

ACCESSIBILITY

AN OVERVIEW OF BEST PRACTICES FOR EVERYONE

Section 508, WCAG, and ADA



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Understanding accessibility is like baking a cake. It's easier when you have everything you need and you see how it all works together. [Public Domain Image]

INTRO TO ACCESSIBILITY

“We have some ‘splaining to do.”
–Lucy Ricardo to Ethel Mertz, probably



Web accessibility refers to the practice of designing and developing websites that can be used by all individuals, regardless of their physical or cognitive abilities. The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) from the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) and Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act from the US government provide best practices for making websites accessible to everyone. In this guide, we will outline key web accessibility considerations and provide tips for creating accessible websites. To begin, here are a few things to consider while creating your website content.

Use clear and concise language:

Using simple and concise language on your website can help all users understand your content more easily. Avoid using jargon or overly technical terms that may be confusing to some users. When using acronyms or abbreviations, make sure to provide explanations or definitions. Consider

using plain language that is easy to read and understand.

Use appropriate headings and structure:

Using appropriate headings and structure on your website can make it easier for users to navigate and find the content they are looking for. Use headings to break up long blocks of text and organize your content into logical sections. Make sure to use heading levels correctly, with H1 as the main title and H2, H3, and so on for subheadings.

Provide alternative text for images:

Images are an important part of many websites, but they can be difficult for some users to access. Providing alternative text for images can make your website more accessible to users who use screen readers or have visual impairments. Alternative text should describe the content and function of the image in a concise and meaningful way. It's best to use a single complete sentence in alternative text to get your idea across.

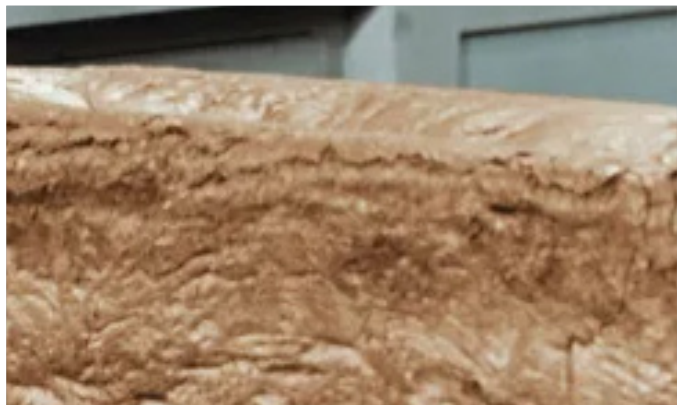
Use color with care:

Color can be a powerful tool for conveying information and creating visual interest on your website. However, it is important to use color with care to ensure that all users can access your content. Make sure that text is readable against the background color and avoid using color alone to convey meaning.

Right: Lucy and Ethel are ready to bake a cake, or work at the chocolate factory...or both. Both.

[Public Domain Image]







Use color with care: (cont.)

Consider using other visual cues, such as icons or patterns, in addition to color.

Provide captions and transcripts for multimedia content:

Multimedia content, such as videos and podcasts, can be difficult for some users to access. Providing captions or transcripts for multimedia content can make it more accessible to users who are deaf or hard of hearing, or who cannot access the content for other reasons. Captions and transcripts should be accurate and synchronized with the content.

Ensure keyboard accessibility:

Not all users can use a mouse or other pointing device to navigate your website. Ensuring keyboard accessibility can make your website more accessible to users who rely on keyboard navigation. Make sure that all interactive elements on your website can be accessed and activated using the keyboard alone.

Test your website for accessibility:

Testing your website for accessibility is an important part of ensuring that it can be used by all users. There are

“By following best practices from the WCAG and Section 508, you can create a website that is accessible to everyone.”

many tools available that can help you identify accessibility issues on your website, such as the WAVE tool from WebAIM. You should also consider user testing with individuals with disabilities to get feedback on the accessibility of your website.

In Conclusion:

Creating an accessible website is an important part of ensuring that all users can access and use your content. By following best practices from the WCAG and Section 508, you can create a website that is accessible to everyone. Remember to use clear and concise language, provide alternative text for images, use appropriate headings and structure, provide captions and transcripts for multimedia content, ensure keyboard accessibility, and test your website for accessibility.

At Left - Ethel: How much yeast did you need?
Lucy: 13 cakes!
Ethel: (looks at cookbook) Lucy, THREE cakes!
Lucy: Oh, well, they're small. It won't make much difference!

[Public Domain Images]

Are we twinsies?!

COMPARING GUIDELINES



ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) and Section 508 are two sets of guidelines that are designed to ensure that digital content is accessible to people with disabilities. While there is some overlap between these guidelines, there are also some key differences.

Applicability:

The ADA applies to all types of entities, including businesses, government agencies, and non-profit organizations, while Section 508 applies only to federal agencies and their contractors. This also extends to those receiving federal

Top: “Don’t ask questions. Just get a knife and a fork and a bottle of ketchup and follow me to the biggest barbecue in the whole world.”

– Lucy Ricardo

[Public Domain Image]

Right: "I was going to.
But, then I asked myself,
'Why?'"
– Lucy Ricardo

[Public Domain Image]

funding. Many state and local websites opt to use federal standards as their guidelines, especially those that interact regularly with federal agencies.

Scope:

The ADA covers all aspects of accessibility, including physical accessibility, while Section 508 specifically addresses electronic and information technology accessibility.

Compliance level:

The ADA has no specific technical standards for accessibility, instead, it uses a general "reasonable accommodations" standard. In contrast, Section 508 provides specific technical standards for accessibility, which must be met in order to be considered compliant.

Enforcement:

The ADA is enforced through private lawsuits, while Section 508 is enforced through complaints filed with the Department of Justice (DOJ) or the General Services Administration (GSA).



Documentation:

The ADA does not require documentation of accessibility efforts, while Section 508 requires federal agencies and contractors to document their efforts to comply with the guidelines.

In summary, ADA and Section 508 guidelines are both aimed at making digital content accessible to people with disabilities, but they differ in their applicability, scope, compliance level, enforcement, and documentation requirements.

"Many state and local websites opt to use federal standards as their guidelines, especially those that interact regularly with federal agencies."



RESOURCES FOR THE ROAD

1. The official website for ADA: <https://ada.gov/>
2. The Section 508 website: <https://section508.gov/>
3. The Access Board's website: <https://www.access-board.gov/>
4. The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) from the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C): <https://www.w3.org/WAI/>
5. WEBAIM: <https://webaim.org/>
6. The WAVE accessibility tool: <https://wave.webaim.org/>

"You mean to tell us that we have equal rights, but you certainly don't give us a chance to act like it."
– Ethel Mertz

[Public Domain Image]

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 508 are important pieces of legislation that aim to ensure accessibility for individuals with disabilities. The ADA prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities and requires businesses and organizations to provide reasonable accommodations, while Section 508 mandates that federal agencies make their electronic and information technology accessible to people with disabilities.

Compliance with these laws not only benefits individuals with disabilities, but it also helps organizations expand their



reach and improve their overall user experience. Additionally, it is essential to regularly review and update accessibility policies and practices to ensure that they remain effective and inclusive.

PRACTICAL APPROACHES

“You can help maintain a consistent look and feel by following simple practices.”



Lucy: I want the names to be unique and euphonious.
Ricky: Okay, “Unique” if it’s a boy and “Euphonious” if it’s a girl.

[Public Domain Image]

1. Bold and italics are best used sparingly to emphasize a portion of your text. Overuse lessens their impact.
Practical Approach: Bold or italics might be fine for one or two words, but should be avoided in long strings of text.
2. Underlined text on a web site looks like a hyperlink.
Practical Approach: Avoid the confusing underline.
3. A common misconception pertains to ALL CAPS. While the reader may notice it, they will generally find it difficult to read.
Practical Approach: All caps may be fine for ONE OR TWO words, but should be avoided in long strings of text.
4. Avoid the use of colored text. Those with vision impairments will have difficulty reading light text on a light background and vice versa.
Practical Approach: There must be a high contrast. To avoid these issues, all coloration takes place in the portal CSS.
5. Maintain a consistent look and feel by:
 - Keeping all text justified left with no indentation
 - Keep paragraphs short and to the point
 - Use “Save for Web” to optimize your images
 - Add descriptive “ALT” text for images in content
 - Add formatted size for documents i.e. [PDF, 252kb]
 - Keep files small: under 50kb for an image, and 2MB for a document
 - Always use descriptive link text. Do not use ‘Download,’ ‘Click here,’ or text without context



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