Information and Communications Standard

Making your website more accessible

Web accessibility benefits millions of users with disabilities, but it also benefits people without disabilities, like people using a slow Internet connection or people with changing abilities due to aging.

Under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, all private and non-profit organizations with 50 or more employees and all public sector organizations will need to make their websites accessible. This guide can help you better understand web accessibility and how to create a more accessible website.

What you need to do

Beginning January 1, 2014:

- If you are launching a new public website and web content or doing a significant site refresh, the site and its content must conform to the World Wide Web Consortium Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0, **Level A**.

Beginning January 1, 2021:

- All public websites and web content must conform with WCAG 2.0 **Level AA**, other than providing captions on live videos or audio descriptions for pre-recorded videos.

You don't have to modify content posted before 2012 and you don't have to make your internal website accessible. If asked, you will need to work with individuals to make the content accessible to them in some way, like large print or Braille.

Not sure you can make your site accessible? Don't understand what a "new website" is? Check out Appendix A for some frequently asked questions.

What is WCAG Level A or AA?

WCAG 2.0 is an internationally accepted standard for web accessibility developed by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C), an international team of experts.

WCAG sets out guidelines for organizations to make their websites more accessible. The guidelines cover things like:

- writing web content in clear language
- providing alternate text for images, or
- making sure someone can navigate your website with just a keyboard.

Each guideline has three levels of accessibility: A, AA and AAA. Level AAA is the highest level of accessibility.

Tip

Make your web content accessible at Level AA now. This will reduce the amount of changes you'll have to make to your website down the road. It may also reduce the requests you receive for accessible formats or communications supports.

Getting started

The following steps can help you and your team better understand the most common barriers on your websites and how to fix them.

If you don't manage your website or don't have web development experience, work with your web developer to make your website more accessible. To learn more about working with web developers, see Appendix C at the end of this guide.

1. Assess your website and web content

Find out if your website and web content is already meeting WCAG accessibility standards. An accessible website takes into account the variety of ways that people with disabilities navigate the web and understand web content. To learn more about how people with different abilities use the web, check out Appendix B at the end of this guide.

If you didn't ask your past developer to meet a certain level of accessibility or are using common software to create your websites, there are likely accessibility issues that need to be addressed. To assess your website and content you or your web developer should test the site using:

- **Automatic assessments**
  These provide a fast way to help you or your web developer identify a wide variety of accessibility issues, such as testing links.

- **A manual assessment**
  This identifies issues an automatic assessment wouldn't, like if the alternate text provided for an image makes sense.

- **Assistive technology**
  Testing the site with assistive technology, like a screen reader helps to make sure people using this type of technology aren't encountering barriers that you may not see.
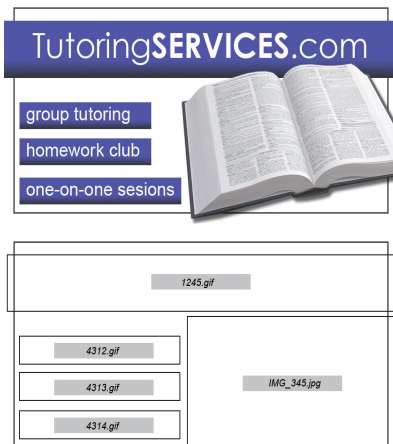
2. Make it accessible

Some accessibility barriers will be simple to fix, while others will be more complex. For example, using larger text and clear language is simple, but providing captions on videos may be more difficult or will take more time.

To get you started, below are tips to fix some of the most common barriers found on the Web .

To review the complete set of WCAG 2.0 guidelines, visit: www.w3.org/TR/WCAG/

- **Provide captions and text alternatives for images and multimedia**
  If someone is using a screen reader, it will scan an image or graphic text to find a description and read it aloud. If you haven't provided any, the user won't know what the image is. For example:
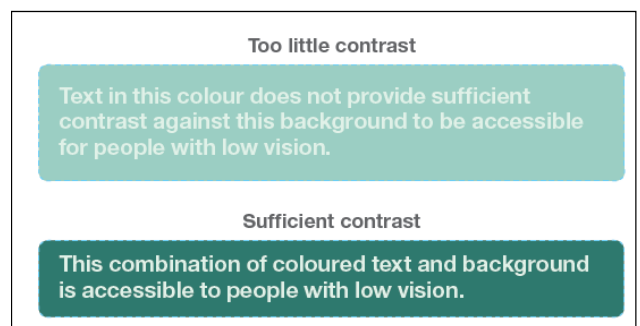

If a meaningful alternative (alt) text has been provided, someone using a screen reader will hear: "tutoring Service Site Label", followed by "Group Tutoring", "Homework club", etc.

If no alt text were provided, the screen reader may just read the file name associated with the image (e.g. 1245.gif), or it might skip it as if it doesn't exist.

- **Use strong contrast between text and background**
  A lack of contrast impacts people with low vision, and people who are colour blind. It also makes your site difficult to navigate for people using devices, like cell phones or in bright sunlight. Try colour combinations like dark blue and matte white, black and white or yellow and black – or use an online contrast analyzer to make sure it's accessible.

Too little contrast

Text in this colour does not provide sufficient contrast against this background to be accessible for people with low vision.

Sufficient contrast

This combination of coloured text and background is accessible to people with low vision.

- **Create content that can be presented using assistive technologies (like screen readers) without losing meaning**
  Start by making your zoom and size settings flexible, especially for text. If you don't allow users to make text larger, or if it causes the content to lose its structure, you may be preventing people with low vision from using your website.

- **Use structured content and make it keyboard accessible**
  A structured website is presented in a logical, predictable way that makes it easy for users to navigate. It uses pre-set styles to tell people using assistive technologies, like screen readers, what text is a heading, a bulleted list, or where there is a hyperlink. Present web content in a structured format and make it accessible from a keyboard so that people using these technologies can use their tab key to navigate the content.

- **Avoid CAPTCHAs and give users enough time to read and use content**
  To prevent Spam, CAPTCHAs (Completely Automated Public Turing test to tell Computers and Humans Apart), typically require users to type letters or digits from a distorted image to make sure they are human. If your CAPTCHA asks people who have vision loss to type in the image they see, the test could be impossible. Instead, ask the user to answer a simple question, like whether fire is hot or cold or provide an audio option.

- **Avoid using time limits when asking users to provide a response or information**
  If you need to use a time limit for security reasons allow the user to extend the time limit if needed.

- **Avoid blinking images**
  Businesses often assume that flashing content will draw attention to their website, but any content that flashes more than three times in one second could cause a customer with epilepsy to have a seizure.

- **Help users navigate and find content**
  Make sure your links state what they lead to so people using screen readers can easily scan the links on the page. For example, instead of your link stating 'click here', try expanding the link to 'click here for more information on prices', or just 'prices'.

- **Help users avoid and correct mistakes**

  If you use any type of online form, avoid using a generic 'error' message. This makes it difficult or impossible for someone with a cognitive disability or someone using a screen reader to fix the mistake they have made.

  Alternately, don't use colour alone to prompt a response. For example, don't ask survey respondents to 'fill in fields marked in red'. This is impossible for someone who doesn't see colour or someone who is using a device that only displays black and white. Use descriptive text or symbols in addition to colour.

  You did not complete all of the required fields. **Required fields are indicated below.**

  Your Name:

  Sophia

  Email Address:

  Sophia@email.com

  Postal Code:

  Password:

  ••••••••••

  You did not complete all of the required fields. **Required fields are indicated below.**
  • Please provide your Postal Code.

  Your Name:

  Sophia

  Email Address:

  Sophia@email.com

  ⚠ Postal Code:

  Please provide your Postal Code

  Password:

  ••••••••••

- **Make your tables accessible**

  Tables are often used to showcase price lists, but if you haven't indicated what cells are headings and/rows, people using assistive technology may not be able to read the information in a way that makes sense.

Service	Cost	Minutes
Massage	$90	60
Shiatsu	$65	30

If this table wasn't formatted for accessibility, someone using a screen reader would hear: "Service cost minutes massage 90 dollars 60 shiatsu 65 dollars 30. If the headings were identified the reader would hear "Table with three columns, three rows. Service: Massage. Cost: 90 dollars. Minutes: 60", and so on for each row.

Did you know?

Accessible websites have better search results. Search engines, like Google, rank websites using guidelines similar to those for Web accessibility. Increasing your website's accessibility may mean your organization is third, rather than 23rd in search engine results.

3. Test your new site or refreshed site

There are a number of ways to know if your new or refreshed website is accessible:

- **Automatic assessment and assistive technology**
  Do a final evaluation on your site using an automatic assessment to flag any issues that may not have been resolved. Review your site using assistive technology like screen readers to make sure the design and technical aspects of the site are accessible.

- **User testing and feedback**
  If possible, ask people with disabilities to test your new or refreshed site before you launch. Get feedback from customers and other site users to find out if there are any improvements needed.

- **Review key milestones and changes**
  Keep a record of the accessibility issues that have been repaired, or ask your web developer to maintain one. This will show you the completed work and the new level of accessibility. It will also be helpful if your organization is asked to show that your website is WCAG 2.0 compliant.

Did you know?

Studies show that accessible websites have lower maintenance costs and a number of economic benefits. Check out this link for more information on how an accessible website can directly benefit your organization: www.w3.org/WAI/bcase/Overview.

4. Keep it accessible

It will be up to you and your employees to make sure your website continues to meet WCAG Guidelines. If you don't have a developer or designer in-house, give your staff resources or training to create accessible web content. If you are creating more robust content, like a video or audio file, think about what is needed to make it accessible from the start.

Where to find more information

- Learn more about the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act and find free tools and templates at Ontario.ca/AccessON.

- The Web Accessibility Initiative provides a variety of resources to help organizations make their website accessible. Visit: www.w3.org/WAI/ .

- The Accessible Digital Office Documents Project is a one-stop shop for creating accessible digital documents using today's most popular office applications (Microsoft, OpenOffice, iWork, Corel, GoogleDocs, etc.) at adod.idrc.ocad.ca/.

please note:

This guide is not legal advice. If you require assistance in interpreting the legislation or the regulation, please contact your legal adviser. This guide has been created to help you understand the legislation and/or regulation and does not replace the official version of the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation, Ontario Regulation 191/11 and the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA). If there is any conflict between this guide and the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation or the AODA, the regulation and the AODA are the final authorities.

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Appendix A:
Frequently asked questions

What is a new website?

A new website is:

- A website with a new domain name (e.g. www.newbusiness.ca)

- A website undergoing a significant refresh

A significant refresh typically means changing more than 50% of the content, design or technology of the website.

Content	Design	Technology
Creating, rewriting, or reorganizing more than 50% of the site's content, such as graphics, text, widgets, etc.	Changing more than 50% of the design elements, such as layout, navigation, placement and style.	Changing more than 50% of the web publishing platform/ model such as the content management system (CMS), Cascading Style Sheet (CSS), or HTML structure.

What if I used software that doesn't support WCAG 2.0 to build my site?

Many software products on the market don't fully support accessibility. They can often be customized to make your website accessible. For example, you may be able to modify the style sheet provided so the layout, font and contrast are more accessible. If it isn't possible to modify the product you used, use software that supports accessibility the next time you refresh your site.

I'm updating my website, but making it compliant with WCAG 2.0 at this point would significantly impact the project plan. What should I do?

If the project was started before 2012 there may be aspects of the web design that you don't have to change to meet WCAG 2.0 standards. Talk to your project team to see how you can incorporate accessibility now or during the next update or refresh.

What if I can't make my website or content accessible?

You don't have to change web content that you don't control. For example, if you use social media sites like Facebook or Twitter to promote your organization, you don't have to make your posts accessible.

You also don't have to make changes that aren't technically possible. For example, it may be impossible for an organization to make a live traffic video feed conform to WCAG standards.

There may be other times when you simply cannot make parts of your website WCAG 2.0 complaint. If this happens, you will have to explain why you were unable to make the content accessible. If asked you will also have to provide a summary of the information in an accessible way.

Appendix B:
What is web accessibility?

An accessible website takes into account the variety of ways that people with disabilities navigate the web and understand web content.

People with vision loss or low vision may need to use accessibility tools like:

- screen readers or navigable audiobooks

- refreshable Braille displays or Braille embossers, or

- large monitors or screen magnification software.

These devices allow users to turn text into speech or Braille. They also allow them to move quickly through structured content.

People with hearing loss often rely on:

- captions

- audio/text descriptions, or

- transcripts to interpret audio content.

Some people, such as those using sign language as their first language, may rely on images to understand context.

People with mobility or dexterity disabilities like muscular dystrophy or arthritis, may be limited in their ability to use their hands, limbs and other body parts.

They may use:

- specialized mouse, keyboard, or pointing device to navigate the web.

- a speech recognition software, an eye-gaze system, or other assistive technologies to make commands – all of which require additional time, control and focus to operate.

People with developmental and learning disabilities may be deterred from using websites that are overly complex, distracting, or poorly organized. Flashing content can trigger seizures for people with a seizure disorder such as epilepsy.

- For more information on how people with disabilities use the web visit www.w3.org/WAI/intro/people-use-Web/Overview.html.

Appendix C:
Tips for working with web developers

If you don't manage your website or don't have web development experience, the following steps may help you work with a web developer to make your website more accessible.

Determine your web developer's level of expertise

Make sure your in-house developer, or the developer you plan to hire has the expertise needed to make your website more accessible.

Here are some questions you may want to ask:

- Are you familiar with WCAG 2.0, Level A and AA?

- Have you developed/refreshed an accessible website (WCAG 2.0, Level A or higher)? Do you have links or references for these sites?

- Do you code manually or with the assistance of a program – if so, does the program support accessibility?

- Do you test the website for accessibility using automated and manual assessments and assistive technology?

Communicate your expectations

Think about accessibility from the start. When working on the website design, let your web developer know your expectations for:

- making the website and web content accessible (WCAG 2.0)

- the level of accessibility (Level A or AA), and

- timelines for completing the website

Ask for a project plan

Your developer should provide you with a project plan for completing the website that:

- **Identifies techniques or software used**
  Developers should tell you if they are using accessible coding techniques or software that supports accessible websites.

- **Outlines how your website will be tested**
  The plan should include automated and manual tests, as well as testing using assistive technology, like screen readers.

- **Identifies how the site will be maintained**
  This could include training you or your staff on how to make changes to the website, how to create accessible content, or an agreement to maintain the website.

- **Outlines key deliverables and timelines**
  Whether the developer is fixing accessibility issues or creating an entirely new website, they should be able to clearly tell you when and how the project will be delivered.