

Guide to Digital Accessibility

**How to make your online
content—from websites to
emails—more inclusive and
compliant**



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CHAPTER 1

Introduction to Accessibility

**Why we can't afford to ignore the “purple pound” – from
market valuation to driving brand advocacy**

Why inclusivity matters

As the digital world evolves, so too does the conversation around accessibility.

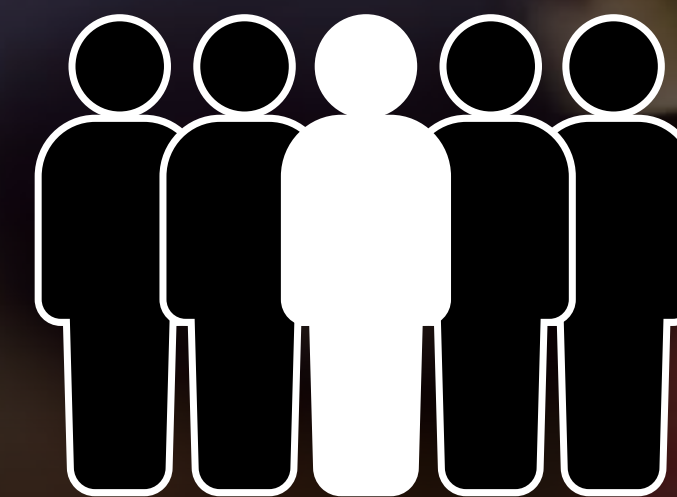
Because for far too long, the design of digital spaces – from websites to mobile apps – has centred on the able-bodied user.

But what does that mean for people who can't see? Hear? Use a mouse?

1 in 5 people in Europe* live with a disability, and arguably should benefit the most from online access to major retailers.

While the gap between accessibility and digital design may be closing, there's still a long way to go, with millions of customers and billions of sales lost due to various barriers.

With the introduction of new regulations and increasing pressure from customers, it's time we rethink how we design our digital platforms through the lens of creating more inclusive, online shopping experiences.



Did you know...

Over 100 million people live with disabilities in the EU = 1 in 5 people

<https://www.edf-fehp.org/>

Assistive Tools & Technology

Disabled users may be accessing your online store and content by using one or a combination of assistive tools, including:



Screen readers: software that reads text displayed on a screen aloud, aiding visually impaired users



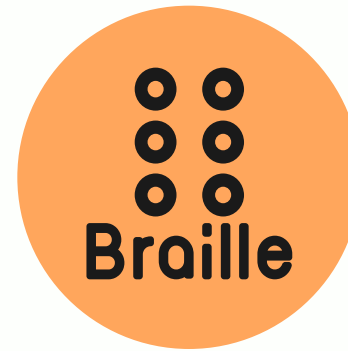
Speech recognition software: enables control of computers and dictation of text verbally, suitable for users unable to use traditional input devices



Screen magnification software: enlarges text and graphics on the screen for users with low vision



Assistive scanning keyboards: specialist keyboards that require minimal motion/commands for those with mobility or dexterity limitations



Braille terminals: devices that allow visually impaired users to read text through a tactile braille display



Head pointers: devices worn on the head to direct a screen pointer, helping users with limited hand mobility



Text-to-speech tools: apps that convert written text into spoken words, useful for users with visual impairments and learning difficulties



Eye tracking systems: technology that uses eye movements to control screen cursors, ideal for individuals with limited hand mobility



Alternative input devices: includes hardware such as joysticks, touchpads, and adapted mice designed for specific accessibility needs

For this tech to function, extra considerations and adjustments must be made to the design and build of online shopping spaces and digital content.

Did you know...

90% of disabled users exit a website instead of reporting accessibility issues*



90%

<https://wearepurple.org.uk/web-accessibility-infographic/>



The true market value

Creating accessible online shopping experiences is more than just meeting legal requirements—it's about enriching customer engagement and fostering loyalty among a diverse consumer base.

Not only does this differentiate our brands it futureproofs them, by creating a more inclusive community and opening up our customer base to a previously underserved market.

Commonly referred to as the “purple pound” here in the UK, the market potential is vast and currently big retailers are leaving money on the table – an estimated £2 billion a month in lost revenue, every month!

<https://wearepurple.org.uk/the-purple-pound-infographic/>

Accessibility in numbers

Big spenders

Global spending power = £8 trillion!



<https://purpletuesday.co/About-Us/About-Us>

Breaking barriers

80% of customers with access needs spend money, not on the cheapest, but where fewer barriers were faced



<https://www.clickawaypound.com/downloads/cap19final0502.pdf>

Brand values

91% global consumers would switch brands if a different brand of a similar price and quality supported a cause

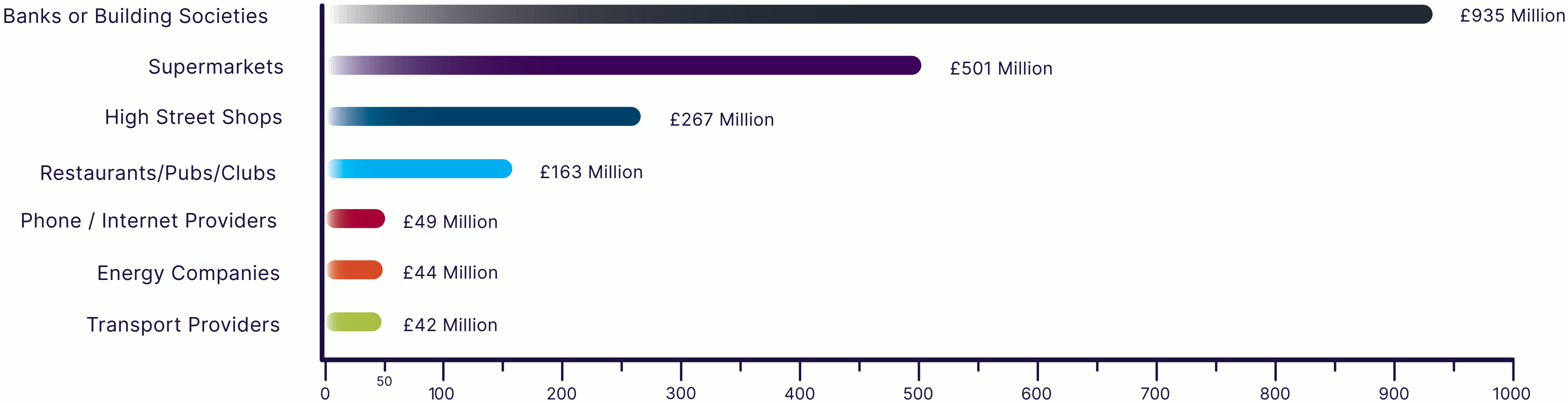


<https://www.cbd.int/doc/case-studies/inc/cs-inc-cone-communications-en.pdf>

Are you losing billions?

Loss of income by sector:

Disabled users may be accessing your online store and content by using one or a combination of assistive tools, including:



<https://wearepurple.org.uk/the-purple-pound-infographic/>

Did you know...

Businesses lose an estimated \$2 billion, every month due to accessibility issues

The spending power of the “purple pound” is estimated to be worth £274 billion in the UK

<https://www.clickawaypound.com/downloads/cap19final0502.pdf>

High Street Shops = £267 Million

CHAPTER 2

The Facts

Is accessibility a legal requirement? What are the consequences of non-compliance?

Is Accessibility a legal requirement?

In a nutshell: YES – accessibility is a legal requirement. And major changes to accessibility law is coming into effect June 2025 across Europe.



For UK-based BUs:

In the UK accessibility is mandated by law for public sector bodies. While the legal requirements for private ecommerce entities aren't as stringent as for public sectors, failure to adhere to accessibility standards can still lead to reputational damage and potential legal challenges under broader equality and discrimination laws. UK businesses are encouraged to make their websites and apps accessible, meaning they should be perceivable, operable, understandable, and robust for all users, including those with disabilities.



For EU-based BUs:

Across the European Union, accessibility is a legal obligation enforced by the European Accessibility Act and the EU Web Accessibility Directive. These laws ensure that essential online services like ecommerce, electronic communications, and digital banking meet certain accessibility standards, making them usable for everyone, including people with disabilities.



New changes to the European Accessibility Act

What's the European Accessibility Act?

The European Accessibility Act is a significant legislative initiative that aims to enhance accessibility across a broad range of products and services within the EU. Its primary goal is to establish a barrier-free environment that ensures equal access to information and communication technologies for all individuals, especially those with disabilities

Is this Act new?

The European Accessibility Act itself was adopted by the European Parliament in March 2019 and aims to improve access to goods and services in the EU single market. The requirements becoming legally binding by 2025 represent a significant update, as they move from directive to enforceable standards across Member States.

Who must comply?

The Act affects manufacturers and service providers who sell essential products and services across European borders. Including:

Private sector companies including **ecommerce platforms**, computers and operating systems, smartphones and other electronic communication devices, banking services, eBooks, service terminals. Governmental websites such as state, regional, and local authorities; Bodies governed by public law and financed via public contract, are also obliged to comply to the act.

Exceptions include: micro enterprises (businesses with 10 or fewer employees and with an annual turnover of less than two million euros).



Key Date:

Starting on 28th June 2025, all new products and services covered under the European Accessibility Act must be accessible.

Landmark legal cases & learnings

Over the past decade we’ve seen some of the world’s most recognised brands being held to account in court for not adhering to accessibility standards.

Notable legal cases include:

Amazon:

In 2018, Cedric Bishop filed a lawsuit against Amazon, claiming the website was not compatible with screen readers and Braille displays. This case underscored the necessity for digital platforms to accommodate all users, including those with visual impairments, and was settled privately with undisclosed terms.

EA (Electronic Arts) Inc:

In 2022: Rafael Cordero, sued EA, arguing that their website did not adequately accommodate blind and visually impaired users. The lawsuit cited various accessibility barriers including the inability of screen reading software to effectively navigate the site, access product descriptions, and retrieve prices. The case is ongoing.

Domino’s Pizza:

In 2019, Domino's Pizza was sued for not making its website and mobile app accessible via screen-reading software, violating ADA Title III. The court ruled in favour of the plaintiff, ordered Domino’s to fix the accessibility issues, and awarded the plaintiff \$4,000.

Nike:

In 2017, Maria Mendizabal sued Nike Inc. for failing to make Nike.com and Converse.com accessible to blind and visually impaired users. Claiming they violated the ADA and state laws, she highlighted issues including missing alternative text for images, empty link texts, and redundant links. Mendizabal sought a permanent injunction requiring Nike to make their websites accessible, alongside claims for damages, court costs, attorney’s fees, and interest. The settlement details were not publicly disclosed but spurred Nike to enhance digital accessibility on their sites.

Park Entertainment:

In 2019, Park Entertainment faced legal action because its website did not allow visually impaired users to purchase tickets for a Beyoncé concert. The lawsuit identified major accessibility barriers such as the absence of alternative text for images, lack of accessible drop-down menus and navigation links, and inability to navigate the site by keyboard instead of a mouse. The lawsuit highlighted the challenges faced by people who are legally blind and the spectrum of accessibility barriers.

Landmark legal cases & learnings



Target:

In 2005, the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) notified Target of its website's inaccessibility for blind and visually impaired users. The main issues included the lack of alternative text for images, missing navigational headings, the inability to complete purchases without a mouse, and inaccessible store location maps. Initially, Target argued that its online services were not subject to ADA compliance as they weren't physical spaces.

However, the company later settled in 2008, agreeing to a \$6 million class-action settlement and significant improvements to its website accessibility. Additionally, Target consented to three years of monitoring by the NFB to ensure ongoing compliance. This case marked a significant recognition of ADA standards in the digital realm.



NETFLIX



Netflix:

In 2012, The National Association of the Deaf (NAD) sued Netflix for not providing closed captioning on its "Watch Instantly" streaming content. Despite Netflix's claim that ADA standards did not apply to its online-only service, the court disagreed, establishing that digital services are indeed "public spaces" under the law. Netflix was mandated to caption all streaming content by 2014 and paid \$755,000 in legal fees and damages, setting a precedent for accessibility in streaming media.

Key Takeaways:

These cases illustrate the legal implications and potential financial and reputational consequences of neglecting digital accessibility.

CHAPTER 3

The Design Dos & Don'ts

**Everything you need to know to test for accessibility from
guidelines and tools to case studies**

An introduction to Web Content Guidelines

A great starting point and benchmark for understanding accessibility barriers, is to follow the Web Content Guidelines (WCAG).

Role of WCAG in Accessibility:

The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines are not law. But they are widely recognised as the standard for creating accessible web content.

Developed through the W3C process, in cooperation with individuals and organisations around the world, WCAG guidelines aim to provide a single shared standard for web content accessibility that meets the needs of individuals, organisations, and governments internationally.

Following these guidelines helps make web content accessible to people with a wide range of disabilities, including visual, auditory, physical, speech, cognitive, language, learning, and neurological disabilities.



Web Content Accessibility Guidelines: A closer look

Principles Accessibility:

Four principles that provide the foundation for Web accessibility: perceivable, operable, understandable, and robust.

Perceivable:

Information and user interface (UI) components must be presented in a way that is easily processed by users.

Operable:

UI components and navigation must be operable by all users, such as with a keyboard rather than a mouse.

Understandable:

Users must be able to perceive and use a website, but they also must be able to understand it—the content and navigation cannot be beyond understanding.

Robust:

Content must be robust enough that it can be interpreted by a variety of platforms, browsers, and devices, as well as assistive technologies.

Levels

The three levels of WCAG 2.0 (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines) conformance are:

A

To meet this level, you have to meet 25 success criteria. For example, at this level, you can't identify something by colors, such as in "Push the yellow arrow to proceed."

AA

To reach this level, you have to meet 13 additional success criteria—and those are on top of the 25 from Level A. An example of criteria at Level AA is meeting color contrast standards.

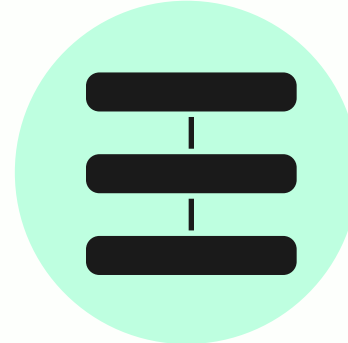
AAA

This comes with an additional 24 success criteria (for a total of 62). Examples of achieving Level AAA success would be an enhanced level of color contrast or a removal of any element that blinks or flashes three times per second in order to decrease the likelihood of a user having a seizure.

How to manually test for accessibility

Understanding UX Reviews

Regular UX reviews help identify, refine, and assess, if your website/app is both usable and accessible to everyone. During a UX review, several key design elements are carefully evaluated to enhance both usability and accessibility, including:



Visual structure: Is the visual layout aiding understanding and navigation?

123

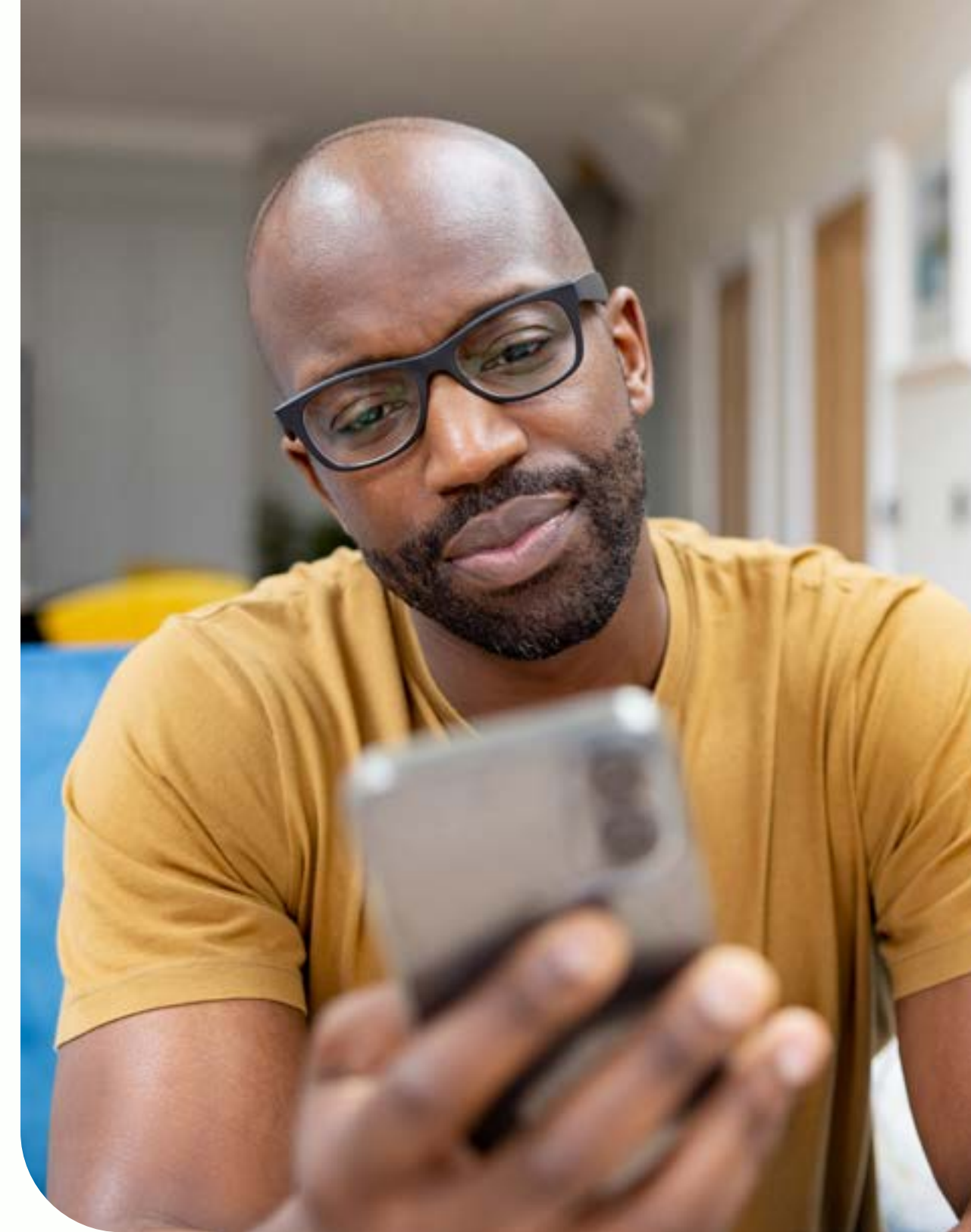
Logical page layout: Is the content arranged in a predictable and easy-to-follow way?



Menu functionality: Are the menus intuitive and easily navigable for all users, including those who rely on assistive technologies?



Button size: Are the buttons of a sufficient size to interact with, particularly for users with mobility impairments?



Manual Accessibility Testing Explained

Testing your website/app manually involves detailed, hands-on evaluation to uncover issues that automated tests might miss. It focuses on the human aspect of accessibility to understand the user experience from various disability perspectives.

Did you know...

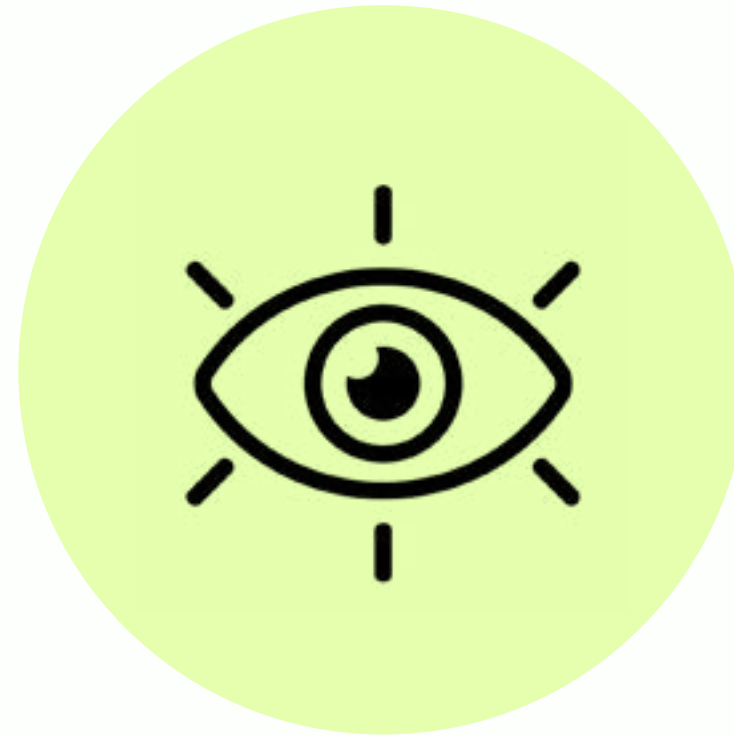
70% of WCAG (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines)* success criteria require human review to effectively assess and interpret the standards.

For example: an image may have alternative (alt) text present, but is the text a meaningful description of the image? This determination is best made by a human reviewer.

<https://blog.usablenet.com/automated-wcag-testing-is-not-enough-for-web-accessibility-ada-compliance>

Examples of Manual Accessibility

Hand-on strategies to manually test your websites/apps:



Screen Reader Testing:

Navigate your site or app using a screen reader to ensure the content makes sense when read aloud



Muting Sound:

Turn off speakers and microphones to verify that your site's functionality and experience remains intact without audio



Keyboard Navigation:

Use only a keyboard to navigate through the site/app, checking for the presence of "skip navigation" links and ensuring all interactive elements are accessible. Testing all menus with the keyboard to ensure none are skipped over.



Keyboard Commands:

Verify that links and form fields are highlighted when using keyboard commands. And check for skip links at the top of each page to allow users to jump directly to key content, for those relying on keyboard navigation.



Test Without a Mouse:

Tab between sections of a web page to ensure they can still be found without using a mouse

COMMON ACCESSIBILITY CHECKS:

Visual Structure

Different elements of a web page must be easy to locate and identify. This includes navigation menus, links, and text sections. Key design recommendations:

- Key elements should be at predictable locations and consistently identified.
 - Form labels and instructions must be clearly associated with their controls.
 - Provide distinct styles for interactive elements, such as links and buttons, to make them easy to identify. For example, change the appearance of links on mouse hover, keyboard focus, and touch-screen activation.
 - Ensure that styles and naming for interactive elements are used consistently throughout the website
- Making these key changes helps content become more accessible for:
- New site/app visitors
 - Users who are not confident using computers/web
 - Mobile device/tablet users (smaller screens)
 - Users with cognitive and learning disabilities who require clarity and consistency
 - Distracted/impatient users
 - Users with low vision using screen magnification



COMMON ACCESSIBILITY CHECKS:

Logical Page Layout

Key design recommendations:

- Provide sufficient contrast between foreground and background.
- Foreground text needs to have sufficient contrast with background colours. This includes text on images, background gradients, buttons, and other elements. This does not apply for logos, or incidental text, such as text that happens to be in a photograph.
- “Contrast ratio” is a short version of the more technically correct term “luminance contrast ratio”.

Pro tip: Don’t use colour alone to convey information

While colour can be useful for differentiation, it shouldn’t be the only way information is conveyed. For example, use an asterisk in addition to colour to indicate required form fields, and use labels to distinguish areas on graphs.

Pro tip: Make interactive elements easy to identify

Use distinct styles for interactive elements, such as links and buttons, to make them easy to identify. Change the appearance of links on mouse hover, keyboard focus, and touch-screen activation. Ensure that styles and naming for interactive elements are used consistently throughout the website.

Pro tip: Form elements have clearly associated labels

All fields should have a descriptive label adjacent to the field. For left-to-right languages, labels are usually positioned to the left or above the field, except for checkboxes and radio buttons where they are usually to the right. Avoid having too much space between labels and fields.

Pro tip: Use headings and spacing to group content

Use whitespace and proximity to make relationships between content more apparent. Style headings to group content, reduce clutter, and make it easier to scan and understand.

COMMON ACCESSIBILITY CHECKS:

Logical Page Layout

Menu Functionality

Menus and their items should be easy to identify. In addition to the structural markup the colour scheme is necessary to communicate the presence of menus and items visually.

Menu Readability

Appropriate sizing of menus and menu items to fit all text. Menu sizes should also adapt to varying text sizes, to accommodate languages with longer words and people who need larger text. Avoid all uppercase text, line breaks, and hyphenation, as these are often distracting and hard to read.

Menu Size

Provide sufficient white space, like padding, to support people with reduced dexterity and small touch screens on mobile devices. While also ensuring that menus do not overlap or interfere with other content when users increase the text size or zoom the page.

Menu States

Convey menu items and their states by using colour and other styling options. Don't rely on colour alone as some users will be unable to perceive such changes. For example, alter the shape of a menu item, or add an icon, in addition to changing its colour when it is selected.

Default state

Use distinct styling to visually indicate menu items as regions of the page that can be activated. However, avoid exaggerated text decoration, such as words in upper case or small caps, as these make text harder to read.

Hover and Focus states

Change hovered or focused menu items, which gives users visual guidance when navigating the menu. In this example, hover and focus states use an inverted colour scheme (blue on white instead of white on blue) and underline.

Active state

Indicate the menu item that was activated through clicking, tapping, or keyboard selection. Users can identify unintended activation, for instance when they have clicked on the wrong menu item. In this example, the active item has a darker blue background and an underline.

Current state

Also visually indicate the current menu item in addition to the structural markup discussed in the previous section. Consider adding a bottom border to give the current menu item a distinct colour and shape.

Visited state

For some types of menus, such as instructional steps, it may be useful to indicate menu items that a user had already visited. However, most menus are not expected to change based on the visited state

Fly-out Menus

People with reduced dexterity, such as tremors, often have trouble operating fly-out menus.

For some, it might be impossible. Make sure to provide other ways to reach the submenu items, for example by repeating them on the page of the parent menu item. Indicate navigation menu items with submenus visually by Icons and using markups within the code.

The fly-out functionality should be created using CSS mouse and keyboard users must be taken into consideration.

Pro tip: Insights for keyboard users

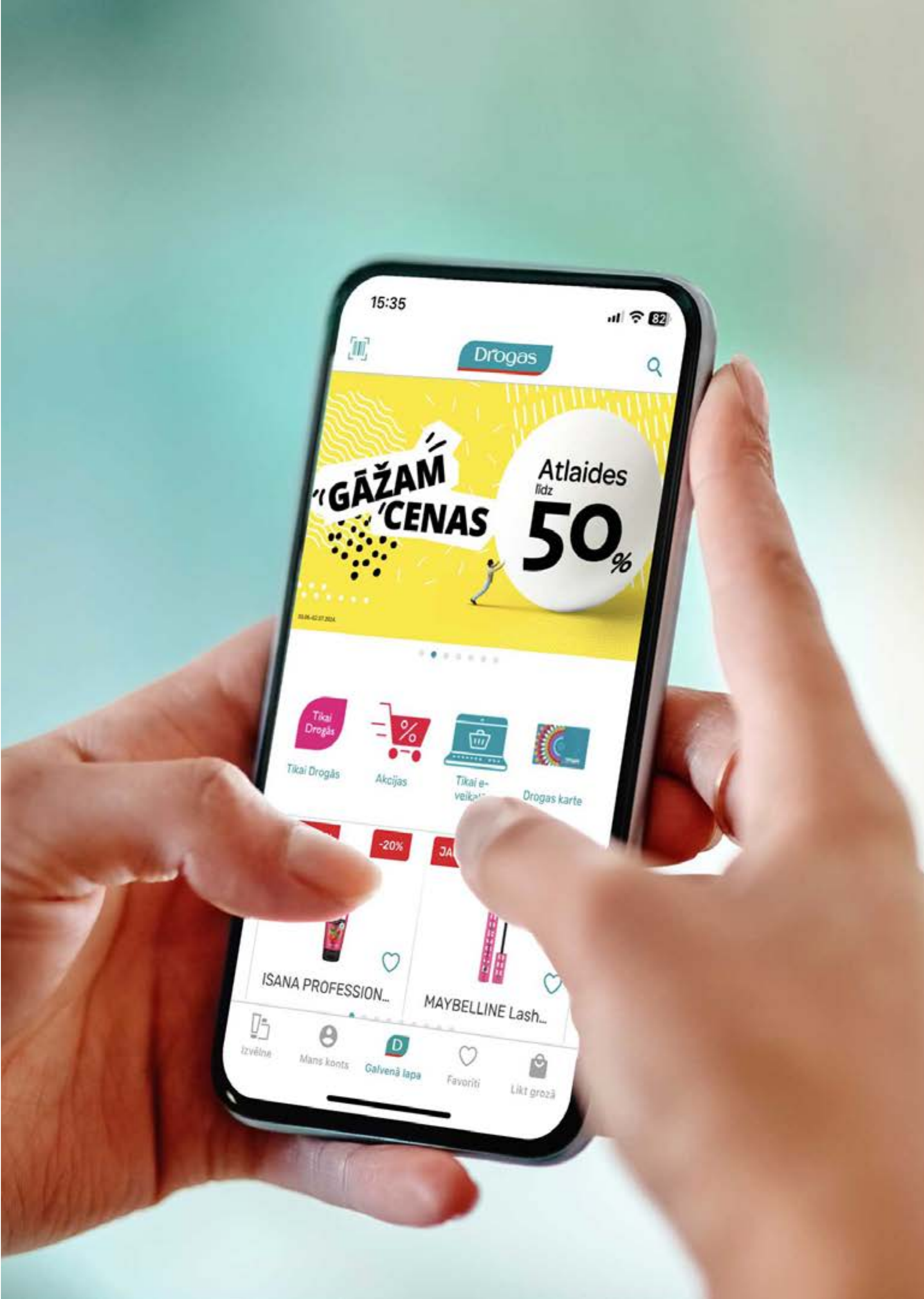
When designing with keyboard users in mind, submenus should not open when using the tab key to navigate through the menu, as keyboard users would then have to step through all submenu items to get to the next top-level item. Set the sub menu to activate on click, and the keyboard command as a enter or space bar.

COMMON ACCESSIBILITY CHECKS:

Button size

More than half of marketers said they considered the readability of buttons and links as a critical matter. Feedback has revealed that making the buttons a higher contrast is extremely helpful to disabled users; including text links that stand out from the body copy.

Where possible, it is recommended to use native HTML buttons rather than images, as native HTML buttons are supported by all user agents and assistive technology and provide keyboard and focus requirements by default, without need for additional customization.



DISCOVER



DISCOVER



DISCOVER



DISCOVER



Did you know...

If you want to make your links accessible and engaging, the best combination is colour and an underline, just like the default browser styling.

<https://www.temper.net/blog/why-you-should-almost-always-underline-your-links>

Fonts

When choosing a font for accessibility, it's essential to consider how the font will look on different display sizes, as some fonts may be more legible on a large display than on a small one. Additionally, accessibility fonts should be optimized for platforms like mobile viewports and accessibility readers. In short, accessibility fonts are important because they help ensure that everyone can read the content you create regardless of ability. Here are three fonts that are readily available on most machines within ASW Group.

Arial

Arial is a sans-serif font that has been designed with accessibility in mind. It has a high x-height, wide letter spacing, and a clear distinction between similar-looking characters. Arial is also compatible with accessibility readers and screen magnifiers, making it an ideal choice for accessibility projects.

Helvetica Neue

Helvetica Neue is another popular accessibility font with a large x-height, bold outlines, and increased character spacing to make the text easier for people with visual impairments to read. Additionally, Helvetica Neue also supports accessibility readers and screen magnifiers.

Verdana

Verdana is another accessibility font that has been specifically designed for accessibility purposes. It features a large x-height, bold outlines, wide character spacing, and clear distinction between similar-looking characters to help make the text easier to read. Additionally, Verdana is compatible with accessibility readers and screen magnifiers.

These 3 fonts are recommend, but additionally if these fonts are not available, then a sans-serif font would allow dyslexic users to see the shapes clearly.

What Fonts should not be used

Serif fonts. They may look decorative, but serif fonts can cause reading problems for dyslexic users. Serifs tend to obscure the shapes of letters, making the letters run together. This is because a lack of hooks increases the spacing between letters and makes them more distinguishable.

Italicized text

Italics are sometimes used to highlight text. But you shouldn't use italicized text because they make letters hard to read. The letters have a jagged line compared to non-italic fonts. The letters also lean over making it hard for dyslexic users to make out the words. When the text size is small (mobile screen), italicized text is even more illegible. A better way to highlight is to use bold text because the letters are clearer and give better contrast.

Display

River Effect

Dyslexic users may sometimes see the river effect in the text they’re reading. This is when large gaps occur within consecutive lines of text. It can look like a river of whitespace flowing down the words on a page. There are a couple bad practices that make the river effect happen.

Justified text

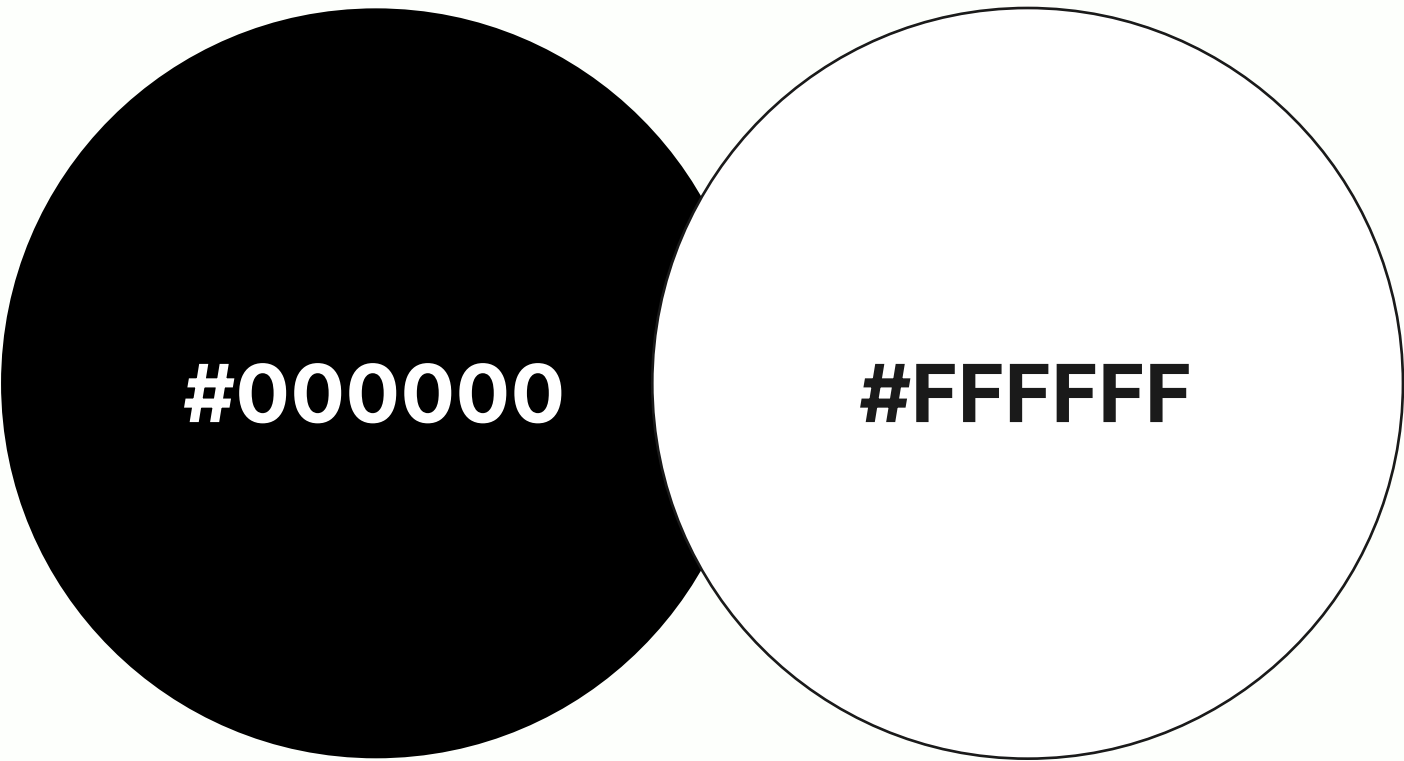
Justified text is not only difficult to read for dyslexic users, but for non-dyslexic users as well. This is because it creates large uneven spaces between letters and words. When these spaces line up above one another, a distracting river of whitespace can appear. This can cause dyslexic readers to repeatedly lose their place when reading. You can avoid creating the river effect by using left-aligned text, instead of justified text for your paragraphs.

Double spacing after periods

Most of us have a habit of double spacing after periods at the end of a sentence. This practice originates from the typewriting days of the past. Typewriters used monospaced fonts back then. Because of this, people thought that double spacing after periods would make the end of sentences more distinct. But single spacing after periods is enough because most websites use proportionally spaced fonts. Double spacing after a period can create “rivers” within text that make it difficult for users to find the end of sentences. On the web, single spacing wins.

Long blocks of unbroken paragraphs

Long blocks of unbroken paragraph text are not only hard for dyslexic users to read, but for non-dyslexic users too. It’s easy for dyslexic readers to lose their place with long paragraphs. That’s why it’s better to use short paragraphs that express one idea. This is because dyslexic users need more breaks between ideas than non-dyslexic users. Breaking up your text to one idea per paragraph makes reading a lot easier for both dyslexic and non-dyslexic users.

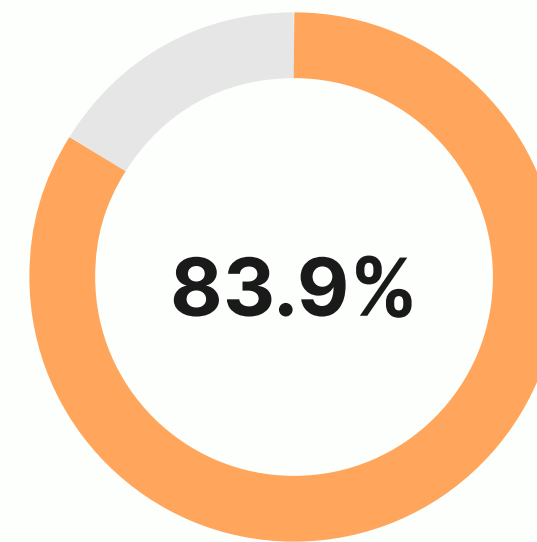


Pure black text on a pure white background

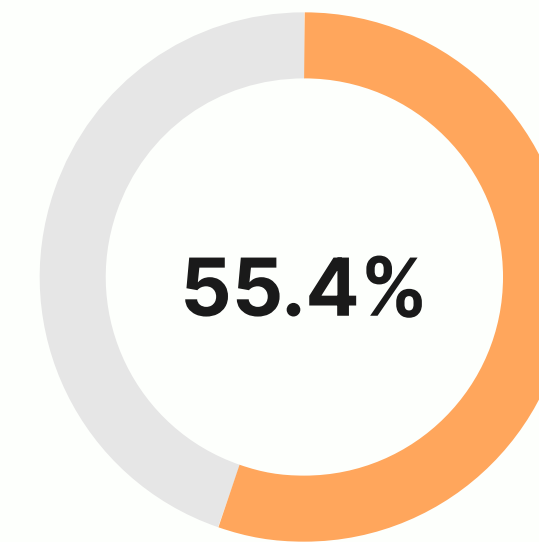
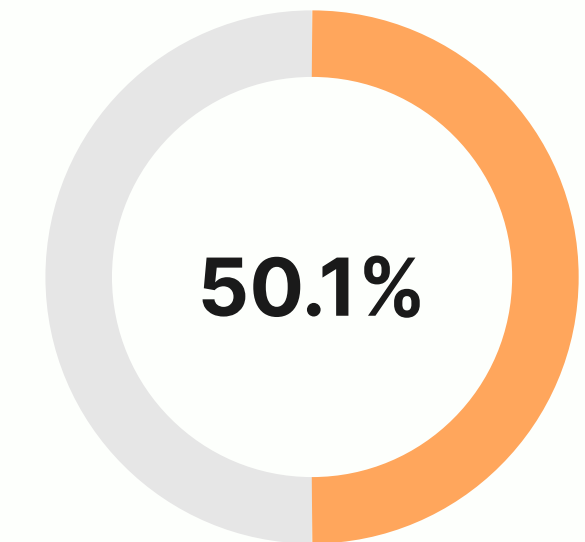
There’s a reason the text you’re reading now is not pure black (#000000), and the background is not pure white (#FFFFFF). It’s because many dyslexic users are sensitive to the brightness the high contrast colors cause. This can cause the words to swirl or blur together. To avoid this, use an off-white color for your background, like light gray or tan. You can also use a dark gray or dark blue for your text instead of pure black to cut the glare even more.

Most common failures on websites

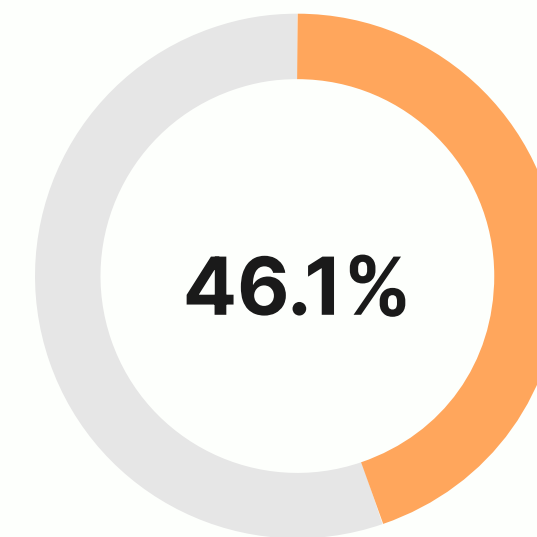
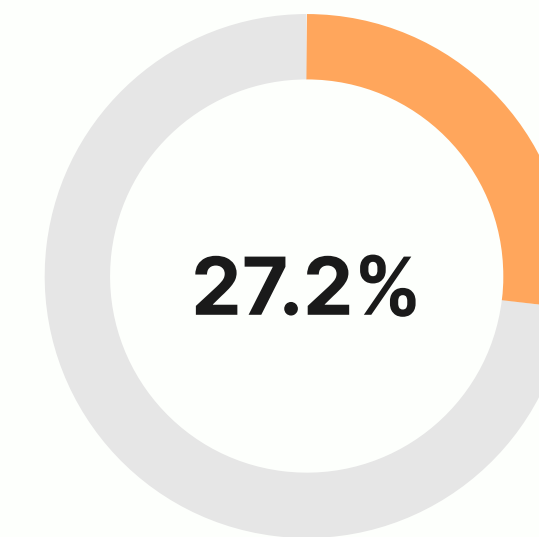
According to the WCAG, 96.5% of all errors detected on Homepages fall into these six categories (and have been the same for the last 4 years). Addressing these common issues would significantly improve accessibility.



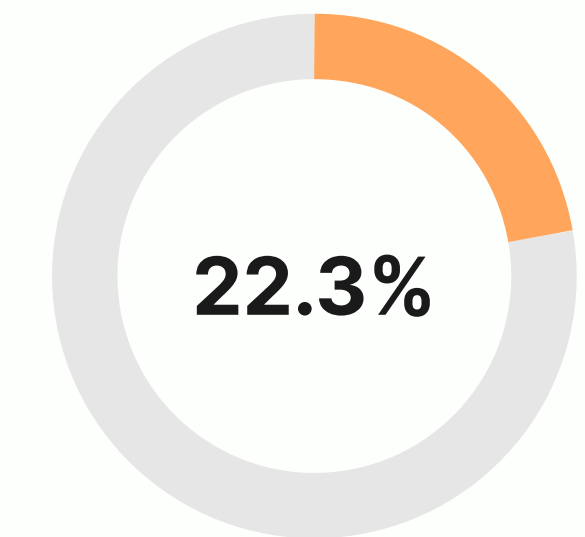
LOW CONTRAST

MISSING
ALTERNATIVE
TEXT

EMPTY LINKS

MISSING FORM
LABELS

EMPTY BUTTONS

MISSING DOCUMENT
LANGUAGE

Additional Tools for Testing

In addition to Manual Accessibility Testing tools and methods (as we've explored in page 17) you can also use Automated Testing methods. These tools can help you efficiently identify and address accessibility issues across your entire website.

Here are some examples:

Colour Contrast Checker

Colour Testing tools are a simple and effective way to check your accessibility. They verify the foreground-to-background colour contrast ratio to ensure it meets accessibility standards:

Normal text: Ratio should be more than 4.5:1

Large text and icons: Ratio should be more than 3:1

Low colour contrast ratio can make material harder to read. Avoid colour combinations like red and green, which may be challenging for those who are colour-blind.

Automated Accessibility Testing Tools

Automated tools can scan your entire site (or multiple sites) for accessibility errors. Some of these tools will not only identify errors on your website — they'll correct them for you. The automated tools are ideal for larger websites with hundreds to thousands of web pages.

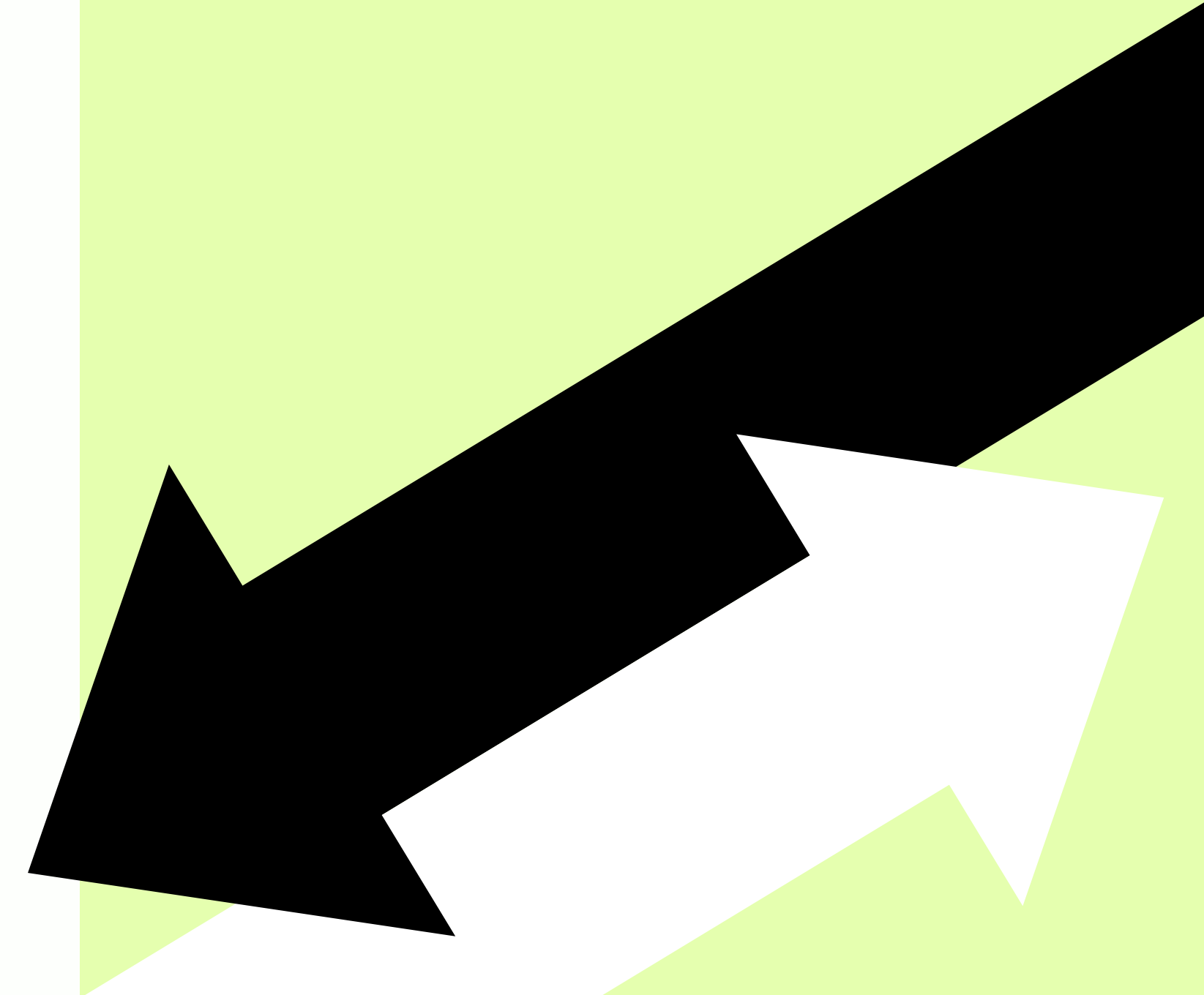
Here are a few examples (with free plans available):

Axe by Deque: A popular tool that integrates with browsers and development environments to help detect and fix accessibility issues

WAVE by WebAIM: An online tool that provides visual feedback about the accessibility of your web content by highlighting potential issues directly on the web page

Lighthouse by Google: An open-source, automated tool for improving the quality of web pages, including their accessibility.

Accessibility Insights by Microsoft: A suite of tools that helps developers find and fix accessibility issues in web, Windows, and Android apps.



Applying Accessibility to Emails

Applying Accessibility to Emails

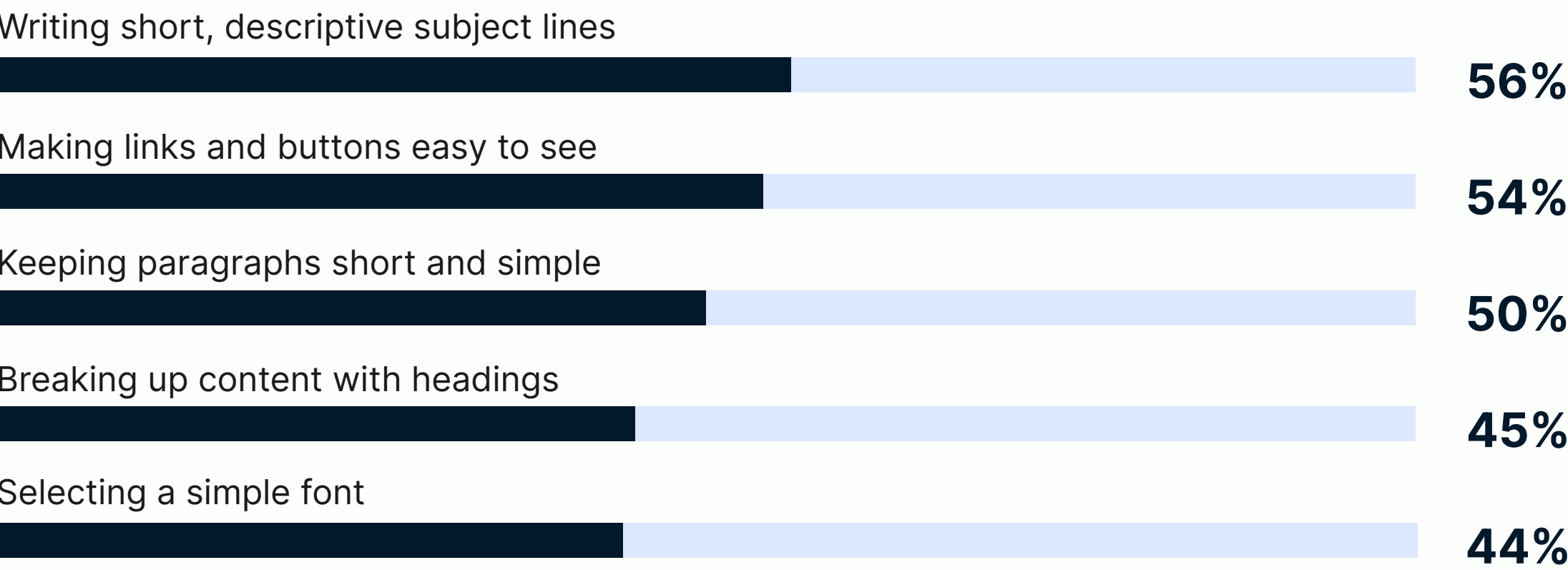
Emails are a powerful marketing tool that allows us to segment our lists for different audiences and personalise the experience for individuals, including subscribers with disabilities. It’s crucial to design emails that are accessible to everyone, ensuring all subscribers, regardless of their abilities, can engage with your content and promotions

Do email marketers consider accessibility?

From a broad perspective, it seems that the traditional 80/20 rule applies. Just over 80% of marketers consider email accessibility at least some of the time, while 19% admit they do not. These percentages shift when considering target audience and company size: 64% of B2C marketers regularly consider email accessibility, compared to 54% of B2B marketers

Supporting email accessibility

A closer look at common practices reveals that many email marketers may overlook important accessibility factors. The most frequently identified accessibility considerations include:



<https://www.emailonacid.com/blog/article/email-development/email-accessibility-in-2017>
Results from Accessibility in the Inbox survey (2021)

These elements all enhance the readability and usability of an email. While white space, short paragraphs, and a simple font are beneficial, there are additional strategies to further improve accessibility

Applying Accessibility to Emails

Colour Contrast

A particular item that fell in the middle of the list of options is color contrast. Only 35% of marketers said they were considering color contrast in email design. Design trends may play a role in the lack of color contrast being higher up the list; many designers saw Apple’s use of gray text on white backgrounds and mimicked the look – even though it’s not the most accessible.

Alternative text

The primary purpose of alt text (alt tags) is to describe an image. This helps screen reading software interpret graphics for people with vision impairments or blindness. The text also shows up when images fail to load in browsers and email clients. Alt text is used for search engine optimization (SEO), and try to use keywords to improve their rankings. Alt text should accurately reflect the image and describe it in a useful way.

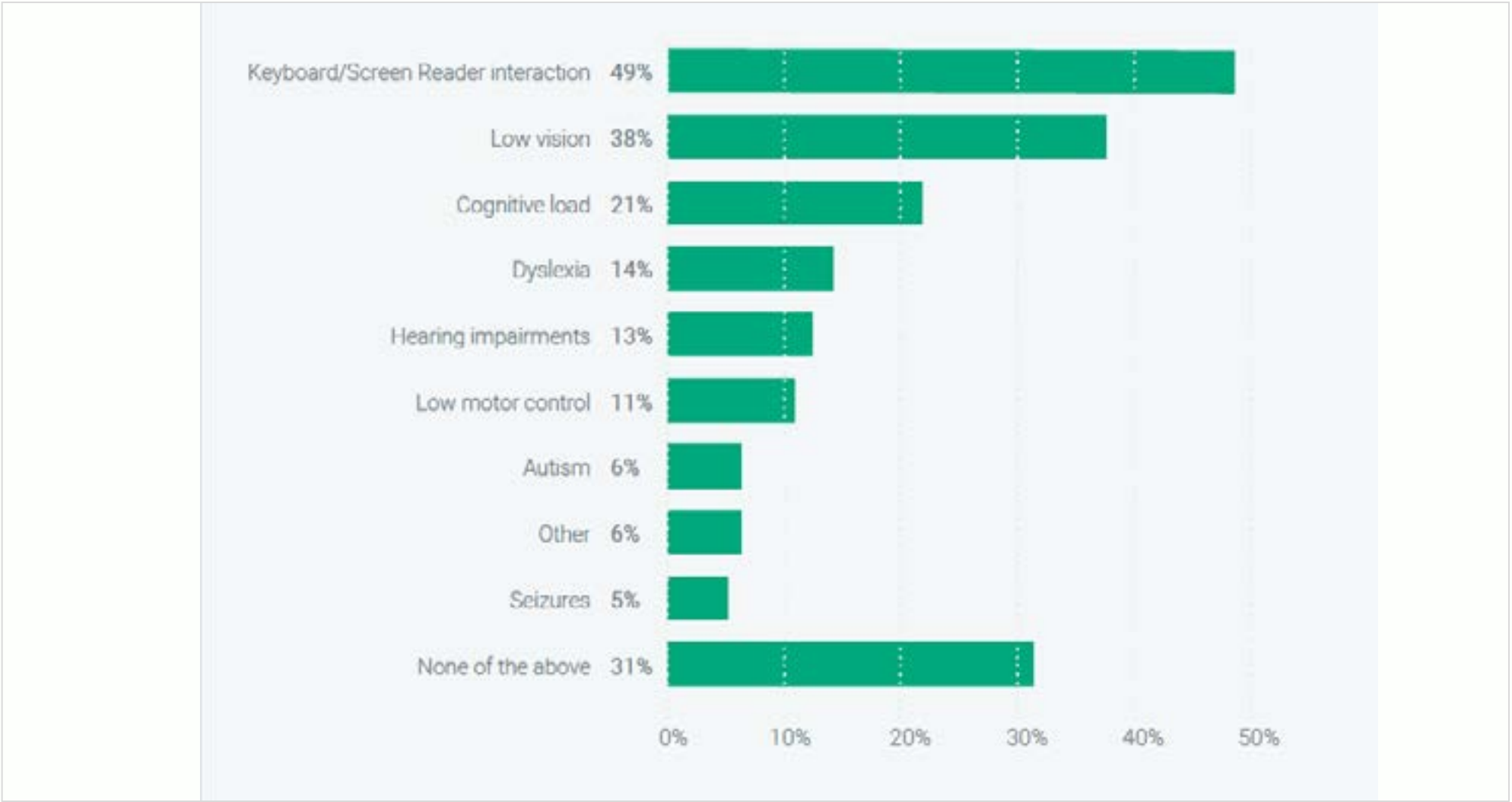
Other accessibility improvements require coding knowledge. These factors will require email developers. They include correctly sized tap targets for mobile accessibility and keyboard navigation friendliness for subscribers using screen readers. Semantic HTML or ARIA labels during development will improve further.

Addressing different disabilities

Every single subscriber is unique. People with disabilities are diverse and have a wide variety of needs.

Vision impairments

Email is a visual medium that requires reading. It’s usually people who are blind or have severe visual impairment who use screen readers to help them access the web and their email. Those subscribers often use keyboard commands to navigate through and interact with email content.



There are millions of people around the world with problems from glaucoma to color vision deficiency. Designing emails with low vision impairments in mind is an area where usability and accessibility intersect.

Applying Accessibility to Emails

The use of semantic HTML code is important when developing emails for screen reader interaction. Screen readers also use alt text to describe images.

Cognitive load and neurological issues

Cognitive load refers to the brain processing power that’s required to consume and understand content in an email. A key consideration for cognitive load should be avoiding the tendency to overwhelm people with information. Reducing distraction and making your emails easy to understand benefits all users. Dense copy can also be an issue for subscribers with dyslexia. That’s why using white space and keeping paragraphs short is a good best practice for email.

Graphics and animation, including GIFs, can cause issue for other subscribers. Overusing movement in an email campaign is distracting for people of all abilities. It may even cause them to miss your main call-to-action. As with other accessibility factors, reducing distraction and making your emails easy to understand benefits all subscribers, not just those with disabilities.

Hearing impairments

It’s not often that video and audio are used within an email, but it’s not impossible either. Email client support for the HTML5 elements <video> and <audio> is inconsistent and clunky at best. As of early September 2021, the tool Can I Email indicates only partial support from Apple Mail and Outlook. Without Gmail in the mix, many markets will likely stay away from embedding video and audio in emails. Naturally, email is constantly evolving so we can never say never. When video and audio become widely supported in email clients, then adding captions and transcriptions for multimedia content will be needed.

Physical limitations

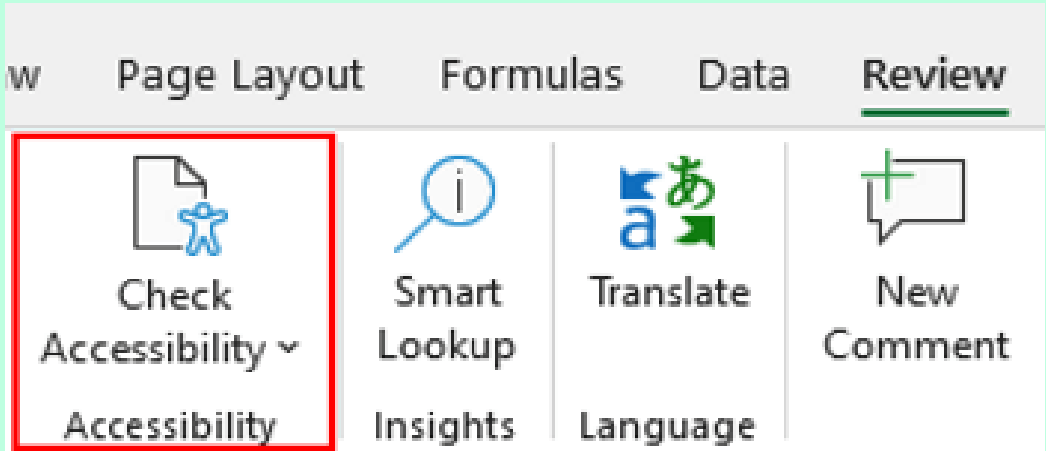
Mobility issues also present challenges, Some of these may be permanent physical disabilities. Some are temporary situations, such as a broken arm. Other physical limitations could be situational such as a new mother holding a crying baby while trying to read emails on her mobile phone. People won’t take the next step if they’re unable to click or tap elements of your emails.

Testing and optimization

Several of the accessibility advocates we spoke with highly recommended experiencing the emails for yourself. This helps you empathize with subscribers who are dealing with impairments even if you don’t have a disability.

Pro-tip: A note on Outlook

Want to make your emails more accessible? Before hitting send (or before sharing a Word doc, Excel spreadsheet, or PowerPoint presentation) use Microsoft’s accessibility checker. A quick click could make all the difference to helping a user better understand your content.



Applying Accessibility to Apps

Ensuring your mobile app is accessible allows disabled users to fully experience and utilize its features. It also often enhances the user experience for all consumers. Here are techniques that can be implemented easily and immediately to make your mobile app more accessible:

Hierarchy and Titles

A title for the app is required and upholding the hierarchy with headings. Landmark ARIA to depict the structure of an app or page, roles like search, navigation, content info, complementary, and banner within the HTML in order to communicate the roles, states, and properties for elements that have user-interaction.

Keep Gestures Simple

An app with gestures that are too complicated—such as requiring multiple fingers or drawn images would make it hard for users with motor impairments to complete. They may also be incompatible for blind users using screen readers as the gestures may conflict with the screen reader's controls. So it would be best to have gestures that are as simple as possible. Or to be able to allow users to customize how they interact with the application. It becomes frustrating when using an app if they have to turn off my screen reader, attempt the gesture, and then turn the voice back on hoping they did it correctly. Or having to wait for a sighted friend or family member to help.

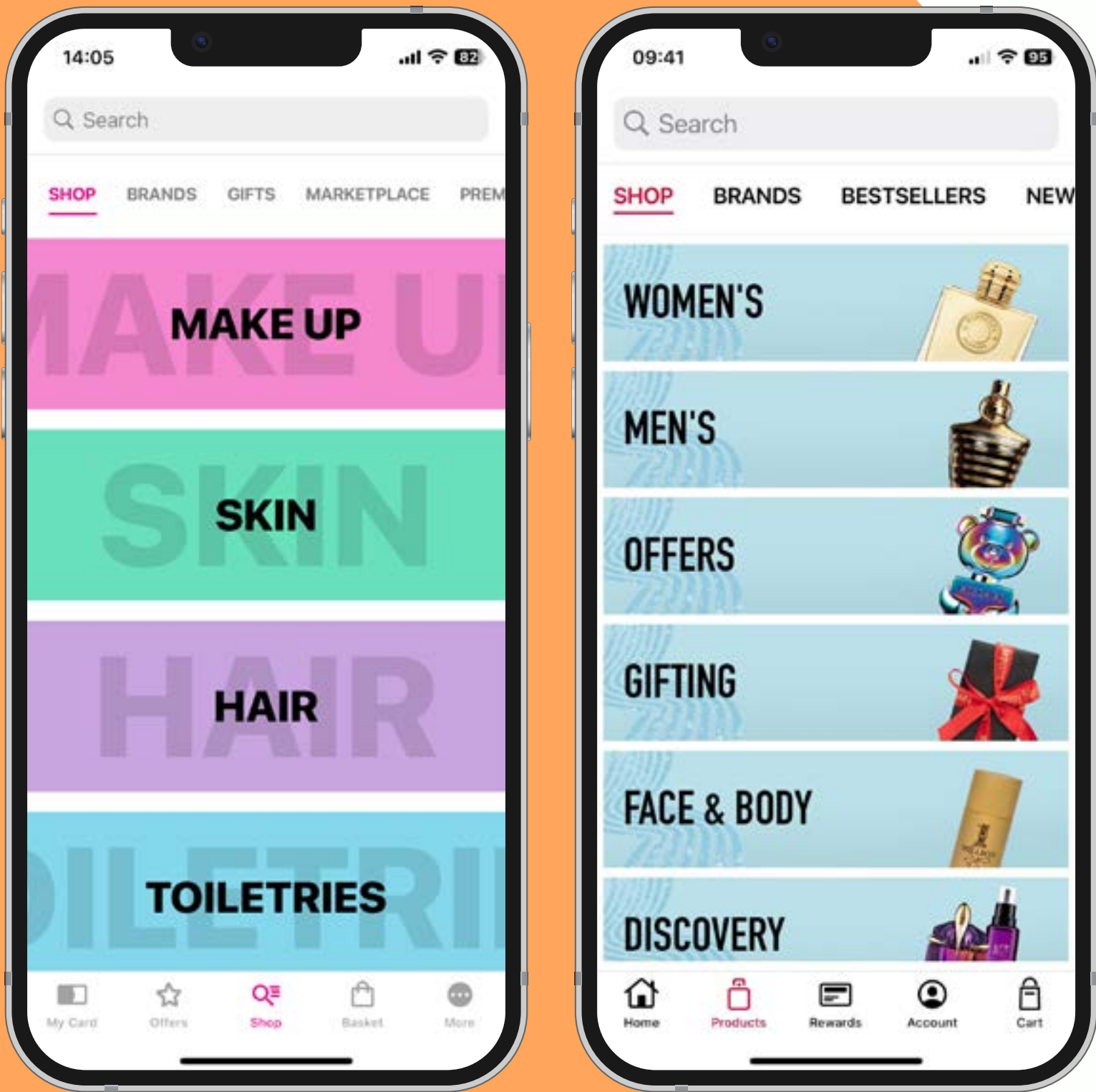
Touch Targets and Placement

Mobile devices' increased resolution enables numerous interactive elements to coexist on a small screen. These components must be sufficiently large and spaced apart for users to reach them by touch. Especially when users need to use the mobile with quick gestures, the tap targets in the app should be large enough for user to interact with accuracy and confidence. The following are recommended touch target sizes:

- Constructing touch targets with a minimum 34 pixels height and 34 pixels width
- Including the area around tiny touch targets that is inactive

Regardless of how the device is held, interactive elements in mobile apps should be placed where they are simple to access. UX Designers and Developers should think about how a button location that is simple for certain users might be challenging for others. Use with the left or right hand, for instance, or how far the thumb can move. The following are ideas for where to set touch targets:

- Put buttons at a convenient location.
- Give all interactive components the option of flexible use.



Applying Accessibility to Apps

Use Colour Contrast

Using good contrast is in general a best practice for all users. Especially on a mobile device where lighting may vary. A good contrast ensures that text remains legible for low vision and fully

or connecting a Bluetooth keyboard will help. sighted users alike. A low color contrast ratio makes the material harder to read. Avoid color combos like red and green when choosing a color as they may be challenging for those who are color-blind. According to the WCAG criteria, the text should have a color contrast ratio of at least 4.5:1 (larger text at least 3:1).

Provide Different Methods For Entering Data

It can be difficult for users to manually input information. So having alternative options such as information autofill, select menus, radio buttons or the ability to dictate can ease the strain on users. Depending on how much information I have to input, having select menus or connecting a Bluetooth keyboard will help.

Different Designs for Different Screen Sizes

Mobile devices are distinguished by their smaller screens and unique aspect ratios. That needs to be considered by designers when creating native apps. The amount of information that can be viewed on a tiny screen is constrained, especially when the user needs to zoom in on the content owing to eyesight problems. The following ideas will assist users in getting the most out of small screens:

- To reduce the need for users with low vision to zoom in and out, touch controls and preset screen sizes for content are provided.
- Placing the form field behind the labels rather than next to them.
- Reducing the amount of data on each page by offering a mobile website specifically for mobile devices or intentionally constructing the website.
- Link text length can be changed according to the viewport width

Ensure Consistent Layouts And Templates

Consistency is key when keeping apps user-friendly and accessible. Having a layout that changes depending on the screen's positioning or device can make it hard for users to know how to navigate.

Applying Accessibility to Apps

Consistent Navigation and Layouts

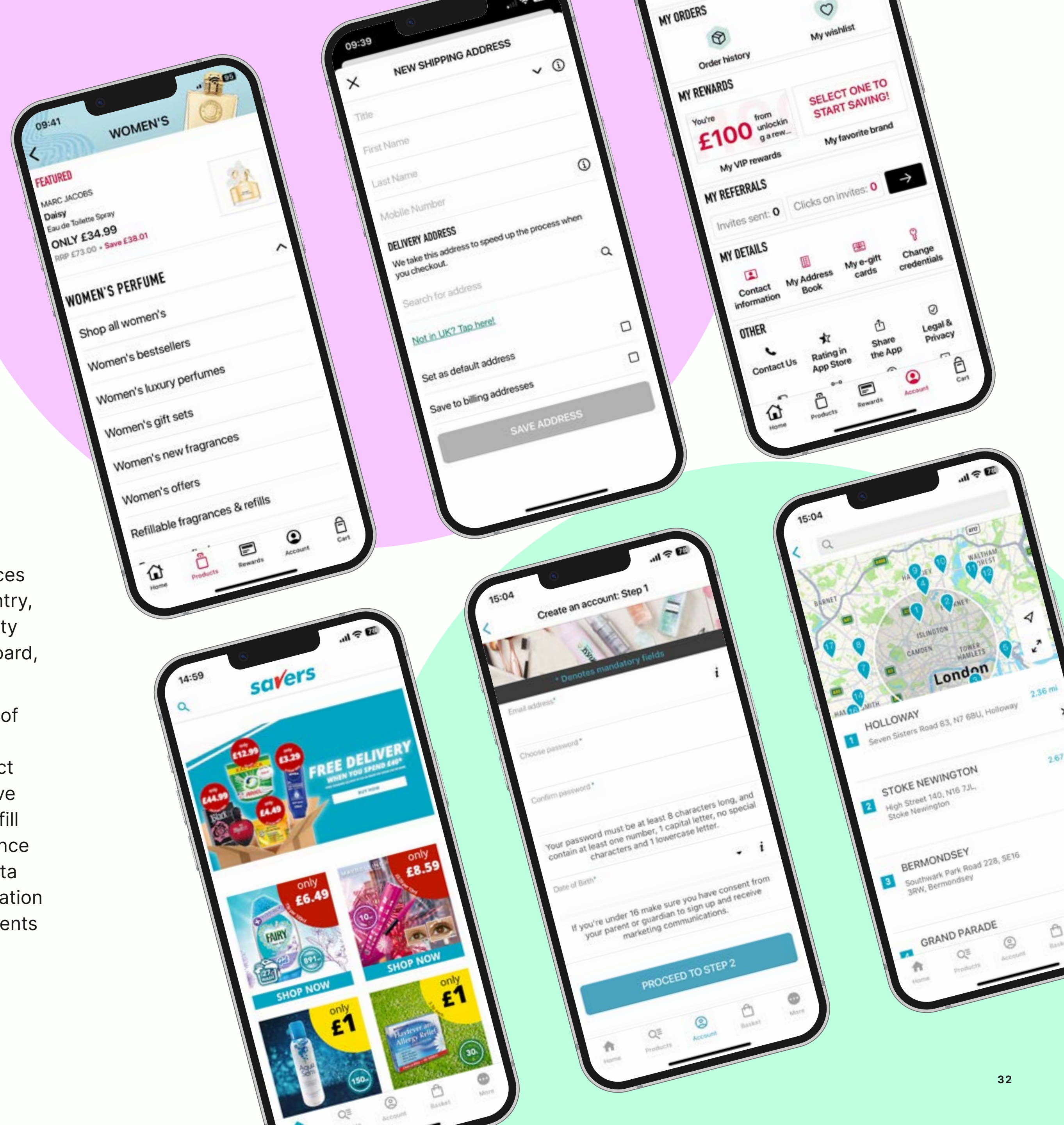
Consistency in content, layout, and navigation are all important components of user experience. Those with weaker motor skills could have trouble using a mouse or keyboard. They frequently avoid using web browsers in favor of mobile apps. Users of all kinds can benefit from mobile apps with assisted navigation that leads them from one option to the next.

Additionally, layouts are a crucial factor in determining whether mobile apps are accessible to all types of users.

Simple Data Entry Methods

Another distinguishing feature of mobile devices and native applications is multi-modal data entry, which allows users to enter data using a variety of methods, such as speech, a wireless keyboard, and an on-screen keyboard.

Other data entry methods can take the place of text entry, which can be time-consuming and difficult for some users. Simply integrate select menus, radio buttons, and checkboxes, or have information like date, time, and location auto-fill to lessen the amount of text entry needed. Since typing takes time, offering alternatives like data exchange between apps, autofill, or even dictation enhances the whole app experience and prevents mistakes.



Quickfire Design Do's & Don'ts



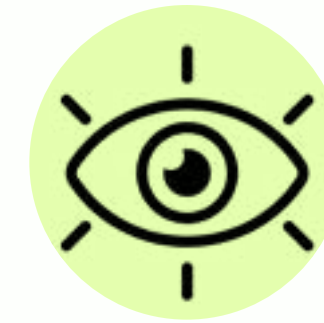
Designing for users on the autistic spectrum

Do

- Use simple colours
- Write in plain language
- Use simple sentences and bullets
- Make buttons descriptive
- Build simple and consistent layout

Don't

- Use bright contrasting colours
- Use figures of speech and idioms
- Create a wall of text
- Make buttons vague and unpredictable
- Build complex and cluttered layouts



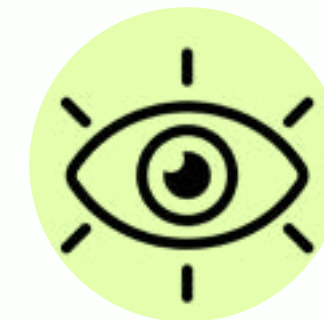
Designing for users of screen readers

Do

- Describe images & provide transcripts for video
- Follow a linear, logical layout
- Structure content using HTML5
- Build for keyboard use only
- Write descriptive links and heading

Don't

- Only show information in an image or video
- Spread content all over a page
- Rely on text size and placement for structure
- Force mouse or screen use
- Write uninformative links and heading



Designing for users with low vision

Do

- Use good contrasts and a readable font size
- Publish all information on web pages (HTML)
- Use a combination of colour, shapes and text
- Follow a linear, logical layout and ensure text flows and is visible when text is magnified to 200%
- Put buttons and notifications in context

Don't

- Use low colour contrasts and small font size
- Bury information in downloads
- Only use colour to convey meaning
- Spread content all over a page and force user to scroll horizontally when text is magnified to 200%
- Separate actions from their context

Quickfire Design Do's & Don'ts



Designing for users with physical or motor disabilities

Do

- Make large clickable actions
- Give form fields space
- Design for keyboard or speech only use
- Design with mobile and touch screen in mind
- Provide shortcuts

Don't

- Demand precision
- Bunch interactions together
- Make dynamic content that requires a lot of mouse movement
- Have short time out windows
- Tire users with lots of typing and scrolling



Designing for users who are D/deaf or hard of hearing

Do

- Write in plain Language
- Use subtitles or provide transcripts for video
- Use a linear, logical layout
- Break up content with sub-headings, images and videos
- Let users ask for their preferred communication support when booking appointments

Don't

- Use complicated words or figures of speech
- Put content in audio or video only
- Make complex layouts and menus
- Make users read long blocks of content
- Make the telephone the only means of contact for users



Designing for users with dyslexia

Do

- Use images and diagrams to support text
- Align text to the left and keep a consistent layout
- Consider producing materials in other formats (for example, audio and video)
- Keep content short, clear and simple
- Let users change the contrast between background and text

Don't

- Use large blocks of heavy text
- Underline words, use italics or write capitals
- Force users to remember things from previous pages - give reminders and prompts
- Rely on accurate spelling - use autocorrect or provide suggestions
- Put too much information in one place

Case studies & Insights

Understanding different perspectives: Dyslexic user experience – a case study

When we’re designing with accessibility in mind, we must consider the spectrum of lived experiences and adapt our content accordingly. To bring this to life, we’ve explored a case study through the lens of the user with dyslexic learning considerations.



HOW A DYSLEXIC CUSTOMERS EYE WILL FOCUS ON THE SPSPACES BETWEEN THE CHARACTERS

Text placement

Below we have 2 examples of how justified text affects dyslexic users.

River Effect

Users with dyslexia will experience what’s called the ‘river effect’ when they see large gaps in long lines of text. The spacing between words moves the visual focus onto the background space, which looks like a river flowing down the page. This makes the reader have problems reading fluently and accurately.



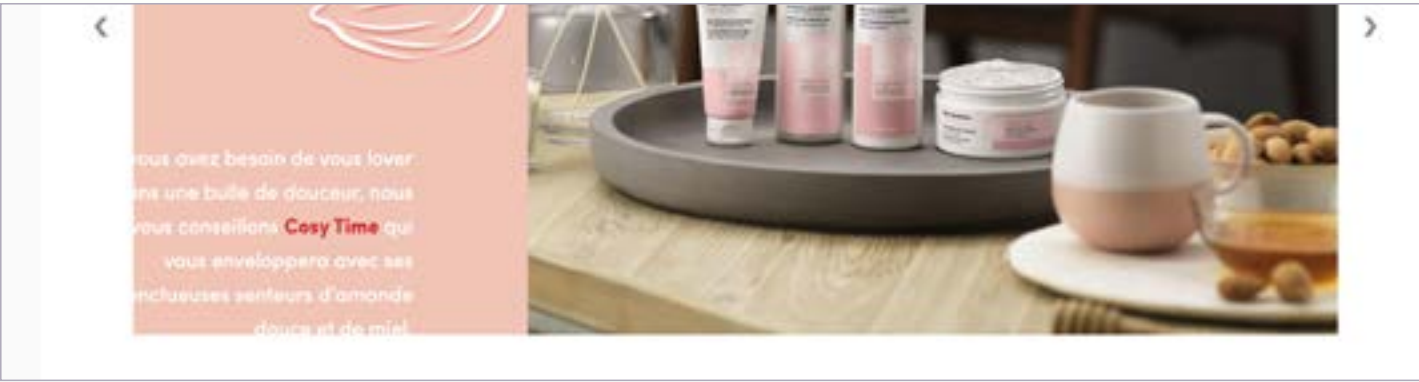
Washout Effect

When text looks faint and indistinguishable, like in the example to the right (multiple layers of text, purple text on a light purple background) it can cause dyslexic users to have a washout effect.

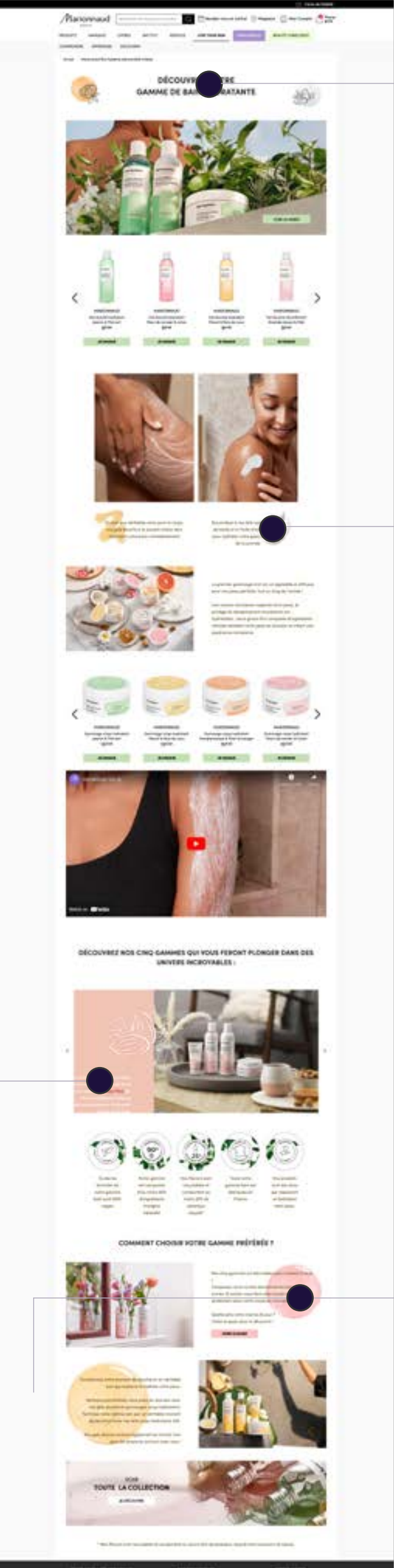


Dyslexic user experience – a case study

Aside is an example of a landing page with accessibility barriers for the dyslexic user, plus recommendations on how to improve.



Text in white runs off the coloured block: Even customers without disabilities would struggle to read this. Recommendation: Background colour fails contrast checker. Change both the text and background colour.



Headline is all in capitals: Dyslexic users will have difficulty reading this headline. Recommendation: Change to Sentence case (Upper and Lowercase) lettering and change the alignment to range left.



Multiple examples of text over image: Dyslexic users will experience abnormal patterns of eye movement during reading. Recommendation: Ensure the paragraphs area maximum width of 60-80 characthers . Also ensure the paragraphs are aligned left.

Dyslexic user experience – a case study

Legibility on Banners

Website banners are an important component that speak directly to our customers and drive conversions. How would those banners be read from the perspective of a dyslexic user?

Here's a look at past banners that pass and fail according to WCAG.

More examples on the next page.

DROGAS



Fail

Although the banners uses good contrast and the font is a Sans Serif font, all of the copy is in capital letters. A customer with dyslexia will struggle to read the offer.

MARIONNAUD FRANCE



Fail

The font is a Serif font, in capitals and set in Italics. Dyslexic users cannot read this banner as the font runs into one another and obscures the shapes of the letters.

THE PERFUME SHOP



Fail

The headline uses capital letters and italics that make it difficult to read, the gradient on the text makes it further difficult to read, as it fails the contrast checker.

SAVERS



Fail

All the text is in capital letters make it difficult to read. The text being centred and not aligned left will also impede the customers with dyslexia.

Dyslexic user experience – a case study

KRUIDVAT



Fair

This banner is an improvement, but using all capitals in the headline will make it hard for dyslexic customer and the design of the 'i' character will be particularly difficult.

TREKPLEISTER



Fair

The banner is an improvement, the headline and the CTA text is in sentence case. However, the Roundels are in capitals and the background fails the contrast checker.

MARIONNAUD ROMANIA



Pass

The banner is an improvement, the headline, body and CTA text are in sentence case. The background passes the contrast checker. The font point size is at a legible size.

TREKPLEISTER



Pass

This banner meets most needs, the headlines and CTA text are sentence case, the background passes the contrast checker.

Case studies & Insights

Contrast CTA Colours: Do you pass or fail?

The European Accessibility Act (EAA) will be in effect from June 28, 2025. Which means it will soon be a legal requirement for digital products to embrace accessibility, conforming to WCAG 2.1 level AA at a minimum.

Let's test ASW Group's (within Europe) CTA colours used on their websites to see if they comply...

Drogas	Background Colour #4398a7	Foreground Colour #ffffff
Kruidvat	Background Colour #d2392a	Foreground Colour #ffffff
Ici Paris XL	Background Colour #000000	Foreground Colour #ffffff
Marionnaud France	Background Colour #8064DB	Foreground Colour #ffffff
Marionnaud	Background Colour #151515	Foreground Colour #ffffff
Savers	Background Colour #4aa5c2	Foreground Colour #ffffff
Superdrug	Background Colour #4aa5c2	Foreground Colour #ffffff
Trekpleister	Background Colour #ee7203	Foreground Colour #ffffff
The Perfume Shop	Background Colour #000000	Foreground Colour #ffffff

BU	AA Large	AAA Large	AA Normal	AAA Normal
Drogas	✔ Pass	✘ Fail	✘ Fail	✘ Fail
Kruidvat	✔ Pass	✔ Pass	✔ Pass	✘ Fail
Ici Paris XL	✔ Pass	✔ Pass	✔ Pass	✔ Pass
Marionnaud France	✔ Pass	✘ Fail	✘ Fail	✘ Fail
Marionnaud	✔ Pass	✔ Pass	✔ Pass	✔ Pass
Savers	✘ Fail	✘ Fail	✘ Fail	✘ Fail
Superdrug	✔ Pass	✘ Fail	✘ Fail	✘ Fail
Trekpleister	✘ Fail	✘ Fail	✘ Fail	✘ Fail
The Perfume Shop	✔ Pass	✔ Pass	✔ Pass	✔ Pass

CHAPTER 4

The Future of Accessibility

The accessibility landscape (and laws) are changing June 2025, here's what to do before then...



Testing & next steps

With big changes coming into law in June 2025, it's important every BU has a plan towards reviewing and improving online experiences with accessibility in mind.

Here's some recommended next steps:

Undertake an accessibility audit of your current website: Put together a development plan for improvements. Some will be quick wins and others will require more planning.

Consider mobile device testing as a priority: More users are accessing content from smartphones and tablets, starting here is a great next step.

Review the basics: For example: ensure all images have Alt Tags and are described correctly and numbered in the correct sequence.

Consider your current environment: Think about the content on your site and the speed that it loads when making changes as not everyone has high speed broadband.

Alternative methods of providing the same information: Are you using colour as the only visual means of conveying information?

Familiarise yourself with industry accessibility standards: Use this guide and WGAC 2.0 as a benchmark for any accessibility audits.

Create internal testing user groups: If you have team members with disabilities and additional learning needs, listen to their experiences and do role play activities as they can provide valuable insights. Understanding the user experience is a vital component to making improvements and changes.

When commissioning third parties: Ensure you ask about their web accessibility credentials, in any engagement and monitoring discussions.

Start with essential assistive technologies: such as screen readers and magnifiers. Make sure your website enables them to work as a bare minimum and include in your development plan

Strategic forecast and planning ahead

The benefits of making improvements to your website, app, and emails, extend beyond ticking boxes for guidelines and for legal. Investing time and resource into accessibility now, means a future that could include:

Broader market reach

Making your digital content more accessible widens your audience, significantly expanding your customer base. For example: inaccessible websites miss out on 15-20% of potential clients, while accessible sites increase market penetration, leading to more customers, improved revenue, and enhanced brand visibility.

Improved user experience

Content is more navigable and understandable for all users, not just those with disabilities. This leads to a better user experience, potentially lower bounce rates, and higher customer retention, satisfaction, and conversion.

Reduced risk of legal complications

By providing equal access to all users, you minimise the chances of facing lawsuits related to accessibility issues.

SEO boost

Aligning SEO goals with web accessibility improves your website’s search engine rankings.

Practices such as adding ALT-text to images, writing accurate content, and maintaining a clutter-free page boost your rankings. An accessible site decreases bounce rates and appeals to both screen readers and search engines. Techniques like image optimisation and descriptive text alternatives for non-text elements further improve your website’s position.

Innovative mindset

Optimising your web design for accessibility fosters creativity and innovation, allowing your business to keep up with constantly changing trends. This proactive approach not only meets current standards but also prepares your business for future developments in digital accessibility.

Enhanced brand reputation

An accessible website helps build a positive brand reputation. Compliant sites demonstrate social responsibility by providing equal access to all users. Positive web experiences lead to positive reviews and recommendations, strengthening your brand’s reputation

Increased customer loyalty

An accessible website supports a smooth user journey, making it easier for all visitors to engage with your content and complete desired actions. Simplifying forms, reducing steps in checkout funnels, and ensuring sufficient session timeouts for users with assistive technologies all contribute to higher conversion rates.

Faster page loading times

Accessible guidelines such as image optimisation and proper titling contribute to faster loading speeds, ensuring that visitors stay on your site.

Final thoughts

Here at eLab, we believe that investing in accessibility is more than a technical upgrade and legal requirement: it's about opening our doors to a wider, more diverse customer base that values inclusivity.

This allows us to connect with a new community of customers and show how we value every interaction, because we create- from products to websites-with everyone in mind.

Conclusion

Making your site accessible is a very positive step, not only for your audience but also for improving your business. It will allow you to cater to an audience that otherwise would have been blocked to you, (by their own will or by your site), who wants to reach out to and do business with companies that empathise and embrace them. Once you make the necessary changes and they recognised the efforts made, to allow them access to your site, you automatically open your business doors to exponential growth. Spending time cleaning up the code, eliminating bugs, and reaching a universal design will be time well spent as focusing on on-site usability and accessibility helps your user base grow.

If you want to know more, or need assistance in testing/auditing your content, then please contact our Design & UX team:

Andrew Montgomery (UX)

Email: Andrew.Montgomery@uk.aswatson.com

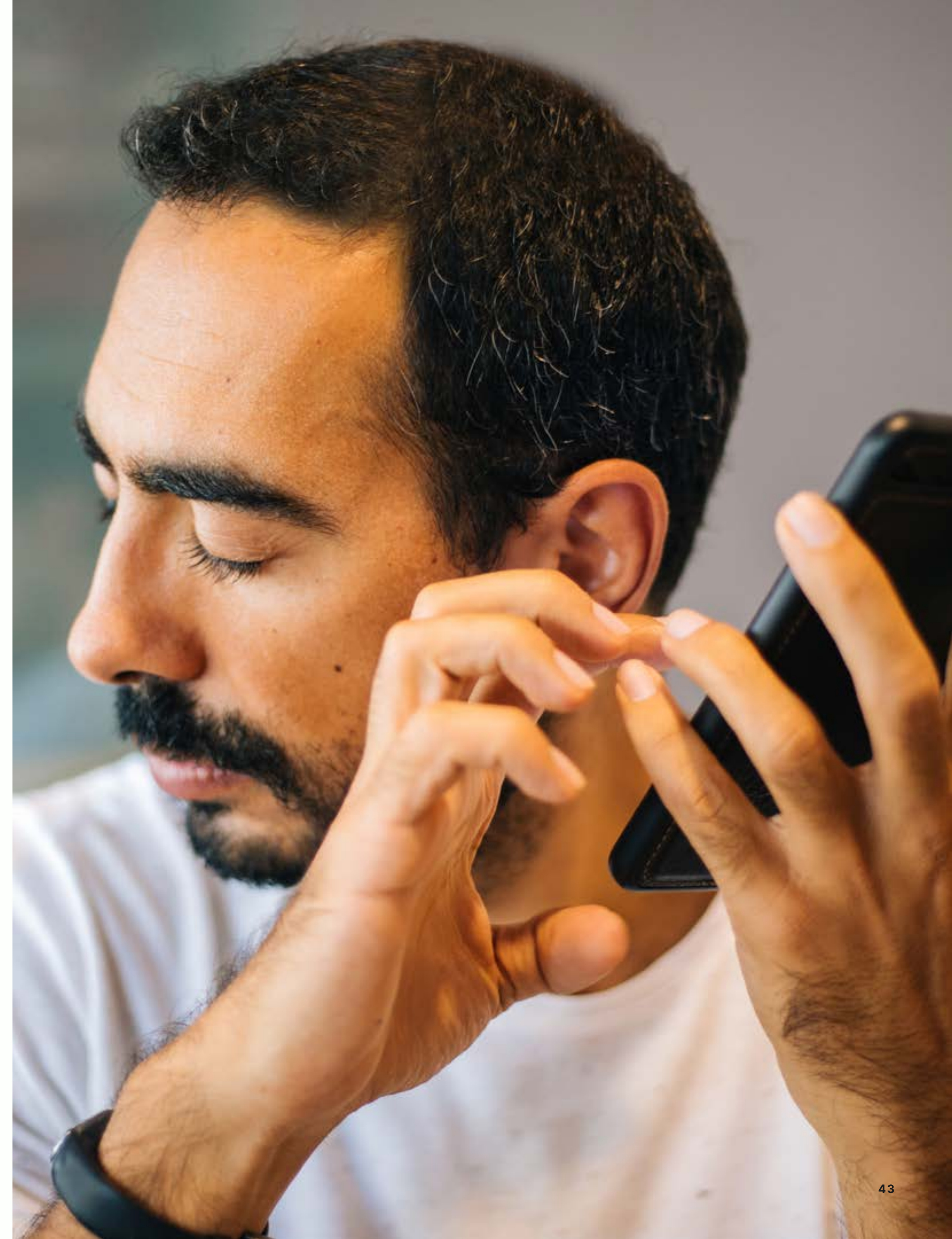
Mark Woodland (Design)

Email: Mark.Woodland@uk.aswatson.com

Outside of this, you build a connection between your brand and the disability community by showing that you care for them through your accessible website.

Your new clients will then potentially show gratitude to your business by being fiercely loyal visitors, returning again and again, eventually over time relying solely on your site.

If you wish to know more about how accessibility can be applied to your website, or would like assistance in testing, or auditing your website, then please do not hesitate to contact the Design & UX team, here at eLab Commercial.



Resources & References

European Disability Forum: influential umbrella organisation that represents the interests of over 100 million persons with disabilities in Europe, advocating for their rights and inclusion across all areas of European policy.

<https://www.edf-feph.org/>

Purple Tuesday: a global social movement for improving the customer experience for disabled people and their families.

<https://purpletuesday.co/>

Purple Pound: a social enterprise that works to change the conversation about disability by bringing disabled people and businesses together to understand and address the challenges of disability exclusion, particularly in the economic sphere.

<https://wearepurple.org.uk/>

European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA): Data and research on disability rights across EU countries, including access to digital services.

<https://fra.europa.eu/en/theme/people-disabilities>

Free training & webinars:

<https://abilitynet.org.uk/free-tech-support-and-info/webinars>

Glossary

ADA: Americans with Disabilities Act is a civil rights law that was enacted in 1990 in the United States to prohibit discrimination against individuals with disabilities in all areas of public life, including jobs, schools, transportation, and all public and private places that are open to the general public

Alternative Text (Alt Text): Text provided as an alternative to non-text content like images, which helps screen reader users understand the content and function of images.

ARIA (Accessible Rich Internet Applications): A set of attributes that define ways to make web content and web applications more accessible to people with disabilities, especially dynamic content and advanced user interface controls developed with HTML, JavaScript, and related technologies.

Colour Contrast Ratio: The ratio of the luminance of the brightest colour (white) to that of the darkest colour (black) in a text, ensuring text is readable against its background.

Skip Navigation Links: Links that allow users to bypass repetitive navigation links and go straight to the main content of the page, improving accessibility for keyboard and screen reader users.

WCAG: Web Content Accessibility Guidelines are developed through the W3C process in cooperation with individuals and organisations around the world, aiming to provide a single shared standard for web content accessibility that meets the needs of individuals, organizations, and governments internationally.

W3C: The World Wide Web Consortium is an international community that develops open standards to ensure the long-term growth of the Web. The W3C process involves collaboration among experts and stakeholders from various fields and industries to create and update standards like the WCAG.