Content guide

Creating accessible content for your website

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Contents

Introduction

This document details how to prepare your content in the most accessible way for your website.

Accessibility is useful for everybody, the article ["6 web accessibility features that benefit more people than you think"](#) is extremely informative about the different people that will benefit and different scenarios people may find themselves in.

If you prefer to watch a video then the W3C website has several perspective videos, such as the ["Web accessibility perspectives videos: Explore the impact and benefits for everyone"](#). Most of these are covered in how we design and build the website but the video on ["Understandable content"](#) is useful for you too.

Your pages

Top level pages

The number of top level pages are kept to a minimum. As a guide 7 is the **very most** to have (including Home).

As a guide aim for approx 100-150 words intro for each section introducing what can be found within it and how people can use it.

Content for deeper level pages

The text on these pages can be longer than the top level pages but make sure they are broken down into chunks with clear headings (more on this later).

Also don't be afraid to cross link where useful rather than repeat sections of content, it's much better to do this than to have the same content on multiple pages.

Typically, people cannot process more than **7 pieces** of information at once.

Style guide

It is best to decide up front the tone of the site so it remains consistent – this can differ in different sections, for example a blog post or story feature can be more conversational and from the first person.

- For consistency, decide on preferred formats, terms and conventions for commonly used content e.g:
  - Dates (e.g. 25th Nov 2017 or 25/11/17)
  - Times (12 or 24 hr clock)
  - Period dates (e.g. 19th Century or 1800s)
  - Measurements & units
  - Pricing / costs (£1 or 1GBP)
  - Wars (WW1 or First World War)
- Name your assets - (image files and documents) descriptively so they are useful
- This should follow what is in your print and promotional material
- Make sure everyone who is contributing to the site is aware of these

Writing for the web

It is ideal to have a **consistent tone of voice** across all copy on a website. This creates continuity and prevents the content and organisation appearing fragmented. If there are a number of people with editorial rights to the site, you may like to have one or two central people to run copy through/sign it off to help maintain the organisation's voice.

- **Avoid idioms** e.g. "it's raining cats and dogs"

- **Avoid abbreviations and acronyms** – if they are unavoidable then make sure to spell them out when first used on the page

- **Avoid 'walls' of text** – break up your content into easily- digestible chunks, and use headings to create sections that humans can easily understand and take in

- The Hemingway Editor app is a useful tool to help with this

To understand your audience you should know:

- **How they behave**, what they're interested in or worried about – so **your writing will catch their attention and answer their questions**

- **Their vocabulary** – so that you can use the same terms and phrases **they'll use to search for content**

Writing for the web

Meeting the user need

- **Always keep your audience in mind** when creating copy for your website. Try to think about what they would want to get from the site and what tone of voice is suitable for them. Your writing will be most effective if you understand who you're writing for

- People don't usually read text unless they want information. When you write for the web, start with the same question every time: **what does the user want to know?**

Figure 3: User testing websites for accessiibiliy with disabled participants

Don't publish everything you can online.
Publish only what someone needs to know so they can complete their task. Nothing more.

Always be:
- **specific**
- **informative**
- **clear and to the point**

Writing for the web

How people read on the web

- Users read very differently online than on paper. They don't necessarily read top to bottom or even from word to word

- Instead, **users only read about 20 to 28% of a web page.** Where users just want to complete their task as quickly as possible, they skim even more out of impatience

- Remember that the pressure on the brain to understand increases for every 100 words you put on a page

- Someone coming to a website for help may be feeling anxious and stressed which increases this pressure even more

- Web-user eye-tracking studies show that people tend to 'read' a web page in an 'F' shape pattern. They look across the top, then down the side, reading further across when they find what they need

- What this means is: **put the the most important information first.** For example, say 'Canteen menu', not 'What's on the menu at the canteen today?'

- **Avoid the urge to always state the name of your organisation as the first word(s).** This helps people identify the most important information to them as they scan quickly through the page and is also good for Search Engine Optimisation (SEO)

Figure 4: Representation of how people read on the web in a "F" shape pattern.

Writing for the web

Writing for specialists

Research shows that higher literacy **people prefer plain English** because it allows them to understand the information as quickly as possible.

For example, research into use of specialist legal language in legal documents found:

- 80% of people preferred sentences written in clear English – and the more complex the issue, the greater that preference (eg, 97% preferred 'among other things' over the Latin 'inter alia') the more educated the person and the more specialist their knowledge, the greater their preference for plain English

- People understand complex specialist language, but don't want to read it if there's an alternative. This is because people with the highest literacy levels and the greatest expertise tend to have the most to read. They don't have time to pore through reams of dry, complicated prose.

- Where you need to use technical terms, you can. They're not jargon. You just need to explain what they mean the first time you use them.

Source: [Clarity is king – the evidence that reveals the desperate need to re-think the way we write by](#) Government Digital Service blog

Figure 5: Manuscript of Beowulf from c. AD 1000, located in the British Library. Creator: benedek, credit: Getty Images

Headings

- As mentioned above, Headings are great to break up large walls of text. They are also great for search engine optimization (SEO) because headings (titles) and subheadings (summary) have greater importance than normal paragraph text for search engines.

- Try to think about what they contain and make the content meaningful and refer to key points from the paragraph text

- Generally on a website 'Heading 1' is reserved for the title of the whole site. 'Heading 2' is for page titles and 'Heading 3' are sub-headings within a page.

- When creating a page layout we would suggest a 'magazine' style, with images on the left and right and sections separated by sub-headings. Images can be aligned left, right or full width but not centred.
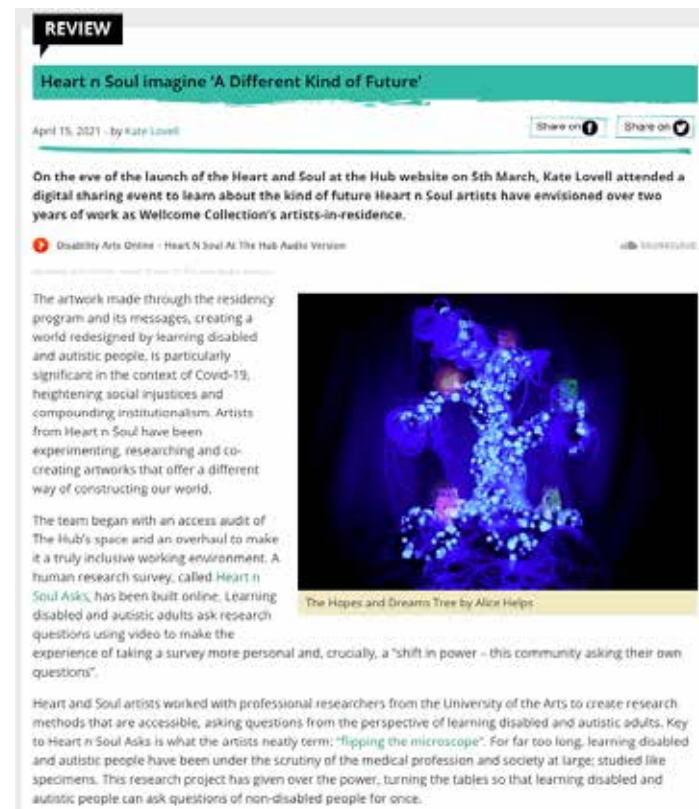

Figure 6: Example of "magazine" style layout used in the article by Disability Arts Online

Adding headings and splitting the text into smaller chunks make content easier to understand.

Many users (including those with reading difficulties such as dyslexia or those with visual impairments) will find long and wordy passages hard to wade through.

Breaking it down will help them and many others to understand what you're trying to say.

Headings

- Keep in mind **65 characters or less** (including spaces). This is because search engines truncate (cut off) titles in Google search results over that number. Words or parts of words will be cut off.

- Make sure your **title is unique**. It's not helpful for people if search results show a list of pages with the exact same title.

- Titles should be **clear and descriptive**. The title should provide full context so that people can easily see if they've found what they're looking for

- **Front-load your headings.** The most important information and the words the user is mostly likely to have searched should be at the beginning of the search result.
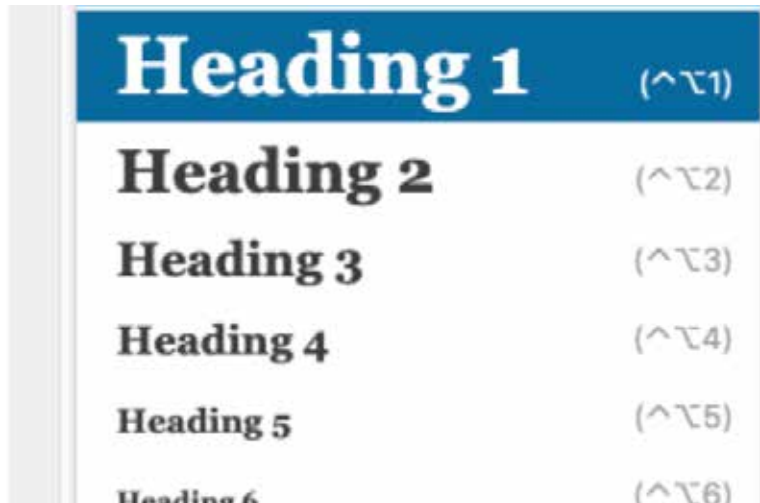
Figure 7: WordPress heading menu options

Child analysis today

For nearly 100 years Melanie Klein's ideas have provided fertile ground for clinicians and professionals, deepening our understanding of children's emotional worlds. Theorists such as Donald Winnicott, Wilfred Bion and Edna O'Shaughnessy have brought further insights into the complex psychological dynamics involved in the relationship between babies and their caregivers. Clinicians today continue to use and develop these theories in a wide range of settings, through therapeutic work and consultation with children and families from infancy to young adulthood.

Infant observation and child psychotherapy training

Klein was fascinated by the emotional world of babies, closely observing the way they respond to pleasure, pain and frustration.

> "I have seen babies as young as three weeks interrupt their sucking for a short time to play with the mother's breast or look towards her face. I have also observed that young infants – even as early as in the second month – would, in wakeful periods after feeding, lie on mother's lap, look up at her, listen to her voice and respond to it by their facial expression; it was like a loving conversation between mother and baby."
>
> — Klein, 'On observing the behaviour of young infants' (1952)

Esther Bick, a child analyst, first introduced weekly observations of babies as a core component of the Tavistock Clinic's child psychotherapy training in 1948. Since then the practice of psychoanalytic infant observation has grown rapidly. It remains a key training component for child psychotherapists at the Tavistock and elsewhere, but is now also a core requirement for child and adult psychoanalytic trainings at the Institute of Psychoanalysis, and for many other adult psychotherapy trainings. Infant observation is increasingly used as a training module in a wide range of professional trainings across the UK, parts of Europe and the USA.

Read Margaret Rustin's paper exploring Bick's legacy of infant observation at the Tavistock.

Suggested reading

- 'The experience of skin in early object relations' (Bick, 1968)
- Closely Observed Infants (Miller, 1989)
- Developments in Infant Observation (Reid, 1997)
- Surviving Space: Papers on Infant Observation (Briggs, 2002)
- 'Melanie Klein and infant observation' (Sherwin-White, 2017)

Child psychotherapy in the public sector

Child psychotherapists and analysts continue to see children and adolescents in private practice for a range of issues such as anxiety, depression or aggressive behaviour, using a very similar model to that used by Klein with her child patients (read more about Klein's technique). But modern child psychotherapy in the UK now has a presence across child and adolescent mental health services, social service departments, hospitals, schools, residential units and general practice settings.

Figure 8: A good example of hierarchy and sensible headings on a page where there is a lot of text. Article from Melanie Klein website.

Links

- Avoid lists of links, instead incorporate them into paragraph text. This gives them more meaning and puts them into the context of how they may be useful. People are unlikely to scroll through lists of links looking for what they want and search engines will mark you down if you have links pages as it sees them as spam.

- Use meaningful links – Rather than using 'Click here' or 'Read more' try to have meaningful link text as screen readers will read all the links on the page out in a list

- This is also beneficial in terms of search engine results as they tend to look for links when searching.

- Avoid using directions when highlighting a link e.g. 'Click the link on the right hand side of the page'. It may be on the right hand side when you are editing the site but won't necessarily be every time, as there are different layouts for different screen sizes and devices.

Links need to make sense even if they stand alone, as many assistive technology users will short-cut to a list of links on a page as a way of getting a quick impression of what content is available on that page.

Making links look consistent follows standard conventions for navigation and will make the site as usable and accessible as possible, as users will know what to expect as they explore the site.

Images

Images, photos and icons can make info easier to understand but undescribed are inaccessible.

- **Image alt-text** is used by screen readers to describe an image to people with visual impairments when having a website read out aloud to them. Without alt-text the screen reader just reads the word 'image' when reading the webpage. As you can imagine this can be very frustrating for the user.

- Search engines will also mark the site down if the alt-text field is left blank.

- Good alt-text is **succinct, under 100 characters** and helps users understand what is being depicted when it can't be accessed visually. The article ["How to write better alt-text descriptions for accessibility"](#) from the Big Hack website explains well what makes good and bad alt-text.

- An example of bad alt-text for the image on the right would be "Painting of lady crying" whereas useful alt-text might read "Painting of Anne Boleyn in the Tower of London, resting her head on her crying maid's lap, shortly

Figure 10: Anne in the Tower by Edouard Cibot.

Images

Context

- The context of the image helps to decide what is important to include in the alt-text

- If an image is **purely decorative** then you don't need to include alt-text, as this just adds clutter

- You wouldn't need to state that the image is a photograph unless it was part of a photographic exhibition for example

Images should ideally be **no less than 2000px** on the shortest side. It's best not to go below this size so that the image remains at good quality for high retina screens.

Images for the web must be in .jpeg, .png or .gif format.

Avoid using 'rogue' characters e.g. &"() **or** spaces **in file names**; they should not include any characters other than those from the alphabet and underscores.

Figure 11: A decorative image used as a background illustration

Images

- More complex images e.g. with text in the image, a map, chart or is interactive in some way also need to include an alternative description and ideally another way of accessing the information

- Any text that appears in an image should be repeated somewhere on the page or in the Alt-text so that it can be read by a screen reader

The figure 12 shows a screenshot of an interactive map. In this instance, it was not enough to simply describe the image *e.g. A map of Portsmouth highlighting the different museums in the area.* Instead an alternative for the screen reader was provided which reads: "Our museums house a wealth of collections illustrating all aspects of Portsmouth's history, culture and heritage. We offer an ideal destination of families, schools and city explorers. Please choose from the following list of our museums to find out more:
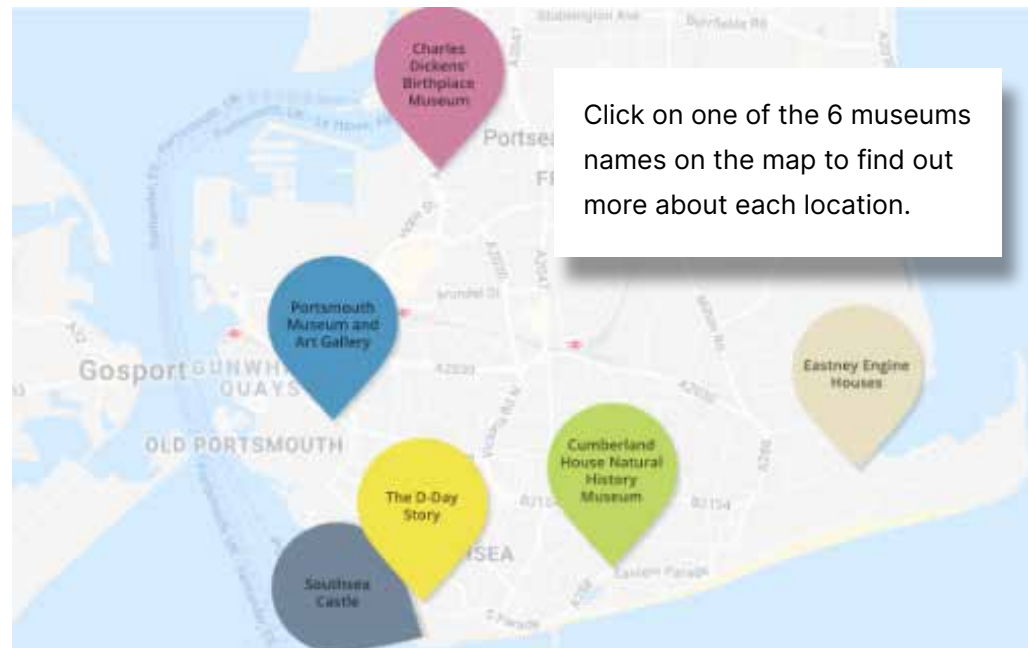
Portsmouth Museum and Art Gallery

Figure 12: Screenshot of Portsmouth and immediate surrounding areas where the 6 museums are based.

Film

Films are everywhere - users expect film and it must be accessible.

Create accessible film content

- Use colours with good contrast

- Use text that is easy to read

- Avoid fast-flashing images

- Do not set film to auto-play on a website as this can be annoying and tends to dominate screen readers.

- Always include controls for people to stop, pause and play

You can read more about the differences between caption, subtitles and transcripts in this article by Big Hack

A guide to using subtitles, captions and transcripts for accessibility.

Captions

Specifically designed for D/deaf viewers - dialogue, descriptions of sound and music.
Many people also prefer watching films with the sound off if they are in an environment where it would be distracting.

Subtitles

Straightforward translation of dialogue

Transcripts

It is best practice to include a transcript of all film or audio

Audio description

A further level is to include an audio description of what is depicted in the film

Figure 13: Example of video used on a website that has user control options.

BSL/ASL and EASY READ

British Sign Language (BSL) and American Sign Language (ASL) are languages in their own right. An estimated 50,000–70,000 people use BSL as their first or preferred language and ASL is the third most common language used in the United States.

For those users, offering BSL or ASL translation is a must. It is quick, relatively inexpensive and shows D/deaf people how seriously you take accessibility.

Figure 14: Example use of BSL on earnscliffe.associates

Easy Read is alternative simplified language you can offer on your site. It is:

- Clear and easy to understand
- Different from plain English but builds on these principles:
  - Write in short sentences 15-20 words
  - Write as if you are speaking
  - Use active verbs as much as can
  - Keep language personal, e.g. you, we, I
  - Use Arial font size 16 +
  - Each sentence has one idea
  - Avoid jargon or acronyms
  - Don't write in uppercase; avoid italics; use numbers (don't write them)
  - Make sure layout is consistent; use bullet points to list

Documents

- Any documents you upload to your site as a resource need to be accessible too.

- Follow the advice about [headings](#) (have a hierarchy) bullet points and breaking up text that have been mentioned in this document.

- Many applications such as Word include a built in accessibility checker.

When saving out to PDF ensure the following options are selected in PDF creation settings:

- Enable tagged PDF

- Create headings using Word headings

Creating a **tagged PDF** is especially **important for accessibility** as it ensures that information about **document structure** such as headings, lists and alternative text **will be available within the PDF document.**

Glossary of terms

Alt-text

Description added to an image describing what is contains

ASL

American Sign Language

Assistive technology

Any device, software or adaptive equipment that makes a website easier for someone to use

Audio description

Description of the action that is happening on a film

BSL

British Sign Language

Captions

Specifically designed for D/deaf viewers - dialogue, descriptions

Easy Read

An alternative simplified language for websites

PDF

Portable Document Format - a universal file format that can be used by most people

Screen-reader

Technology that reads out all the text on a website to the user

SEO

Search Engine Optimisation - the optimal way to create content so a search engine reads and indexes it so the website can be found

Subtitles

Straightforward translation of dialogue

Transcripts

Text version of any audio

W3C

Abbreviation used for the 'World Wide Web Consortium' - the main international standards organisation for the World Wide Web

WAI

The W3C's Web Accessibility Initiative aims to improve accessibility of the Web for disabled users, publishing guidelines and resources and promoting education and standards

WCAG

The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines are the guidelines produced by W3C and define how to make web content more accessible