OER: Document Accessibility Guidelines

Document Accessibility Guidelines

There are 3 big principles:

1. structure
2. give alternatives
3. identify

There are also a few additional items regrouped under the title "further considerations" below.

Big principle 1: Structure

The idea is to use structural elements (tags) such as headings to properly structure documents and therefore identify clearly the various elements which make up the document. This can be done in both word-processed documents and in Websites. These structural elements are often referred to as styles in word-processors.

This is of particular importance for the following elements

- Document title

- Headings (of part, chapter, sessions, subsections, etc.), respecting their hierarchical order

- Lists : use true numbered and bulleted lists.

As corollary, **presentation must be separated from content**. The layout properties of characters and paragraphs have to be set up independently from the structure. An example is about the end-of-lines. Do not use empty lines to put space between paragraphs, instead, use the properties of paragraph, where you can set precisely the space before and after the paragraph.

Big principle 2: Give Alternatives

Every non textual element must have a textual alternative. In all cases this alternative needs to take the context into account. For instance a single picture might have different description whether it is used in a context or another.

- **Images**: all images must have an alternative text (short and functional)

  - In case of images conveying meaningful content, a contextualised long description must be provided, explaining all the information contained in the image. This is valid for instance in case of graphics presenting data, pictures illustrating text where information in the picture is not included in the text, schemas, etc.

- **Sounds**: a text transcription is necessary, containing all the text said in the sound (if any), and all the meaningful other sounds.

  - If necessary a video of the interpretation in Sign Language can be provided, to improve understandability by deaf people who don't have a good understanding of written language.

- **Videos**: provide a text transcription and subtitles. Text description describes the scenes and contains also a transcript of all meaningful sounds. Subtitles can be developed from the transcription.

  - Like in the case of sounds, a Sign Language video may be necessary (see above)

  - Audio-description may be necessary for blind users if the main content of the video cannot be understood without images.

Big principle 3: Identify

- The main language of the document (as well as language of paragraphs/bits of text written in another language if any)

- The title of the document (in document properties -- often called metadata), why not fill in other metadata (like author, description, etc.)

- If possible provide abstracts at the beginning of substantial document components like chapters and major sections.

- Make sure that Link anchor text makes sense

Further Considerations

- Never use layout (colour, bold, italics, alignment, etc.) to provide information that would not be present explicitly in the text.

- Avoid using a level of language which would be uselessly complicated (in particular do not use very long paragraphs).

- Expand abbreviations and acronyms at first occurrence

- Keep tables simple – have a header row and make sure they read correctly row by row column by column
- Repeat headings of tables on each page if necessary (don't do it manually, most editing software have an option to do that automatically)
- Put accents even in capital letters (when writing in a language including accents)

Improve layout for people with print difficulties

While respecting and allowing individual preferences, the following settings can benefit a wide number of people.

- Ensure that font size is sufficient, usually around 12 points or more.
- Avoid Serif based fonts such as Times new Roman. All those extra decorative elements (Serifs) on characters present unnecessary additional challenges for those with print disabilities.
- Use left alignment of text. The uneven spaces between words which are a feature of justified text present an extra cognitive load for significant groups of people.
- Provide sufficient contrast.
- Set the page background colour to a non-white colour e.g. a light pastel colour. This helps those impacted by visual stress sometimes called the glare effect or Scotopic sensitivity effect.
- Do not use animated effects such as blinking text.

Complementary information

To go further, here is a (non comprehensive) list of resources about content accessibility guidelines

- WCAG (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines) is a quite technical set of rules developed by the Web Accessibility Initiative from the W3C Consortium between 1997 and 2008. This document can be considered as the father of document accessibility guidelines in all domains. See https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG20/
- PDF Create and Verify Accessible PDFS
- Microsoft Accessibility
- OASIS (Organization for the Advancement of Structured Information Standards) published some accessibility guidelines for ODF formats (used by OpenOffice/LibreOffice) http://docs.oasis-open.org/office/office-accessibility/v1.0/cs01/ODF_Accessibility_Guidelines-v1.0.html
- WEBAIM Principles of Accessible Design

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