

The Basics

Some Basic Tips for Designing Accessible Web Sites

1. Keep it simple. Unless you are a web programmer and familiar accessibility standards it is best to use a standard HTML code. If you *are* familiar with web coding and scripting languages you may want to consider using CSS (Cascading Style Sheets). CSS is the preferred coding of many experts in the field of web accessibility because it provides the opportunity to design attractive, uniform web pages that are also highly effective to its users.
2. When designing web pages you should be sure to use proper markup, using HTML tags the way they were intended. For example, you should identify headers with `<h1>`, `<h2>`, tags, list items with `` and `` tags, paragraphs with the `<p>` tag, and so on. You should also provide markup and meaningful titles to frames and data tables to describe them. Frames and tables are not inaccessible to screen readers but they can be disorienting as screen readers cannot scan them quickly.
3. Use as much real text as possible, especially with headers and navigation links. Text within graphics does not enlarge without special software and they often look pixilated and blurred when enlarged. When possible, you should limit or eliminate text within graphics. Using real text also allows users to set their own browser settings with ease.
4. Although real text is preferred you may use images and simple graphics when designing accessible web sites. You should always provide an "alt" attribute to each image or graphic you display. Screen readers only recognize text, by applying an "alt" tags you inform the screen reader what the image is conveying. You should especially apply "alt" tags to linked images that control page navigation. Most web editing software like Dreamweaver and Frontpage offer alt tag field options. You can also add an "alt" tag to an image using standard HTML code. See example below.

Example: ``

5. Avoid using complicated fonts in your content. Cursive and decorative fonts are often hard to read. For web content you can use either standard Serif fonts such as Times, Palatino, Courier, and Bookman or you can use San-Serif fonts such as Arial, Verdana, and Helvetica. You should also avoid using Italics for persons with low vision.
6. Avoid using colorful or patterned backgrounds and text for those who may have low-vision, blindness, and color-blindness. It is best to use a standard background with high-white content and dark text. If a dark background with high-white content is preferred by a user they can change the browser settings for better accommodation.
7. When posting downloadable documents and publications on an accessible web site make certain they can be downloaded in html version as well as an acrobat version. PDF files are not always accessible to screen readers. You may also want to add text versions as they are read easiest by screen readers.
8. Use clear and simple language in your content. In other words, write well. The better you write, the better you will be understood. This is important for those who have cognitive impairments.
9. Last, but not least, you should check your web pages for their accessibility using an online accessibility tester. These services allow you to test your pages for free to make certain they are in compliance with the existing accessibility guidelines (Section 508 and W3C WCAG). Once your site has passed the test you can then post an accessibility compliance logo or 'statement of accessibility' on your site. Some validation tools include: W3C Validation Markup Service (<http://validator.w3.org/>) and Watchfire WebXACT (<http://www.webxact.com>)
10. To learn more about Web Accessibility please visit the following web sites: World Wide Web Consortium (<http://www.w3c.org>), ADA Section 508 (<http://www.section508.gov>) and Web Accessibility in Mind (<http://www.webaim.org>)

For more information please contact:

**Crystal Smith, North Carolina Office on Disability and Health
Phone/TTY: 919-843-3531 or Email: smith@mail.fpg.unc.edu**