

# Digital Accessibility



## Understanding digital accessibility

### What is digital accessibility?

It means preparing online information and designing digital experiences that can be interacted regardless of people's abilities, circumstances, environment or the device they use.

Accessibility is an important goal for websites, as it gives all users equal access to your content. This covers: web, social, apps, videos and more.

It benefits a wide range of people including those with:

- ◆ visual, auditory, physical, speech, cognitive and neurological disabilities
- ◆ temporary disabilities such as a broken arm
- ◆ changing abilities due to aging
- ◆ low literacy levels

Accessible content enables people to make independent decisions, and provide greater opportunity for participation, interaction, education and employment.

## Why is digital accessibility important?

The need for digital content has never been greater. Technology underpins how we get things done – both at work and at play. Whether you want to attract customers to your business or provide information to your group, it is essential that your content is accessible.

Being accessible means that your digital content is:

- ◆ easy to find
- ◆ user-focussed and accessible across all devices
- ◆ written and structured so that it contains useful, timely, informative, and up-to-date content

## The abilities and expectations of individuals varies

Accessibility is all about supporting flexibility for different users:

- ◆ 1 in 5 Australians has some form of disability
- ◆ About 44% of adults read at literacy level 1 to a 2 - a low level
- ◆ 3.6 million people are affected by hearing loss
- ◆ 16% of Australia's population is over 65. It will rise to 21-23% by 2066
- ◆ 29% of Australia's 26 million people were born overseas where English may be a second language.

## Disability accessibility is a legal requirement

In Australia, the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 requires organisations to ensure people with disability have the same access to information and services as others in the community. This is enforced by Australian Human Rights Commission.

Each state and territory also has a discrimination or equal opportunity Act that makes it is against the law to discriminate against a person on the basis of disability and carer status.

If you plan your digital content with accessibility in mind, you will be able to comply with the laws relevant to your jurisdiction. There are guidelines available to help you to provide your digital content in an accessible format.

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) defines what makes a site accessible and includes technical recommendations on how to make web content accessible for people with disabilities and testing directions.

These guidelines were developed by individuals and organisations around the world with the goal of providing a shared standard for accessibility. Following these guidelines ensures most users will be able to access and understand digital assets.

## What is the most accessible format?

A webpage is the most accessible format, as it can be accessed from anywhere and can work alongside assistive technologies.

An accessible document is formatted and structured so the reader can understand the order and layout of content and the document(s) type. This means applying heading styles to headings, bullet point formatting to lists, adding document types and file sizes etc.

This information is then used by screen readers to read out content to someone who is visually impaired. [Watch a video about how screen readers work](#)

## Uploading documents to a website

If you are adding documents to your website for downloading, you must ensure that when creating your Word or PDF documents that they are accessible before you upload them. Remember HTML (a web page) is the most accessible option.

## Content types and accessibility requirements

**Webpage (HTML) i.e. content on a web page.** This is the most accessible and the preferred option.

**Word or excel documents** must be formatted in a single column and with relevant styles for headings, paragraphs, bullet points etc.

**PDFs** are the least accessible format. It's best if you create a PDF from a Word document that has the correct heading styles applied. PDFs can be developed as accessible documents by graphic designers if you have the time and budget. Ensure you make accessibility part of your design brief from the beginning.

**Images/maps** must have alternative (alt) text. This is a short description that explains what the image is conveying. Alt text is read out by screen readers. Images shouldn't include text unless it is part of a logo.

Videos and audio files must have a transcript to cater to those with a hearing disability. Transcripts should be provided in a word document. If a transcript is not provided, the video platform may automatically add captions to your videos, which are sometimes incorrect and inappropriate.

### **Tables are OK but they must be accessible**

Sighted users can visually scan a table making visual associations between data and column or row headings. Someone who cannot see can't make these visual associations, therefore the table must be marked up correctly. Tables should also only be used to present data and not for layout purposes.

To meet accessibility tables must:

- ◆ use a data table component if your CMS has one
- ◆ include a descriptive heading before the table to summarise it
- ◆ have a title, caption and headings
- ◆ have an even number of rows and columns or columns. Break complex tables into separate tables
- ◆ don't merge or split cells within a table
- ◆ avoid blank cells
- ◆ code tables with a summary (if you have access to the back end code of your online page).

**Link text should make sense**

Relevant and helpful links encourage people to stay

- ◆ Use language that conveys information about the link destination, for example. The name of the website or the document name.
- ◆ Types of links to avoid: Links that take you to **this page** or **click here**

## Embed URLs

- ◆ Don't link directly to downloads - it's annoying when a click triggers a file download without expecting it
- ◆ It can also be a serious issue for people using assistive technologies
- ◆ Indicate when a link triggers a download including document size and type.

## Remember that accessibility is not a nice to have, it's a must have

If someone is creating a document on your behalf and it needs to go on the website, ask them to make it accessible or to create an accessible alternative.

If an accessible version is not available online, you must to offer an alternative, for example, a contact number or email where an accessible version can be emailed or read out over the phone.

## Accessibility checklist

1. Could the information you wish to share be communicated on in HTML?
2. Word documents:
  - a. Is your information presented in one column?
  - b. Does it have heading styles applied?
3. For graphic designed documents (such as a PDF or map):
  - a. Has your graphic designer made the documents accessible?
4. Images:
  - a. Do your images have alternative (alt) text?
  - b. Images are not used for text, unless the image is part of a logo or brand name.

5. Audio and video:

- a. Do your audio and video files have transcripts of the recording – word for word?

6. Meaningful links

- a. Links use the name of the website where the link is going, not the URL address or meaningless text. For example, "Visit [Meet Me](#) to find out more about me" **NOT** "Visit [www.fionademark.com.au/meet-me](http://www.fionademark.com.au/meet-me) to find out more about me" or "Click [here](#) to find out more about me"