

Write accessible content

Accessible writing makes your content easier for everyone to consume. Consider the following tips on how to write with accessibility in mind.

Write plainly

Documentation is only as good as what people can get out of it. If the writing is too complicated, they won't be able to use it. Plain language improves accessibility.

- Keep sentences short. They should be around 20-25 words at most.
- Use simple words. Use words, or combinations of word, with 1-2 syllables when possible. For example, use "to" instead of "in order to".
- Use contractions.
- Use tools like [Hemingway Editor](#) to measure the readability of your text. To meet WCAG standards, aim for a readability level of grade 8 and lower.

Heading structure

Headings are critical when creating accessible content. They provide screen reader users with the ability to jump directly to specific content, which can save them time.

Work with the system in which you are writing. All popular tools like Microsoft Word, PowerPoint, and Open office provide style and formatting options to help you build the proper structure into your documents. Use the styles and formatting options provided in your chose content editor tool.

Example: Heading 1 (<h1>)

The numbers in the heading style create structural context for the screen reader and help non-visual users understand the content.

Emphasize content

Screen readers do not identify font styles, including the following:

- Color
- Bold
- Italics
- Underline
- Strikethrough

Use these styles to provide visual breaks, do not use them as the only way to indicate importance or convey information.

Example: Red text looks like an alert. Screen readers will not announce the color of the text is red. As such, users miss the cue and don't know it's an alert

When you need to give a strong visual cue, make sure that you use an accessible alternative. Use an exclamation mark at the end of your sentence if it is important. Screen readers intonate exclamation and question marks. This means the tool will not read "question mark" but instead will lend a questioning tone as it reads a question aloud.

Alt text

Providing alternative descriptions for images and content allows screen readers to describe the image to non-visual users.

For decorative images, leave the alt text field blank. The screen reader will ignore the image in this case. An image is decorative when it doesn't add to the information on the page.

If you have an image that adds to the information on the page, you will want to add descriptive alt text for screen readers.

Example: If you have an image showing the tools available in a User Interface, don't just say "image of UI tools" in your alt text. Explain what the image is displaying. Be concise, clear, and descriptive. You do not need to say "Image of" as the assistive tools already know it's an image.

Infographics

An infographic is a narrative that tells the same story the users get from the visual.

Infographics require a text alternative. The text alternative should be on the page immediately following the infographic. Include an anchor link at the top of the page to view the text alternative.

[See an example of an infographic with a text alternative](#)

Links

It is critical to make your links descriptive. Every link should describe what the user can expect to find when they click on it.

This is key for the Links List tool that screen readers provide. This tool only lists the links on the page, nothing else. There is no additional context for the link.

Consider these tips as you create your links:

- **Avoid using generic phrases.** Phrases such as "click here" or "see more" are not descriptive on what a user will see or where a user goes when clicking on the link. The Links List tool will read the text of the link exactly as entered. Use descriptive text for your links so users know what clicking on the link will do or where it will take them.
- **Avoid web addresses or URLs.** Web addresses and URLs are not considered informative and shouldn't be used. The screen reader reads each letter individually. Instead, make the text descriptive.

- **Avoid opening in a new window.** Opening links to a new window can be disorienting. Keep them to a minimum and be sure to tell your users when you are using a new window.

Lists and tables

Let the tools in which you are creating content do the work.

Use the bullet, numbered list, and table tools in the content editor, or view the source and use the correct HTML tags.

Lists

Bulleted list HTML: ``

Numbered list HTML: ``

Properly created lists inform the screen reader how many items are in the list, and will read the number for each item in a numbered list.

Tables

Use lists over tables when you can! Tables can be made accessible, but screen reader users need to know advanced keystroke commands to navigate and understand tables.

Use column headers (`<th>`) which causes the screen reader to re-announce the column heading for each cell as the user navigates through. This gives the user context for each cell content.