The Ultimate Web Accessibility Checklist

ACCESSIBLE METRICS

Introduction

Web Accessibility guidelines accepted through most of the world are based on the World Wide Web Consortium's (W3C) Web Content Accessibility Guidelines Version 2.0 AA (WCAG 2.0 AA). WCAG 2.0 AA is the compliance standard for the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act, as well as other global regulations.

While these guidelines specify what web accessibility should look like from a functional standpoint, they do not provide specific practices to fulfill this. The sheer complexity and diversity of the web makes it impossible to subscribe one solution for everyone. However, there are best practices and common, helpful hints that can make make web accessibility (also called a11y) easier to implement.

The most important parts of accessibility on your website are how a user moves through the site (navigation), how users understand the content (comprehension), how well users can use the site (usability) and whether they can input data where needed (inputs). In this checklist, we'll take you through the most essential elements of each. The last item on the checklist is to test your site for these items, with some hints on how to do this.

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1.
Navigation

Navigation concerns how a user moves through the website. To make your website accessible, all users should be able to navigate through the same paths, even when using different technology. The traditional way to navigate your site, generally with a mouse, may not always work for someone using a screen reader or other assistive technology (AT), which functions more like a keyboard.

Navigation

- ## Make Buttons Clickable Without a Mouse

  Individuals using a keyboard or AT to navigate your site must be able to click buttons without a mouse. This is a common concern for navigation menus that only appear when a user hovers over them with a mouse.

- ## Move Important Links to the Top

  When navigating with a keyboard, the focus shifts from link to link. For this reason, it is helpful to have the most important links at the top. This is also helpful for others using your site in the traditional way, as your most important links will be readily available.

- ## Create Multiple Search Paths

  When using assistive technologies, it isn't always realistic to move through links on a page the way sighted users with a mouse would. This is especially true for very large sites, where there might be dozens of links on each page and hundreds of paths. In this case, create an alternative search path, such as a comprehensive site map or a search bar. Most likely, you already have a site map that only requires a few updates, and many plugins will install a search bar on your site.

Navigation

- ## Remove Keyboard Traps

  If a user can move onto an area of your site while using a keyboard, but cannot move away, this is called a "keyboard trap." Keyboard traps occur most often with advertisements, chat bots, or other pop-up messages.

- ## Remove Differences in Focus vs. Activation

  Some elements react differently when a user "focuses" on them, such as hovering over the element, compared to "activating" an element; clicking on it. For individuals using a keyboard or AT, focusing on an element is how they navigate and understand a site. Screen readers and AT will generally not be able to interpret the different reactions between focus and activation. Therefore, it is ideal to make these reactions the same. This generally makes websites more intuitive for all users.

2.

Comprehension

Comprehension describes how well users can understand and interpret the content on your site. Accessible sites can be understood by all users, including those who have vision or hearing loss, among others.

Comprehension

- ▣ **Essential Information is Described**

  When essential information on your site, such as graphs, buttons or menus, is contained in an image but it is not described, users with vision loss have no way of understanding these elements. Most often, this occurs with images and a lack of alternative text (alt text).

- ▣ **Substitute Informational Tables with Programmatic Text**

  If you refer to a table that is an image file, screen readers cannot interpret this. Instead, use HTML to build a table onto the page. Screen readers are programmed to understand and interpret these tables.

- ▣ **Use Enough Color Contrast**

  Color contrast is important to visually-impaired and color-blind people. For most parts of your site, your color contrast should be 4.5:1. This also makes the site generally more attractive and modern. Keep this in mind for all elements of your site, including buttons, menu bars, clicked and unclicked links, backgrounds etc.

Comprehension

- ▣ ## Use Large Text

  There's no hard rule for how big text should be, since the actual size and comprehension will vary based on screen size (mobile vs. desktop, for example), font choice, and distance. A 16 point font is generally a good choice, but you'll need to test this to make sure. This not only helps users with vision loss, but also makes your site more readable for everyone.

- ▣ ## Enable Reflow

  Many people with visual impairments—including not only blurry vision but blind spots, peripheral vision loss, or central vision loss—use screen magnifiers to read content. "Reflow" allows the site to reorganize itself in an intuitive way when it's magnified. Responsive sites, which reorganize automatically for users on a mobile devices, already do this. Upgrading to a responsive site will also help mobile users, which now makes up the majority of all web searches, and it will improve your SEO, since Google favors mobile-friendly sites.

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Comprehension

- ### Use Headings Logically

  Screen readers and other AT will read out headings to show how content is organized. Use headings in a logical, intuitive manner, in order. Don't use headings just for emphasis, instead use emphasis tags, like <strong.>

- ### Use Accurate Page Titles and Metadata

  Use accurate titles and meta descriptions on each page to show what a page is about. This is also helpful for SEO.

- ### Correct Semantic Meanings

  Bold or italics denoted in html with <b> or <i>, instead of <strong> or <em>, isn't conveyed to screen readers, so the semantic value is lost. If it actually changes the meaning of a sentence, this can be an issue. Consider these sentences:

  - "She didn't take the **boat**." - Implying she took something else
  - "She **didn't** take the boat." - Emphasizing her action, for clarity
  - "**She** didn't take the boat." - Implying that someone else took the boat

3.

Inputs

Inputs are data a user can enter or actions they can take to interact with the site. This might mean filling out a contact form, subscribing to emails, purchasing a product, entering comments, and a variety of other things.

Inputs

- ▪ ## Make Forms Navigable

  All forms should be navigable with a keyboard.

- ▪ ## Label Form Fields

  Instructions or effective labels are provided in lieu of placeholder text for all form fields. Screen readers and other AT can interpret labels, but not placeholder text.

- ▪ ## Make Forms Browseable

  Allow a way to continue browsing the form without inputting all values, including required values. Remember that users may wish to explore the form before filling it in.

- ▪ ## Use Adequate, Necessary Timing

  Make sure users have enough time to fill out a form or take an action, or they can stop or refresh a timer, such as timers for security purposes when making a purchase. Timers that cannot be stopped should only be used if they are essential to the functionality, such as in a real-time auction.

4.

Usability

Usability includes all the elements that a website visitor might click on or gather information from, and how well these elements can be utilized. This might include videos, audio clips, blogs, downloadable content, and a variety of other content.

Usability

Use Proper Reading Order

The visual reading order of the page—for example, left to right and top to bottom in English, or right to left and top to bottom in Arabic—is usually the same as the tab order, which is how screen readers interpret the reading order. However, tab order can be incorrect if the content is improperly formatted, which can happen in PDF documents or in some forms. Make sure the visual reading order is the same as the tab order, especially for essential content pieces like forms or downloads.

Disable Autoplay

Automatically playing music, blinking icons, scrolling or other features are distracting to all users, but they can make website unusable for some people. Anything blinking, scrolling, playing, or updating should only do so on command. Or, if it must be automatic, the user should have the ability to stop it. Consider advertisements, especially pop-ups, as well as your site content.

Usability

- **Provide Captions or Scripts with Video and Audio**

  Videos with captions not only allow people with hearing loss to understand a video, but it is a good practice in general, since many people mute their computers or smartphones. Some video applications like YouTube provide captions, but their accuracy is uncertain. You can also solve this by providing a script of your video or audio clip.

- **Use No or Low Flashing**

  No element on your site should flash more than three times a second. This is not only distracting, but it is a hazard for people with seizure disorders.

- **Use Proper Alt Text**

  Images are explained using accurate alt text, especially if they are important to the understanding of the content. Consider alt text for elements like clickable icons you might use in place of links, or charts that are necessary to understand the meaning of a blog.

5.
Testing

The best way to see if your site is truly accessible is to test it. Some of these tests you can perform yourself, and others may require the help of an expert. You might wish to do this at the beginning and end of your accessibility changes, as the preliminary test will show what issues exist, and a final test will show if the issues are resolved.

Inputs

▣ Test for Magnification

Using Control/Command and + you can zoom in on your content, similar to how a screen magnifier would for sight-impaired users. If your site isn't usable at 300% or 400% zoom, you'll want to consider reflow and responsive site options (see "Enable Reflow" in the Comprehension section).

▣ Perform Automated Testing

Automated testing tools can test your site for color contrast, alt text attributes, automatic audio, correct use of headers and page titles, and other attributes. This will save you from having to comb through your pages individually.

▣ Perform Manual Testing

A computer can determine if certain essential elements are present or not, but cannot determine if they are useful or intuitive. A manual test will show whether your site is usable and whether a person can actually understand your site when using assistive technology.

Inputs

▣ Try a Keyboard

Starting at the browser address bar, use Tab to move through links, buttons and form fields, Shift+Tab to go back, and Enter to click. This is similar to how a screen reader will "see" your site.

▣ Remove Stylesheets

Style sheets are CSS files that determine many visual elements of your site. Screen readers can't interpret style sheets. You can disable style sheets using a specialized plugin, or in the View or Menu options in Firefox or Safari.

▣ Turn Off Images

In the tools or settings menus, you can tell most browsers not to load images. You'll still see the alt text behind them, but not the image itself. If important elements are contained in images without the right alt text, this test will show it.

▣ Test a Common Site Path

Using the keyboard, no style sheets, and no images at the same time, try to take a common path through your site, like filling out a contact form, buying a product, or reaching a particular page. This will feel strange, but you should be able to do it if your site is accessible.

Solve Web Accessibility

Making your site accessible means you have opened information and services to all web users. These changes will also make your site more intuitive for visitors who use the web in the traditional way, and can improve your SEO and Google rank. This may seem complex at first, but you'll be surprised at how easily many accessibility problems can be solved once you know about them.

Find and solve web accessibility issues on your site now.

START YOUR FREE SCAN ›

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