

Cohesive visual and linguistic identity for clarity and trust

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Abstract.

Statistics Sweden's visual and linguistic identity describes what Statistics Sweden should look like through photographs, fonts, illustrations and other visual means, as well as how we should express ourselves with words, to be perceived in the way we want by all those who encounter us. The visual and linguistic identity guides all external communication regardless of channel, medium and target group. We want to mediate the same image of Statistics Sweden to those who read statistical information on our website in the form of press releases, articles or reports, and to the individuals who are invited to participate in a survey, as well as to the companies who are informed that they are legally required to complete a business survey questionnaire, and to those who encounter our statistics on Instagram.

The most important element of Statistics Sweden's identity is that we should be perceived as friendly, transparent and helpful. To achieve this, the visual and linguistic identity states that we must use, for example

- *wording and terminology that are adapted to the purpose and the target group's prior knowledge and interest*
- *a friendly tone that inspires trust between us and the recipients*
- *clear layout and helpful meta text that guide the readers*
- *a limited number of colours in fonts, illustrations, and icons to make our statistics clear and easily recognisable*
- *graphic elements that convey the role of statistics in society and suggest a society in constant change*
- *everyday themes in photographs and infographics.*

In this paper we will explain Statistics Sweden's visual and linguistic identity, present examples and present how we are working to implement it among all employees.

Keywords: plain language, image concept, infographics

1. Introduction

As a public authority, we want to be, or be perceived, in a certain way. But is this really something we can decide? After all, we can't control the recipient's opinions or force them to think the way we want.

We can however make it easier for the recipient. With communication that is easy to understand, both linguistic and visually, there is a bigger chance that we will be perceived the way we want: as being friendly, transparent and helpful.

In this paper we will explain Statistics Sweden's visual and linguistic identity, show examples, and present how we are working to implement it among all employees.

2. Linguistic identity – plain language

Expressing ourselves in a way that suits the recipient is not always easy. It may be our intention, and we may even think that we are doing so. However good our intentions are we do not always succeed. Instead, we might be perceived in a totally different way.

a. From short manual to linguistic identity

For many years, Statistics Sweden have been working with plain language and have also had a brand manual. The manual was available on Statistics Sweden's website, scb.se. A couple of pages of the brand manual was about the linguistic. However, even if it was supposed to act like a linguistic identity it was more of a short manual on how one should write and express a few specific things. For example, there were instructions on how to write numbers in text and how to write from a norm-critical perspective. None of this was wrong, but it was not what we needed and therefore we decided to rewrite the document: from short manual to a linguistic identity.

The purpose of Statistics Sweden's new linguistic identity is to help the writer regardless of communication channel and target group. Its purpose is not to serve as a set of rules, but to guide how we communicate so that we are perceived by the outside world in the way we intended. It should contribute to Statistics Sweden being perceived as an open, helpful and transparent authority.

b. Documents that form the basis

When we developed the linguistic identity, we went through both external and internal governing documents. We were looking for things that told us something about how Statistics Sweden should behave in relation to those not working in here. That is, both how we ourselves want to be and how others, such as the government, want us to be when we interact with. The communication output must thus give the recipients – the users of statistics, the respondents and others with whom we are in contact – the "right" picture of us when they read scb.se, emails, letters and other things.

The base for the linguistic identity is formed by the following documents:

- the Language Act (2009:600)
- the Statistical Ordinance
- the Appropriation Letter (from the Government)
- Statistics Sweden's operational plan.

c. What should linguistic identity contribute to?

As said before, Statistics Sweden's linguistic expression is intended to contribute to us being perceived as an open and transparent authority. It should also show that we take responsibility for being aware of the needs and wishes of our users making the statistics easy to use and language easy to understand. It should be easy and convenient for the outside world to have contact with us, regardless of their statistical reading comprehension.

Today the linguistic identity is accessible from Statistics Sweden's intranet and include the following:

- Tone, disposition and reader support
- Choice of words and linguistic correctness
- Good examples
- What we are called – name of the authority
- Governing documents that form the basis

Today, in contrast to the old brand manual, the linguistic identity will help the user to write texts that meet Statistics Sweden goal of how we want to be perceived. Texts that also meet what is described in the governing documents. A major change is also that the content is aimed for us working in Statistics Sweden.

3. Visual identity - Image concept

Aswell as the linguistic identity, our visual identity describes how we should be perceived. It shows what we should look like through photographs, fonts and other visual means. It states that we should use

- a limited number of colours in fonts, illustrations, and icons to make our statistics clear and easily recognisable
- graphic elements that convey the role of statistics in society and suggest a society in constant change
- everyday themes in photographs and infographics.

a. Few colours and even fewer fonts

Statistics Sweden's logo has looked more or less the same since the 60s. It is a central component of our communication and the anchor of the visual identity.

When it comes to fonts, we only use one. With a consistent use of typography, we create recognition for our users, and the overall impression becomes calmer. A calm impression helps the reader since he or she does not have to focus on the visual. The visual complements the written content.

Our primary colours for text are dark blue and white. To achieve optimal readability on dark backgrounds, the text should be white. On light backgrounds, the text colour is primarily dark blue. The shade is dark enough to ensure good readability while giving a softer expression than if the text had been black.

As for colours in general, the base consists of four shades of blue. The accent colours are pink, green and orange. They should be used sparingly and handled as contrasts to the blue scale. The exception is our infographics on Instagram, where they can be used more generously. The colours are also reflected in our photographs.

b. Photographic style

Statistics Sweden has a broad and permissive photographic style, but it is at the same time cohesive in colour tone and choice of motifs. The key words for the style are documenting and close to everyday life. A photo from Statistics Sweden should feel close to reality and reflect society. For the person who sees the photograph, it should feel familiar. Therefore, we prefer not to use AI-generated photographs in our communication.

Figure 1: Examples of photos with colours as elements

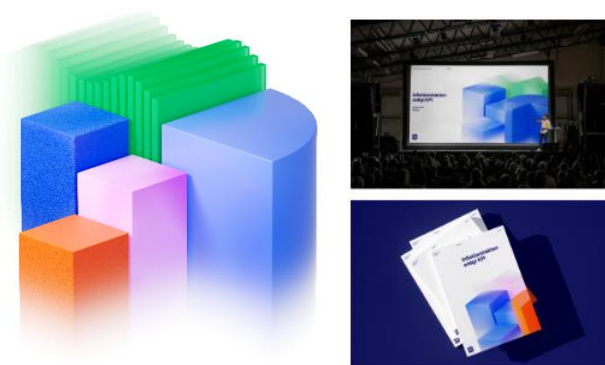


c. Graphic elements

The graphic elements in 3D are based on simple shapes inspired by the world of diagrams. The forms are linked to the role that statistics has in society, where the whole is reminiscent of a society in constant change.

The elements are included in all relevant templates, so the user within Statistics Sweden does not have to add them to slideshows, reports or the like.

Figure 2: Examples of 3-d graphic



The examples show an example of our 3D graphics and how they can be used in presentations and brochures.

4. Implementing the linguistic and visual identity

Both the linguistic and visual identity are approved by Statistics Sweden's management. The major implementation is planned to start properly in the autumn of 2026 and last for the next year. However, we have started implementing the identities in a small scale. So far there has been no major reactions.

We have implemented the visual identity in templates all employees use. When it comes to the linguistic identity, all employees at the Communications department have been given a half-day briefing called "Make friends with Statistics Sweden's linguistic identity". Here we received valuable input which led us to plan a workshop on how to restructure the communication pages on the authority's intranet. All to improve and simplify for employees when they create communication that is consistent with our visual and linguistic identities.

A shorter briefing has also been held for statisticians in a few different sections/departments. Their reaction was positive; the identities felt natural. These employees had many times previously worked in the Statistics Service, where they helped the recipient find or understand the statistics over the phone.

During these briefings we received requests for more examples. This will be added to the identities.

The aim is for all employees to know about the identities and, of course, also follow them. Implementation will for instance take place through:

- workshops or briefings with units who wants that
- reviews of the guidelines at the agency's analysis meetings
- articles on the intranet.