

Practical Web Accessibility Guide

A practical guide to identify accessibility gaps, prioritize improvements, and ensure inclusive web experiences.

Purpose

This guide is designed to guide teams in systematically improving the accessibility of websites and web applications. It covers essential technical optimizations, UI/UX adjustments, and compliance with accessibility standards (such as ADA and WCAG) to ensure your digital products are inclusive for users with diverse abilities.

When to use

- During initial website or web app design and development to embed accessibility from the start.
- When conducting accessibility audits or reviews of existing sites and applications.
- Prior to major redesigns, feature rollouts, or platform migrations to identify potential accessibility risks.
- As part of ongoing maintenance to ensure compliance with evolving standards and user needs.

How to use

- Review the checklist sections based on your project's current accessibility maturity—quick wins, medium-level testing, or long-term refactoring.
- Assign responsible team members for each item to ensure accountability.
- Use the provided resources and tools linked within each section to support testing and implementation.
- Track progress and updates regularly to maintain ongoing accessibility improvements.

Quick list of things to look into

- Technical optimizations - optimize for screen readers and assistive technology - see tools and standards below
- Assess color scheme and color combinations - see tools and standards below
- Optimize for people with cognitive disabilities - see resources below
- Adhering to existing standards such as ADA and WCAG would be the best way to ensure the inclusiveness and a higher degree of access of the website to various groups of people with different needs.

Typical short-term & easy improvements

- Fix/replace some of the non-compliant color combinations (visual disabilities)
- Fix/replace some of the non-compliant markup (visual disabilities)
- Remove important text from images so it can be read by screen readers (visual disabilities)
- Simplify/optimize the UX (cognitive disabilities)
- Simplify/optimize text (cognitive disabilities)
- Add captions and transcriptions to media/video/audio content (hearing disabilities)

UI/UX

- Avoid non-compliant color combinations
- Avoid using text that is smaller than 16px (see website footer, logo etc.)
- Avoid using text on top of high contrast and colorful images (e.g. website hero, homepage cards) to improve legibility
- Reduce complexity and simplify the UI as much as possible. This includes:
 - Streamlined and simplified navigation (multilevel navs etc.)
 - Reducing the amount of text
 - Clarifying main goal and main action for each page on the website
 - Adjust text to 6-8 grade reading level
 - Adopt principles of minimalism and mobile-first design
- Ask for a consultation with a UI/UX designer and get advice on accessibility improvements
- Investigate and test some of the available accessibility plugins & tools

Medium level

- Conduct advanced manual & user testing, potentially do an audit using one of the paid services
- Identify the need for accessibility widgets (based on user feedback & audit results)
- Implement widgets if necessary
- Retest the website to ensure that 3rd party widgets are not causing issues with users' assistive tools and technologies
- Implement a user feedback (if any)

Long-term & significant changes

- Full refactor with accessibility in mind meaning:

- Full technical compliance (at least WCAG level AA)
- New brand/style guide and fully compliant color scheme and component library
- Revised and improved navigation, search functionality, user journeys
- Content/text rewrite according to the new improved standards
- Clean, concise and minimal page design & templates
- Clear accessibility standards for all types content (video/audio, text, images etc.)
- Implement accessibility compliance testing as part of the build/deploy/QA process

Useful resources

Optimizing for people with cognitive disabilities

<https://www.w3.org/TR/coga-usable/>

<https://ncdae.org/resources/articles/cognitive/>

<https://lilianna11y.com/2017/11/06/5-ways-to-make-website-app-accessible-for-people-with-adhd/>

<https://www.maxability.co.in/2014/11/23/web-accessibility-dyslexia/>

<https://www.w3.org/WAI/cognitive/>

Optimizing for people with different impairments

<https://developers.google.com/web/fundamentals/accessibility>

WCAG checklists

<https://yale.app.box.com/s/l6pgsff9giglfusm3b0g3ej6g7olm0ae>

<https://webaim.org/standards/wcag/checklist>

<https://www.wuhcag.com/wcag-checklist/>

https://kma.global/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/WCAG_2.1_Checklist.pdf

Testing

<https://frozenrockets.nl/articles/en/user-testing-with-disabled-people> - user testing guide

<https://adasitecompliance.com/what-is-a-manual-accessibility-audit/> - manual audit guide

Google lighthouse - testing tool

<https://www.deque.com/free-accessibility-test/> - testing tool

(also have advanced tools and do audits/assessments)

<https://color.a11y.com/?wc3> - testing tool

<https://www.accessibilitychecker.org/> - testing tool

<https://www.webaccessibility.com/> - testing tool (also have advanced tools and do audits/assessments)

<https://wave.webaim.org/> - testing tool

<https://accessibe.com/ace> - testing tool

<https://remediate.co/> - testing tool

WordPress plugins (may be useful for the public site)

<https://wordpress.org/plugins/wp-accessibility/>

<https://wordpress.org/plugins/wp-accessibility-helper/>

<https://wordpress.org/plugins/pojo-accessibility/>

<https://wordpress.org/plugins/tool-for-ada-section-508-and-seo/>

<https://wordpress.org/plugins/screen-reader-with-fontsize/>

<https://wordpress.org/plugins/wp-ada-compliance-check-basic/>

Widgets/toolbars

<https://www.audioeye.com/> (also do manual audits)

<https://maxaccess.io/>

<https://accessibe.com/>

<https://userway.org/>

<https://maxaccess.io/>

Advanced platforms, consultants, services

<https://www.essentialaccessibility.com/>

<https://www.accessibility.works/>

<https://www.deque.com/>

<https://www.a11yproject.com/>

<https://usablenet.com/>

<https://siteimprove.com/en-us/accessibility/>

<https://adasitecompliance.com/>