

Web Accessibility: A One-Page Guide

Best practices for anyone creating digital reports, documents, or images.

What is web accessibility?

Making digital content — web pages, documents, PDFs, images — usable for people with disabilities, including those who rely on screen readers or keyboard-only navigation.

Title II Digital Accessibility Requirements

In 2024, the U.S. Department of Justice issued updated regulations under Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), establishing technical requirements for the accessibility of web content and mobile applications provided by public entities, including public institutions of higher education.

What You Can Do

1. Build accessible PDFs, starting in Microsoft Word (or equivalent)

- **Use your word processor's built-in heading styles, lists, and tables** rather than manually formatting them.
- **Save or Export to PDF, don't "Print to PDF."** Printing to PDF strips out metadata needed for accessibility.
- **Run the Accessibility Checker** (Word's Review tab) before you export. Fixing issues upfront is easier than retroactively repairing a finished PDF.

2. Add alt text to images

- Describe the key takeaway a sighted reader would get. Listing every visual detail isn't necessary.
- If an image is purely decorative and doesn't convey important information or serve a meaningful purpose, it may not need alt text.
- To add alt text in most Office apps: right-click the image and choose "View Alt Text" (or use the Picture Format menu).



EXAMPLE ALT TEXT — "A small research vessel piloted by CBNERR Director Dr. William Reay speeds across the water in the Chesapeake Bay."

3. Write descriptive link text

- Instead of hyperlinking "[click here](#)" hyperlink the text that tells the screen-reader user where the link goes, e.g. "[View the Sea-Level Report Cards.](#)"

4. Use tables for data, not layout

- If you want text or images to have a certain layout on a page, use your word processor's alignment options instead of tables. Screen readers always interpret tables as data tables, so using them for layout can cause confusion.
- For data tables, mark header rows and columns as headers — a checkbox in Word's table properties — rather than just making them bold.

5. Share the data behind charts and maps

- Where possible, include the underlying data — even in an appendix or separate file — so the information is accessible to someone who can't fully interpret the visual.

PROGRESS OVER PERFECTION

Having information available and imperfect is better than having it unavailable. Our guidance is that web accessibility issues should not stop a document from being uploaded and shared. Compliance is judged by documented progress, so track any measures you take to make your materials more accessible.

Questions? The web team is here to support. Email jwcatherine@vims.edu for assistance.