

Content for Everyone

Seven Tips for Accessible Content

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With more than one billion people worldwide living with some form of disability, it's vitally important to ensure that the content you're creating for your websites, emails and social media is accessible, usable and inclusive of everyone.

Accessibility isn't only about making sure people who are blind and use screen readers can perceive all your content. You also must consider those with other visual disabilities, as well as site visitors who may have hearing loss, cognitive disabilities (such as dyslexia, autism and others), or motor disabilities that might, for example, prevent them from using a mouse or other pointing device to navigate the site.

These seven tips aren't the only things you can do to create content for everyone, but they are a great place to start.

1 Meaningful alternative text for images

There's usually a field for alternative text that's available when you upload images through your content management system, email platform and social media.

- To determine what to write for alternative text, consider what someone needs to know if they can't see the image. Within the context of the page, email, or post, it is probably not an exact description of the image itself, but instead the meaning you intend for it to convey.
- If the image is a link, the alternative text needs to indicate the link destination.
- If the image is just for visual interest and decoration, you can leave the alternative text field blank so that users with screen readers aren't given information that wouldn't be helpful.
- Be aware also that social media sites Facebook and Instagram will produce alternative text automatically for images where you don't provide it. This text is never what it should be. When uploading to those platforms, update the alternative text so it's meaningful.

2 Accurate captions and transcripts for multimedia programs

For any audio or video programs, proper captions and transcripts are required to ensure that people who can't hear the audio, or who might understand text easier than audio, can engage with the program.

- Transcripts are necessary for an audio-only program, such as a podcast, and should be on the page alongside the audio player.
- Videos must have proper synchronized captions available through the platform where the video is played, such as YouTube, Instagram, or TikTok

- The captions and transcripts must be accurately edited. Do not rely on captions or transcripts that are automatically generated as they will have many misspellings, wrong words, poor punctuation and capitalization, and other issues.

3 Meaningful link text

Having a page full of links that simply say, “click here,” “read more,” or “buy now” isn’t helpful. Members of your audience who use screen readers and review the list of links available will have no idea which links they may wish to visit. Other visitors also might be confused by the redundancies and ambiguity.

- Rather than a “buy now” link after a book’s description, you could add the name of the book so it’s distinct—such as “buy *Content for Everyone* now.”
- Or you could link the name of the book on its first reference and allow that alone to be the link.
- Avoid link redundancies as well. Ideally you only use links once per page, email, or post. But if you do link to the same place multiple times, make sure it’s got the same link text so it’s clear to everyone that it is the same.

4 Easy-to-read color combinations

For anyone looking at your content, it’s important to make sure you’re using color combinations that are easy-to-read and following proper rules for color contrast. We’ve all experienced instances where text is impossible to read because the creator uses a color combination that is hard to read (such as a springtime color combo of yellow text on a green background).

- Use the color contrast checker at <https://webaim.org/resources/contrastchecker/>. You can enter the hex codes for the foreground and background, and it will tell you if the contrast passes or fails.

5 Images that contain text

Images of text are never considered accessible for a couple of key reasons. First, with the text as part of the image, screen readers and other assistive technology can’t present the text in alternate formats. Second, viewers with low vision as well as those with some cognitive impairments might also have problems understanding the image or they won’t be able to customize the text to make it more readable like the rest of the page’s content.

While we would love to see images of text never be used, we know that’s not practical. There are things you can do, however, to ensure that the text message in the image is available to everyone.

- Place the text that’s in the image in the alternative text.
- Make sure the colors you’re using in the image meet the color contrast requirements we discussed in number 4 to improve readability.
- Avoid fancy fonts that might be thin, or have lots of flourishes, and instead go with an easy-to-read font.
- Add the text that’s equivalent to what’s in the image on the page/post adjacent to the image so that it’s available to everyone.

6 In emails, balance the usage of images and text

Emails that are full of images and very little text can be difficult for some of your audience to understand and interact with. You can probably guess why based on our number five tip about images of text.

- If all your messaging is contained in images, even if you have meaningful alternative text on each of them, it'll still be a challenge for a segment of your audience to understand the content.
- Rely on regular text to deliver your messaging and images to be more decorative, that way everyone has easy and equal access to information you're providing.

7 Emojis

Emojis are great to use for visual interest, but too often they are used (and overused) in a way that can cause confusion.

Consider an email subject line that reads "Huge 📖 Book 📖 Sale. Save 💰 30% Today. 😊"

This is what a screen reader will say "Huge books book books sale. Save money bag 30 percent today. Smiling face with heart eyes."

After hearing that, while the listener may understand that books are 30 percent off today, it's still a lot of information to parse through to get to the meaning. In addition, for anyone with a cognitive disability who might have difficulty understanding text, adding emojis between words creates unnecessary challenges.

- Keep your emoji use to a minimum and keep them at the end of your messaging. That will ensure the text can be more easily understood.

These tips are things you can start doing right now to improve the accessibility of your content.

If you have any questions, you can contact Jeff at jeff@jeffandwill.com.