



Department for Levelling Up,
Housing & Communities

How to make your content accessible

Tips, tools and best practice for
Local Digital funded projects.

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www.localdigital.gov.uk

#LocalDigital #FixThePlumbing



**LOCAL
DIGITAL**

About this guide

Projects funded by Local Digital are expected to produce outputs that will be [published on our website](#) for other organisations to view and reuse.

It's a legal requirement for public sector websites to meet the accessibility requirements outlined in the [Public Sector Bodies \(Websites and Mobile Applications\) \(No. 2\) Accessibility Regulations 2018](#). This includes content that is available to download via the website.

We have produced this guide to help you make sure the outputs you produce meet basic digital accessibility requirements. It includes simple steps you can follow, as well as advice on best practice and links to useful resources.

We recommend sharing this guidance with everyone in your project team, including any suppliers and contractors you may be working with, before getting started.

While the advice in this guide applies to any outputs you create, it has been designed specifically with written content (such as reports) in mind. GOV.UK has produced a simple but easy to follow guide on [making your digital services accessible](#).

Why accessibility matters

In the UK, 1 in 5 people have a disability. However, the concept of accessibility does not just apply to disabled people – all users will have different needs at different times and in different circumstances.

For instance, someone's ability to access content could be affected by their:

- **location** – they could be in a noisy environment, outdoors in bright sunlight, or an area with poor WiFi
- **health** – they may be tired, stressed, or recovering from a physical or mental illness that limits their mobility or cognitive functions
- **equipment** – they could be accessing content on a small device such as a mobile phone, or using an older internet browser

This is why digital accessibility is about making sure your outputs can be viewed and understood by as many people as possible.

Read more: [UK disability statistics, July 2022](#) (House of Commons library)

1. Organising information and writing content

Language

Research has shown that most users, including specialist audiences, prefer simple language as it helps them to understand and process information quickly.

Tips on keeping language simple:

- Use [Plain English](#)
- Explain technical terms, abbreviations or acronyms the first time you use them, for example: 'Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC)'
- Avoid unnecessary or excessive punctuation
- Avoid using long words when short ones will do, for example, use 'after' instead of 'subsequent to'
- Use direct language when you're giving instructions to get your message across faster, for example: 'follow these steps' and 'read this information carefully'
- Use the active rather than the passive voice to make it clearer who is doing what
- Keep sentences to 25 words or less for better readability

Read more: [Readability guidelines on clear language](#) (Content Design London)

Content structure

Consider how you structure your content to help people to easily navigate and understand it:

- start with a simple outline that includes the key messages to help you create a hierarchy and organise your ideas in a logical way
- put the most important information first
- make sure your web page or document has a unique page title that explains clearly what it's about
- use headings to create a logical page structure and assist people who [use screen readers](#) to navigate content in a consistent, linear way – see next page for more information
- use left-aligned text rather than justified or centred text as it's easier to read
- use bullet points and numbered lists to break up and organise information
- avoid long, complex paragraphs – shorter blocks of text are less intimidating for readers (particularly those with cognitive disabilities) and are easier to scan
- make your content easier to scan by [understanding how people read digital content](#)

Headings

Headings (or ‘headers’) provide structure and help readers to make sense of content.

Use **Heading 1 (or H1)** to introduce the content. All documents or web pages should at least have a H1 level heading – generally this will be the title of the page.

Use **Heading 2 (H2)** for a specific section. Most documents or web pages will only need H2 level headings.

Use **Heading 3 (H3)** to create subsections within your H2 sections.

It’s best to use sentence case rather than title case for headings, as it’s easier to read.

Read more: [Readability guidelines on headings and titles](#) (Content Design London)

Headings example:

I’m the page title (H1)

I’m a section heading (H2)

You can put some content here that relates to the heading above.

I’m a sub-heading within that section (H3)

The content under this heading relates directly to the H3 heading but also to the H2 heading above that.

Headings best practice

The order should always be sequential, for example, H1, H2, H3 and not H1, H3, H2.

Do not skip heading levels just to be more specific, for example, do not skip from H2 to H5.

Do not select heading levels based on their appearance, and never skip a header level for styling reasons. Select the appropriate heading rank in your hierarchy.

Do not use bold instead of a heading. One of the most common accessibility mistakes is making text bold when a heading is needed. The text may look like a heading, but the underlying code will not be set correctly, so screen reader users will not benefit.



Microsoft Word provides the option to apply different heading styles to text.

Tables

A table may not always be the best way to present your content.

Screen readers will read the content of a table in a linear fashion from left to right, top to bottom.

Use tables for presenting data, not for changing the visual layout of the page – for example, to present a list in a neat way.

Accessible tables need HTML markup that indicates header cells and data cells and defines their relationship. Assistive technologies use this information to provide context to users. You can also give tables alt text to describe their purpose.

A simple table can often be replaced with a series of bulleted lists with headings and subheadings.

Example of bad table use:

This table is being used to present a list in a neat way and could be replaced by a bulleted list to improve accessibility.

Team member	Job title
Joe Bloggs	Delivery Manager
Jane Stevens	Product Owner
John Jones	Developer

Read more:

- [W3 Tables Tutorial](#)
- [When to use tables and how to make them accessible](#) (GOV.UK)

Bullet and numbered lists

Use bullet points to break up long sentences.

Bullet points should:

- complete a sentence
- be front-loaded with the most important information
- start with the same language element (verb, noun or adjective)

Lists should be properly formatted so that it is clear to screen reader users that they are reading items on a list. Simply putting numbers or a symbol at the start of each line does not make it clear enough it's a list item.

You should also avoid adding paragraph breaks between list items.

Example of a bad list:

1. This is not a properly formatted list item
2. It's just a number added to the start of each line, and there's a paragraph break between the lines

Example of a good list:

1. This is a properly formatted list item
2. It uses the Numbered List formatting set by this slide template

Web links

Link text should be descriptive and meaningful, and tell users where they are going and why.

A piece of content that features several different links which each say 'click here' will be useless to a screen reader user, because it gives no indication of what link goes where.

It's better to place links at the end of a sentence if possible, as mid-sentence links can be distracting.

Start call-to-action links with a verb if you're telling people to do something, for example 'Apply for a passport'.

Make links stand out from other text by underlining them and using a different colour to other content.

Read more:

- [Linking best practices](#) (WebAIM)
- [Creating usable hyperlinks](#) (Dan does content)

Example of a bad link:

Click [here](#) to subscribe

Example of a good link:

[Subscribe to our monthly newsletter](#)

Example of a good link:

[Learn more about the Local Digital Fund](#)

Example of a bad link:

[Learn more](#)

More resources on content language and structure

Resources on content writing:

- Test the readability of your content and make sure it's accessible to those with lower levels of literacy using this [online readability testing tool](#)
- For spelling and grammar conventions for content published on GOV.UK, refer to the [GOV.UK Style Guide](#)
- Find more [tips on writing and presenting content on the web](#)
- Learn about [best practice when writing content for social media](#)

2. Visual information

Images, videos and colours

Visual information: Do's and Don'ts

Images, videos and graphics can be a great way to communicate and add visual interest to your content, but are common causes of accessibility issues.

Do:

Avoid using images when the same information could be communicated in writing.

Ask yourself: 'if someone is unable to see the colors, images or video, is the message of this content still clear?'

Make sure to add captions and alternative descriptions ('alt text') to your images and graphics, as explained on the next page.

Read more: [Accessible images](#) (WebAIM)

Do not:

Rely on images as the only method of communication, because images may not load properly or may not be seen.

Use flashing content as it can trigger seizures in some users or cause discomfort or distraction.

Use content that autoplays (such as GIFs), without giving the user the option to stop or pause the content.

Alt text

Alt text - also known as 'alt descriptions' - should always be added to images **unless the image is purely decorative**, such as a decorative separator between content.

Good alt text should:

- let people know what information the image provides
- describe the contents of the image
- be short, meaningful and specific
- feature standard punctuation like commas and full stops

Read more:

- [Tips on writing good alt descriptions](#) (WebAIM)
- How to add alt text in [Google Suite](#) and [Office 365](#)

Example:



A laptop keyboard with two stickers that read 'We have signed the Local Digital Declaration' and '#FixThePlumbing, Local Digital', besides a notebook and pen.

Colour contrast

People with moderately low vision or colour blindness may have difficulties viewing content that has insufficient brightness between foreground and background colors.

Aim for minimum colour contrast ratio of 4.5:1 between your text and the background color.

[Try this free tool to check your colour contrast.](#)

It's best to avoid putting text over images as it can be hard to assess the colour contrast ratio.

Text size and weight can also impact the visibility of your content against a certain background colour.

Read more: [Why colour contrast matters](#) (Accessibility in Government Blog)

Button with great contrast

Button with OK contrast

Button with poor contrast

Accessible video

Video content that contains audio should also provide captions (subtitles with non-speech descriptions).

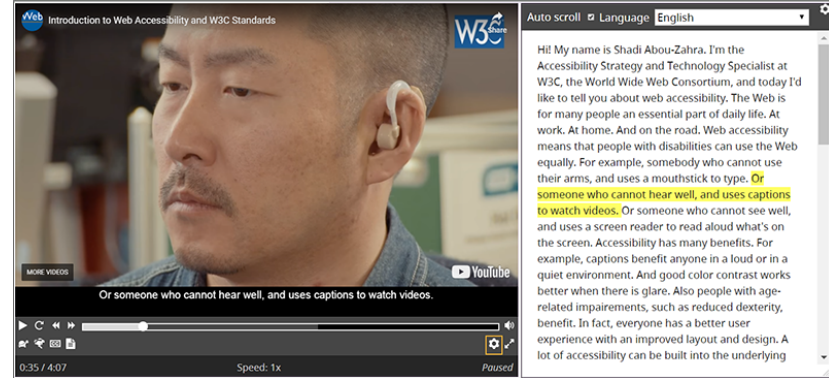
Many video players generate captions automatically, however you should always check that:

- the captions are in sync with the spoken content
- the people who are speaking are identified when they speak
- important sound other than dialogue is included
- there are no spelling mistakes!

You should also provide a provide a transcript – a text version of the speech and non-speech audio information that can be read by screen readers and braille readers. This is particularly important for content that has text on screen, but no audio.

If the video contains important visual information, consider including an audio description (an audio track of someone describing the important visuals) in addition to written transcripts.

Example of a good video:



This video provides the option to view captions and a transcript (image courtesy of W3C).

Read more:

- [Captions and subtitles \(W3C\)](#)
- [Video transcripts \(W3C\)](#)
- [Audio descriptions \(W3C\)](#)

More resources on visual information

- Read GOV.UK advice on:
 - [Making videos accessible](#)
 - [Making images accessible](#)
- Find out [how to make HTML charts accessible](#) (ONS)
- Learn [how to use YouTube captions](#)
- Read this blog post on [why GOV.UK uses YouTube to host videos](#)

3. Getting ready to publish

Pre-publish checklist

Run through this checklist before you finalise your content:

- The content is well organised and structured, and has [appropriate headings in place](#) – [see guidance on content structure](#)
- Any tables used are necessary to structure information and are properly marked up – [see guidance on tables](#)
- The language used is simple, clear and easy to understand – [see guidance on language](#)
- Images and graphics have alt text (unless they're purely decorative) – [see guidance on images and graphics](#)
- Text and design elements have sufficient colour contrast – [see guidance on colour contrast](#)
- Videos have captions, a transcript and an audio description as necessary – [see guidance on videos](#)
- Hyperlinks work and are labelled using accessible link text – [see guidance on links](#)
- The content displays as expected on different browsers and devices and, where possible, has been tested with [different assistive technologies](#)

Creating accessible outputs for the Local Digital website

Please provide us with your project outputs in one of the following formats:

- A **HTML web page** is the easiest format for many assistive technologies to read - if you have the ability to host the content on your own platforms then we can link to it from our website
- The next best option is to [use the interoperable Open Document Format](#), rather than Office 365 or Google file types (both Google and Microsoft allow you to export files in Open Document Formats)
- If you must use a **PDF**, it should be properly formatted and ran through a checker tool to highlight and fix any accessibility issues. PDFs are a format designed to be printed, which means they are not responsive and are difficult to open or navigate on mobile devices or using assistive technology. This blog post explains in more detail [why content should be published in HTML, not PDF](#).

It's also best to avoid sharing documents directly from Google Suite as it may be blocked by some organisations.

Read more:

- [How to save Office files in Open Document Format](#)
- [Tutorials on how to improve PDF accessibility](#)
- [How to make common file types accessible](#) (Accessible Digital Office Document Project)
- [eAccessibility PDF check tool](#)



More information and resources

These are some resources you may find useful in addition to those linked to throughout this guide.

Resources and guidance:

- [Understand the accessibility requirements for public sector bodies](#)
(Government Digital Service)
- Help and encourage people to use your service - follow this [advice on accessibility, assisted digital and user support](#)
(GOV.UK)
- Learn how to make [Google docs and presentations accessible](#)
- Read [Microsoft Office 365 accessibility tips](#)
- Get more tips on [designing for Web Accessibility](#), including user interface and visual design

Tools:

- The free [Grackle app](#) helps you to check and fix any accessibility issues in Google Docs and Slides
- Check if a web page is accessible using the [WAVE web accessibility evaluation tool](#)
- Discover [assistive technology you can test with for free](#)

Training courses:

- [Introduction to Web Accessibility](#) by EdX
(endorsed by W3C)
- [Introduction to UX and accessible design](#) by FutureLearn
- [Introduction to Digital Accessibility](#) by AbilityNet



Do you have a question?

Speak to your Local Digital Collaboration Manager or email campaigns@localdigital.gov.uk for advice and support on digital accessibility and creating accessible outputs.

We would also like to hear any feedback you may have on this guide!