Slide 1 - Accessibility Guidelines Part 3

Accessibility Guidelines
Part 3: plain language
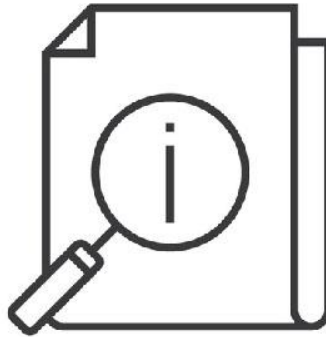
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Hello and welcome to the third and last part of the accessibility guidelines lecture.

Slide 2 - Guidelines addressing...

Parts one and two of the guidelines lectures, we discussed the original four concerns: color, text alternatives, typography, and logical structure.

In this part, we'll talk about a concern that, in my opinion, needs more attention than it gets, the use of plain language. The words 'plain language' are bolded and encircled in red on the screen.

Slide 3 - Plain language guidelines

The Plain Writing Act was established in twenty ten, but so far, it only states that federal government communications must be clear and easy to read. Nothing so far for states and cities or for the general public.

The Plain Writing Act reads: 'An act to enhance citizen access to government information and services by establishing that government documents issued to the public must be written clearly and for other purposes'.

Even though this is directed toward the federal government agencies right now, that's how the ADA started.

First was the federal government, then state and local governments, and now it's for any business offering products or services to the public. I can see this law being expanded in that same way in the near future.

In part two of this lecture, we covered readability and legibility as part of typography. They both belong there, of course, but readability is also dependent on what is called plain language.

According to plainlanguage.gov, plain language is writing that is clear, concise, well organized, and follows other best practices appropriate to the subject or field of the intended audience.

Write content in plain language and provide straightforward easy to follow instructions or explanations. Avoid jargon and complex sentences.

Accessible language ensures that the material is understandable for individuals with cognitive disabilities, literacy issues, and those who are non-native English speakers.

Plain language wasn't on the list of the most common accessibility concerns because right now, it's mostly directed at the government, thanks to the Plain Writing Act.

Slide 4 - Plain language guidelines

Plain language guidelines > semantics

- Use simple, common words
  - × Discombobulated
    - vs.
  - ✓ confused

- Use active voice
  - × The accessibility test was done by me
    - vs.
  - ✓ I conducted the accessibility test

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On this slide and the next few are some guidelines that help to ensure print products and digital products, all cross-media products, are accessible to a diverse audience, including individuals with various disabilities and differing levels of literacy.

For example, someone with cognitive impairments may read differently than someone without. A person with dyslexia will read differently than someone without dyslexia.

This is another great example of the curb cut effect. Yes, simple, clear wording will assist someone with dyslexia but it also helps someone with a lower reading level. There is no one size fits all when it comes to communication That's why plain language is so important.

The first is to use simple common words.

On the top part of the slide are two words, one with a one in red with an x next to it and one in green with a check mark next to it. This is to indicate which text meets plain language guidelines and which should not be used. There's a saying from author Mark Twain that sums up sums this up nicely: 'Don't use a five dollar word when a fifty cent word will do'.

In this example, why use the word discombobulated when confused says the same thing and is much more recognizable?

The second guideline is to use active voice. The red x wording is 'the accessibility test was done by me'. The phrase 'was done' is passive voice.

The green check mark wording is 'I conducted the accessibility test'. Passive voice often starts with is, are, were, was, can be, will be, then followed by a past participle.

By using 'conducted' instead and rearranging some of the wording, we've removed the passive voice and replaced it with active voice, which strengthens the writing and also makes it more clear.

Slide 5 - Plain language guidelines

Plain language guidelines > semantics

- Avoid double negatives
  - × You can't not read the textbooks to pass the quizzes

    vs.
  - ✓ Read the textbooks to pass the quizzes

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Another guideline is to avoid using double negatives. These can be confusing to those with cognitive disabilities, but they also can be confusing to anyone.

The red x writing on the screen is 'you can't not read the textbooks to pass the quizzes'. Wait. 'You can't not...' So that's confusing.

This is often seen in advertising and marketing. For example, if you want to opt out of being on a mailing list, sometimes you will see 'don't opt me out'; it's a tactic to trick users into clicking that. Or I don't want to save thirty percent off my entire per purchase. It's almost like they're guilting you in or prodding you into saying, 'well, yeah, I want to save thirty percent!' It's a dark pattern in marketing, meaning it's trying to get you to do something that you may not want to do.

The green check mark wording is much clearer and doesn't make you need to interpret the wording: 'Read the textbooks to pass the quizzes'. Simple.

Slide 6 - Plain language guidelines

Plain language guidelines > semantics

- Avoid (or at least explain) abbreviations, acronyms
    - × I'm a member of UXPA and HFES
      vs.
    - ✓ I'm a member of the User Experience Professionals Association (UXPA) and the Human Factors and Ergonomics Society (HFES)

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The final guideline under semantics is to avoid abbreviations and acronyms. If you can't avoid them, then spell out the acronym on first use and add the acronym in parenthesis after.

The red x writing is 'I'm a member of UXPA and HFES'. Someone not familiar with user experience and human computer interaction fields won't know what these are.

It's best to spell them out and follow with the acronym as demonstrated on the green check mark writing: 'I'm a member of the User Experience Professionals Association, parenthesis, UXPA, end parenthesis, and the Human Factors and Ergonomics Society, parenthesis HFES, end parenthesis'. Now if you refer to UXPA or HFES in additional text, users will understand.

Slide 7 - Plain language guidelines

Plain language guidelines > readability

- Use legible text size, readable font families
- Use left-aligned text alignment
- Limit sentence and paragraph sizes
- Use headings
- Bullet points are your friend!
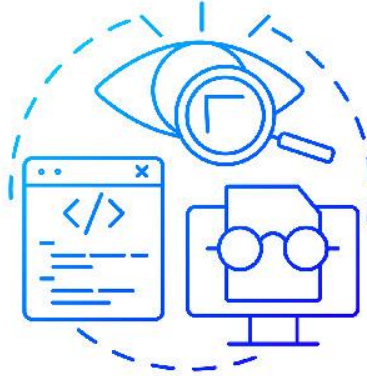
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Another recurring theme in many of the guidelines is... is readability.

And as mentioned in the typography readability guidelines, your design should utilize a legible text size with a font from a readable family and the text content should be left aligned.

Additional guidelines include limiting the sentence and paragraph sizes.

You may have noticed that in the text in these lectures, the text on the slides do not go the full length of the slide. There's a reason for that. Think about a textbook or another book that you've read that is a large size. You'll notice most of the time the text does not go the full distance.

The reason for that is research has shown that the longer the line of text, the more difficult it gets to read and comprehend it. Online... there's a there's a limited number of characters that need to be in place and that will probably depend on the size of the... the dimensions of the site and also who your audience is.
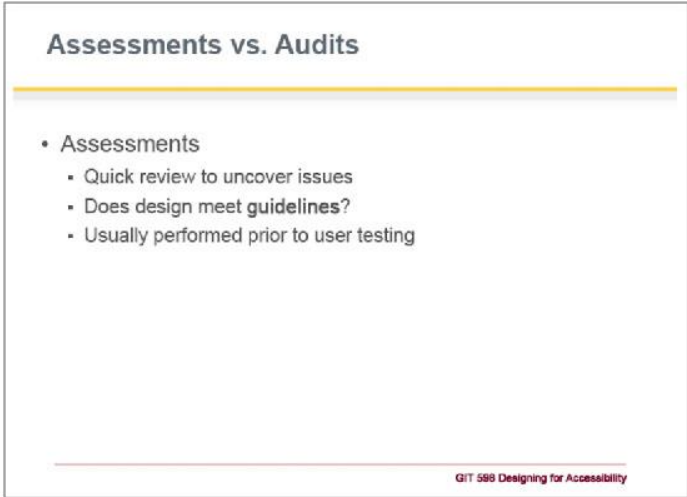
Another readability guideline is to use headings. Headings help break up text visually and topically.

So if someone is looking at a very long page of text, if there's nothing breaking up what each paragraph or group of paragraphs or whatever it is, if there's nothing breaking up what those mean, users may just leave that page because they don't want to read through everything for that one little tidbit that they want to see. So use headings to visually and contextually break up the text.

The final one is while... white space is your friend. Bullet points are your friend as well. A good idea when creating presentations like this: Put bullet points on the screen and then you discuss them further in your slide notes or any notes that you have with you.

Slide 8 - Plain language guidelines

Here's an example of readability.

This is a slide on the right side of the screen that you'll be seeing in a future lecture.

So there is a black bar that has Before and then there are my slide notes, which are paragraphs of text. Not as easy to read, I would say.

Then on the right side of the screen where the screenshot is is after we have bullet points.

So this one is about assessments versus audits. 'Assessments: quick review to uncover issues, does design meet guidelines, usually performed prior to usability testing'. That's short and to the point.

And that versus: Assessments can be done quickly and efficiently to measure adherence to guidelines. Since assessments are a quick review, several can be performed throughout the design process, including one prior to use user testing.

Slide 9 - View information for the guidelines assignment

Congratulations! You made it through the guidelines lectures. Thank you for watching, and please keep these in mind as you are looking at the information for the guidelines assignment.