

# What Is Digital Accessibility?

*Simply put, digital accessibility is all about ensuring everyone can use and access digital artefacts like websites, apps, and electronic devices, regardless of their abilities.*

Let's take an analogy to understand this better. Just like how buildings have ramps and elevators so that people in wheelchairs can enter and move around quickly, digital accessibility works to make sure that websites and apps have features that make them usable for people with different abilities.

For example, some people may have trouble seeing things on a screen properly, so websites should have options to make the text bigger or have higher contrast. Other people may have difficulty using a mouse, so websites should have options to navigate with just the keyboard. In that sense, digital accessibility is important because it allows everyone, including people with disabilities, to participate and enjoy all the benefits technology offers.

*In other words, digital accessibility refers to the design and development of digital content and technology that can be accessed and used by people with disabilities. This includes ensuring that websites, applications, documents, and other digital content can be accessed by people with various disabilities, including visual, auditory, physical, and cognitive disabilities.*

The goal of digital accessibility is to ensure that all individuals, regardless of ability or disability, can use and interact with digital content in the same way as those without disabilities. This is achieved by adhering to a set of guidelines and standards, such as the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), which provide recommendations for creating digital content that is accessible to people with disabilities. That is to say, digital accessibility is an essential aspect of inclusion and equity, as it enables people with disabilities to fully participate in society, access information, and engage with others online.

In this blog article, we will take a look at why digital accessibility is essential for all internet users and how companies can adopt the fundamental principles of digital accessibility to make their websites and/or applications more accessible and, thereby, more effective.

## POUR Principles Of Web Accessibility

There are four major principles of digital or web accessibility. These principles ensure that digital content is accessible to all users, regardless of ability, providing an inclusive digital experience for everyone. The POUR principles are as follows.

### **Perceivable**

Information and user interface components must be presentable to users in ways they perceive. This includes ensuring that text alternatives are provided for non-text content, such as images and videos, and providing captions and audio descriptions for multimedia content.

## Operable

User interface components and navigation must be operable through various methods, including keyboard navigation, touch and gesture input, and voice commands. This enables users with a range of disabilities, such as motor impairments, to effectively use and interact with digital content.

## Understandable

Information and the operation of user interface components must be understandable. This includes designing straightforward, easy-to-read content, using consistent navigation, and providing clear instructions and feedback.

## Robust

Content must be powerful enough to be interpreted by various user agents, including assistive technologies. This includes ensuring the code is well-formed and follows established accessibility guidelines, such as the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG).

## Why Is Digital Accessibility Important?

Digital accessibility has many benefits beyond just making technology usable for people with disabilities. Here are some of the most significant benefits of implementing digital accessibility.

### Improved User Experience

In the digital world, [user experience \(UX\)](#) is crucial to website design and functionality. The way users interact with a website can make or break their engagement with a company or organisation. Digital accessibility is vital in enhancing the user experience by creating digital content and services accessible to all users, regardless of ability.

A website designed with digital accessibility in mind is **more user-friendly and provides a better overall experience for all users**. For example, a website intended to be navigable using a keyboard alone will be more usable for people with motor impairments who cannot use a mouse. Similarly, providing clear and concise text and using clear headings will make the content more accessible to users with cognitive disabilities.

Another aspect of improved user experience through digital accessibility is the ability to reach a wider audience. When a website is designed with accessibility in mind, it becomes more inclusive and welcoming to users with disabilities. This leads to a **higher engagement with the website**, which can increase traffic and conversions. In addition, a website that is designed with digital accessibility in mind can also be more cost-effective. By incorporating accessibility from the start, the website can be built to be usable by a broader range of users, avoiding the need for expensive retrofits and redesigns.

## Increased Inclusivity & Diversity

[Digital technology](#) has become an integral part of our daily lives, and access to the internet and digital content has never been more critical. However, not all individuals have equal access to this technology, especially those with disabilities. Digital accessibility addresses this disparity by making digital content and technology usable by individuals with disabilities, promoting inclusivity and diversity.

Inclusivity in the digital world means ensuring everyone has access to online information and services equally. By making digital content and technology accessible to all users, regardless of ability, organisations can create a more inclusive digital environment. This can **increase engagement and participation from a broader range of individuals**, promoting diversity in the online community.

In addition, making digital content and technology accessible to individuals with disabilities also benefits society as a whole. It **ensures everyone has equal access to information, resources, and opportunities, regardless of ability**. This can lead to a more informed and engaged population, promoting greater understanding and empathy toward individuals with disabilities.

## Legal Compliance

In recent years, the importance of digital accessibility has gained significant attention, not just for its benefits in terms of improving the user experience but also for its legal implications. As a result, **many countries have enacted laws and regulations that require organisations to make their digital content and technology accessible** to individuals with disabilities.

For example, in the United States, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires all public entities and private companies that offer goods and services to the public to make their websites and digital content accessible. The European Union has also enacted similar regulations, such as the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), which sets standards for web accessibility.

Likewise, in Canada, organisations must comply with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA). This act sets standards for accessibility in areas such as customer service, employment, transportation, and information and communications. AODA also requires organisations to make their websites and digital content accessible to individuals with disabilities.

Incorporating digital accessibility into [website design and development](#) from the beginning can help organisations avoid any legal consequences and **ensure compliance with relevant laws and regulations**. Furthermore, by making digital content and technology accessible to all users, organisations can provide a better user experience, demonstrate their commitment to inclusivity and diversity, and ensure that they comply with the law.

## Better Search Engine Optimisation (SEO)

In addition to improving the user experience and ensuring legal compliance, Digital accessibility can positively impact an organisation's search engine optimisation (SEO). This refers to optimising a website to improve its ranking in search engine results pages (SERPs).

By making a website accessible to individuals with disabilities, organisations can also **improve their website's ranking in [search engines such as Google](#)**. This is because search engines favour websites that provide a good user experience and are accessible to all users, including those with disabilities.

For example, incorporating alternative text descriptions for images and providing clear and concise navigation can improve a website's SEO by making it easier for search engines to understand the content and structure of the website. Additionally, providing closed captioning for video content and ensuring that the website is usable with just a keyboard can help improve a website's ranking in search engines.

## WCAG Web Accessibility Standards

*WCAG stands for [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines](#). It's an internationally recognised set of guidelines developed by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C), providing a technical standard for web accessibility. WCAG aims to make web content accessible to people with disabilities, including those with visual, auditory, physical, speech, cognitive, and neurological disabilities.*

WCAG includes a set of guidelines organised around the POUR digital accessibility principles we discussed previously: perceivable, operable, understandable, and robust. These principles outline the basic features of web content and technology to be accessible to people with disabilities. Each principle includes specific guidelines divided into three conformance levels (A, AA, and AAA), with Level AA being the most widely adopted and commonly used standard.

Aside from the WCAG, other international web accessibility standards exist, such as the [Accessible Rich Internet Applications \(ARIA\)](#) specification and the [User Agent Accessibility Guidelines \(UAAG\)](#). These digital accessibility standards provide a framework for digital accessibility, including guidance on designing and developing websites, software applications, and other digital content and technologies accessible to people with disabilities.

Some of the critical elements of WCAG web accessibility standards include:

- **Alternative text for images:** Providing alternative text descriptions for images allows people with visual impairments to understand the image's content.
- **Text transcripts & captions for audio & video:** Providing text transcripts and captions for audio and video content allows people with hearing impairments to access the content.

- **Keyboard accessibility:** Ensuring that all functionality is accessible through a keyboard is essential for people with mobility impairments who may not be able to use a mouse or other pointing device.
- **Colour contrast:** Ensuring that there is sufficient colour contrast between text and background is vital for people with visual impairments who may have difficulty reading content that does not have enough contrast.
- **Clear & straightforward language:** Using clear and simple language helps to ensure that content is accessible to people with cognitive disabilities who may have difficulty understanding complex language.

Ensuring that digital content and technologies are accessible is a legal requirement in many countries and an ethical and social responsibility. By following digital accessibility standards, businesses and organisations can ensure their digital content and technologies are accessible to all users, including those with disabilities.

## Needs For Implementing Digital Accessibility

Implementing digital accessibility has become increasingly important in recent years as the world becomes increasingly digital. Here are some of the reasons why digital accessibility is crucial.

### Bridging The Digital Divide

The rapid advancement of technology has made digital content and technology a critical aspect of our daily lives. However, for individuals with disabilities, access to digital content and technology can be a challenge, leading to a digital divide.

***Digital accessibility is critical in bridging this digital divide and ensuring all individuals, including those with disabilities, have equal access to digital content and technology. Without digital accessibility, individuals with disabilities may be excluded from accessing digital content and technology, impacting their ability to participate fully in society.***

For example, a person with a visual impairment may struggle to access a website that is not optimised for screen readers, making it difficult to access important information and resources. By making digital content and technology accessible to individuals with disabilities, organisations can help bridge the digital divide and provide equal access to digital content and technology for all users.

### Meeting The Needs Of An Ageing Population

The world's population is ageing, and with that, there is a growing need for digital content and technology to be accessible to individuals with disabilities. As the number of individuals with disabilities continues to increase, so does the need for digital accessibility to meet their needs.

By incorporating digital accessibility into website design and development, organisations can help ensure their digital content and technology are accessible to all users, including aged individuals. This can improve their ability to participate fully in society and access important information and resources.

For example, older adults may experience age-related declines in vision, hearing, and mobility, making accessing digital content and technology. By making their websites and applications accessible, organisations can help meet the needs of this growing population and ensure that they are not excluded from accessing critical information and resources.

## **Fostering Innovation & Creativity**

Digital accessibility not only helps ensure that individuals with disabilities can access and use digital content and technology, but it also fosters innovation and creativity. By designing and creating accessible web content, organisations can tap into new markets and user groups, leading to new opportunities for [digital innovation](#) and growth.

***Integrating digital accessibility into website design and development can lead to the creation of new technologies and products that are accessible to individuals with disabilities. This can lead to new business opportunities and the development of new and innovative products and services.***

For example, accessible gaming technology can provide a new market for video game designers and developers. Additionally, accessible e-learning platforms can offer a unique opportunity for educational institutions to reach a broader range of students, including those with disabilities.

## **Providing Business Opportunities**

Digital accessibility not only benefits individuals with disabilities but also provides business opportunities for organisations. By incorporating digital accessibility into website/software design and development projects, organisations can tap into new markets and reach a wider audience, increasing business opportunities.

Making digital content and technology accessible to individuals with disabilities opens up a new market for organisations. This can lead to increased business opportunities, as individuals with disabilities represent a significant and growing demographic with purchasing power.

For example, by making their websites and [custom software](#) accessible, organisations can reach individuals with disabilities who may not have been able to access their products and services before. This can increase sales and revenue and help organisations grow and expand their reach.

## **How To Embrace Digital Accessibility In Your Business**



Embracing digital accessibility into your business requires a concerted effort and a willingness to prioritise accessibility in all aspects of your digital presence. Here are some steps you can take to incorporate digital accessibility into your business:

1. **Educate yourself & your team:** Start by learning about digital accessibility and its guidelines and standards, such as the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG). Next, ensure your team knows the importance of digital accessibility and understands how to design and develop accessible digital content and technologies.
2. **Conduct an accessibility audit:** Conduct an audit of your digital content and technologies to identify areas where accessibility can be improved. Various online tools and services can help you conduct an accessibility audit, or you can hire an accessibility consultant to achieve a more comprehensive audit.
3. **Prioritise accessibility in your design & development process:** Incorporate accessibility into your design and development process from the outset. This means considering accessibility at every stage of the process, from wireframing and prototyping to final development and testing. You should also ensure that accessibility is required for all third-party tools and services you use.
4. **Provide alternative content:** Ensure you provide alternative content for users who cannot access certain types of content or functionality. This may include giving video captions, alternative text for images, and keyboard-only navigation options for users who cannot use a mouse.
5. **Train your team:** Train your team on how to design and develop accessible digital content and technologies. This may include providing training on accessibility guidelines and standards and training on how to use assistive technology to test and validate accessibility.

By incorporating digital accessibility into your business, you can ensure that all users, including those with disabilities, have equal access to digital content and technologies. This can help you to reach a wider audience and create a more inclusive online environment.

## Final Words: What Is Digital Accessibility?

To reiterate, digital accessibility ensures that people with disabilities are not excluded from accessing and using digital technologies. People with disabilities often face technological barriers limiting their access to information, products, and services. Digital accessibility removes these barriers and creates an inclusive online environment where everyone can participate equally.

One of the key benefits of digital accessibility is that it allows people with disabilities to participate fully in society. This includes accessing online information, communication, and commerce. For example, people with visual impairments may use screen readers to access the website content. In contrast, people with mobility impairments may use specialised keyboards or other assistive technology to navigate websites. By designing digital content and technologies to be accessible, businesses and organisations can ensure that all people have equal access to information and services.

We also need digital accessibility to improve the user experience for everyone. Many of the accessibility features that are designed for people with disabilities, such as closed captions or text-to-speech capabilities, can also benefit people without disabilities. For example, closed captions can be helpful for people in noisy environments — or for those watching videos in a language they are not fluent in. By prioritising accessibility in the design of digital products and services, businesses can create better experiences for all users.

Overall, digital accessibility is crucial for creating an inclusive and accessible online environment. By designing digital content and technologies to be accessible, businesses and organisations can ensure that people with disabilities can fully participate in society while also improving the user experience for everyone.

**If you need more information about digital accessibility — or ways to incorporate digital accessibility for your business — feel free to [reach out to us for a friendly chat](#). We're always happy to hear from you!**

Digital [accessibility](#) refers to technology being designed in such a way that it can be accessed by all users, regardless of their physical and intellectual capabilities. This includes electronic documents, websites, software, hardware, video, audio, and other digital assets. It is a diverse group that accesses technology and therefore it is crucial that technology be made available for everyone, including those with visual, hearing, neurological, motor, physical, and intellectual disabilities.

Digital accessibility services include but are not limited to web accessibility, audio accessibility, video accessibility, pdf accessibility, epub or ebook accessibility, image accessibility and mobile accessibility. The World Wide Web certainly has removed several barriers to communication and interaction that many people face in the physical world. However, when websites, applications, technologies, or tools are poorly designed, they in turn can create new barriers that could exclude people from using the Web.

Therefore, Digital Accessibility is essential for Quality assurance, developers and organizations that want to create high-quality websites and web tools and not exclude people from using their products and services. How is accessibility different from usability? While usability is concerned with whether the products are effective, efficient and satisfying to use, it does not specifically focus on the user experience of people with disabilities. Accessibility, on the other hand, is concerned with whether all users are able to access and get the same user-level experience when they use a product or service. Unlike usability, [accessibility](#) focuses on all users.

## **Why should we make digital accessibility a priority?**

Digital accessibility ensures universal access to all: every website and application needs to be designed keeping this in mind. One of the important consequences of the pandemic is working from home: this automatically implies greater accessibility for everyone. The brand image of the company whose website is accessible by everyone will certainly stand apart from the rest. Greater accessibility means better user experience. More people accessing the website translates to a higher ranking in Search Engine Optimization (SEO). Legal expenses on account of lawsuits



filed against companies whose websites are not accessible show a significant increase from 2019.

In many ways, be it legal to obligatory to compassion and concern, digital accessibility is increasing in significance. It is the right thing to do and it benefits not only those with impairments but all of us.

## Web accessibility

Websites are an important part of Digital Accessibility, when websites are designed in such a way that people with disabilities can also use them, it means that the website is accessible or that there is [web accessibility](#). It means that people can understand, navigate and interact with and through the website and contribute to the web.

[Wikipedia](#) defines web accessibility as an inclusive practice of ensuring that there are no barriers that prevent people with disabilities, physical or situational and those with socio-economic restrictions on bandwidth and speed, to access the websites.

All kinds/types of disabilities that affect access to the web are covered under web accessibility. These are:

- Visual
- Motor
- Auditory
- Speech
- Cognitive
- Neurological/Seizures
- Cognitive and intellectual
- Globally at least 2.2 billion people have a near or distance vision impairment
- According to the World Health Organization, an estimated 466 million people, or 6.1 percent of the entire world's population, are deaf or hard of hearing
- According to the [World Federation of the Deafblind](#), between 0.2% and 2% of the world's population is deaf-blind
- It is estimated that between 1 – 3% of the global population, or about 200 million people, have an intellectual disability
- About 2% of adults have a seizure at some point in their life.

Web accessibility is all about social inclusion: it is not just for people with disabilities but also others such as older people, those in remote, rural areas and people in developing countries. And it is highly beneficial for business too. Accessible design improves the user experience and satisfaction, in a variety of situations, across different devices, and for older users. Thus, we find that accessibility enhances the brand, drives innovation, and extends the market reach.

Even people without disabilities benefit from [web accessibility](#):

- People using mobile phones, and smart devices, such as smartwatches, and smart TVs, with small screens
- People in an environment with bright sunlight
- Older people with differing abilities as they are aging.
- Those with temporary disabilities, for example, a broken arm, or visually impaired due to broken or lost glasses
- People with a poor Internet connection

However, currently, the situation is such that many websites and tools are developed with accessibility barriers and are not usable by people with disabilities. In an age where the Internet is an important resource, be it for education, health or economy, it is equally important that all people have equal access to information. This is where web content accessibility legislations become relevant.

## WCAG – Digital Accessibility

In 1999, the Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI), a project of the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C), developed and published the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (**WCAG**) 1.0. On December 11, 2008, the WAI released the **WCAG 2.0** as a Recommendation.

The goal of the WCAG 2.0 is to be up-to-date and more technology-neutral. The WCAG 2.0 have been generally accepted as the definitive guidelines on the way in which to create accessible websites. WCAG 2.0 is based on the four main guiding principles of accessibility represented by the acronym **POUR**: **perceivable, operable, understandable, and robust**, otherwise known as the POUR principles of accessibility.

## POUR Principles of Digital Accessibility

**Perceivable** – For content to be perceivable, one must be able to perceive it through multiple senses. Converting non-textual content into text is most often the key to permeability, which can later be processed by the user's assistive technology.

Bureau of Internet Accessibility points out the guidelines for perceivable as presented in the WCAG 2.1:

- **Text Alternatives:** Text alternatives to be provided for non-text content so that it can be altered into forms that people need, such as large print, braille, speech, symbols or simpler language.
- **Time-based Media:** Provide alternatives for time-based media.
- **Adaptable:** Creation of content that can be presented in different ways (for example, a simpler layout) without losing information or structure.
- **Distinguishable:** Making it easier for users to see and hear content including separating the foreground from the background.

**Operable** – Users use several different devices: web designers must be aware of these devices and enable the user interface components and navigation elements in a way that everyone can

operate with it. For example, not limiting user input to only mouse or pointers but making it available to as many devices as possible like keyboard, voice recognition software, etc.

### **The Operable guidelines:**

- Keyboard Accessible: Make all functionalities available/accessible from a keyboard.
- Enough Time: Provide users adequate time to read and use content.
- Seizures and Physical Reactions: Do not design content in ways that could cause seizures or physical reactions.
- Navigable: Provide help users navigate, find content, and determine where they are.
- Input Modalities: Make it simpler for users to operate functionality through various inputs beyond keyboard.

**Understandable** –A user has to understand what a website is about. This understanding relates to the consistency and ease of use of the navigation elements on a site; so it is vital to reduce the number of navigation elements and present them consistently throughout a website. This can improve usability for the blind, for those with cognitive or learning disabilities, and for the senior citizens. The guidelines are that it should be

- Readable,
- Predictable and
- With input assistance.

*Robust – The content should be such that even as the technology and user agents evolve, the web content should remain accessible. Robust guideline is compatible: Maximize compatibility with current and future user agents, including assistive technologies.*

The WCAG 2.1 was published on 5 June 2018. And, WCAG 2.2 is scheduled to be published by June 2022.

Protecting access to websites for those with disabilities by using the existing human or civil rights legislation is one method. The US for instance protects access for the disabled through the technology procurement process. Typically, nations support and adopt the WCAG 2.0 by referring to the guidelines in their legislation. In places such as North America, Europe, parts of South America, and parts of Asia, compliance with the WCAG is a legal requirement.

### **The accessibility of websites depends on the cooperation of several components such as:**

1. Content that comprises all the information in a web page or web application, including natural information (text, images, and sounds) and markup or code that defines the structure, presentation, etc.
2. Media players, web browsers, and other “user agents”
3. Assistive technologies like screen readers, alternative keyboards, switches, scanning software, etc.

4. The knowledge of the users, their experiences, and in some cases, adaptive strategies employing the web
5. Developers, including coders, designers, and authors, etc., as well as developers with disabilities and website users who contribute content
6. Authoring tools such as software that creates websites
7. Evaluation tools such as web accessibility evaluation tools, HTML validators, CSS validators, etc.

## Examples of Digital Accessibility:

Here are a few examples of web accessibility.

While websites have illustrative graphics and images to add appeal to the website or perhaps to deliver a message, those visually impaired may not be able to view those images. In HTML, it is possible to display an alternative text if an image could not be viewed for some reason. This helps with visual impairments, which require assistive technologies to read web content.

In another case, those color blind may not be able to differentiate normal texts from the clickable links as they are similar to each other. This issue can be resolved by underlining the link text or creating a link button.

Some of the assistive technologies that individuals living with a disability use to enable and assist web browsing are:

- Screen reader software, used by blind/vision-impaired users
- Braille terminals, which has a refreshable braille display that renders text as braille characters
- Screen magnification software that enlarges what is displayed on the computer monitor for the visually impaired
- Speech recognition software is useful for those who have difficulty using a mouse or a keyboard.
- Keyboard overlays for those with motor control issues.
- Access to subtitled or sign-language videos for deaf people.

Web accessibility ensures that all sections of society can access the web and interact with it without any exclusion. And given the growing legal support and the significant benefits even for those who are not disabled point to the fact that web accessibility is here to stay.

## PDF Accessibility

According to [Commonlook.com](https://www.commonlook.com/), a Portable Document Format (PDF) is one of the most preferred formats because one can view, access and share information via a digital document that retains its attributes in terms of content, formatting etc. regardless of the device or the environment that is used to view it.

An accessible PDF is one that can be used/accessed by everyone, including people with disabilities such as those who are blind, visually or cognitively impaired or colour-blind. With an accessible PDF, it is easier for people with disabilities to access PDF documents with the aid of

assistive technology software/devices, like screen readers, screen magnifiers, speech-recognition software, text-to-speech software, alternative input devices and refreshable Braille displays.

It is a common misconception that a tagged PDF is accessible but that is not true. Proper tagging is an important but not the sole aspect of an accessible PDF.

## **How do you know if a PDF is accessible?**

If one is able to select parts of a text, as a few words or sentences, it is accessible. If not, then it is an image and hence not accessible. But here again, it is not the only point to ascertain the accessibility of the PDF.

Tagging should be checked too. Open the PDF document in Acrobat DC or Adobe Acrobat Pro and then, on the Navigation pane on the left, open the Tags panel. If the PDF document is not accessible, there won't be any tags (or just one tag) available in the Tags panel. On the sidebar, in the physical view, if a number of tags appear, associated with content in the PDF document, and when you select any tag, if the connected content gets highlighted on the right side. This is an indication that the PDF is accessible.

Besides, there is a tool called PDF validators that help identify if a PDF is accessible. It is a special software tool that tests the PDF for different accessibility standards and verifies if it is accessible or not.

While it is possible for a PDF to be accessible without complying with the standards, it is the compliance with the standards such as WCAG 2.0, WCAG 2.1, HHS, and PDF/UA that makes it accessible to the largest possible audience.

## **Audio accessibility**

[The W3C of the Web Accessibility Initiative \(WAI\)](#) describes accessibility considerations when planning, scripting, storyboarding, recording, and producing audio and video.

Some of the common accessibility barriers include lack of description of visual information for people who cannot view the video; requiring sight to understand the content of the video and lack of required contrast between the text and the background colours, making the text hard for some people to read.

It has provided specific guidelines for audio accessibility.

- Create high-quality audio: Record using high-quality microphone and recording software, in a room without hard flooring and away from all external sounds.
- Use low background audio: The background sounds should be at least 20 decibels lower than the foreground speech. Avoid sounds that are distracting or irritating.
- Speak clearly and slowly: This is for the benefit of those who want to understand content as well as for captioners and to make the timing better for sign language.

- Pause between topics for people to process the information.
- Use clear language: Avoid or explain jargon, acronyms and idioms.
- Provide redundancy for sensory characteristics: In the script, make the information work for those who cannot see and/or cannot hear. And, providing information using shape and/or location is an effective method which helps those with cognitive limitations.

## Video Accessibility

W3.org provides the following guidelines for making videos accessible for all.

- Avoid causing seizures by avoiding anything that flashes more than three times in a period of one second.
- Consider speaker visibility: Ensure that the speaker's face is visible in good light as it helps those who use mouth movement to understand spoken language.
- Make overlay text readable: Consider the font family, size and the contrast between the text and the background. Provide adequate contrast between text and its background in order that it can be read by those with moderately low vision.
- Plan for sign language: often sign languages are provided as an overlay in the bottom right corner of videos. Plan in a way that important information is not obstructed by sign language overlay.
- Plan for a description of visual information: Description is meant for the blind and those who cannot see the video well. It describes the visual information required to understand the content, including the text displayed in the video. One can either integrate description into the main audio content or record the audio and video with timing for accommodating a separate description.
- Integrate description: In the case of some videos such as presentations and instructional videos, integrate the content in the main audio itself. This is termed as "integrated description". For example, instead of the speaker saying: *As you can see on this chart, sales increased considerably from the first quarter to the second quarter*, the speaker can say, *This chart shows that sales increased significantly, from 2 million in the first quarter to 2.5 million in the second quarter*. Another example would be: instead of the speaker saying, *attach it to the pink end*, the speaker can say: *attach the small pin to the pink end, which is the larger end*.
- Time for description: In the case of dramas, the description of the visual information and context is not a smooth affair in the main video. For those videos, the description needs to be separate. For short descriptions, space can be planned in the audio to add the description. But where it is longer, extra time can be recorded in the scene at the beginning or at the end, to accommodate the description without having to pause the scene.

## Mobile accessibility

When you say that a mobile site or app is accessible, it means that it can be used by those persons with a disability, including those

- Who are visually impaired and use software that reads websites and apps out loud
- Who are hearing impaired who turn on captions when they watch videos

- Who have a hand tremor and use voice command software instead of their fingers to tap on the screen.

When coded correctly, mobile websites and apps work for all of these people. But, typically, accessibility is not followed while coding mobile technology.

Levelaccess.com points out that assistive technology bridges the gap between a disabled person's abilities and the content they wish to access. For instance, a blind person to use an iPhone through VoiceOver which reads content on screen. A layer of audio feedback helps the person navigate between apps and within apps.

Mobile accessibility is necessary as it is the right thing to do. Being inclusive socially, enabling equal access to the internet, the mobile, mobile apps and other technologies for those who are disabled is the proper thing to do. Also, mobile accessibility extends the reach of the market to include those who are disabled who make up 15% (1 billion) of the world's population. When technology is sold via B2B or B2G, then accessibility conformance enables the product ranking to be higher. This ensures easier sale of products and services.

The principles guiding mobile accessibility are: Perceivable, Operable, Understandable and Robust.

Free tools are available to test if the mobile or mobile app is accessible. VoiceOver in iOS and TalkBack in Android are a couple of features that enable the blind to use their phones easily.

[MDN WebDocs](#) provides a checklist for accessibility of mobile app developers:

**Colour:** Colour contrast should comply with WCAG 2.1 AA level requirements. An adequate contrast between the font colour and the background preserves text legibility. The contrast ratio should be 4.5:1 for normal text and 3:1 ratio for large text (which is at least 18 points or 14 points in bold).

Allowing varying contrast ratios for larger text is useful as wider character strokes are easier to read at a lower contrast than narrower ones. This in turn allows designers greater leeway for contrast, which is useful for titles.

And all the information conveyed via colour should be made available by alternative means such as underlined text for links, etc.

While the WCAG's general colour contrast ratios are appropriate for most users, mobile devices and applications need extra attention as they are more likely to be used outdoors, where they are facing the bright and glaring light of the sun. Therefore, using good contrast is vital for all users.

## **Visibility:**

- Content hiding techniques such as zero opacity and off-screen placement should not be used exclusively to handle visibility.

- Especially for single-page apps with multiple cards, everything other than the current visible screen must be truly invisible.

### **Focus:**

- Links and buttons are to be focusable by default while non-standard controls must have an ARIA role such as a button or link or checkbox assigned to them.
- And, the focus should be handled in a logical order, consistently.

### **Text equivalents:**

- Text equivalents should be provided for every non-strictly presentational non-text element within the app.
- Images of text should be avoided.
- All user interface components with visible text as labels must have the same text available in the programmatic name of the component.
- All form controls must have labels to benefit screen reader users.

### **Handling state:**

- The Operating System handles standard controls such as radio buttons and checkboxes but other custom controls state changes must be provided through ARIA states.

### **Orientation:**

- The content should not be restricted to a single orientation such as landscape or portrait unless essential, such as a bank cheque.

Some critical factors while designing mobile apps are:

- - Ease of data entry: Mobile devices and native applications allow users to enter data in various ways such as on-screen keyboard, Bluetooth keyboard, and speech. Text entry which can be tedious can be reduced by means of autofill, by providing select menus, radio buttons, or checkboxes. UsableNet points out that data sharing between apps or dictation of content greatly improves the overall experience of the app.
  - Design for varying screen sizes: Mobile devices mean smaller screens and custom aspect ratios that designers need to account for while building native apps. A smaller screen means only a limited amount of information is available for people to take in at a time.
  - A dedicated mobile website would be ideal to reduce the amount of information on each page (as compared to a laptop or desktop) or design the site responsively
  - Minimize the need to zoom in by providing a reasonable default size for content and touch controls
  - Adapt the length of link text to the viewport width
  - Position form fields below, rather than beside, their labels



## **Touch targets**

Multiple elements can be displayed together on a small screen with high resolution. So, it is important that these elements are large and distanced enough for being easy touch targets.

Best practices for touch target size include:

- Let touch targets be designed to be at least 9 mm high by 9 mm wide
- Add inactive space surrounding smaller touch targets

Interactive elements should be positioned in such a way that they are reachable regardless of how the mobile device is held. Developers should consider left- versus right-handed use, thumb range of motion etc. while designing the app so that what is easy for one user does not become difficult for another. Buttons need to be placed where they are easy to access.

## **Gestures should be simple**

Gestures on touch-screen mobile devices include a one-finger tap or swipe as well as those that involve multiple fingers, multiple taps and drawn shapes. Simple gestures should replace complex ones to enable those with motor or dexterity impairment to use the device easily. In case of accidental clicking, users should be able to go back and correct their course.

## **Consistent layout and templates**

Consistency should be maintained in placing components and navigational elements that are repeated across pages. If, for example, an application has a title, a logo, a navigation bar and a search form, appearing at the top of each page, these elements should appear in the same order and placement and even when the navigation bar collapses into a single icon when viewed in the portrait mode, then the drop-down should contain these elements in the same order.

## **Epub accessibility**

According to AccessiblePublishing.ca, “An accessible EPUB file allows everyone to have access to its content in the way that they need. A file that is completely accessible offers the maximum flexibility of user experience for all readers, and ensuring that publications incorporate accessibility features will allow all readers to customize their own individual reading experience to suit their needs.”

“Having a digital product that can be used by a variety of reading applications and programs, and can adjust to a wide variety of screen sizes ensures that anyone can read the content, regardless of the device they choose or need to use.”

**AccessiblePublishing.ca provides the best practices in accessibility publishing. Select issues and their best practices are cited as follows:**

- **Reflowable content:** The first principle of accessibility is keeping inline styling out of the markup. However, fixed-layout books are typically used to project the appearance of a print book, sacrificing accessibility. But, EPUBs should have reflowable content when it comes to digital accessibility. This way, readers can adjust the font size, style, and color which is crucial for people with poor vision or dyslexia. People with print disabilities will have a superior quality reading experience. **Fixed layout:** Publishers should aim for inserting phrases instead of single words in span tags as it vastly improves readability.
- **Structure:** Modern semantic elements should be used to enable readers to rely on assistive technologies to navigate the content properly.
- **Headings:** Headings are used by readers who use assistive technology to get a feel for how the book is laid out, know when a new section begins, and navigate efficiently between sections. This is why a predictable structure of cascading headings is to be followed. In a book, level 1 headings should be used for major sections, such as chapters. Titles of subsections within chapters should be marked up with level 2 headings, and minor areas within a subsection should be highlighted with a level 3 heading.
- **Single headings:** When laying out titles, it is advisable to set up a single heading for the complete title of a section, with all text relating to one heading enclosed in a single set of heading tags.
- **Images and Alt-text:** It is important to provide descriptions in the alternative text HTML tag (alt=" ") attached to all images. The description should be an objective one that takes audience and context into account by using a neutral tone and language and first describing the image generally and then going into more specifics.

## Tools to check conformance

To ensure a degree of quality of the accessible information in ebooks, the [DAISY](#) Consortium maintains Ace, the Accessibility Checker for EPUB.

- Ace

The tool provides automated checking and reporting on a number of WCAG requirements. However, passing the Ace validation tool is not sufficient to claim conformance to the specification, since not all the WCAG requirements can be checked by a machine.

The other tool that the [DAISY](#) Consortium maintains to help check the conformance of EPUB publications is:

- SMART

The SMART tool complements the Ace tool that helps evaluators in all the manual checks needed to ensure conformance to the accessibility specification.

## Conclusion – Digital Accessibility

Creating an inclusive world is possible only if digital accessibility is available. At Hurix, we believe in equal access to online education, healthcare, and eCommerce for people with special needs. It also means equal access to friendship and growth in the age of social media.

## . Understanding Content Accessibility

Content accessibility is about making sure that digital content is designed and created to be accessible and inclusive to all users, regardless of their abilities.

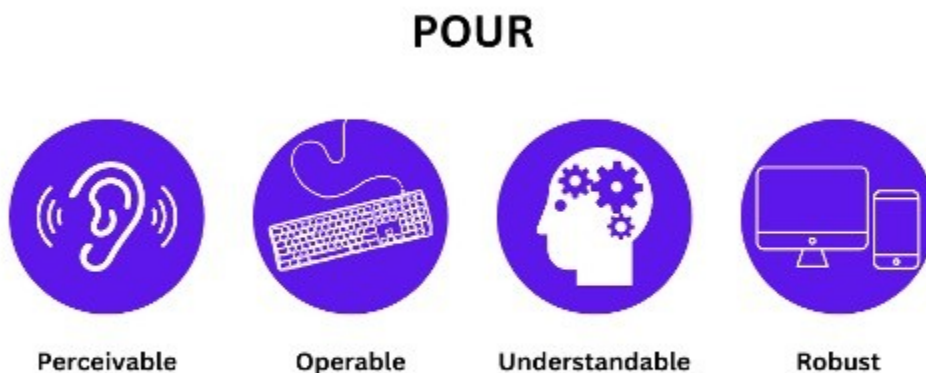
Content accessibility ensures that everyone can understand and interact with digital content and technologies equally.

The primary goal of content accessibility is to remove barriers that prevent people with disabilities from accessing content or technologies. Content accessibility aims to provide people with disabilities an equally effective way of accessing information, services, and opportunities.

Although content accessibility is primarily concerned with improving accessibility for people with disabilities, accessible content benefits everyone. For example, consider a video with sound. There are many reasons why a viewer may not be able to hear the sound on a video. They may be deaf, they may be in a public space and do not want to disturb others, their device may not have working speakers, and so on. In all these cases, closed captions allow the viewer to access the same information in the video as users who can hear the video.

Content developers and designers can achieve content accessibility by following the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG). These guidelines are internationally agreed standards that aim to ensure that digital content is designed to be accessible.

The WCAG are based on four guiding principles. These principles make up the acronym POUR and state that content must be perceivable, operable, understandable, and robust.



To be accessible, digital content must be:

- **Perceivable:** Content must be perceivable to all users. This means that there must be a way for every user to take in the content. For example, non-decorative images must have alt text, so that screen readers can describe them for users who cannot view them.

- Operable: All users must be able to interact with and navigate through the content at ease. Users must be able to access the content at a pace that suits them and using whatever assistive technologies they require.
- Understandable: All users must be able to understand the content on a site and how to use the site itself. Therefore, content should be presented and written in a straightforward and logical way.
- Robust: All users must be able to access the content using their required devices and assistive technologies. The digital content must be compatible with a variety of devices, using a wide range of browsers and assistive technologies.

## **II. The Importance of Content Accessibility**

In today's increasingly digital world, content accessibility is more important than ever. As a content provider there are many important reasons to create accessible content and many benefits of implementing content accessibility.

### **A. Ensuring equal access for individuals with disabilities**

The World Health Organisation (WHO) [estimates that approximately 16% of the world population experience disability and that this number is growing.](#) There are a number of disabilities and diversities of ability that effect how people interact with and understand content. These include diversities of ability such as age-related impairments, situational impairments, and so on, and disabilities including auditory, cognitive, physical, speech, visual, and learning and neurological disabilities.

As the world becomes more digital, opportunities such as job vacancies, services like shopping and banking, and content ranging from news to vital health service information have moved online.

Content accessibility ensures that people with disabilities are not prevented from accessing services, information, and opportunities that are available to people without disabilities.

This means that no one is excluded or discriminated against based upon their abilities.

### **B. Complying with legal requirements and regulations**

Worldwide, there are laws and regulations that businesses must comply with to ensure that their websites and content are accessible to all users, including those with disabilities. Failure to comply with accessibility laws and regulations can result in legal action, fines, and damage to a company's reputation.

[Accessibility.com](https://www.accessibility.com/) reports that 2,387 website accessibility lawsuits were filed in the United States in 2022 with Consumer Goods, Services and Retail companies being the most affected. This figure is a 1.5% increase from the previous year.

### **C. Expanding audience reach and engagement**

Content accessibility is also instrumental in improving the reach and engagement of businesses.

By implementing content accessibility in communications, marketing materials, and website content, businesses can reach a wider pool of people.

Without content accessibility, businesses exclude a substantial portion of the population, and in turn do not attract that audience to interact with their products or services.

### **D. Improving user experience for all users**

While content accessibility focuses on making sure that people with disabilities have equal access to content, it benefits everyone who uses the content.

For example, content accessibility benefits all users in the following ways:

- Content is more straightforward and easier to understand. Elements of accessible content such as plain language increase the readability of the content, making it easier for everyone to read and understand.
- Content has improved structure. Elements of accessible content, such as ensuring headings are used correctly, adequate spacing, and so on make content easier to scan and follow, which benefits all users.
- Visual and audio alternatives help people who may have situational impairments. For example, users may not be able to see a visual on their device due to lighting or may not be able to hear audio due to loud background noise. In these cases, elements like alternative text, transcripts, or captions can allow them to access the content.

### **E. Enhancing brand reputation and credibility**

As a business, it is important to ensure that your brand image reflects your values and commitment to inclusivity. Research has shown that customers view accessible businesses more favourably, which can lead to increased brand loyalty and customer satisfaction.

A [2021 study by Current Global, MAGNA and the IPG Media Lab](#) found that when users with disabilities felt that brand communication was inaccessible, 40% of respondents said they would

not purchase from the brand or recommend it to others. Similarly, 81% of respondents said that when communication was inaccessible, they felt disconnected from the brand, felt less excited by the brand, felt like the brand was unreliable, and so on.

By creating accessible content, businesses can demonstrate their commitment to making their products and services available to everyone, regardless of their abilities.

### **III. Guidelines for Making Content Accessible**

To effectively implement content accessibility, it is imperative to follow the WCAG when designing and developing content. Doing so will ensure that your content is perceivable, operable, understandable, and robust.

The following guidelines give an overview of some important elements to consider when creating accessible content.

#### **A. Visual Accessibility**

Use the following guidelines to improve accessibility for people with visual impairments:

- Use descriptive alt text for images.
- Use null text "" for decorative images to enable screen readers to skip the image.
- Provide clear and descriptive headings.
- Ensure proper colour contrast. You can test contrast using a contrast checker, for example, the [WebAIM contrast checker](#).
- Use scalable and readable fonts.
- Implement responsive design for different devices.

#### **B. Text Accessibility**

Use the following guidelines to increase the readability of your content:

- Write clear and concise content.
- Use proper formatting (headings, lists, and so on.)
- Provide transcripts for audio and video content.
- Avoid jargon and use plain language.
- Ensure proper language and readability levels.

## **C. Multimedia Accessibility**

Use the following guidelines to make multimedia elements accessible:

- Add captions or transcripts to videos.
- Provide alt text descriptions for visual content.
- Include accessible media players and controls.

## **D. Navigation and Interaction Accessibility**

Use the following guidelines to improve navigation and make it easier for people with disabilities to interact with your content:

- Design intuitive and easy-to-use navigation.
- Provide alternative navigation options.
- Ensure keyboard accessibility and focus indicators.
- Implement proper form elements and labels.

# **IV. Instances Where Content Accessibility Matters**

Content accessibility is vital in all forms of content to ensure equal access for all users. The following are some examples of areas where content accessibility matters.

## **A. Websites, web applications, and mobile applications**

Content accessibility is necessary in websites, web applications, and mobile applications as it removes barriers to accessing information, opportunities, and services. By developing websites, web applications, and mobile applications in adherence with WCAG principles, web developers and designers can increase usability for all users. This allows all users to engage with and benefit equally from these digital platforms.

## **B. Social media platforms**

Social media platforms have become a mainstay in everyday life when it comes to socialising, sharing information, accessing news, networking professionally, and so on. However, for people with disabilities, social media platforms can be a challenge. The previously referenced [2021 study by Current Global, MAGNA and the IPG Media Lab found](#) that 20% of respondents found

social media platforms difficult or very difficult to use, particularly non-visual platforms. Respondents cited difficulties such as small text and too many options and menus as reasons why these platforms are difficult to use.

### **C. E-learning and online courses**

E-learning and online courses are useful in allowing people increased access to knowledge and learning. E-learning and online courses can be a more cost-effective way for people to upskill, in comparison to traditional classroom-based courses. E-learning also enables learners to gain skills in a more flexible way. Learners can access the courses at times that suit them, from any location, and can work through the learning content at their own pace. This can greatly benefit some people with disabilities, who may have difficulties accessing classroom-based training, need additional time to work through course material, and so on. Therefore, E-learning creators should develop E-learning content in accordance with WCAG to allow people with disabilities to engage with the learning materials effectively and have a frustration free experience.

### **D. Email newsletters and communication**

To enable people with disabilities to engage with your brand, it is important to apply content accessibility in your newsletters and communications. By doing this, you can keep your entire audience up to date with developments in your organisation and build a positive relationship with your audience.

### **E. Presentations and slide decks**

Presentations and slide decks are essential in sharing information in the workplace, in educational settings, and at industry events. To effectively share your message to everyone in your audience, your presentations and slide decks should follow accessibility guidelines, such as:

- Make sure slide text is legible. Ensure that the text is large and that there is not too much text per slide. There should be sufficient contrast between the text and the background.
- Provide text alternatives for audio only elements and if your slides involve video, make sure that these videos have captions and that the captions are legible from a distance.
- Describe images in your presentation for audience members who cannot see them and ensure that images do not rely on colour alone to convey information.
- Allow adequate time for the audience to read each slide.
- Format slides to aid accessibility, for example, each slide should have a title.
- Share the slide deck with your audience to review in their own time.



## **F. Document sharing and collaboration tools**

With the increase in remote working in recent years, there is a greater need to use document sharing and collaboration tools to work as part of a team. Unfortunately, such tools can be difficult to use for some people with disabilities, as features such as review comments and real-time editing can be challenging for screen readers. To make these tools as accessible as possible, designers should consider accessibility concerns and incorporate accessibility from the beginning of the design process. Designers should incorporate [WCAG](#), ensure that the tools are compatible with assistive technologies, and should encourage feedback from users to consistently improve accessibility.

## **G. Intranet systems and internal communication**

Accessible internal communications and intranet systems ensure that all employees have equal access to information and tools necessary to undertake their job. It also ensures that all employees can access and understand important human relations information. Creating an accessible environment shows your employees that you care about their needs. This fosters a culture of respect, which can contribute to employee retention.

## **Conclusion**

Content accessibility plays a crucial role in ensuring equal access to information for all individuals, regardless of their abilities. By understanding the concept of content accessibility, recognizing its importance, and following the provided guidelines, we can create inclusive and impactful content in various instances of information sharing. By embracing content accessibility, we can foster inclusivity, reach a wider audience, and contribute to a more equitable digital landscape.

## **Accessibility is Important for Individuals, Businesses, Society**

The Web is an increasingly important resource in many aspects of life: education, employment, government, commerce, health care, recreation, and more. It is essential that the Web be accessible in order to provide equal access and equal opportunity to people with diverse abilities. Access to information and communications technologies, including the Web, is defined as a basic human right in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN [CRPD](#)).

The Web offers the possibility of unprecedented access to information and interaction for many people with disabilities. That is, the accessibility barriers to print, audio, and visual media can be much more easily overcome through web technologies.

Accessibility supports social inclusion for people with disabilities as well as others, such as:

- older people
- people in rural areas
- people in developing countries

**There is also a strong business case for accessibility.** As shown in the previous section, accessible design improves overall user experience and satisfaction, especially in a variety of situations, across different devices, and for older users. Accessibility can enhance your brand, drive innovation, and extend your market reach.

Web accessibility is **required by law** in many situations.

### **More Info on Accessibility is Important**

- General information on business benefits is in [The Business Case for Digital Accessibility](#).
  - Examples of the benefits of [making audio and video media accessible](#) is in the section [Benefits to Organizations](#).
- Guidance on figuring out legal requirements is in the archived [Legal and Policy Factors](#).

## **Making the Web Accessible**

Web accessibility depends on several components working together, including web technologies, web browsers and other "user agents", authoring tools, and websites.

The W3C Web Accessibility Initiative ([WAI](#)) develops technical specifications, guidelines, techniques, and supporting resources that describe accessibility solutions. These are considered international standards for web accessibility; for example, WCAG 2.0 is also an ISO standard: ISO/IEC 40500.

### **More Info on Making the Web Accessible**

- More about these aspects of accessibility working together is in [Essential Components of Web Accessibility](#).
- Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), Authoring Tool Accessibility Guidelines (ATAG), ARIA for Accessible Rich Internet Applications, and other important resources are introduced in [W3C Accessibility Standards Overview](#).
- To learn more about how W3C WAI develops material through multi-stakeholder, international participation and how you can contribute, see [About W3C WAI](#) and [Participating in WAI](#).

## **Making Your Website Accessible**

Many aspects of accessibility are fairly easy to understand and implement. Some accessibility solutions are more complex and take more knowledge to implement.

It is most efficient and effective to incorporate accessibility from the very beginning of projects, so you don't need go back and to re-do work.

## More Info on Making Your Website Accessible

- For an introduction to accessibility requirements and international standards, see [Accessibility Principles](#).
- To understand some common accessibility barriers from the perspective of testing, see [Easy Checks – A First Review of Web Accessibility](#).
- For some basic considerations on designing, writing, and developing for accessibility, see [Tips for Getting Started](#).
- When you're ready to know more about developing and designing, you'll probably use resources such as:
  - [How to Meet WCAG \(Quick Reference\)](#)
  - [Web Accessibility Tutorials](#)
- For project management and organizational considerations, see [Planning and Managing Web Accessibility](#).

If you need to make quick fixes now, see [Web Accessibility First Aid: Approaches for Interim Repairs](#).

## Evaluating Accessibility

When developing or redesigning a website, evaluate accessibility early and throughout the development process to identify accessibility problems early, when it is easier to address them. Simple steps, such as changing settings in a browser, can help you evaluate some aspects of accessibility. Comprehensive evaluation to determine if a website meets all accessibility guidelines takes more effort.

There are evaluation tools that help with evaluation. However, no tool alone can determine if a site meets accessibility guidelines. Knowledgeable human evaluation is required to determine if a site is accessible.

## Accessible content vs. inclusive content: What's the difference? (With examples)

While both accessible [content design](#) and inclusive content design are essential for creating a positive user experience, they have slightly different focuses.

Accessibility is primarily concerned with functionality; making sure a digital product or experience is usable, intuitive, and enjoyable for as many people as possible—including people with disabilities. This could include:

- Designing content that's easy to navigate using assistive technologies such as screen readers,
- Ensuring video and interactive content has closed captioning, and
- Ensuring people can quickly locate key information on the page to reduce cognitive load.

The UK government website is a leading example of accessible content. On this page, we can see a clear use of headings—which makes the content easier to navigate for visually impaired people using shortcut keys. With clear, well-signposted content, visitors can quickly and easily find what they need.

It's also important to note that many countries have laws and regulations in place that require digital content to be accessible. Non-compliance can lead to lawsuits and financial penalties in some cases (especially for public sector bodies), so it's good practice to get familiar with accessibility legislation in your local area.

**Read next:** [Accessible UX with Deque Systems' Glenda Sims and Patrick Sturdivant](#)

Inclusive content design, on the other hand, is focused on making sure that everyone, regardless of their background or identity, feels welcome and represented in the content. It involves incorporating diverse perspectives and experiences into the content design process and creating products that aren't just functional, but enjoyable for everyone—fostering a sense of belonging and community for all users.

This includes:

- Using culturally sensitive and appropriate language,
- Avoiding exclusionary or biased language, and
- Diversifying the use of visuals throughout the content.

Designing inclusive content requires an intersectional lens, which acknowledges the different types of bias, discrimination, and exclusion people regularly face, so you can ensure your content avoids harmful assumptions.

For example, this form acknowledges that self-identification is personal, and allows users to describe their own gender identity before providing the option to select as many of the listed terms as they feel suits them best.

## 2. Why inclusive and accessible content design matters

As technology becomes more widespread, and audiences interact with online products in new ways, accessible and inclusive content has gone from being a 'nice to have' to a cornerstone of good UX.

Not only does accessible and inclusive content provide an enhanced user experience for people of varying abilities, it also helps create a more harmonious, positive atmosphere where everyone feels their lived experiences are respected and valued.

Designing accessible content means removing barriers to information and communication for those with disabilities or impairments, which can lead to improved engagement, understanding, and empowerment for all individuals.

Designing inclusive content means representing, championing, and celebrating the diversity among the world's users, which can help you expand your audience and increase the impact of your message.

Overall, the standards of accessible and inclusive content are quickly evolving—and designing content for everyone will help you stay ahead of the curve. To learn more, check out our [trends forecast for content design and UX writing](#).

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## 3. How to design inclusive content: 3 actionable steps

### Develop guidelines for inclusive language

Language plays a critical role in how people perceive and relate to content. Inclusive language helps to create a welcoming and respectful environment, where people feel safe, welcomed, celebrated, and valued. On the other hand, exclusive or offensive language can alienate people, perpetuate stereotypes and discrimination, and hinder effective communication.

To ensure your content resonates with as many people as possible, it's worth developing comprehensive guidelines around writing for everyone. Developing these guidelines requires in-depth research into your audience, familiarising yourself with the appropriate terminology for different communities, and consulting with experts and members of marginalised communities to ensure that the guidelines are comprehensive, accurate, and up-to-date. You should also be aware of any cultural or social nuances that may affect how the language could be interpreted.

Once you've developed these guidelines, you can audit and update your content for maximum inclusivity. You'll also need to regularly review and update the guidelines to reflect changes in language use.

### Design inclusive forms

From registration to applications: forms are vital for collecting and sharing information and are an unavoidable part of the digital experience. By designing forms that are accessible, user-friendly, and inclusive, you'll ensure users can comfortably share their information without facing unnecessary barriers or discrimination.

Closed-ended questions with limited response options don't always capture the full scope of people's identities and experiences. As a result, they might force people to choose from options that don't accurately reflect their situation. Instead, opt for open fields. This way, your users can use their own words and phrases to describe their identity, experiences, and needs, without being limited by pre-determined categories or options—allowing them the flexibility to describe themselves in a way that's comfortable, accurate, and meaningful to them.

It's also important to reflect on what you're asking from your users. As you design your form, ask yourself: "Do I actually need this information?" Think about which fields are required and which are optional, and you'll find your way to more inclusive and streamlined forms in no time.

## **Test your content with diverse audiences**

People from different backgrounds, identities, cultures, and experiences will have unique interpretations of the content. But without diverse user data—or perspectives on your team—you risk unintentionally excluding or marginalising certain groups.

By testing your content with a diverse user base (different ages, ability levels, gender identities, races, cultural backgrounds, jobs, religions, foreign language speakers, etc.), you can identify potential biases, assumptions, or misunderstandings in your content and make necessary adjustments to ensure it's relevant and respectful to everyone.

[Testing content with diverse users](#) can also help you to identify gaps in your knowledge or assumptions about certain groups of people. It can validate or challenge your assumptions about language use, preferences, and cultural norms, and provide you with insights you otherwise might not have considered.

## **4. How to design accessible content: 3 actionable steps**

It's essential to be aware of the different user needs and contexts associated with your audience when developing web copy. Here are some steps you can take to create accessible content:

### **Incorporate multimedia**

Not all users consume information in the same way. Text-heavy web pages, for example, can present significant barriers for people with visual, cognitive, or learning disabilities.

Providing alternatives to text, such as video and audio, is essential for ensuring that all users have equal access to the content—regardless of their abilities or limitations. Not only does it benefit those with accessibility needs, but it also makes the content more engaging and appealing to a broader audience.

Similarly, it's equally important to provide alternatives for individuals with auditory disabilities when designing video or audio content. This means providing captions or transcripts so that users with hearing impairments can access videos or audio content.

Overall, the more you distil your content through a variety of mediums (text, video, audio, etc.) the easier it will be for your users to access the content in a way that's comfortable for them.

## Signpost your content

One of the goals of accessible content design is to make the information easy to access and understandable for as many people as possible. To reduce cognitive load, it's crucial that key pieces of information are easy to find—and users don't get lost while trying to complete a specific goal. This is where signposting comes in.

Signposting is the effective use of headings, subheadings, and other visual markers to indicate the organisation and hierarchy of the content. This is particularly important for people with visual impairments, cognitive disabilities, or anyone who might struggle with dense blocks of text.

Signposting tells the user exactly what they'll find on the page and breaks up large blocks of text to avoid overwhelming your users. Clear and descriptive headings, for example, help screen readers and assistive technologies to navigate the content more easily. It's also good practice to use descriptive link text that provides context and describes the destination of your links. To learn more, check out our [ultimate guide to information architecture](#).

## Write in plain language

Depending on your brand personality, it can be tempting to 'stylise' your written content out of fear of it sounding simple or boring. But that's not always the most accessible way to go.

Writing in plain language makes content easier to read and understand for a wider range of users, including people with cognitive or learning disabilities, non-native speakers, and those with limited literacy skills. This means avoiding complex vocabulary, jargon, and acronyms that may be difficult to understand. You should also stick to short sentences that are easy to read, and use active voice instead of passive voice wherever possible.

Tools like [Readable](#) and [Grammarly](#) are quick ways to audit your content for maximum readability and accessibility. Once you copy-paste your text into the tool, it'll highlight words and phrases that a general audience might struggle to read or understand.

## 5. General best practices for accessible and inclusive content

In addition to the steps we laid out in the previous sections, here are a few best practices to help guide your content strategy:

- **Understand accessibility guidelines:** Read through published accessibility guidelines and standards, like the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG). These guidelines provide recommendations for making web content accessible to people with disabilities.
- **Try accessibility tools:** There's a host of accessibility tools and plugins like [WAVE](#) which you can use to check for accessibility issues within your content.

- **Choose an accessible format:** Stick with formats like HTML, which can be read by screen readers and is easily navigable with keyboard commands.
- **Use alt text for images:** For any images included in your content, make sure to provide descriptive and meaningful alternative text (alt text) that can be read by screen readers.
- **Choose accessible colours and fonts:** High-contrast colours (e.g. black and white) and easy-to-read fonts (e.g. sans-serif) are better for readability as it makes the text more visible to users with visual impairments.
- **Ask for feedback from your users:** Providing feedback forms or actively asking your users what you can do to improve the overall experience helps your content remain inclusive.

## Final thoughts

Accessible and inclusive content design is crucial for creating an equitable digital world where everyone can access the same information and opportunities. By taking the steps laid out in this blog post, you can maximise your product's reach and impact—and empower and affirm people who may have felt marginalised or excluded in the past. Both of these outcomes ultimately lead to better results for your business.