Accessibility isn't just a legal right, it's a basic human right. Failing to make any service or amenity accessible is discrimination that marginalizes parts of the community. Web accessibility means allowing people with any type of disability to perceive, understand, navigate, interact with and contribute to web content. The term disabilities includes all physical, visual, auditory, speech, cognitive and neurological disabilities.

According to the WebAIM Million project, the six most common accessibility errors are low contrast, missing alt text, empty links, missing form labels, empty buttons and missing document language. WebAIM concludes that if these six errors were fixed, overall web accessibility would be vastly improved.

# Low Contrast

86.3% of homepages have low contrast text

There are numerous free contrast checker tools online. I use Sketch for user interface design, and a plugin called Stark to check color and text contrast. Here are a few general rules I use to guide my design choices.

* Background colors must have a minimum contrast of 3.1:1 against its text to be accessible.
* Backgrounds that are not user interface components do not have an accessibility requirement.
* User interface components must have a minimum contrast of 3.1:1 next to their adjacent colors.
* Color cannot be used as the only visual means of conveying information, indicating an action, prompting a response, or distinguishing a visual element.
* Text must be sized appropriately
  + 18pt or 24px for large text
  + 14pt or 18.67px if bold for normal text

# Missing Alternative Text

66% of homepages have missing alternative text for images. This does not include alt=””. An empty alt attribute tells the screen reader to skip the image; a perfectly acceptable and preferable method for handling images that are decorative and don’t provide content value to the page. Whether the image has value or not, make sure to include an alt attribute.

# Empty Links

59.9% of homepages had empty links. This is an a tag and href, but no text to tell the user what action to take. This is a common mistake that I am also guilty of. It usually happens when I’m using an a tag around an image or graphic that I want to make linkable. The easiest fix is to add text, or add an aria-label=”” attribute to describe the action the user takes when clicking the link.

# Missing Form Input Labels

53.8% of homepages had missing labels for their form inputs. This is an incredibly easy fix!

<label for=”first\_name”>First Name</label>

<input id=”first\_name” type=”text” name=”first\_name” placeholder=”First Name”/>

Placeholder text is not a substitute for a label. Screen readers will not announce placeholder text. To associate a label with an input, use the for=”” attribute and a matching id=”” in the input. You can also hide the label off canvas if you need to, but don’t use display: none; because that will also hide it from screen readers.

# Empty Buttons

28.7% of homepages had an empty button. This is similar to an empty link, and the fix is to either add text, which should be a clear call to action, or use an aria-label to describe the action to the user. An example of this might be a button with an icon. These are fine for people who can see, but for those who rely on a screen reader the button should tell the user what action to take.

# Missing Document Language

28% of homepages had a missing document language attribute. This is probably the easiest, and most important, thing to fix. It’s the language we tell the screen reader to use. It’s the first thing, at the very top of the DOM, on the HTML element.

<html lang=”en”>