

Web Writing for Accessibility

These guidelines describe how to make web content more accessible to people with disabilities. Accessibility involves a wide range of disabilities, including visual, auditory, physical, speech, cognitive, language, learning, and neurological disabilities.

Users with disabilities that make it difficult to decode words and sentences are likely to have trouble reading and understanding complex text. Complex text may be appropriate for *most* members of your intended audience. But there are people with disabilities, including reading disabilities, even among highly educated users.

In addition, readers with no disability often suffer comprehension challenges when reading online text, especially if they are tired, distracted, under stress, or non-native speakers of English. Making your text more readable will improve the experience for all your website visitors.

If you cannot simplify your text to a recommended readability score (such as in the case of legal policies or technical language), then you should provide a plain-language summary of the content.

10 ways to reduce the complexity of text:

1. Use a single topic or idea per paragraph.
2. Write short sentences (15–20 words).
3. Break up long paragraphs (three sentences or less).
4. Use bulleted or numbered lists instead of paragraphs that contain a series of words or phrases separated by commas.
5. Use sentences that contain no more than two conjunctions.
6. Replace long or unfamiliar words with shorter, more common terms.
7. Remove redundant words. A word is redundant when a sentence has the same meaning with or without the word.
8. Remove complex words or phrases that could be replaced with more commonly used words without changing the meaning of the sentence.
9. Avoid professional jargon, slang, and other terms with a specialized meaning that may not be clear to all your readers. Keep abbreviations and acronyms to a minimum.
10. Use the active voice whenever possible. Sentences in the active voice are often shorter and easier to understand than those in the passive voice.

Additional considerations for users with reading disorders and cognitive disabilities:

Even following the guidelines above, text content will always pose problems for some users. Here are three additional recommendations for accommodating people with cognitive disabilities:

1. **Supplement the text with images.** Do everything possible to clarify and simplify the text, then go one step further by supplementing the text with illustrations, diagrams, or photos.
2. **Reduce text to a bare minimum.** Pages with a large amount of text can intimidate users with reading difficulties. Reduce the text and break it into separate sections using headings.
3. **Be as literal as possible.** Some people with cognitive disabilities have a hard time distinguishing between the literal meaning of ideas and implied meaning. Sarcasm and parody can be especially confusing for some people.

*This page includes information adapted from **Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0**, from the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) Working Group, and **Web Accessibility in Mind (WebAIM)**, a program of Utah State University.*