

Create a Readable Info Sheet in 6 Steps

Many organizations depend on their ability to communicate ideas quickly and effectively. Below, we've used a sample legal aid flyer to show you how to write a readable info sheet. Just follow our 6 simple steps!

Step 1 – Write an effective title

The title is almost everything. It should respond to the reader's **natural** question.

- Put the title in its **natural** location, in the top right-hand corner of the page. The reader's eyes land here first, then travel diagonally to the bottom left-hand corner of the page.
- Use the consumer's language in your title.

For example, the original title of a California info sheet explaining how to change your name was: *Legal Name Change Process for Adults in the State of California*. Keeping our title tips in mind, we changed the title to:

How to Change Your Name *(for an Adult)*

It uses clear, familiar language to answer the reader's natural question: *What is this flyer about, and does it apply to me?*

Step 2 – Use the consumer's language

To keep your flyer readable:

- Address the reader: *You must...*
- Use familiar, conversational language.
- If you must use difficult terms, define them.
- Aim for a 6th grade reading level. (You can find your document's reading grade level in *Tools* → *Spelling and Grammar*. Make sure *Show readability statistics* is checked in your Preferences.)

In California, adults can change their name *without* going to court. You can just start using your new name.

But, sometimes it's better to get your name changed by a court. Government agencies, like DMV, may not accept your new name without a court order.

There are **two** main ways to get a court order for a name change.

Check out Transcend's book *Readability* (available on **amazon.com**) for more plain language tips!



Step 3 – Create “handles”

Handles are a way for the reader to navigate down the page. **Subheads** are great handles. The reader will read the subhead and quickly decides whether that section applies to his or her situation. Subheads are most effective when they are in the form of a question from the reader’s point of view. Here’s an example from our info sheet:

Can the Court refuse to change my name?

The court usually agrees to change the name, *unless*:

- Someone objects and the judge agrees.
- Your new name includes threatening or obscene words, racial slurs, or words that would cause confusion.
- You want to do something illegal with a new name.
- The new name interferes with the rights of someone else. For example, you cannot change your name to a famous movie star’s name to make money by using that name.

What happens after my name is changed?

It is a good idea to get a certified copy of the court order from the court clerk. (Some agencies or companies may ask you for this.)

Important! More than half of readers of brochures read *only* the subheadings. Make them count!

Step 4 – Organize intuitively

Present your information in an order that makes sense *to the reader*. This is not easy! Think about:

- How would I explain this in person?
- What questions would the reader ask, and when?
- Are there steps the reader must follow?

Use **numbering** or **bullet points** to present related pieces of information. For example:

You can use the certified copy to request important legal documents with your new name, including:

- A birth certificate with your new name
- A new social security card
- A driver’s license or ID card with the new name.

Important! Avoid cross-referencing and complex tables. If your reader is forced to jump around the page looking for information, s/he may become distracted and stop reading.



Step 5 – Add a graphic

Graphics serve many purposes. They catch the reader’s eye, break up blocks of text, and help low-literacy readers understand your message. Use graphics that:

- Are simple and easy to understand
- Explain or clarify ideas
- Are close to the text that they explain
- Match the demographic of the audience

We added a simple, meaningful graphic to our info sheet to make its purpose more clear:



Step 6 – List resources

The reader’s eyes travel from the top left corner to the bottom right corner of the page. These two areas are prime *page real estate*. Use the bottom right corner to tell the reader where to go to with questions:

- Websites
- Mailing addresses
- Office locations

Use a graphic of a question mark or a simple question – *Need help?* or *Questions?* – to capture the reader’s attention. Let’s try this in our flyer:


Need help?

Go to the ACCESS Center for the forms and instructions you need. We can also help you prepare your notice for newspaper publication. And, we can provide you with a list of newspapers for you to contact.

Our schedule is:

Monday – Thursday: 8:30 a.m. – 12 Noon
1:30 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Friday: 8:30 a.m. – 12 Noon



ACCESS

San Francisco Superior Court
575 Polk Street
Room 001
San Francisco, CA
94102-4514
415.551.5880
access@sftc.org

Important! Many legal aid info sheets have a wide bar at the bottom of the page with a sentence explaining that the info sheet contains information, not legal advice. These bars can distract the reader from more important text. Save this part of the page for a list of helpful resources.

See the next page for our finished flyer!





How to Change Your Name *(for an Adult)*

In California, adults can change their name *without* going to court. You can just start using your new name.

But, sometimes it's better to get your name changed by a court. Federal agencies and many government agencies, like DMV, will not accept your new name without a court order.

There are **two** main ways to get a court order for a name change.

① Fill out and file these court forms to ask the court for a name change:

- *Petition for Change of Name*, Form NC-100
- *Attachment to Petition to Change Name*, Form NC-110
- *Order to Show Cause for Change of Name*, Form NC-120
- *Decree Changing Name*, Form NC-130

You can fill out the forms online at:
www.courtinfo.ca.gov/selfhelp/other/namechange.htm

And, put a notice in a newspaper saying you are changing your name. (You do not have to let anyone else know you are asking for a name change.)

Then go to a court hearing and ask the judge for a court order with your new name.

② Ask for your old name during or after your divorce.

If your divorce is *not* final, ask the judge to give you back the name you had before you were married.

If your divorce *is* final, you can ask the court to give you back your old name by filing a *Request for Restoration of Former Name*, form FL-395.

The Family Law Self-Help Center can help you fill out your forms.

Go to: **400 McAllister Street, Room 009**

Can the Court refuse to change my name?

The court usually agrees to change the name, *unless*:

- Someone objects and the judge agrees.
- Your new name includes threatening or obscene words, racial slurs, or words that would cause confusion.
- You want to do something illegal with a new name.
- The new name interferes with the rights of someone else. For example, you cannot change your name to a famous movie star's name to make money by using that name.

What happens after my name is changed?

It is a good idea to get a certified copy of the court order from the court clerk. (Some agencies or companies may ask you for this.)

You can use the certified copy to request important legal documents with your new name, including:

- A birth certificate with your new name
- A new social security card
- A driver's license or ID card with the new name.

This will make it easier to have your other records changed.

Need help?

Go to the ACCESS Center for the forms and instructions you need. We can also help you prepare your notice for newspaper publication. And, we can provide you with a list of newspapers for you to contact.

Our schedule is:

Monday – Thursday: 8:30 a.m. – 12 Noon
1:30 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.
Friday: 8:30 a.m. – 12 Noon



ACCESS

San Francisco Superior Court

575 Polk Street
Room 001
San Francisco, CA
94102-4514

415.551.5880

access@sftc.org