Tips for Accessible Web Content

Many people use accessible features of websites. Much of what makes a website "accessible" has to do with whether or not it is "readable" by screen-reader software, however not everyone who use

1   TEXT CONTENT

Consider your audience and the language you are using. Plain language should be used unless the website is explicitly for a specific audience with unique knowledge of the subject. When conveying public service information, plain language should always be used. (There are programs available online to check the reading level of your content.)

Make font size comfortable to read or provide and option for user to enlarge/choose font size.

Consider contrast of text against background – high contrast is much more reader-friendly. The lighter the text on a light background, the more difficult it is to read. (There are programs available online to rate contrast levels.)

Avoid text on an image or busy background – the background will be distracting and may make it difficult to read.

Use proper text formatting tags when laying out the text content on the page. Use H1 H2 H3 tags appropriately to indicate content hierarchy and outline. Screen readers are able to click through the headings, if properly formatted to find the information they are looking for.

Provide a "search" feature where people can search for the topic they want without having to "read" the site's entire navigation.

Do not convey information intended to be read in an image – images are not "readable" by a screen reader. (See section below on Images & Alt Tags).

Links should clearly identify what the person is being linked to. For example, in the statement, "Click here for a list of committee members" it is "list of committee members" that should be the linked phrase, and NOT "click here." A page full of "click here" links is not helpful to someone using a screen reader.

When providing a downloadable document such as a PDF, be sure that it is an electronically saved document and not a scanned document. For instance a document produced in Word (or most any other word processing/page layout program) can be saved as a pdf – this creates an electronic pdf that is readable. However, ANY document that is scanned, regardless of how it was originally created, becomes an image, and is not readable by a screen reader. (NOTE: There are programs that can offer to "read" a scanned document and interpret it back to text, however this is not always reliable and may produce unreliable transcription.)

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1.1 TABLES & GRAPHS

If your content is laid out in a table, make it as simple as possible. Most Web platforms will have basic accessibility built into their table layout.

When imbedding a table or graph into your content, consider that it is likely an image and not readable by a screen reader. All information conveyed in the table or graph should be provided additionally in an accessible format. If it is a small amount of info, this can be achieved with a caption. If the information is too lengthy to reasonably be placed on the page with the information, a link should be provided where a full breakdown of the information presented is offered in a descriptive text format on another page.

Info-graphics fall under this same category – any information that is presented in a visual format, should also be explained in a text format.

2 IMAGES & ALT TAGS

Images, regardless of their format, are not readable by a screen reader. The person using a screen reader will be informed that there is an image present, but they will not know what it is or if it is important to the context of what they are reading.

Any image conveying information should have a descriptive alt tag explaining the pertinent information.

Decorative images, that is images that are present solely for providing visual esthetic and do not communicate information, do not require a descriptive alt tag; they can be handled with either an empty alt tag (written as alt=" " with a space between the double quotes) or a null alt tag (written as alt="" with no space between the quotes), either tells a screen reader to skip over the image. Note, this is not the same as not entering an alt tag at all – if there is not alt tag, a screen reader will identify each image and describe it with cryptic information such as the size dimensions of the image or other meaningless information that will be disruptive to the flow of information.

Image links should have an alt tag identifying the destination of the link. For instance if there is an image of children playing on a playground that links to a list of local playgrounds, the alt tag should read "link to local playgrounds" and NOT "children playing."

3 VIDEO CONTENT

All video content, weather linked or embedded, should include closed captions or a transcript or both. Closed captions allow the viewer to read along with the video, which is preferred. A transcript is simply the text content of the video provided separately from the video. Beware of "auto" captioning – there have been some epic fails that proved embarrassing for the video provider!

When creating video content, providing audio descriptions of what is being viewed provided accessibility for people who cannot view the video.

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4   WEBSITE ACCESSIBILITY RESOURCES

W3C provides a lot of information about web accessibility – a google search of "accessible web content" will lead you to much of it. Here are some links to their info online:

- Introduction to Web Accessibility (https://www.w3.org/WAI/fundamentals/accessibility-intro/)
- Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) (https://www.w3.org/WAI/standards-guidelines/wcag/).

Usability.gov provides some general information as well on web accessibility (https://www.usability.gov/what-and-why/accessibility.html)

There are a number of online tools that can check website accessibility. WAVE is a free tool (https://wave.webaim.org/) available to check individual web pages. Not everything flagged as an error is necessarily an error, but probably deserves a second look to be sure.

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