ACCESSIBILITY
CONFIDENT EMPLOYERS

Tip Sheet: Digital Communications

These seven core skills are from the University of Minnesota. While this isn't a comprehensive list, the idea is to start with one at a time and incorporate into your work.

Alternative text

Alternative text, or "alt text," can be read by assistive technologies, which helps more of your audience access your content. It also can help you, the author, make sure an image communicates your intended purpose. Answer the question: What is the content conveyed by the image and this specific context?

Write in simple, precise language, and keep the explanation brief. Typically, no more than a few words are necessary, though rarely a short sentence or two may be appropriate. Provide different information in alt text and surrounding content.

- The alt text should appropriately describe the content of the image.
- The caption should explain more about the purpose of the image.

Contrast

Make sure foreground and background colours and other visual indicators contrast each other. Understanding just a little bit about colour and contrast can help you communicate more effectively in your documents, web pages, and presentations.

Both RGB and CMYK are modes for mixing colour in graphic design. As a quick reference, the RGB (Red, Green, and Blue) colour mode is best for digital work, while CMYK (Cyan, Magenta, Yellow, Black) is used for printed materials.

Colour should never be the sole means of conveying information. Screen readers don't offer a way to search by colour, and people in or with a wide variety of conditions and in certain environments won't be able to see the difference either. Use colour **plus** another element (bold, size, etc.) to emphasize or visually distinguish information differences.

Headings

Structure your digital content with paragraph styles in documents or heading tags in web pages. You can apply heading best practices in any written medium, from emails to research papers to blog posts. Everywhere you write, document structure can help you organize your work. As a bonus, if you style your headings correctly and decide to change a font or its weight or size later, you can make one change and all of your headings will change, saving you oodles of time.

- Use level 1 headings to indicate the title, topic, or purpose of each page.
- Use level 2 headings to indicate each main section of the document.
- Use level 3 headings to indicate sub-sections and 4,5,6 for sub-sub sections.

Links

Write links that are concise, descriptive, and meaningful out of context. Links are one of the most basic elements of any digital experience. Learning to write good link text can improve your emails, web pages, course websites, documents, and digital content. Embed most links within other text. Write as you normally would, then highlight the text you want to make into a link and insert the link.

For example: There are several things to consider in creating accessible link text. Don't display the actual URL as a link. Adaptive technologies users will have to listen while their screen reader reads every single character of the URL. Clearly explain in the linked text what information your readers will find when they click on a link. Avoid link text such as: Click here, More, Read more, Listen to a sample, and Info.

Lists

Present key concepts, sequences, and like items of more than two as lists where possible. Lists help users comprehend text more quickly. Writers can use them to reduce reader fatigue resulting from trying to comprehend dense or complex paragraphs. Lists can provide a break in the document flow and encourage users to stick with the content. Use lists to:

- Present key terms and concepts
- Organize information into meaningful chunks
- Convey sequencing necessary for processes and procedures
- Create links to additional information

Tables

Simplify tables and include a header row and/or column and a summary, either in a caption or alt text. When sighted users focus on a table cell, they can visually determine which row and column the cell is in by scanning up and down or left and right. This adds context to what the value in a particular cell means. On the other hand, a screen reader can only read aloud each cell one by one from left to right and top to bottom. If the table is not formatted correctly, there is no easy way to determine what label a particular value in a cell might have. Use alt text or a caption to describe the table.

Video and Audio

Include both human-edited captions and audio descriptions in videos and ensure transcripts in audio-only content. Video and audio content, such as podcasts, videos, and narrated slideshows, are increasingly being used to enrich and deliver online experiences. Video and audio content must include text-based alternatives (captions and transcripts) so all users can access the information. Transcripts are plain-text versions of the speech or audio in a video or audio recording. Unlike captions, transcripts are not time-coded; they are static documents.

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