

Beyond Borders (and Outlines):

Crafting Inclusive Experiences with Modern CSS

Manuel Sánchez

manuelsanchezdev.com







1. I studied Translation and Interpreting











2. I did a bootcamp 5 years ago to become a Frontend Developer

I studied Translation and Interpreting



- I studied Translation and Interpreting
- 2. I did a bootcamp 5 years ago to become a Frontend Developer
- 3. Work at Die Zeit as a Full Stack for almost 1 year (it's been fun!)



- I studied Translation and Interpreting
- 2. I did a bootcamp 5 years ago to become a Frontend Developer
- 3. Work at Die Zeit as a Full Stack for almost 1 year (it's been fun!)
- 4. I develop some games and do pixel art in my free time

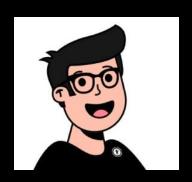


- 1. I studied Translation and Interpreting
- 2. I did a bootcamp 5 years ago to become a Frontend Developer
- 3. Work at Die Zeit as a Full Stack for almost 1 year (it's been fun!)
- 4. I develop some games and do pixel art in my free time
- 5. I love a11y!



- I studied Translation and Interpreting
- 2. I did a bootcamp 5 years ago to become a Frontend Developer
- 3. Work at Die Zeit as a Full Stack for almost 1 year (it's been fun!)
- 4. I develop some games and do pixel art in my free time
- 5. I love a11y!









Crafting Inclusive Experiences with Modern CSS

Debug A11Y Issues with CSS

Get always enough contrast with CSS

Crafting Inclusive Experiences with Modern CSS

Debug A11Y Issues with CSS

Get always enough contrast with CSS

How to spot A11Y issues?

Usual Path





(contrast analysers, automatic/manual tests...)





How to spot A11Y issues?

Usual Path





(contrast analysers, automatic/manual tests...)





CSS First Path





? HTML / ARIA / JS SOLUTION

CASE 1

Debug A11Y Issues with CSS









Interactive elements

Adding a semantic role is not enough — you also need to ensure the necessary event listeners are in place, add a tabindex, and apply default styles.



Go to Example



3 CSS

```
[role="button"],
[role="link"] {
  outline: 2px dashed var(--color-debug-warning);
  outline-offset: 4px;
  position: relative;
}

[role="button"]::after,
[role="link"]::after {
  content: " ▲ Role needs keyboard support";
  color: var(--color-debug-warning);
  font-size: 0.675rem;
  display: block;
  border: 1px solid var(--color-dark);
  background-color: var(--color-light);
  padding: 0.25em 0.75em;
  border-radius: 1.25em;
}
```

Interactive elements

We could have just targeted **div** or **span**, but people tend to get creative.



Go to Example



3 CSS

```
[role="button"],
[role="link"] {
  outline: 2px dashed var(--color-debug-warning);
  outline-offset: 4px;
  position: relative;
}

[role="button"]::after,
[role="link"]::after {
  content: " ▲ Role needs keyboard support";
  color: var(--color-debug-warning);
  font-size: 0.675rem;
  display: block;
  border: 1px solid var(--color-dark);
  background-color: var(--color-light);
  padding: 0.25em 0.75em;
  border-radius: 1.25em;
}
```

Interactive elements

Now we're ready to identify those interactive elements and use native

button> or <a> tags whenever possible.







```
Company
Contact
Country
Alfreds Futterkiste
Maria Anders
Germany
Centro comercial Moctezuma
Francisco Chang
Mexico
```

Adding a <caption> tag helps satisfy Success Criterion 1.3.1: Info and Relationships.



```
table:not(:has(caption)) {
 outline: 2px dashed var(--color-debug-error);
 outline-offset: 4px;
 position: relative;
 width: 100%;
table:not(:has(caption))::after {
 content: "X Table missing <caption>";
 color: var(--color-dark);
 font-size: 0.675rem;
 font-weight: bold;
 display: block;
 margin-block: 0.25em;
 background-color: var(--color-debug-light-error);
 border: 1px solid var(--color-dark);
 padding: 0.25em 0.75em;
 border-radius: 1.25em;
 width: fit-content;
```

Adding a <caption> tag helps satisfy Success Criterion 1.3.1: Info and Relationships.

Company	Contact	Country				
Alfreds Futterkiste	Maria Anders	Germany				
Centro comercial Moctezuma	Francisco Chang	Mexico				
X Table missing <caption></caption>						



```
Company
Contact
Country
Alfreds Futterkiste
Maria Anders
Germany
Centro comercial Moctezuma
Francisco Chang
Mexico
```

After reviewing the table, we decide to add a caption for clarity.



```
<caption>Company Contacts/caption>
Company
 Contact
 Country
Alfreds Futterkiste
 Maria Anders
 Germany
Centro comercial Moctezuma
 Francisco Chang
 Mexico
```

Good job!

Company Contacts

Company	Contact	Country	
Alfreds Futterkiste	Maria Anders	Germany	
Centro comercial Moctezuma	Francisco Chang	Mexico	



```
    <div>Wrong child</div>
    Okay

wrong child</div>
    <div>Wrong child</div>
    Okay
```

UL/OL with invalid children



```
ul:has(>:not(li)),
ol:has(>:not(li)) {
outline: 2px dashed var(--color-debug-warning);
outline-offset: 4px;
position: relative;
ul:has(>:not(li))::before,
ol:has(>:not(li))::before {
color: var(--color-debug-warning);
font-size: 0.675rem;
font-weight: bold;
display: block;
margin-top: 0.25em;
border: 1px solid var(--color-dark);
 background-color: var(--color-light);
 padding: 0.25em 0.75em;
 border-radius: 1.25em;
width: fit-content;
```

UL/OL with invalid children

▲ List has children that aren't

Wrong child

Okay

▲ List has children that aren't

Wrong child

1. Okay



```
<div>
<h3></h3>
</div>
```

Empty headings

```
5 HTML
</div>
```

3 CSS

```
h1:empty,
h2:empty,
h3:empty,
h4:empty,
h5:empty,
h6:empty {
 outline: 2px solid var(--color-debug-error);
 outline-offset: 4px;
 position: relative;
h1:empty::before,
h2:empty::before,
h3:empty::before,
h4:empty::before,
h5:empty::before,
h6:empty::before {
 content: " / Empty heading";
 color: var(--color-debug-warning);
 font-size: 0.675rem;
 font-weight: bold;
 display: block;
 margin-top: 0.25em;
 border: 1px solid var(--color-dark);
 background-color: var(--color-light);
 padding: 0.25em 0.75em;
 border-radius: 1.25em;
 width: fit-content;
```

Empty headings

3 CSS

```
h1:empty,
h2:empty,
h3:empty,
h4:empty,
h5:empty,
h6:empty {
 outline: 2px solid var(--color-debug-error);
 outline-offset: 4px;
 position: relative;
h1:empty::before,
h2:empty::before,
h3:empty::before,
h4:empty::before,
h5:empty::before,
h6:empty::before {
 content: " / Empty heading";
 color: var(--color-debug-warning);
 font-size: 0.675rem;
 font-weight: bold;
 display: block;
 margin-top: 0.25em;
 border: 1px solid var(--color-dark);
 background-color: var(--color-light);
 padding: 0.25em 0.75em;
 border-radius: 1.25em;
 width: fit-content;
```

Empty headings



5 HTML

```
<div>
<img src="https://picsum.photos/200/300" />
</div>
<div>
<img src="https://picsum.photos/200/300" alt="" />
</div>
<div>
<img src="https://picsum.photos/200/300" alt="A random image" />
</div>
```

Img without alt tag











```
<div>
<img src="https://picsum.photos/200/300" />
</div>
<div>
<img src="https://picsum.photos/200/300" alt="" />
</div>
<div>
<img src="https://picsum.photos/200/300" alt="A random image" />
</div>
```

Img without alt tag







3 CSS

```
*:has(> img:not([alt])) {
outline: 2px dashed var(--color-debug-error);
outline-offset: 4px;
position: relative;
*:has(> img:not([alt]))::after {
content: " X Image missing alt text";
color: var(--color-dark);
font-size: 0.675rem;
font-weight: bold;
display: block;
margin-top: 0.25em;
background-color: var(--color-debug-light-error); border: 1px solid var(--color-dark);
padding: 0.25em 0.75em;
border-radius: 1.25em;
width: fit-content;
```

Img without alt tag

We need to target the direct parent, since the img tag doesn't support ::after or ::before.









```
*:has(> img:not([alt])) {
outline: 2px dashed var(--color-debug-error);
outline-offset: 4px;
position: relative;
*:has(> img:not([alt]))::after {
content: "X Image missing alt text";
color: var(--color-dark);
font-size: 0.675rem;
font-weight: bold;
display: block;
margin-top: 0.25em;
background-color: var(--color-debug-light-error); border: 1px solid var(--color-dark);
padding: 0.25em 0.75em;
border-radius: 1.25em;
width: fit-content;
```

Img without alt tag

We need to address the direct parent, since img tag does not allow :: after and ::before.









```
<div>
<label>Email address</label>
</div>
<div>
<label>Email address</label>
<label>Email address</label>
<input type="email" id="email_no_for" />
</div>
<div>
<label for="email_no_id">Email address</label>
<input type="email" />
</div>
```

Inputs without labels // Labels without "for"

Email address

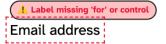
Email address

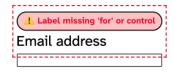
Email address



```
<div>
<label>Email address</label>
</div>
<div>
<label>Email address</label>
<input type="email" id="email_no_for" />
</div>
<div>
<label for="email_no_id">Email address</label>
<input type="email"/>
</div>
</div>
```

Inputs without labels // Labels without "for"





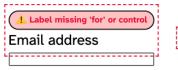
Email address								
r								Ī
127								_



```
label:not([for]):not(:has(input, select, textarea)),
label[for]+input:not([id]),
label[for]+select:not([id]),
label[for]+textarea:not([id]) {
 outline: 2px dashed var(--color-debug-error);
 outline-offset: 4px;
 position: relative;
label:not([for]):not(:has(input, select, textarea))::before,
label[for]+input:not([id])::before,
label[for]+select:not([id])::before,
label[for]+textarea:not([id])::before {
 content: " / Label missing 'for' or control";
 color: var(--color-debug-error);
 font-size: 0.675rem;
 font-weight: bold;
 display: block;
 margin-top: 0.25em;
 background-color: var(--color-debug-light-error);
 border: 1px solid var(--color-dark);
 padding: 0.25em 0.75em;
 border-radius: 1.25em;
 width: fit-content;
```

Inputs without labels // Labels without "for"

Label missing 'for' or control
Email address



Email address

We do not see a message in the latest case, because input does not allow pseudoelements.



(Icon) Button with no aria-label





```
button:has(svg):not(:has(span)):not([aria-label]) {
 outline: 2px dashed var(--color-debug-warning);
 outline-offset: 4px;
 position: relative;
button:has(svg):not(:has(span)):not([aria-label])::after {
 content: " / Icon-only button needs a label";
 color: var(--color-debug-error);
 font-size: 0.675rem;
 font-weight: bold;
 display: block;
 margin-top: 0.25em;
 background-color: var(--color-debug-light-error);
 border: 1px solid var(--color-dark);
 padding: 0.25em 0.75em;
 border-radius: 1.25em;
 width: fit-content;
```

(Icon) Button with no aria-label

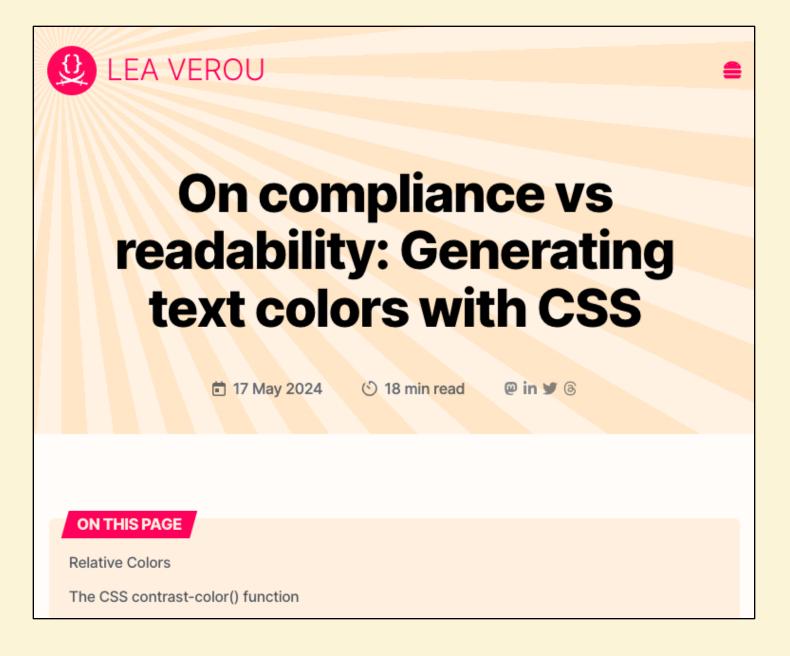
You can even enforce rules — for example, if a button contains an svg, the text must be wrapped in a span.

(You can define different warnings or errors as needed.)

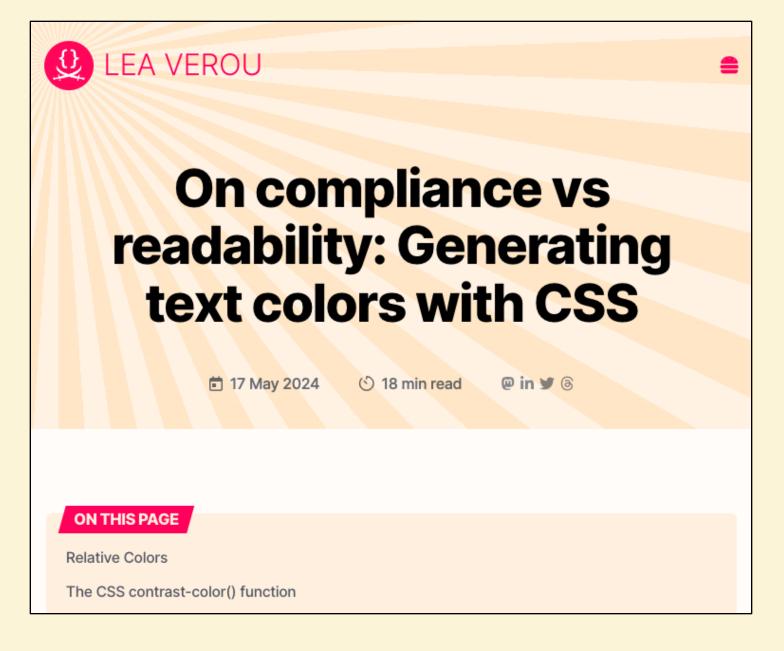


CASE 2

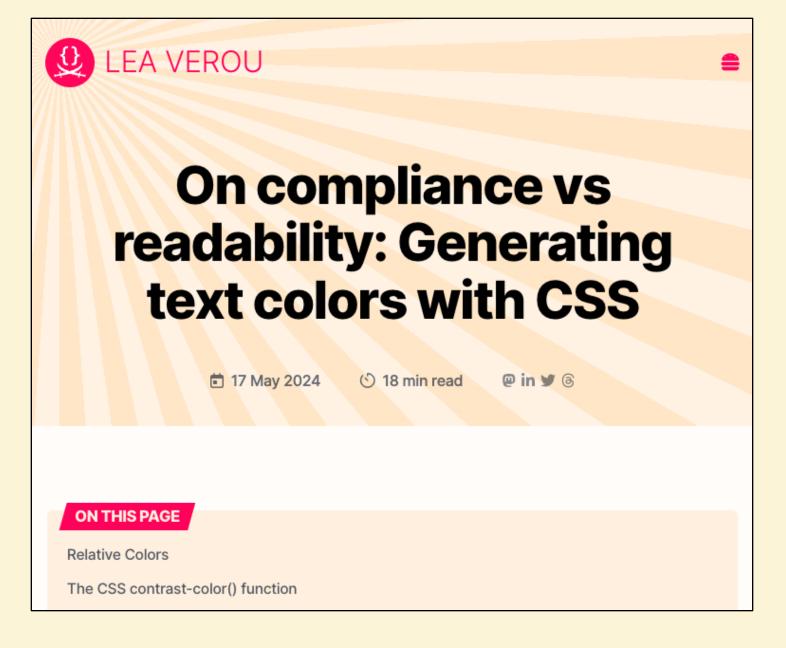
Get always enough contrast with CSS



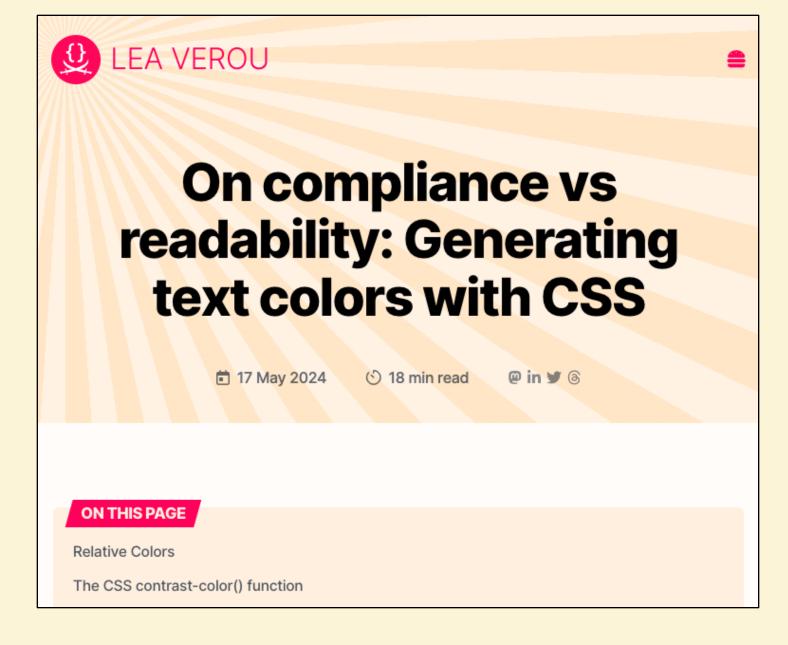
Lea Verou, the CSS Queen



- Lea Verou, the CSS Queen
- Worked at W3C as a Dev Advocate

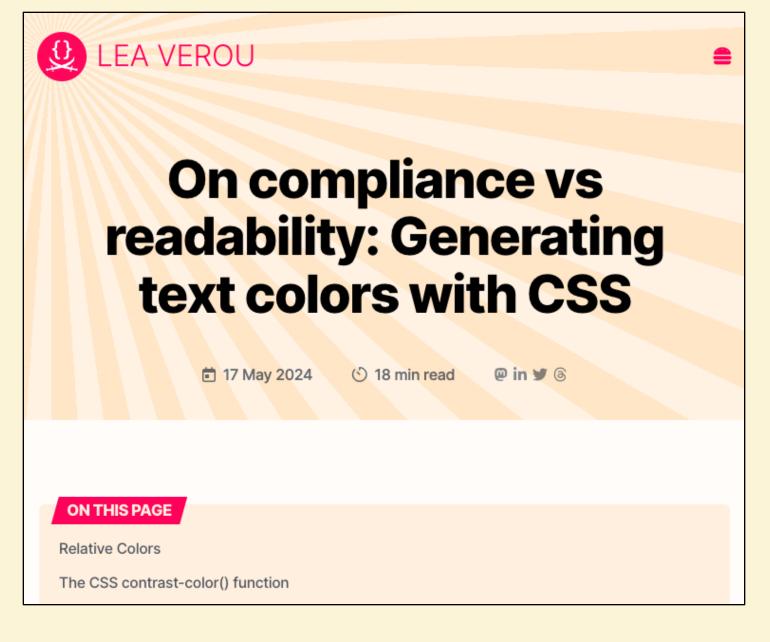


- Lea Verou, the CSS Queen
- Worked at W3C as a Dev Advocate
- Many open source projects (like PrismJS or Color.js)



- Lea Verou, the CSS Queen
- Worked at W3C as a Dev Advocate
- Many open source projects (like PrismJS or Color.js)
- Involved in many proposals like :is(),
 :has() or if() and Relative Color
 Syntax(RCS)

```
--color-lighter: hsl(from var(--color) h s calc(1 * 1.2));
--color-lighterer: oklch(from var(--color) calc(1 + 0.2) c h);
--color-alpha-50: oklab(from var(--color) l a b / 50%);
```



```
background: var(--color);
color: contrast-color(var(--color));
```

```
background: var(--color);
color: contrast-color(var(--color));
```

```
:root {
  --color: #FFF;
}
```

```
:root {
    --color: #000;
}
```

```
background: var(--color);
color: contrast-color(var(--color));
```

```
background: var(--color);
color: contrast-color(var(--color));
```

```
:root {
  --color: #FFF;
}
```

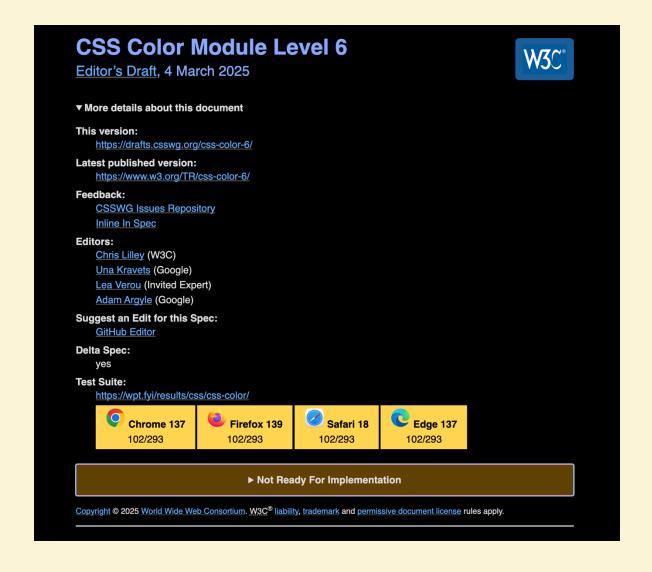
```
:root {
    --color: #000;
}
```

```
background: var(--color);
color: contrast-color(var(--color));
```

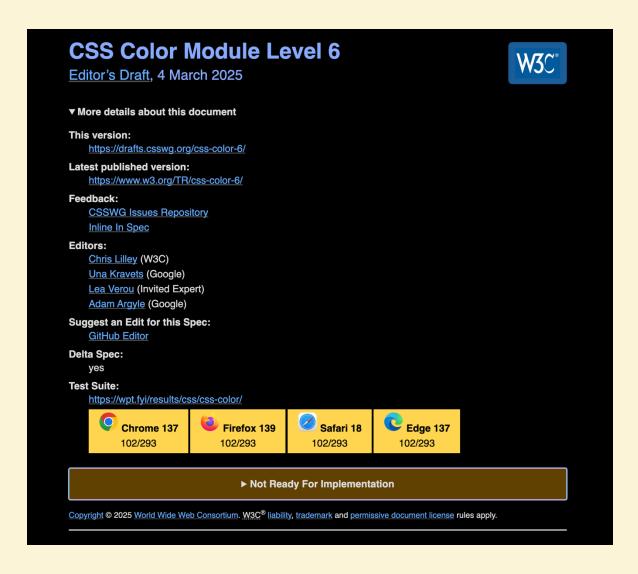
```
background: var(--color);
color: contrast-color(var(--color));
```

 The contrast-color() feature reached MVP in Level 5 (https://github.com/w3c/csswg-drafts/issues/9166)

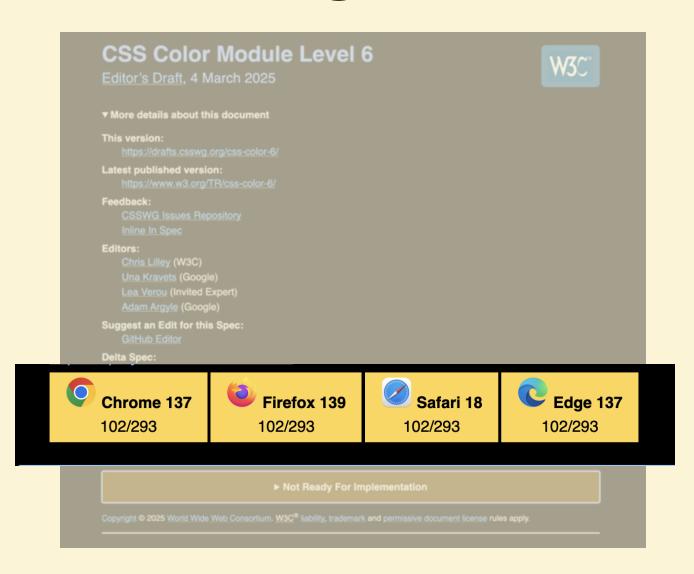
- The contrast-color() feature reached MVP in Level 5 (https://github.com/w3c/csswg-drafts/issues/9166)
- However, we can see it in the Editor's Draft in Level 6 (https://drafts.csswg.org/css-color-6/#funcdef-color-layers)



- The contrast-color() feature reached MVP in Level 5 (https://github.com/w3c/csswg-drafts/issues/9166)
- However, we can see it in the Editor's Draft in Level 6 (https://drafts.csswg.org/css-color-6/#funcdef-color-layers)
- Level 5 is for feature that build on top of previous levels (3 adds new features and 4 refines them)
- Level 6 is for more advanced or experimental features.
- As I understand it, in **Level 6**, it evolved into a **general-purpose contrast function**, giving developers more control over what fallback colors to consider which is amazing for design systems and accessibility.



- The contrast-color() feature reached MVP in Level 5 (https://github.com/w3c/csswg-drafts/issues/9166)
- However, we can see it in the Editor's Draft in Level 6 (https://drafts.csswg.org/css-color-6/#funcdef-color-layers)
- Level 5 is for feature that build on top of previous levels (3 adds new features and 4 refines them)
- Level 6 is for more advanced or experimental features.
- As I understand it, in **Level 6**, it evolved into a **general-purpose contrast function**, giving developers more control over what fallback colors to consider which is amazing for design systems and accessibility.



In the meantime...



Wait until the feature works in all browsers

See if
Lea Verou
found
a workaround



```
:root {
    /* Default color, a purple */
    --color: oklch(65% 0.15 270);
}
```

Step 1 – Choose your color

We will be using oklch color space.

Lightness: 65% - This determines how light or dark the color is.

Chroma: 0.15 - This indicates the saturation of the color, with lower values being less saturated.

Hue: 270 - This represents the color's position on the color wheel, with 270 degrees corresponding to a shade of purple.



```
:root {
 /* // A threshold value for lightness */
 --I-threshold: 62.3%;
 /* Default color, a purple */
 --color: oklch(65% 0.15 270);
```

Step 2 – Compare the bg lightness to a threshold

We then compare the lightness of the background color to a threshold value (in this case, 62.3%). Why this number? After many tests with thousands of colors, Lea Verou found out that:

- White text always passes WCAG AA when the lightness of the bg is less than 62.3%
- Black text always passes WCAG AA when the lightness of the bg is greater than 62.3%



```
:root {
    /* // A threshold value for lightness */
--I-threshold: 62.3%;

/* Default color, a purple */
--color: oklch(65% 0.15 270);
}

.contrast-text {
    /* Fallback */
    color: white;
    text-shadow: 0 0 0.05em black, 0 0 0.05em black;

@supports (color: oklch(from red I c h)) {
    --I: clamp(0, (I / var(--I-threshold) - 1) * -100000, 1);
    color: oklch(from var(--color) var(--I) 0 h);
    text-shadow: none;
}
```

Step 3 – We get black/white with clamp()

We can use the clamp() function to determine the text color based on the background color's lightness.

- if the background is darker than the threshold,
 we will get 1 as output (meaning white text)
- Otherwise, we will get 0 and therefore black text.

If the browser **does not** support this trick with oklch (**92.13% as of June 2025**), it will use a white text color with a black text shadow as a fallback.

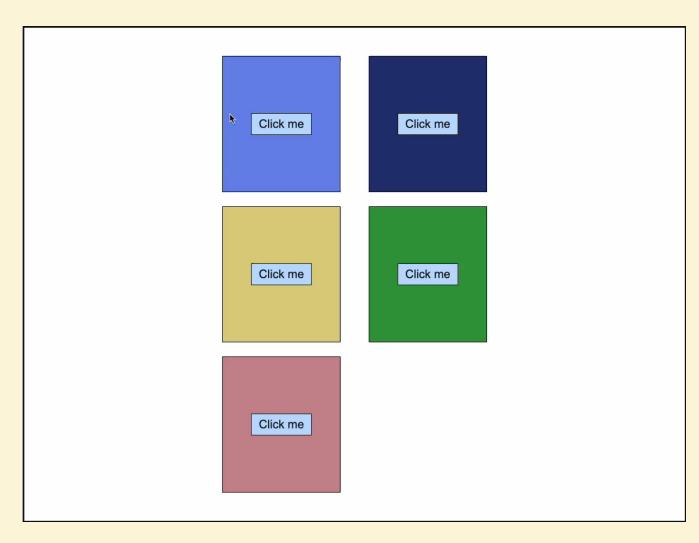


```
:root {
/* // A threshold value for lightness */
--I-threshold: 62.3%;
/* Default color, a purple */
 --color: oklch(65% 0.15 270);
.contrast-text {
/* Fallback */
 color: white;
 text-shadow: 0 0 0.05em black, 0 0 0.05em black;
 @supports (color: oklch(from red I c h)) {
  --l: clamp(0, (I / var(--l-threshold) - 1)* -100000, 1);
  color: oklch(from var(--color) var(--l) 0 h);
  text-shadow: none;
 @supports (color: contrast-color(red)) {
  color: contrast-color(var(--color));
```

Step 3 (Part 2) – We add support for the future

And also, when one day the contrastcolor() function is widely supported, we can use it directly to get the compliant text color based on the background color. This text color adapts based on background color

And what about outlines!



Conclusion

We can use **CSS** as a tool in addition to as a solution to fix some A11Y issues.

Be able to have **contrast-colors()** someday out of the box will help lots of people, so let's stay tuned!

References

- Lea Verou's blog article titled "On compliance vs readability: Generating text colors with CSS": https://lea.verou.me/blog/2024/contrast-color/
- The contrast-color() feature reached MVP in Level 5: (https://github.com/w3c/csswg-drafts/issues/9166)
- Editor's Draft in Level 6 (https://drafts.csswg.org/css-color-6/#funcdef-color-layers)
- Repo: https://github.com/manuelsanchez2/cssday-2025-a11y
- Live Page: https://cssday-2025.manuelsanchezdev.com/

Special thanks

- Manuel Matuzović, who helped me get some presentation ideas
- Kateryna Porshnieva, who presents in such a cool way and I used some of her slide layout.

Thank you!

Find a summary of this talk and some examples under https://cssday-2025.manuelsanchezdev.com/

Manuel Sánchez

