Accessible Design: Best Practices

At Georgetown, we strive to be people for others. By ensuring that our content is accessible to everyone, we build an inclusive experience that is mindful of individuals' differing needs. All content should be consumable by every viewer, regardless of ability. The following guidelines will help you design to these standards. While these guidelines represent best practices, you may find complete information by visiting accessibility.georgetown.edu.

Images should not contain text.

Text included as part of an image is impossible for screenreader users to read. Print media, like flyers and posters, are not accessible without the use of descriptive alt text.

Images must include descriptive alt text.

This includes a transcript of any text that may display in the image. Alt text should be succinct (no more than 125 characters) and convey the emotion, purpose, and impact of the image. Alt text should contain appropriate punctuation at the end of the text.

You should not include "Photo of" or "Image of" in your alt text.

Use headings rather than bold to separate your sections.

Headings communicate the organization of a page's content. They facilitate easier navigation and provide the structure for screen readers to "scan" a webpage.

Instead of bolding text to inticate a new section of content, use headings. Headings are ranked, with 1 (<h>) being the most important heading, and 6 (<h6>) the least important. Headings with an equal or higher rank start a new section, headings with a lower rank start new subsections that are part of the higher ranked section.

Use appropriate color contrast and font sizes.

Color contrast refers to the difference between the background color and the foreground/font color. This difference has implications for accessibility. Online contrast checker tools (webaim.org/resources/contrastchecker) can be used to check the accessibility of background/foreground combinations.

Foreground text and background must have a contrast ratio of at least 4.5:1 for normal text and 3:1 for large text. Large text is defined as 18pt and larger, or 14pt and larger **if it is bold**.

Use clear and concise link text.

The link text should be understandable out of context. Screenreaders include the option to read a list of links on a page, making it easier to navigate quickly. The user hears only the link text (not the URL), so the link text should be descriptive of the link's purpose.

Don't use "click here," "learn more," or similar variations. Remove surrounding text and read the link text on its own. If you know where this link will take you, it's accessible.

Don't force the user to open links in a new window. Screenreader users are given no audible warning that a new window has opened, so the user assumes they're in the same window. When they try to go back to the previous page, the Back button doesn't work as expected.

If you have two links on the page with the same link text, be sure their URLs are identical. Similarly, if you have two links on the page with the same URL, be sure their link text is identical. However, in the latter case, you should use an aria-label to distinguish the differences for screen readers.

Resources

Electronic and Information Technology Accessibility at Georgetown
accessibility.georgetown.edu

Social Media Accessibility Standards
accessibility.georgetown.edu/social-media-accessibility

Website Accessibility Standards
accessibility.georgetown.edu/getting-started/websites

Email and Newsletter Accessibility Standards
accessibility.georgetown.edu/emails-and-newsletters

Video and Audio Accessibility Standards
accessibility.georgetown.edu/getting-started/videos

Request Accessibility Help
accessibility.georgetown.edu/request-accessibility-help

Accessibility Training
accessibility.georgetown.edu/training

WebAIM Color Contrast Checker
webaim.org/resources/contrastchecker