

A Tiny Chat Companion: Clear Court Communications

1. *Keep it simple.*

This applies to the organization of text and graphics on the page and to the language you use. If the information about the courts' response to COVID-19 isn't on the homepage, the direct link to the resource page should be easy and obvious to find. Odds are the information the public needs to know is buried in a congested and complex Court or Administrative Order. Use plain language with intuitive and simple organization. A good test is to consider whether a fifth grader would be able to understand what to do with the information.

2. *Use graphics and text.*

People learn in different ways. Pictures can help reinforce text and things like infographics and cartoons may lead to greater understanding and better recall.

3. *Be explicit.*

Which kinds of cases is the court hearing now, and which kind is it not? If a person has one of the "not" cases, what should they do? If cases are proceeding virtually, what do court users need to know to correctly make their appearance? If they are going to appear by phone or video, what devices and operating systems are compatible with the Court's system?

4. *Consider anticipatory orders.*

Get ahead of the crisis and inform users what to expect when the court is able to re-open for delayed cases.

5. *Offer resources for people to ask questions.*

To the extent possible, display clear contact information. If feasible, include a hotline (with hours of operation listed), an email address or contact form, and a chat or chatbot option.

6. *Be mindful of ADA compliance and provide notices in languages other than English.*

Even if your website can be visited in multiple languages, keep in mind that a lot of COVID-19-related information from the courts comes in PDF format, which does not automatically translate with the other sites and microsites on your page.

7. *Include a COVID-19-specific FAQs list.*

By now your court probably knows which questions are being asked frequently. FAQ lists are a terrific way to organize and answer simply, be explicit, and stave off too many phone calls and emails.

Additional Resources

- National Association For Court Management: [Plain Language Guide \(2019\)](#)
- The Plain Language Action and Information Network (PLAIN): www.plainlanguage.gov
- Plain Language Association International: www.plainlanguagenetwork.org
- Web Content Accessibility Guidelines: <https://www.w3.org/WAI/standards-guidelines/wcag/>
- Readability Test Tool: <https://www.webfx.com/tools/read-able/>
- Limited English Proficiency: LEP.gov
- [NCSC Covid-19 Translated Resources Directory](#) (updated frequently)
- [Remote Court Operations Incorporating Access to Justice Principles](#)
- NCSC: [Language Access Services Division](#)
- Michigan examples mentioned in the Tiny Chat
 - Chief Justice Bridget M. McCormack's [memo on remote proceedings](#)
 - [Building Capacity: What Courts Can Do Now](#)

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