

Inclusive writing tips

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Introduction - designing for inclusion

We provide information to others to change how they think, feel and act. So when you create content, you want it to be engaging and useful to all of your audience. Beyond deciding *what* to say, the real decision is deciding *how* you will communicate it so that anyone can understand, interact with and respond to it. Poor choices and about how we design content can create unintentional and unnecessary barriers. Your design decisions will determine how usable and accessible your content is to your audience.

Eg: Increasing the whitespace between lines by adjusting the line spacing from 1.0 to 1.5 will increase reading efficiency (speed + comprehension) by 20 - 25%

There is a wealth of research on how people interact with content on screen as well as the strategies to ensure that your content is usable and accessible to the widest possible audience. Much of this research has been incorporated by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) into a set of technology neutral guidelines and accompanying strategies to ensure that individuals and organisations can create accessible and usable content. The official name of these standards is the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.0). These guidelines can be applied to both web and non-web-based digital content.

What follows is a distillation of those guidelines into a set of simple strategies. Not only will you create better content but you will also meet your legislative requirements under the Disability Discrimination Act, Disability Standards for Education and Australian Teaching Standards.

regards

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Start accessible

- Create and use an accessible document template. that specifies the paragraph styles and document language.

Write in an accessible style

- Write text that is clear and direct. Aim for a reading age of 12 yrs.
- Supplement text with graphics when this would help explain ideas, processes or concepts.
- Avoid using idioms, jargon or unusual words. If you cannot, explain or define these terms.
- Avoid using abbreviations. If you cannot, provide access to the expanded form.
- Do not write instructions that rely only on sensory characteristics such as shape, size, location, orientation, colour or sound.
- Provide a pronunciation of words when the meaning would otherwise be ambiguous.
- Avoid the use of repeated 'blank' characters.

Structure content

- Chunk and organise your content with headings.
- Show the structure of your content by using the relevant heading styles / tags (Heading 1- Heading 4).



- Do not use text formatting, such as font size or bold to give the visual appearance of headings - use the actual heading (<h1> - <h6>) styles for all content headings as assistive technologies and other browsers rely upon this to determine and communicate structure.
- Write headings that describe the topic or purpose of the content they label.

- Use numbered lists (numerical or alphabetical) when the content items has a hierarchy.
- Use bulleted lists when the content items does not have a hierarchy.

Typography to increase reading efficiency

- Use standard Sans serif fonts (e.g., Arial, Calibri, Verdana) with clear spacing and easily recognised upper and lower case characters. Some serif fonts such as Cambria may be used as for headings
- Choose fonts with a tall lowercase 'x' height to improve readability. (e.g. Verdana)
- Ensure large text (over 18 point or 14 point bold) has a contrast ratio of at least 3:1.
- Include text as text unless a graphic is required for the visual presentation.
- Use font sizes between 12 and 18 points for body text. If the document is designed to be read on screen, make 14 point your normal paragraph size.
- Use fonts of normal (regular) weight, rather than bold or light weight fonts. If you do choose to use bold fonts for emphasis, use them sparingly.
- Avoid large amounts of text set all in caps, italic or underlined as this decreases reading speed and comprehension.
- Use normal or expanded character spacing, rather than condensed spacing.
- Use a line spacing of a minimum of 1.3 preferably 1.5
- Avoid animated or scrolling text.

Present data in tables

- Use tables for tabular data and not for layout. Don't use blank cells for formatting.
- Ensure data tables maintain a regular structure and include a header row.
- Add a bookmark in the header row. Ensure it has an appropriate and unique name.
- Add captions and summaries to data tables to enhance understanding.

Support navigation

- Write page titles that clearly describe the topic or purpose of the page
- Ensure links can be readily distinguished from the surrounding text.
- Ensure link text makes sense on its own by making the purpose of each link understood from the link text itself.
- Avoid "click here" in link text and other ambiguous links, such as "more" or "continue", can also be confusing.
- Avoid using the same text for links that go to different locations.
- Do not use a URL as the link text put it in context.
- Provide bookmarks for long documents.
- Include the file type and size in the link text if it doesn't link to a web page. eg: learning strategies (.pdf 355kB).
- If you are include icons make sure their meaning is explained, they are clearly perceived and used consistently.

Support understanding with inclusive rich media rich media

Rich media can be images, charts, audio, video.

- Provide appropriate text alternatives for any non-text content such as graphics.
- Ensure text and images of text have a contrast ratio of at least 4.5:1.
- Avoid "floating" elements. All images and other objects are positioned inline with text.
- Do not rely on shape, size, or visual location, sound or colour for instructions.
- Do not rely on colour alone to convey information or distinguish visual elements.
- Ensure labels for form and interactive controls are informative and avoid duplication.
- Closed captions are included for inserted audio and video.

Finish accessible

- Review your content to ensure it is consistent, correct and accessible before publication. If you are using Microsoft Office use the checking for accessibility option to assist this process.

Further reading

1. Microsoft: [Make your Word documents accessible](#)
1. Microsoft: Make your PowerPoint presentations accessible
2. Google: [Make your Google content accessible](#)



To design for inclusion we implement strategies that are absolutely essential for some and extremely useful for all.