



AGE FRIENDLY SANTA CLARA COUNTY

COMMUNICATION GUIDE



ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Age Friendly Silicon Valley is part of the World Health Organization and AARP Age-Friendly Network. The County of Santa Clara was the first county in the U.S. to have each and all of its cities become members of the WHO network. Together, we are re-imagining infrastructure, services and policies to create a better community for people of all ages.

Public messages about older adults influence readers' perceptions about aging. We created this communication guide to raise awareness about common stereotypes and journalistic practices that should be avoided to create a more accurate and positive media environment.

In an age-friendly Santa Clara County, public messages about older adults should reflect the diversity, resiliency, and rich experiences of our aging population. There are many positive aspects of aging and our communications can reflect that while still covering important issues that older adults are facing. Everyone is aging, so these communication best practices are for the benefit of everyone.

IS AGE RELEVANT?

"Jane Doe, 76, said....."

It is common practice to include the age of subjects quoted or described in news stories. However, this is often irrelevant to the story and can perpetuate stereotypes.

Consider whether or not the person's age is relevant, and if not, leave it out.

GROUP IDENTIFIERS

Seniors, elders, or older adults?

When using a group term, first **consider whether or not there is a more precise and neutral way to describe the group** you are writing about, such as people over 60, retired faculty, assisted living residents, etc. If you need to use a group term, **ask the people you are talking about for the term they prefer.**

ADJECTIVES

Active, spry, sweet, grandmotherly, etc.

Of course, **avoid stereotyping language.** Even positive descriptions associated with an age group identifier, such as "active senior," can imply this person is different than most people in their age group, perpetuating the idea that most 'seniors' are not active. Instead, explain why you are describing them as active.

For example, instead of writing:
"Jane, an active 76-year-old...."

Try something like:
"Jane, an avid swimmer and dedicated ESL tutor...."

TO NE

An 80-year-old yoga instructor? WOW!

Avoid a tone of surprise when covering a story about someone doing a job or task that would be unremarkable if their age were left out of the story. This conveys the message that the subject is an exception to the rule of decline and inactivity with advancing age, which is simply not accurate.

Instead, consider other factors that may be interesting, such as the changes they've seen in their industry over time or the reason behind a late stage career change.

DEMOGRAPHICS

"Silver Tsunami," etc.

Improved healthcare and public health measures have increased life expectancy around the world. **Avoid using language that implies people living longer is a disaster.** Some policies and systems will need to change to support a larger number of older adults, but there are also many positives to an aging society. For example, we have a more experienced workforce, more civically engaged population, and more families with support from three or four generations.

EMBRACE AGE

"Sixty is the new forty", "75 years young"

Statements like these imply getting older is inherently bad, which is at the root of ageism. Instead, embrace age for what it is: the number of years of life filled with experiences and good stories.

AGE-FRIENDLY FORMATTING

FONT

As we age, our ability to read small font declines and some other forms of visual impairment, such as macular degeneration, become more common. Sans serif fonts, such as Helvetica or Arial, in at least 12 point size can make text easier for older adults to read.

CONTRAST

There should be high contrast between text and the background, with black and white being the easiest to read. Avoid yellow text or backgrounds because aging eyes have a harder time seeing this color due to yellowing of the intraocular lens.

HEADINGS

Breaking up written material with headings can improve readability and draw readers eyes to the most important points. Headings printed in a different color than the body text help more clearly mark these divisions.

SPACING

Sufficient spacing of written content, both between individual lines of text and between blocks of texts, make the material easier to read for someone with visual impairment. For example, the spacing used in this document is easier to read than this:

These lines of text are too close together and make this sentence harder to read.

TRANSLATION

In Santa Clara County, data from the American Community Survey estimates that 48% of residents age 65+ speak a language other than English at home and 19% speak English "not well" or "not at all". Therefore, it is important to translate materials whenever possible to reach this demographic.

REFERENCES & ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- ▶ [Frameworks Institute: Gaining Momentum](#)
- ▶ [Elevate Aging through Language: A Usage and Style Guide](#)
- ▶ [Words are Powerful: A Style Guide for Avoiding Ageist Concepts and Language](#)
- ▶ [ICAA's Guidelines for Effective Communication with Older Adults](#)
- ▶ [Media Takes: On Aging](#)
- ▶ ["Elders?" "Older Adults?" "Seniors?" Language Matters](#)
- ▶ [Words to Age By: A Brief Glossary and Tips on Usage](#)
- ▶ [Successful Aging: What words to use, which to avoid in describing the older generation](#)
- ▶ [Change Conversations: "Vision Changes: Typography for Aging Audiences"](#)
- ▶ [Age-Friendly Communication: Facts, Tips and Ideas - Formulating your message](#)

