



Website Accessibility Guide

How to make your website and digital content accessible to people with vision impairments.

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About this Guide

Your website is often the first experience your customer has with your organisation. If you think of it as the 'front door' for your company, digital accessibility means you can welcome more visitors in, and provide them with a better experience.



In this guide, we'll provide information and practical steps to help you understand and embrace digital accessibility. If you're building a new website, this guide will help you make accessibility part of your design and development from the start. If you want to improve accessibility in your current and future digital content, use this guide to educate yourselves and get into good habits around accessibility. Share it with your whole team and make accessibility part of your organisation's collective behaviour.

Why digital accessibility is important

- The World Health Organization reports that globally there are more than 2 billion people with a vision impairment.
- Most people who have a vision impairment are able to see something - only around 7% of blind people have no vision at all.
- Assistive technology - including screen magnifiers and screen readers - is used by people with visual impairments to access digital information such as website content and emails.
- Only around 7% of people registered blind or partially sighted read braille (RNIB, 2022).

How do blind and partially sighted people read websites?



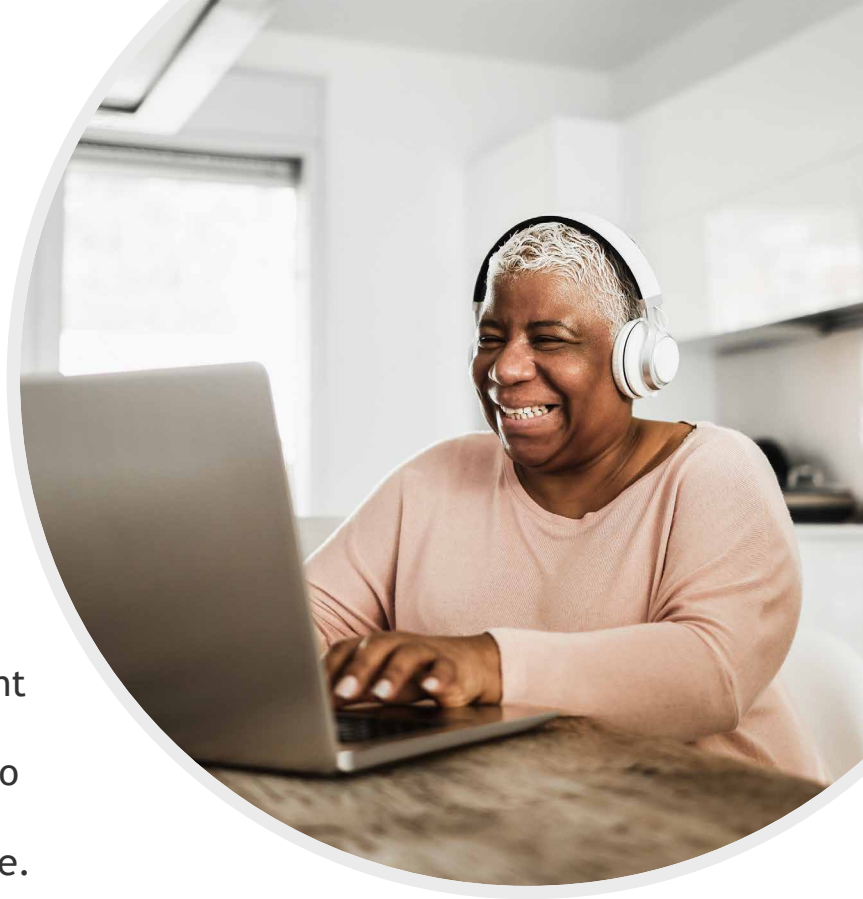
People with visual impairments can access the information on their computer in different ways. These include:

- Screen magnification software which increases the size of everything on the screen.
- Speech functions which read all the words on a screen.
- Screen reading software reads out text and other on-screen information to aid navigation. Things like whether a checkbox is ticked, punctuation and styling information, links and buttons.
- This information can be read aloud with speech, or transferred to an electronic braille display, to be read with braille.
- Some people may use a combination of all of these.

What is 'accessibility'?

When we talk about accessibility in this guide, we're talking about the removal of barriers so that everyone can have an equitable experience.

More specifically, this guide intends to help you make your digital space - such as your website and email communications - a place where people with a vision impairment can read, navigate and explore independently, with consideration also given to how this digital material is experienced by neurodivergent people.



A key part of making something accessible is to reduce or remove barriers to people being able to independently engage and participate in an activity. To improve accessibility, you should actively consider how something might be a barrier, and remove or reduce it. Get into the habit of doing this at the start of a product or process, rather than as a reaction. Make it a part of your company culture.

Accessibility benefits everyone, it removes barriers to inclusion, so anyone who wants to can visit your website, use your services or buy your products!



The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) set the global standard for accessibility. They should be used by all web designers and developers to help present your website in an accessible way. Familiarise yourselves with these guidelines. Remember, the best people to test accessibility are those with lived experience of disability. Use feedback to guide you.



Improving Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Accessibility (DEI&A) is increasingly important to businesses and individuals. But what does this mean in practice, and how can you make your DEI&A policies a reality?

One way to improve DEI&A is to make your digital output accessible. This includes websites, emails, blogs, social media posts and other electronic content. This makes it easier to read, understand and navigate for people with a disability.

It's important to recognise that accessibility isn't part of a trend. It's written into laws around the world - including the European Accessibility Act (EAA) and the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA).

From a business and profitability perspective, improving the accessibility of your organisation means your website is more discoverable, so you can welcome more customers. It also builds trust, and gives you an advantage over your competitors.

The good news is that there are some really easy things you can do now to make your website and digital communications more accessible.



Readability

Ensure your website text is plainly written, with short sentences. Concise messages make it quicker and easier to read. This benefits people with dyslexia and also leads all visitors to your calls to action sooner.



We recommend you write at Grade 9 level, as this is the most universally understood. You can check text using free online tools such as [Hemingway Editor](#) or [Grammarly](#). These measure the reading level and offer suggestions for change.

Appropriate terminology

If you are writing about any disability, do your research into the terminology you use and take advice from the experts: the person or people you're talking about, or appropriate organisations.

We recommend familiarising yourself with identity-first and person-first terminology, along with the Social Model of Disability.

Remember that terminology can differ depending on types of disability and from person-to-person. Be prepared to adapt your content over time, as language evolves, so acceptable terms may become outdated. Respect the way anyone chooses to talk about themselves.

If you use terminology that doesn't land well, apologise, adapt, learn, and share what you learn with your colleagues.

Alignment

Left-aligning your text and other content makes it more accessible for screen magnifier users. When screens are magnified to high levels, centralised information can be missed if a visitor scrolls down the page.

Tables and Charts

Avoid using tables to display information. They can be really difficult to navigate with a screen reader. Try using bullet pointed lists instead.

Text Styling

Avoid italics, bold or underlines to convey meaning in text. They can be difficult to read and are not always accessible to screen reader users. Underlines usually indicate a link.

Bullet Points

Use large, bold bullet points and ensure they have a good colour contrast to make them more accessible.

Acronyms

If you're using acronyms, don't assume everyone knows or remembers what they mean! Always provide the long-form and follow with the acronym in brackets. After which, you can use the acronym only in the rest of the document.

For a document or email where a lot of acronyms are used, it's more accessible to provide a key or glossary.



Visual Design



Images and Alt Text

This is easy and important for accessibility. Make the images on your website, emails and socials, and even on documents and presentations accessible by providing a short description of the image's contents in the Alt Text.

The image Alt Text is read out by a screen reader, so people who are blind can use this to have a better idea of what is being conveyed visually. While a picture can tell a thousand words, try and be concise in your description, and convey meaning and mood where it is appropriate. If it's important to know details, you should fully describe the image and its context.

If you want to describe the image in more detail, with more context, add an image description into the body of your social post or document. If it's not important to the message, you could be more concise and a little less descriptive.

Decorative Images and Icons

If there are any decorative graphics or images on your website, perhaps corners, page breaks, small icons and decorative flourishes, you don't need to describe these. It's not necessarily helpful for a screen reader user to have these read aloud. You can ask your web developer to tag these as 'Aria-hidden' images in the code. It means the screen reader will skip them.



Graphics Containing Words

For good accessibility, don't make an image which has important written information in it. Screen readers can't pick up and read the words in an image.

In some cases, if you do need to include text such as infographics, labelled diagrams or invitations, please ensure you also display the written information as text next to the image.

Logos are an exception to this rule. You can label logos in the Alt Text, with or without a description.

Image Links

Don't use images as buttons and avoid using images or graphics to link through to other pages. If you do use icons, ensure they are appropriately labelled with Alt Text, or otherwise tag them as Aria Hidden and display the call to action as a text link below.

Colour Scheme

The relationship between the colour contrast of your website text and the background colour can make or break accessibility. Always use appropriately contrasting colours on your website. For example, avoid using soft grey text on a white background because the contrast would be too low to read accessibly.



We recommend the free [WebAIM Contrast Checker](#) to check and choose your colour contrasts. Simply type in your preferred colours and it calculates the contrast and advises you if it meets accessibility guidelines.

Text size also affects the colour contrast of text. While contrasts of colour are accessible in a larger font size - perhaps in your headers - the same colour contrast may not be accessible in a smaller size - your body text for example. Ensure you check for this.

Fonts



Accessible Font size

For good accessibility, we recommend a minimum of 16px with a 150% line space.

While there's no official minimum font size, it's generally considered that 16px is the most accessible size for body copy on the web.

While the default line height for web text is 120%, to make it accessible, it should be 150%. This extra white space between lines enables people with a visual impairment or reading disability to more easily process the written information.

Font Type

Always use a 'Sans Serif' font. This ensures your characters are sharper and it improves readability, particularly for people with dyslexia or low vision. Fancier 'serif' fonts make things more difficult to read.

Font Colours

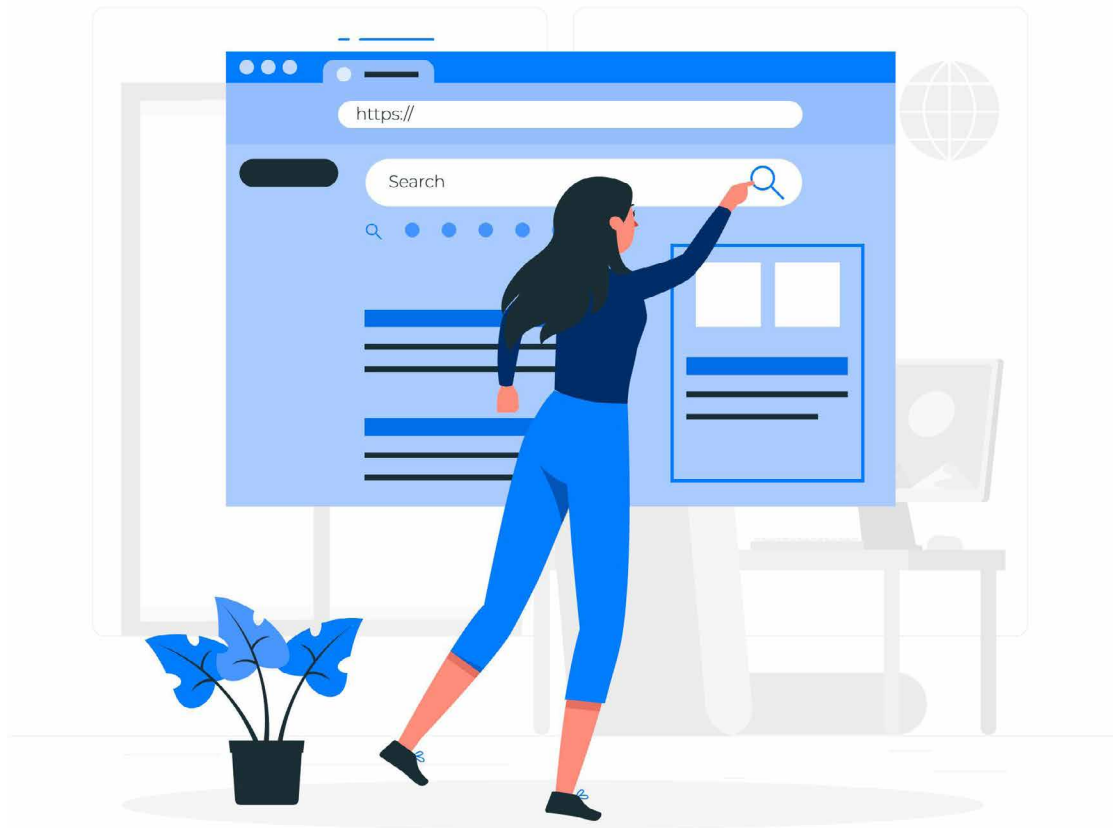
While black and white might seem the most obvious choice, it's advisable not to use a rich (100%) black for your font colour. Many people, including people with visual impairments, find that a pure black font on a pure white background can often be too harsh on the eyes.

The recommended shade of black for accessibility is #333333. It's a slightly softer black, which is easier to read while maintaining a strong contrast. For an example of this, view the [Dolphin website](#)



Use the [WebAIM colour contrast checker](#) to test your font sizes and colour scheme and find a set of colours and fonts that work for your brand identity and for accessibility.

Navigation



To make your website more accessible to people who don't use visual cues, there are a few key things to consider that vastly improve navigation.

Links and Calls to Action (CTA)

When you're linking to another page, avoid blanket terms like 'click here', 'view', or 'try this' and don't use ambiguous terms which don't make sense out of visual context. Instead, be concise and specific about the content you'll find by clicking that link: Something like [Read Accessibility Blog](#) or [About Dolphin](#) give a better indication of where you'll end up. Indicate links in a consistent manner, you can underline, use a contrasting colour or use a bold font.



Unless necessary, don't paste the whole link as a URL. Try adding your link to a couple of words as part of a sentence (as per the examples above). This makes it easier to navigate, and helps when visitors are navigating by link only or button only. Particularly helpful for many screen reader users, who may have to listen to the whole URL each time.

Titles

Ensure titles and sub-headings always relate to the information conveyed directly below it. Header Tag (H Tag) them as described below, so screen reader users can navigate by title alone.



- **H1** is your main page header. Use only one of these per page.
- **H2** are the key headings on your page. There can be multiple H2 headings.
- **H3 - H6** tags are additional sub-headings within the text. You may not need all of these.

Screen reader users often use the headings on the page to navigate and quickly find the information they need on websites. They can also use these when reading long documents such as reports.

H Tags are used in web design to separate information on a page in a hierarchy of headings.

When designing your website, it's important to H Tag your website content appropriately. While they are often used for visual purposes, they should principally be used for content hierarchy.

Title Hierarchy

You can set your H Tag hierarchy as a visual hierarchy too. Set each H Tag to have a specific size, font and colour. You could make these brand colours to match your visual designs. Always ensure you use accessible fonts, colour schemes and sizes.



Headers and Search Engines

Google and other search engines also use your H Tags to find information when they crawl your website. So, if your titles are tagged properly, contain keywords, and they're relevant to the rest of the content, your website appears higher in search engine listings. This can give you a competitive edge.

Accessibility in the office

You can also H Tag Microsoft Word documents and marketing emails to make them more accessible.

Highlight your header text, right click and select 'Styles' from the ribbon bar, choose the header type:

H1 for the main page header

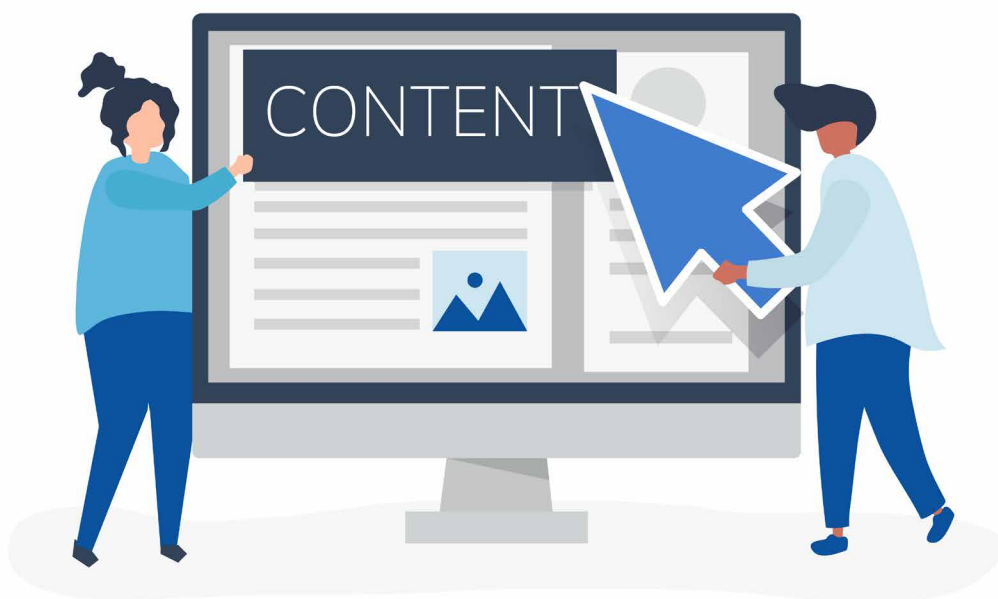
H2 for key headings

H3 for sub headings

You can also create your own H Tag header styles in Word. Ensure they're accessible fonts, sizes and colours!

Visit the [Dolphin Blog](#) to read articles including :

- 6 tips to make text based documents accessible
- Assitive technology for a productive workforce
- Using assistive technology to evaluate website accessibility





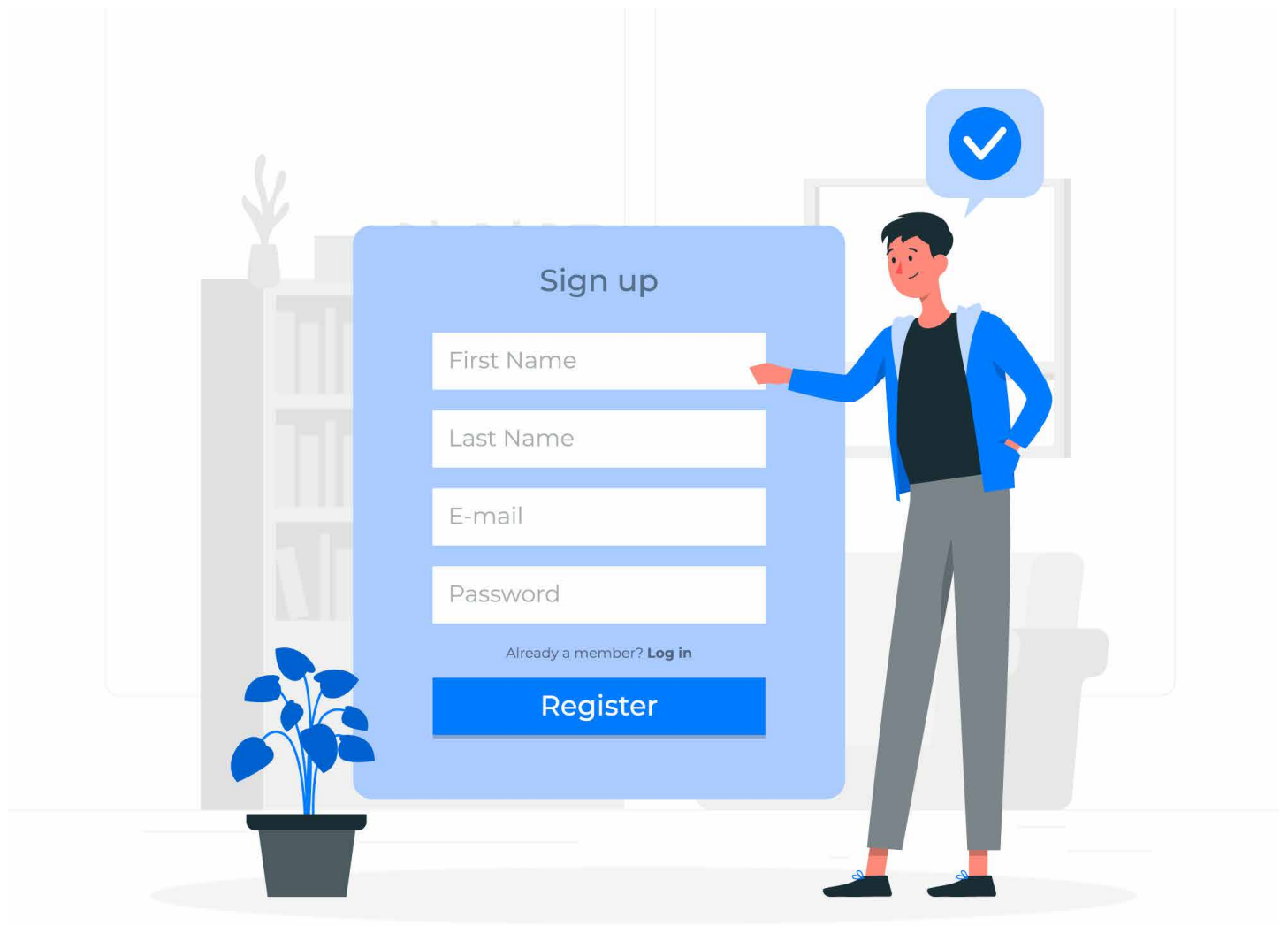
Buttons

Button text should be descriptive and concise, e.g. 'Visit Blog' rather than the vague 'Click Here'. Each button should clearly indicate where you will go when you click. To ensure good navigation, test all buttons link to appropriate pages.

Screen reader users may navigate a page by scrolling through the buttons. They can be an important navigation tool for blind and partially sighted people.

If you use buttons as Calls to Action (CTAs), ensure that they are an accessible colour, with a contrasting text colour inside. Be consistent throughout your website and try to use the same colour, shape and size buttons for continuity of the message. Never use an image as a button or CTA.

You can use the WebAIM colour contrast tool to check the accessibility of your buttons and text.



Forms

When forms on your website are important for gathering visitor details, subscriptions and sales, ensure they are accessible! This will help you gather more of the important data you need.

Ensure form fields have clear instructions and error messages. This will help screen reader users navigate.

Always ensure your form fields are labelled clearly and correctly. Your web developer can use nested `<label>` elements in the html to help with this.

Test that all interactive elements on your forms can be navigated with a keyboard alone. This includes the form fields, links, checkboxes and buttons.

Social Posts

There are lots of accessibility features built into social media, which you can use to make your organisational and personal content accessible to more followers. Some channels are more accessible than others, so do your research and consider which you want to work with.



There are a few key things you can do to make your posts more accessible to people with a visual impairment. Some of them you might be doing anyway without realising they're accessibility features e.g. providing captions for videos and transcripts for audio content.

It's important though not to use accessibility features such as Alt Text for jokes or hidden messages. This doesn't help people who rely on these features to use social media, and often excludes them further. Be considerate and be kind.

Emoji Use

If you're planning to use emoji's in your digital communication - usually social posts - keep them to a minimum. If you do need to use them, try to do so at the end of the post. This makes your content more accessible to screen reader users, who have each emoji's description read aloud each time it's used. A post peppered with emojis, or several emojis in a row can be frustrating to read, or won't be read at all!

Never use emoji's in lists to replace bullet points.



Accessible Hashtags



Camel Case and Pascal Case are ways of writing hashtags so they are easier to read. Whether you use them exclusively on socials, in your blog or anywhere else, you can make hashtags accessible to people who use screen readers. As each word will be read out independently, rather than as a string of what sounds like gibberish.

Camel Case

In a multi-word hashtag expressed in camel case, the first word is all lower case, whereas the first letter of subsequent words are upper case, like this: #camelCase

#accessibilityAtWork #itsEasyToBeInclusive #screenReaderAccessibility

Pascal Case

In a multi-word hashtag, the first letter of each word is capitalised, like this: #PascalCase

#InclusivityAtWork #ItsEasyWhenYouKnowHow #AccessibilityForAll

Although they are primarily used in hashtags, you might also find uses of Camel Case and Pascal Case in a company name or in a URL. Familiar examples include iPhone and eBay (Camel Case) and PayPal and EasyReader (Pascal Case).

Try and do this each time you write a hashtag and it'll soon become second nature. From a business point of view, it can also help you avoid certain embarrassing hashtag mishaps, which can be a PR nightmare!



Dolphin Computer Access develops assistive technology for people with visual impairments and neurodiversity. For over thirty years, we have built a range of screen magnification and screen reading software that gives people access to the information on their computers at work, in education and at home. Dolphin also develops EasyReader App, a reading app that enables people who are blind, partially sighted or neurodivergent to access and read books.

Inclusion and accessibility should be important to everyone, and we know it's important to you. Now you have some pointers on digital accessibility, we hope it helps you make your organisation more accessible too!

At Dolphin, we hold ourselves to high accessibility standards. As part of this, we redeveloped our own website to make it more accessible for people with visual impairments. We also researched and considered accessibility for neurodivergent visitors, and built this into the whole process.

With our website, our marketing and our products, we practice what we preach. As advocates of accessibility, we want to pass this knowledge and experience on to you, to help make your digital content accessible to people who are blind, partially sighted, neurodivergent, or otherwise print-impaired.

www.YourDolphin.com

Useful Tools

You can check the accessibility of your content, design elements and navigation yourself using some very easy - and free - online resources. Here are some we enjoy using:

WAVE Content Checker

This free browser plugin helps you identify areas your website meets current accessibility guidelines - and where it doesn't! It analyses the structure of your page, its HTag structure, alt text and colour contrasts.

It's an easy-to-use tool for website designers and developers.

Hemingway App

Quickly check your content is accessible and easy to read. Either copy and paste existing text into Hemingway App, or type it in directly. You'll receive an instant grade level. Try for Grade 9 to boost accessibility.

Colour Contrast Checker

Use this to determine how accessible your brand colours are to people with low vision.

It shows how your chosen brand colours work together, and as text against background colours and other visual elements.

SuperNova

We welcome you to download a free 30-day trial of SuperNova Magnification and Screen Reader software, to [test](#) how accessible your website or documentation is to a person who is blind or partially sighted.

Explore and navigate your website with accessibility features including screen magnification and speech. Braille is also available.

Access SuperNova training and guides to help you use it effectively, for a better accessibility testing experience.

YourDolphin.com/SuperNova



Your Accessibility Checklist

If you review your website or you're releasing a new web page, marketing email or social post, use this handy accessibility checklist to make sure you've covered the key areas that make your digital content accessible:

- Alt Text:** Ensure all images have concise, descriptive Alt Text to convey the image content.
- Text Free Imagery:** Ensure images are free from text. If text is necessary, include this information in the image description.
- Video Captions and Transcripts:** Provide captions for videos and transcripts for audio content.
- Header Structure:** Format each header appropriately with H tags (<h1> <h2>, <p>) and structure content logically.
- Colour Contrast:** Verify your on-screen text has sufficient contrast against background colours.
- Readable Fonts:** Use legible fonts and font sizes with a good amount of line spacing for easy reading. A sans-serif font is recommended.
- Accessible Forms:** Ensure form fields have clear instructions and error messages. Make sure your form field are labelled correctly.
- Accessible Buttons:** Make sure your buttons make sense out of context and go where you'd expect when clicked. Check colour contrast.
- Keyboard Navigation:** Test all interactive elements (buttons, links, forms) can be accessed and used via keyboard navigation.
- Test with Screen Readers:** Test your website and other content with screen readers - Try Dolphin Magnifier & Screen Reader free - to identify accessibility issues.
- Social Posts:** Minimise emoji use. Use camelCase or PascalCase when using Hashtags. Include text descriptions for images, videos and gifs.