

ACCESSIBILITY CHECKER

WAVE CAN HELP YOU EVALUATE THE ACCESSIBILITY OF YOUR WEB CONTENT.

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With the click of a mouse, the world can be "at your fingertips"—that is, if you can use a mouse... and see the screen... and hear the audio—in other words, if you don't have a disability of any kind.


This introduction should help you understand how people with disabilities use the web and what you can do to make your website more accessible.

SEMANTIC STRUCTURE


LINKS




MAJOR CATEGORIES OF DISABILITY TYPES




Visual



Hearing



Motor



Cognitive

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Creating a web page with semantic structure gives the web page more meaning. It makes web pages more accessible for anyone who uses a screen reader to read web pages aloud, as well as for search bots and other programs that need to interpret the content of a web page irrespective of its design.



USING HEADINGS FOR CONTENT STRUCTURE

When encountering a lengthy web page, sighted users often scroll the page quickly and look for big, bold text (headings) to get an idea of the structure and content of the page. Screen reader and other assistive technology users also have the ability to navigate web pages by heading structure.

Pages should be structured in a hierarchical manner. Technically, lower degree headings should be contained within headings of the next highest degree (i.e., one should not skip heading levels, such as from a heading 2 to a heading 4, going down the document).

Using Headings Correctly

Do not use text formatting, such as bold to give the visual appearance of headings - use actual heading 2-4 for all content headings. Assistive technologies and other browsers rely upon the literal markup of the page to determine structure. Items that are bolded or display in a bigger font are not interpreted to be structural elements.

Likewise, do not use headers to achieve visual results only. For instance, if you want to highlight or emphasize an element within your content that is not a heading (such as I did with the previous sentence), do not use heading elements to achieve the visual appearance you want instead use bold or italics.

USING LISTS FOR CONTENT STRUCTURE AND CORRECTLY

Lists also convey a hierarchical content structure. Each of type of lists has rules regarding their use as well.

As with heading, lists should be used correctly and for the right purposes.

- Unordered and ordered lists should always contain list items
- Empty lists are incorrect structure
- Lists should never be used for merely indenting or other layout purposes

Unordered List

Unordered (bulleted) lists should be used when there is no order of sequence or importance.

- List Item
- List Item
- List Item

Ordered List

Ordered (numbered) lists suggest a progression or sequence.

1. List item
2. List item
3. List item

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Hypertext links are one of the most basic elements of HTML, as its name implies (HTML stands for HyperText Markup Language). As such, making hypertext links accessible is one of the most basic and most important aspects of web accessibility. For the most part, this is an easy task. Standard hypertext links work with all technologies and platforms and users of all abilities can access them, whether directly or through the use of some sort of assistive technology.

As might be expected though, there is more to hypertext link accessibility than simply creating a link. Some types of links are more accessible than others, and some types of links are completely inaccessible to people with certain types of disabilities. Because links are so basic to the functionality of web content, inaccessible links are one of the most severe barriers to overall accessibility.

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Avoid uninformative link text phrases

Links are more useful when they make sense out of context. In most cases, links should be words or phrases. Avoid non-informative link phrases such as:

- click here
- here
- more
- read more
- link to [some link destination]
- info

In fact, the phrase "click here" is unnecessary, even if it precedes a more meaningful phrase. For example, a link that says "click here to access today's weather" can be shortened to "today's weather." In some cases it may make sense to precede a link phrase with "more" or "read more about," (e.g. "more about global warming"), but if these extra words can be avoided, it is probably best to avoid them (e.g. "global warming" may convey the same meaning as "more about global warming," depending on the context).

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Link Appearance

Links should look like links, and nothing else should. Users may get frustrated if they try to click on textual phrases or graphics that look like links but are not. They will also be frustrated if they have to move their mouse all over the page trying to discover links that do not look like links.

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Email Links

By default, web browsers handle email links differently when clicked by opening an email program (e.g., MS Outlook, Apple Mail, etc.) or webmail service (e.g., Yahoo Mail, Google Mail, etc.). Most users do not know use these programs or services or for the most part know they change it to the program or service they do use. Because of this, use the email address as the link text so users know it's an email link to avoid loading unwanted programs.

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Links to New Windows

There is much debate about the merits of links that open in new windows. Some people would like to ban them entirely. Others concede that they can be appropriate at times, but nearly everyone agrees that users ought to be alerted when the link does not open in the current window.

The accessibility issue is that some users can get confused with the new windows or tabs. Newer screen readers alert the user when a link opens a new window, though only after the user clicks on the link. Older screen readers do not alert the user at all. Sighted users can see the new window open, but users with cognitive disabilities may have difficulty interpreting what just happened.

It is up to the authors to alert the users when they set links to open in a new window. Authors can add this information to links by placing "opens in new window" in the ToolTip.

Most common use for setting a link to open in a New Window:

- External websites
- Non-HTML files

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Links to Non-HTML Resources

Users should generally be alerted to links that lead to non-HTML resources, such as PDF files, Word files, PowerPoint files, and so on. However, there is some debate as to whether the content author or the browser should be the one to alert the user. The trouble is that none of the browsers or screen readers currently alert the user at all, so the debate is more theoretical than practical.

A link to a PowerPoint slide show, for example, could say "Fall 2014 Opening Meeting Presentation (PowerPoint)", and a link to a PDF file could say "Academic Forgiveness Form (PDF)".

Important

When identifying the link file type, this additional content should be presented inside the link, rather than just after it, so that the information is presented with the link if a screen reader users navigates by links or reads a link list.

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URLs as links

Web addresses, or URLs, present two types of challenges:

1. Readability
2. Length

URLs are not always human-readable or screen-reader friendly. Many URLs contain combinations of numbers, letters, ampersands, dashes, underscores, and other characters that make sense to scripts and databases but which make little or no sense to the average person. In most cases, it is better to use human-readable text instead of the URL.

Does this mean that URLs should never be used as links? No. If the URL is relatively short (such as a site's homepage), the URL may be used as the link text. The key is to be considerate of screen reader users who must listen to the longer, less intelligible URLs.

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Alternative text for images used as links

When images are used as links, the alternative text performs the function of link text. As with linked text, the alt text of linked images does not need to inform users that the link is a link, since this is already presented. The alternative text should convey the content of the image and the function of the link. In some cases, the content of the image and function of the link are the same, so this text can be very succinct (e.g., alt="Course Schedule"). In some cases, it may require more text (e.g., alt="Chart showing 10% enrollment increase over the last decade with link to more enrollment data.").

Important

Images that are the only thing within a link must have alternative text. If a link image does not have alternative text, a screen reader may read the image file name or the URL being linked to.

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Links to Anchors on the Same Page

Links are often used to jump to another location on the present page. The Article Contents links above are an example. In-page links can provide great accessibility functionality, particularly with "Skip" links to bypass page navigation or links to jump over lengthy lists of links or other complex or potentially confusing information.

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GATHER HERE. GO FAR.