positive language.** Say what someone should do instead of what not to do.
- **Use words consistently.** If there are many ways to say something, pick 1 option and stick with it.
- **Use an active voice.** Active voice uses the standard word order in English.
- **Say "if" before "then".** This helps readers quickly know if the information applies to them.
- **Speak directly to the reader.** Use personal pronouns like "you" and "we."
- **Write headings as questions or active instructions.** Questions and instructions make it easier for voters to connect the information to the actions they will take.

To learn more, check out the plain language resources.
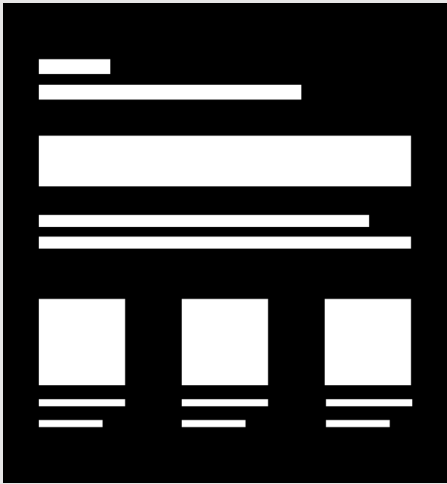
Present information clearly

Information design principles

When you communicate with someone, you are designing information to cause an action. Sometimes, this action is as simple as learning something new. Other times, the action might be more complicated, like registering to vote. Information design is the process of making the information you want to share clear, engaging, accessible, and usable.

You can apply information design principles to everything from your website and voter education to ballots and forms.

Key principles of information design included here are:

- Knowing your audience
- Content structure
- Plain language
- Hierarchy

- Typography
- Visuals
- Color
- Consistency

Best practices in information design

- **Have a clear call to action.** A call to action guides readers to tasks that will help them reach their goals.
- **Organize content in a logical way using headings**. Headings allow readers to scan text quickly to find the information relevant to them.
- **Apply color intentionally.** Make sure you use color to support, not replace, written or verbal information. When you use color, it's also important to make sure there's enough color contrast to make sure it's accessible to people with color blindness.
- **Provide multiple ways to access information easily.** Sharing website URLs, QR codes, phone numbers, and other contact information streamlines access to information.
- **Use easy-to-read fonts with multiple language options.** Fonts like Google Noto Sans support multiple languages, allowing for translations in over 1000 languages. If you can't use Noto Sans, you can use a sans serif font like Calibri.

Best practices in information design

- **Use imagery to support meaning.** Images used in your materials should help readers understand the content. Avoid using images as decoration as it can be distracting.
- **Make your materials clean and visually consistent.** Over time, voters will be able to recognize and trust that the information they're getting is coming from a credible source.

To learn more, check out the [information design resources](#).
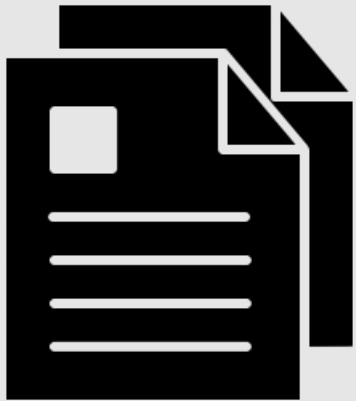
Test your materials with people

Usability testing

Now, you have a good grasp on how to make effective voter education materials. Maybe you've put it into practice and developed materials using templates from this toolkit. If you have time, usability testing your designed materials on people from your audience or colleagues can take your materials from good to great.

Usability testing is a way to learn how easy or difficult it is for people to use something by observing them actually using it.

Why do usability testing

Through usability testing, you can learn about what works (and what doesn't) for users, and you can confirm or challenge assumptions.

With data from usability testing, you can update your election materials, design a ballot, or launch a new outreach campaign confidently.

It will help you:

- Identify problems in the design of election materials
- Make it more likely that people will have efficient, effective, and pleasant interactions with your office
- Make it easier for users to use your materials – whether the users are candidates, voters, poll workers, election staff, advocates, media, or other people your office interacts with

When to do usability testing

You can do usability testing almost any time, but it's most useful:

- Before you start redesigning something
- While you're still working on a draft
- When a significant event happens that may cause changes or require staff or volunteers to be retrained
- When something about the voting situation has changed since the last election

To learn more, check out the [usability testing resources](.).

Additional resources

Voter Experience: "The epic journey of American voters" from Center for Civic Design

Plain language
- Plain Language.gov
- Plain language | Center for Civic Design
- Writing Instructions Voters Understand
- Hemingway Editor – A free online tool that highlights many plain language criteria such as excess words, passive voice, hard-to-read sentences, and phrases with simpler alternatives. It color codes problem areas and gives a readability score.

Information design
- Designing voter education booklets and flyers
- Designing a voter guide to an election
- Download the election design color palette
- Learn about using colors effectively

Usability testing
- Usability testing | Center for Civic Design
- "What can you learn from usability testing in the civic space" from Center for Civic Design