

Achieving Cultural and Linguistic Competence in Information Dissemination Activities

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When creating a new publication or posting information, there are several aspects to keep in mind during the development phase to ensure the publication fully takes into consideration cultural and linguistic differences and representations, regardless of the methods by which that publication or piece of information is being produced and disseminated.

The following guidelines are not intended to be either requirements or a checklist that guarantees a product or piece of information is appropriate to all audiences. Rather, we hope that this document will serve as a point of reference and stimulate careful consideration for anyone writing or producing information for any audience.

Creating Information

Identify your Audience

Knowing your audience is essential to a well-produced and well-received publication. Many of the answers to the questions and guidelines below will hinge on knowing your intended audience. It is important to note, however, that just because a piece of information or a publication is intended for one audience does not exempt it from being as culturally and linguistically appropriate as possible.

- What is the primary intended audience of this information?
- Are there secondary or other audiences who might be interested in accessing and consuming the information?

Contributing Perspective

Having an individual with a disability, someone of a different racial or economic background, or an organizational partner participate as an author or review the material and offer comments before it is disseminated may enrich the message and make it applicable to a wider audience.

- Are diverse perspectives represented, e.g.: the experiences of individuals in rural/suburban/urban settings, or individuals of high/medium/low income or economic status?
- What partners, both traditional and new, could be or have been identified as consultants on the content and perspective of the information? Were their suggestions carefully considered and potentially incorporated?
- Is it appropriate to suggest to the authors to consider an additional voice to present a more fully rounded point of view?
- Have individuals of different cultural backgrounds reviewed the material and offered comments?

Language

A piece of information, whether posted on social media or published as a book or anything in between, has a specific intended audience, but it often reaches several secondary audiences as well who might consume or be interested in consuming the information. Think about the audience(s) and the spoken/written language and literacy level that they will best understand.

Language of Origin

- Considering the intended audience(s), should the information be translated into another language(s)?
- If the information is translated into another language and a translation service is being used (e.g. Google Translate, YouTube, or one of the many other programs), consult with a native speaker before final publication to ensure accurate contextual translation.

Use of Language

- Does the language in which the material is written include colloquial phrases which might be difficult to interpret by those of other cultures?
- Have phrases with negative connotations or stereotyped undertones been replaced with alternate language, such as “black sheep” and “white lie”?
- Considering the intended audience, is the material written in a way that it will be understood by those with different reading levels?
- Should a companion document be made available that uses language more readily understood by people with a different reading or context level, such as non-native English speakers or individuals with intellectual disabilities?

Design

The use of good design in disseminating a piece of information, whether online, on a mobile device, in print, or in any other form, is essential to its success. How colors, images, and navigation are used can make or break whether an item will be used by and shared with many. From the text on the page to the graphics that support it, consider how different cultures interpret images and color.

Graphics & Images

Images and graphics are often used to show people doing the things explained in the text. Using images that contain only people that look one way, i.e. are of only one racial background, can portray the message that the content isn't applicable to people of different backgrounds.

- Are the images and graphics used representative of individuals of different backgrounds? Think of the ethnic, socioeconomic status, familial makeup, age, gender, disability representation, etc. being shown.
- Do graphics in any way appear to represent something that might be offensive to a population? Think of how the image, logo, or color selection might be interpreted by Native Americans, the LGBT community, the disability community, religious groups, and others.
- Is the meaning of symbols or figures used clear to individuals of different cultures? Abstract symbols or stick figures are often used in international documents as they can transcend issues of skin color, race, age, gender, etc, however they can also de-emphasize diversity. Note that the use of 'neutral' symbols may not be appropriate for the goal of every published message or organization.

Color

- Color is an important tool to conveying a message, and the emotions and values attached to different colors varies by culture. For example, in the United States, red is often the color of warning (think of stop signs and red lights), but the Chinese recognize red as the color of prosperity.
- Considering your intended audience, do the colors or color combinations convey the same emotions as the text?

References

The information contained in this document is based on the experiences and expertise of AUCD staff, as well as the following references:

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- International Organization for Standardization (ISO): <http://www.iso.org/iso/home.html>

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