

IT Accessibility Guidelines for Writers and Editors

Clear and simple language improves Web sites for everyone. No one wants to plow through dense text—especially on the Web.

When reading Web sites, people want information fast. They scan pages, looking for certain words and topics that tell them what they want to know or if they're on the right page yet. For people who use screen readers, navigating sites takes less time if text is well organized and concise.

It's helpful to keep in mind how people may access content.

- Blind individuals often use screen readers, which is software that uses audio output to interpret and "read" the content out loud to the user.
- Hearing impaired individuals may depend on captions and transcripts to access audio.
- Individuals with motor control impairments may prefer to listen to content rather than use a mouse or keyboard.

Guidelines

Here are tips for writing easily scanned text:

- Keep it concise.
- Write meaningful headings, not cute ones.
- Organize text with subheadings.
- Make hyperlinks meaningful.
- Stick to one topic per paragraph.
- Use bulleted or numbered lists.
- Delete promotional fluff and unnecessary adjectives.
- Use the active voice.
- Target an audience.
- Have an objective and stick to it.

Some documents or text can't be simplified or shortened but must be provided as originally written. This includes policies or research papers. Nevertheless, there are techniques to consider:

- Provide a synopsis.
- Add a table of contents or index.
- Divide the document with subheadings.

Sources

- Useit.com: ["How Users Read on the Web"](#)
- Useit.com: ["Applying Writing Guidelines to Web Pages"](#)
- WebAIM: ["Writing Clearly and Simply"](#)
- Webcredible: ["Writing Effective Link Text"](#)
- Plainlanguage.gov: ["Improving Communication from the Federal Government to the Public"](#)