Tips to make your website accessible

Accessible websites assist in ensuring that people with disabilities can access and view your online information. The provision of information and online services through the web is covered under the Disability Discrimination Act (1993). The best practice guidelines used internationally on making websites accessible to people with disabilities are the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0, released by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) in 2008. The Disability Services Commission aims to meet these guidelines to a high standard (Level AA). To meet the requirements under the Disability Discrimination Act, state and local government authorities are encouraged to comply with the guidelines at this level.

Below are eight parts of websites that staff and web coordinators can check and alter to help to make websites accessible. The information below is based on the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0.

1. Images

Ensure your images have alternative (alt) text unless they are purely for decoration. For images that are purely decoration such as a bullet point or border, the alt text should be empty or null. For very long or descriptive alt text, the long description attribute should be used (longdesc). Text should be used rather than an image of text, unless the image is part of a logo or brand name.

Check your alt text by putting your mouse pointer over the image and a yellow box should appear with a description of what the image is (unless it is for decoration).

Reason: people with sight impairment listen to alt text to hear what the image represents. Text presented as an image can become unclear when the image size is increased by people, particularly with sight impairment.

2. Audio and video

Ensure you have subtitles, captions or at the very least written transcripts available with video and audio content.

If there is audio that plays automatically on a website, ensure that these sounds can be paused or stopped by the users.

Check your audio and video has open captions (captions that are available all the time) or written transcripts and that there is a pause or stop on automatic audio on your pages.

Reason: people with hearing impairment use captions and subtitles to read what is being heard. Sounds that play automatically with no option to pause or stop can be confusing to people listening to content.

3. Colours

Ensure that there is high contrast between the colour of the text presented and that of the background. Ensure that colour is not the only prompt used to convey information (eg do not say "select the red circle to continue").

Check your contrast by ensuring that your backgrounds are dark with light text, or vice versa. Use the free tool (Colour Contrast Analyser) available from Vision Australia to test your contrast.

Reason: Low contrast (eg light grey text on white background) makes it difficult for all people to view websites and more so people with sight impairment. Using colour to convey information is inappropriate for people with colour-related visual impairments.

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4. Text

Ensure that your text can be made larger without affecting the content or function of the page or site. Don't use images of text for decorative sake.

Check that your text can be made larger and smaller and that the page continues to make sense in Internet Explorer by selecting "view" and then "text size" and select "largest".

Reason: People with low visibility need to increase the text size of pages to view the information. Text should be text, images can be unclear when resized so just use straight text and style as appropriate, unless it is for a logo or brand name.

5. Links

Ensure that your links describe where the link is going, what the link is or the purpose of the link. If you link to a document, ensure that you state what type of document it is (DOC or PDF) and the file size.

Check that links are displayed correctly (eg use Disability Services Commission not www. disability.wa.gov.au and never Click here or Read more….). Check documents state their file type and size after the document name in the link.

Reason: People listening to links need to know what the link is or means to choose if they want to go to that destination or open that document. The file size gives people with slow connection the chance to know how long that document may take on their connection.

6. Navigation and site structure

Ensure that all parts of your website are able to be accessed without a mouse. Ensure that the reading and navigation order is logical and intuitive. Ensure that there are multiple ways of finding information.

Check that the website can be navigated through using "Tab", "Shift+Tab" and "Enter" keys on the keyboard. Look at pages in a text only browser such as Lynx View to confirm that the site makes sense and appears logically. Look for a site search, site map, related links as well as basic navigation on your pages.

Reason: People who use keyboard-only or voice-only will not be able to access parts of the website that rely on a mouse click. Badly constructed sites are difficult to navigate and make it hard for people to find what they are looking for. People use websites in different ways and many pathways to your content creates a more intuitive and navigable website.

7. Forms - including fields of text entry, buttons and checkboxes

Make sure there are labels immediately next to fields you want people to type in or click on.

Check that fields that prompt for a input (eg name, email, comments) have a label next to it which explains what data is to be put in it.

Reason: People using assistive technologies need to be able to identify what is to be put in each of the fields and will listen to the instruction or prompt to identify what belongs in that field.

8. Page time limits and flashing

Ensure that pages with a time limit can have the time limit adjusted or turned off. Moving, blinking or scrolling can be used to highlight content so long as it lasts less than three seconds. However, do not put anything in your pages that flashes more than three times in any one second.

Check you have no quick flashing text or time limits imposed on pages. If there are time limits for example before a page changes, ensure there is a control to adjust the time limit or turn it off.

Reason: People take time to look at web pages and imposing changes before the browsing is finished can be confusing and frustrating. More than three flashes per second is inappropriate and known to cause seizures.

Checklist for websites to assist with accessibility

In web pages:	Yes	No
Images have alternative (alt) text (unless they are purely for decoration)		
Images are not used for text, unless the image is part of a logo or brand name		
Audio and video have subtitles, captions or written transcripts available		
Audio and video can be paused or stopped by users		
There is strong colour contrast between text and background		
Colour is not used as a prompt or to convey information		
Text can be increased and decreased in size by the user		
Links describe where the link is going, not the url address		
Links to documents contain the document type and file size		
All documents are available in an accessible version (ie in both Word doc and PDF)		
All parts of the website can be accessed using only the keyboard		
There is more than one way to find information (search/sitemap/navigation)		
Labels are presented next to fields that require the user to enter information		
There are no time limits imposed on users		
Pages do not contain quick flashing (ie more than three flashes a second)		