Assignment 2: Guideline Research

Guideline 1: Logical Structure

Adaptable

The core concept behind "Adaptable" is that content "can be presented in different ways without losing information or structure." This would mean that, given a lack of sensory data (e.g., sight, audio), a user can still interact in the same meaningful way with the content. Adherence to this sub-guideline benefits both permanent disabilities (e.g., blindness) as well as situational disabilities (e.g., viewing a webpage on a phone screen).

A positive example of adaptable in practice is creating the content in such a way that a user could use their own style sheet to change colors, fonts, line spacing, and more. A negative example is having a webpage with images that don't scale for different size screens or browsers, thus making the page potentially unusable on, for example, a phone or laptop.

Architecture

Within digital media, architecture refers to the way in which pages are linked together. The intent behind accessible architecture is to protect the user can reach their desired endpoint and not become confused or lost. This mirrors the concept of "Wayfinding and Orientation" in physical architecture. A core tenet behind digital architecture, according to AudioEye, is the number of clicks to get to and from the homepage. Fewer clicks are better (and ideally, fewer than four). This is helpful for those with screen readers or those who use keyboards.

A positive example of accessible architecture is making a clear menu design with fewer main navigation options and sub-menus. A negative example would be a single main navigation option with 10+ sub-menu items.

Content Structure

A strong emphasis for logical structure is on the content structure itself, that is, how the underlying code itself is written and defined. Many online guides give in-depth how-to's for accessible coding practices, such as using the correct elements (`<article>` for a self-contained portion of a webpage, `<section>` for a region of a page or article, `<p>` to denote new paragraphs). The underlying code can be analyzed by screen readers in particular in order to call out the importance of different portions of the page. Of particular interest as well is lists. Different list types denote information about the structure of the contents. For example, ordered lists imply steps or actions that must happen in sequential order, such as with a recipe. Description lists group together items by overarching terms, which can bring important meaning that would otherwise be lost.

As a positive example, a content creator can use a nested list to describe the high-level steps of a recipe (ordered) and the ingredients required for each step (unordered). As a negative example, a content creator could wrap all different sections on a page in `<div>` HTML wrappers with no appropriate labels, which would do a disservice to anyone accessing the content with a screen reader.

References

- Adaptable
  - https://www.w3.org/WAI/WCAG22/quickref/?versions=2.0#adaptable
  - https://pressbooks.library.torontomu.ca/iwacc/chapter/1-3-adaptable-level-a/
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  - https://www.audioeye.com/accessible-web-design/download-pdf/?utm_source=resourcehub
  - https://www.architecture.org/online-resources/architecture-encyclopedia/accessible-architecture
- Content Structure
  - https://web.dev/learn/accessibility/structure
  - https://www.w3.org/WAI/tutorials/page-structure/content/

Guideline 2: Plain Language

The “Plain Language” guideline recommends that content creators write in clear, concise, and well-organized ways in order to remain accessible. Below are several sub-guidelines.

Introduce, Explain, and Summarize

The “Introduce, Explain, and Summarize” sub-guideline centers on the idea that content creators should tell readers what they are going to tell them, tell them, and then remind them what they have been told. The crux of this sub-guideline is that content creators should be explicit about the information that they are presenting from start to finish. The introduction and conclusion are high-level overviews and summaries (respectively) to help ground the reader, give them context, and remind them when they finish reading. With respect to accessibility, this helps those with cognitive or learning disorders to see the information multiple times to assist with memory as well as understanding.

As a positive example, let’s say a content creator wants to explain to a user how to clip a cat’s nails. They may begin their article by writing, “Today I am going to show you the steps for safely cutting a cat’s nails”, followed by the steps, ending with, “That’s how you cut a cat’s nails!” As a negative example, the content creator might simply list the steps for cutting nails. This does not adhere to the “Introduce” and “Summarize” elements of this sub-guideline.

Keep it conversational

The "Keep it conversational" sub-guideline focuses on actions that can make readers feel like they are having a conversation with the content creator. In her 2007 book "Letting Go of the Words: Writing Web Content that Works," Redish claims that, "Good web writing is like a conversation … not a rambling dialogue but a focused conversation started by a very busy person." The idea Redish is portraying here is that readers are normally looking to get to the point quickly and easily, but in a way they can understand. This can be achieved by using contractions (to make writing "less stuffy and more natural"), using examples, and using "must" when discussing requirements.

As a positive example, a content creator presenting a recipe might write, "Doesn't this look delicious? To achieve this result, you must follow the instructions." As a negative example, the content creator might write, "The achievability of this result is dependent on the reader's attention to detail."

Put the important stuff first

"Put important stuff first" is exactly as it sounds – if there is important information for the reader, display it right away. To quote the National Institutes of Health, "If you put your most important ideas up front, your readers will be more likely to get the main message." This concept is also known as the "inverted pyramid" in journalism, a metaphor to describe how information about be presented and structured (most newsworthy first, important details next, other general information last). This is particularly important for accessibility for those who have cognitive, learning, or mental health disorders (e.g., someone with dyslexia will have an easier time getting the main point if they have fewer sentences to parse).

As a positive example, a content creator listing their favorite ice cream brand would put it in their first sentence: "My favorite ice cream company is Ben & Jerry's, and let me tell you why." As a negative example, the same content creator could spend several paragraphs describing the pros and cons of different brands before revealing their favorite brand in the second-to-last sentence.

References

- Introduce, Explain, Summarize:
  - https://webaim.org/techniques/writing/
  - https://writingcenter.uagc.edu/introductions-conclusions
- Keep it conversational
  - https://www.plainlanguage.gov/guidelines/conversational/
  - Redish, Janice Ginny. *Letting go of the words: Writing web content that works*. Morgan Kaufmann, 2007.
- Put the important stuff first:
  - https://acf.gov/digital-toolbox/content/plain-language
  - https://www.nih.gov/sites/default/files/institutes/plain-language/nih-plain-language-getting-started-brushing-up.pdf

- Po¨ ttker, Horst. "News and its communicative quality: the inverted pyramid—when and why did it appear?." *Journalism Studies* 4, no. 4 (2003): 501-511.