

ACCESSIBLE COMMUNICATIONS GUIDELINES

SPRING 2022

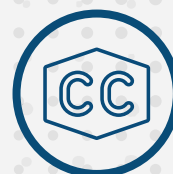




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FOREWORD



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As professional communicators, it is incumbent on us to make communications inclusive for people of all abilities so we can reach every member of society. Today, however, our industry falls short.

One in eight people globally has some form of disability. And every day they struggle to access content and communications from brands and organisations of all kinds.

They are excluded by default or by design.

It's time we changed this.

Our guidelines for Accessible Communications – updated in Spring 2022 to include more detail on video and animated graphics, thoughtful use of language and representation, and hosting of physical and virtual events – are designed to help every member of the PRCA and the industry beyond create more inclusive content and campaigns. The technology and tools to help us do this are readily available. The key priority is to update the way we work to adhere to best practices laid out in this document.

Current Global launched its Accessible by Design offer in 2020, anchored by a commitment that every piece of communication it develops, curates or publishes on behalf of the firm and its clients will meet the highest accessibility standards. I want to recognise Current Global for being the first global agency to make such a commitment, and for partnering with the PRCA to develop these guidelines and help instigate change across the industry.

I would also like to thank our Digital Inclusion Partner Texthelp for their invaluable contribution to the Spring Edition.

Together, we can make communications accessible for all.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The PRCA is strongly committed to Diversity & Inclusion. These guidelines have been launched to further that priority commitment, with the goal of accelerating industry change to a point where all communications content and campaigns are accessible to people of all abilities.

This document is designed to help organisations and professionals gain a better understanding of the importance of accessible communications, and to equip them with practical tools, best practices and step-by-step processes to do so.

There are different forms of disabilities, but those most directly connected to and impacted by the accessibility of communications content and campaigns are: Visual, Hearing, Cognitive and Speech. These guidelines break down the different kinds of content and work typically produced by the communications industry, and the key considerations for making them accessible for people with disabilities in these four categories.

Lastly, this document includes some advice on embedding accessibility in the working practices of your communications function or organisation.

Note: These guidelines do not affect the responsibility of PRCA members to do their own due diligence to ensure compliance with statutory requirements on accessibility which may vary from country to country.

This document exists in a [fully-accessible Microsoft Word version](#).

PRCA ACCESSIBLE COMMUNICATIONS MANIFESTO

The PRCA's goal is to ensure the industry operates to the very highest accessibility standards so that communications are inclusive for people of all abilities.

What do we believe?

- No one should be excluded by default or design based on their ability.
- Inclusive communications are vital for a fairer, more equitable society.
- We have a responsibility to make the issue of inclusion more visible and to lead by example.

What do we want?

- For agency and in-house executives to lead from the top and help instigate industry change.
- To elevate accessibility as a board-level issue every brand and organisation needs to prioritise.
- For every professional to make a personal commitment to produce accessible communications.

How do we get there?

- Make accessibility a core requirement of every piece of communications content or campaign.
- Apply the tools and best practices in these guidelines every day in our work.
- Continue to learn and identify new opportunities to enhance the accessibility of communications.

SECTION 1

THE IMPERATIVE FOR CHANGE

COMMUNICATING INCLUSIVELY IS BOTH MORALLY AND COMMERCIALY THE RIGHT THING

Every day content is published that's inaccessible to many. Campaigns are launched that have not been designed to be inclusive of people of all abilities.

But it doesn't have to be this way.

According to the World Health Organization, over a billion people (one in eight of the world's population) have some form of disability. With an ageing population, more than 2 billion people will need at least one assistive communication, memory or hearing aid in the next 10 years. In the UK, circa 20% of the population will experience communication difficulty at some point in their lives.

That's a significant audience to exclude by default or by design.

An audience which collectively has a buying power of \$13 trillion globally, according to Return on Disability.

According to Accenture's research of 140 U.S. companies, The Disability Inclusion Advantage, companies that champion disability inclusion achieve on average 28 percent higher revenue, double the net income, and 30 percent higher economic profit margins compared to companies that do not prioritise disability inclusion.

The more we explore this topic, the more we learn of people who are impacted by it. We want our members to be at the forefront of solving this issue, recognising that if agencies and in-house teams act now, **together we can make communications accessible to all people.**



DISABILITY IN NUMBERS

- On average, workers with disabilities earn less than workers without disabilities and are often denied access to education, technologies and social protection, among other essentials.
- Research suggests that companies will access a new talent pool of more than 10.7 million people if they embrace disability inclusion.
- Globally, more than 1 billion people need one or more assistive products, with only one in 10 having access to them.

A SYMBOL FOR CHANGE

In 2020, the PRCA helped launch a new disability symbol designed to make life easier for millions of people in the UK.

The Communication Access Symbol (pictured right), with underpinning training and standards, was created for businesses, organisations and consumers by the [Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists \(RCSLT\)](#) in partnership with the [Stroke Association](#), [Headway](#), [MND Association](#), [Disability Rights UK](#), [Business Disability Forum](#), [Communication Matters](#), [The Makaton Charity](#), and the [National Network of Parent Carer Forums](#).



The partnership is known as **Communication Access UK**.

With the arrival of the symbol, businesses and organisations across the entire UK can now embrace the cause of accessible communication. Those who take free online training on accessible face-to-face, telephone and online customer service will earn the right to display the symbol – demonstrating they have all their customers' needs close at heart.

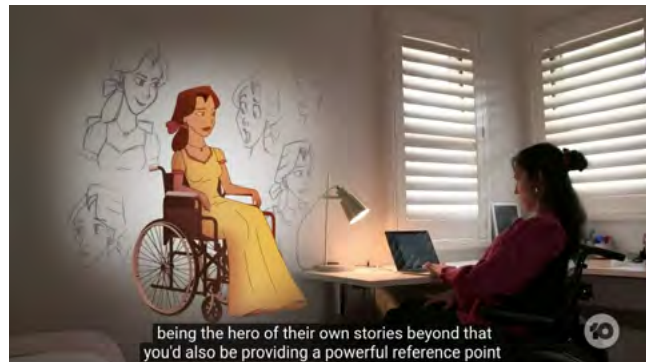
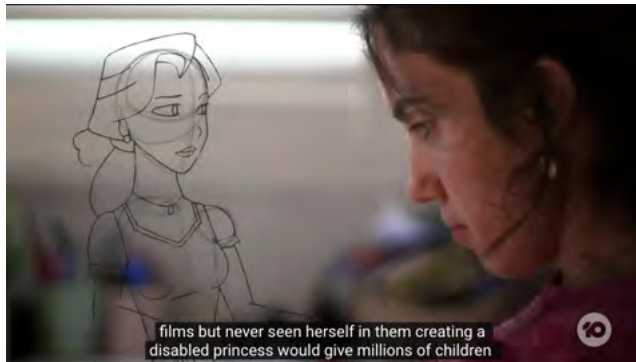
Nothing for us without us

As we strive to create a more inclusive industry we must remember the mantra of the disabled community, *"nothing for us without us"*. This should be front of mind for all communicators when conceiving and executing campaigns, deploying brand ambassadors (e.g. actors, models, spokespeople, influencers), constructing their own teams, and more.

It enables organisations to leverage individual lived experiences and better identify disability and inclusion gaps and opportunities as well as ensuring content is accessible for individuals of all abilities.

MEET HANNAH DIVINEY

Paving the way for better disability representation is Hannah Diviney, a 21-year-old disability advocate and writer from Australia whose 2021 [Change.org petition](https://www.change.org/p/disney-add-a-disabled-princess-to-their-library-of-characters) asked Disney to add a disabled princess to its library of characters. Hannah's petition aimed to "give millions of children around the world the invaluable chance to see themselves as the hero of their own story." It quickly gained supporters including Hollywood actor Reese Witherspoon.



UNDERSTANDING THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF CONSUMING MEDIA AND CONTENT

A 2021 study of more than 800 people with disabilities in the US and UK explored their lived experience with media and content. Commissioned by Current Global, the research revealed that the majority struggle with accessibility. Even those who have access to and use assistive technology encounter significant problems. Looking at social media specifically, people of all disabilities (visual 22%, hearing 17%, speech 27% and cognitive 23%) reported a struggle with accessing the content.

For many, they have 'normalised' their consistently poor experiences, leading to low expectations of brands and the content they produce. Emotionally, this takes a toll.

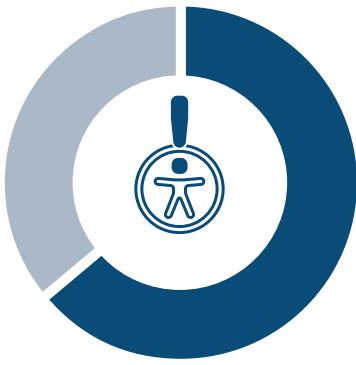
But when content and communications are accessible, the response is overwhelmingly positive, leading to a significant rise in brand preference, purchase intent and peer recommendations.



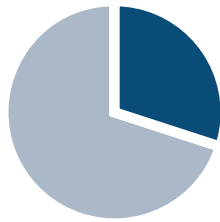
A FIFTH OF PEOPLE SURVEYED SAID THAT SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS ARE VERY DIFFICULT TO ACCESS AND CONSUME CONTENT ON, MAKING IT THE MOST PROBLEMATIC MEDIA CHANNEL.



56% OF THE OVERALL AUDIENCE NEEDS ASSISTIVE TOOLS, BUT THEY DON'T HAVE ACCESS TO THEM, WITH MANY SAYING THEY ARE TOO EXPENSIVE OR INCONVENIENT TO SET UP.



64% OF THOSE WHO USE AN ASSISTIVE TOOL HAVE REPORTED HAVING PROBLEMS CONSUMING CONTENT...



... WITH 30% OF THOSE RESPONDENTS SAYING THEY HAVE PROBLEMS BECAUSE OF THE CONTENT ITSELF – POINTING DIRECTLY TO WHERE BRANDS HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO HELP.



INACCESSIBLE COMMUNICATIONS LEAD TO A RANGE OF EMOTIONS:

- **38% FEEL FRUSTRATED**
- **31% FEEL DISAPPOINTED**
- **27% FEEL IGNORED**
- **21% FEEL UNHAPPY**
- **17% FEEL ISOLATED**

AN OVERWHELMING 81% HAVE NEGATIVE EMOTIONS TOWARDS BRANDS WHEN COMMUNICATIONS ARE NOT ACCESSIBLE, WITH FEELINGS OF BEING DISCONNECTED, LESS EXCITED, OR THAT THE BRAND LACKS POSITIVE QUALITIES OR IS UNRELIABLE.



WHEN BRANDS ARE ACCESSIBLE, THEY REAP A HOST OF BENEFITS AND SPARK POSITIVE EMOTIONS INCLUDING FEELINGS OF:

- **SATISFACTION (49%)**
- **SUPPORT (45%)**
- **HAPPINESS (41%)**
- **INCLUSION (36%)**
- **RELIEVED (28%)**

SECTION 2

HOW COMMUNICATORS CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

DISABILITIES AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR ACCESSIBLE COMMUNICATIONS

Disabilities come in many forms, both visible and unseen, and fall within three broad categories:

- People with permanent disabilities.
- People with temporary impairments, e.g., broken arm.
- People managing situational requirements, e.g., working hands-free and eyes-free while driving.

We believe producing accessible communications within our industry should focus on people with permanent disabilities, which means working to the highest accessibility standards – that also encompass the needs of those with temporary impairments and situational requirements.

Pictured below are the types of permanent disabilities and how they are most often manifested.



VISUAL
**COLOUR BLIND
LOW VISION
BLIND**



HEARING
**HARD OF HEARING
DEAF**



MOBILITY
**ARTHRITIS
QUADRIPLEGIA
SPINAL CORD INJURY**



COGNITIVE
**LEARNING DISABILITIES
AUTISM
SEIZURE**



SPEECH
**SPEECH IMPEDIMENT
UNABLE TO SPEAK**



NEURAL
**BIPOLAR
ANXIETY
PTSD
OCD
DEPRESSION**

The disabilities that are most directly connected to and impacted by the accessibility of communications content and campaigns are the four highlighted on the previous page: **Visual, Hearing, Cognitive, and Speech.**

Consideration should be given to hidden cognitive disabilities/neurodifferences such as dyslexia, ADHD, and autism that have an impact on how content is consumed. Texthelp offers up many useful resources such as these listed below:

- [Resources: Neurodiversity in the workplace](#)
- [Blog: 12 neurodiversity strengths that come from thinking differently](#)
- [Video Series: Supporting Neurodiversity at Work](#)

Mobility and Neural disabilities fall within the sphere of permanent disabilities too; however, they do not pose the same kind of consideration with regards to accessibility and consumption of the typical communications output our industry produces daily.

By ensuring that everything developed, curated or published within the remit of a communications campaign is made more accessible to people with visual, hearing, cognitive and speech disabilities, we will create more inclusive work that engages the widest possible audiences.

WHAT THESE GUIDELINES COVER

We believe that communications content should be designed from concept to delivery to be inclusive of people of all abilities. For the purposes of these guidelines, we've defined 'communications' along the spectrum of services most commonly delivered by PR agencies and the work undertaken by in-house teams across earned, owned and social channels.

We have not explored related services such as website or app development. The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) develops international Web standards for HTML, CSS, and more which web developers will be familiar with. Compliance is key and it is the law in many countries for websites and digital channels to be compliant with WCAG AA 2.1. All W3C standards are reviewed for accessibility support by the Accessible Platform Architectures (APA) Working Group. To find out more about accessibility implications in this context, please visit [the Worldwide Web Consortium \(W3C\) website](#).

Similarly, we do not address other areas of accessibility that may be important to a firm's or client's business such as accessible product design, which falls outside the typical remit of the communications function.

For additional guidance on handling practical issues associated with disability, please refer to the ["Accommodating Disability" section of the PRCA Diversity & Inclusion guidelines](#).

SECTION 3

DEVELOPING ACCESSIBLE CONTENT AND CAMPAIGNS

TYPES OF CONTENT

In our guidelines we have focused on the most common types of communications content, and the following pages document the tools to use and the steps you should follow to apply best practice and ensure the greatest degree of accessibility. Types of content we will address include:

- Images
- Logos and brand identity
- Video and animated graphics
- Text and written copy
- Social media content
- Influencer content
- Physical and virtual events

Remember: These guidelines apply as much to the content you are paid to produce for your clients (as an agency) or your company (as an in-house team) as it does to the collateral you produce internally, such as branding, employee comms and web content, for example.

VISUAL CONTENT

IMAGES

In this section, we're focusing on images used to illustrate an idea or convey meaning on web pages, within social media posts, etc.

ALT TEXT

To be fully accessible, all images require alternative text (Alt Text) to make them accessible to individuals who are blind or partially sighted.

Alt Text is a textual description of an image or other visual (e.g., charts or graphs) to help people who cannot see understand what is important.

Content creators write the Alt Text description for images they use, then people who are blind or partially sighted use screen reading software to render Alt Text into speech and/or Braille output, enabling them to interact with the visual content.

To find images within a document that are missing Alt Text, use [Microsoft's Accessibility Checker](#) tool which will direct you to the image and give you the option to add Alt Text. [Check page 35 for more on the accessibility checker.](#)

When creating Alt Text for an image:

- First determine whether the image is decorative or meaningful background.
- Decorative or background images, or graphical elements that are purely aesthetic can be marked as “decorative” on a tick box within Alt Text – removing the need to add any further descriptor.
- Ensure that your Alt Text description is accurate, descriptive and succinct. Focus on describing the most important message that an image is trying to convey.

BEST PRACTICE FOR IMAGE USE

- Avoid use of colour alone to convey important information in an image.
- Avoid using important images as a background, such as placing them behind text or other design elements. Doing so may mean that the images are not picked up or adequately described by screen readers or other assistive technology used by people with visual impairments.

- Ensure strong contrast between text and background on an image so people with low vision can see what you are conveying; dark text on a white or off-white background, or white text on a dark background.
- Use images depicting individuals with disabilities interacting with products, services, and other people to confirm the reality that people with disabilities are individuals with capabilities, agency, and intersectional identities.
- Do not use non-disabled actors and models portraying disability as substitutes for people with disabilities. This misrepresents the disabled community. [Getty Images' Disability Collection](#) offers good stock images of people with disabilities. Other resources include, [Unsplash](#), [SocietyPix](#), [Pexels](#), [Stocksy](#), [TONL](#), and [Disabled And Here](#).
- Remember that screenshots, infographics, and charts are also images and should be treated in the same way as all other images with the use of Alt Text.



Good Alt Text example: Photograph of a young Black woman smiling and waving at someone on her mobile phone screen. She has headphones on and is sat on a green chair.

Bad Alt Text example: A picture of a woman.



Good Alt Text example: Cartoon illustration of a diverse team meeting in a boardroom. Colleagues are seated around a table. Four are visible, but the fifth is only outlined to show the team is missing a core member.

Bad Alt Text example: A team meeting in an office.

LOGOS AND BRAND IDENTITY

The accessibility of logos and brand identity is an in-depth topic and could warrant an entire set of guidelines for design professionals.

For the purposes of this document however, colour contrast is perhaps the most important consideration for communications professionals when we think about branding. [Page 36 includes instructions of how to use Microsoft's Color Contrast Analyzer tool.](#)

CASE STUDY: Refreshing Brand Colours and Logo of Current Global

In its pursuit to champion accessibility, Current Global recognised it needed to improve the accessibility of its own brand colours and logo. Two of its four colours were deemed to lack sufficient contrast for people with low vision and colour blindness. These colours, a bright yellow and bright green, were sometimes challenging to see on a white background.

Subsequently, the agency embraced this opportunity. Using the Web Aim Color Contrast Analyzer to adjust brand colours to meet colour contrast accessibility requirements, the design team replaced the bright green with a soft purple; and a refreshed logo and branding now reflects these changes. [Visit Current Global's website](#) to learn more about their commitment to accessibility.

BEFORE



AFTER



VIDEO AND ANIMATED GRAPHICS

Transcripts are supplemental documents that include text for the audio and visual components of your video. Created in various formats, transcripts can resemble a screen play (including speaker dialogue, background sounds and stage directions). Transcripts are necessary for podcasts and other audio materials.

Adding a transcript enables the inclusion of people who are deaf-blind, deaf, hard of hearing, and/or neurodiverse. Additionally, it benefits people who prefer reading text over watching a video or listening to audio.

HOW TO CREATE TRANSCRIPTS FOR VIDEO

Creating a transcript involves manually transcribing in sequence what you see and hear. Pretend you are writing a screen play while you document the dialogue, sounds, and actions within the video.

To create a readable video transcript, you can create a SubRip Text file (SRT), which is a common file format for subtitles and captions. For instructions, [use 3Play Media's SRT File Guide](#).

Closed captions are on-screen displays of text for audio within video content, which enable individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, or neurodiverse to consume content. Closed captions also help non-disabled people consume content in a noisy environment.

This accessibility feature can be turned on and off. When activated, it provides an on-screen textual transcription of dialogue and other sounds synchronized with the video and audio.

HOW TO ADD CLOSED CAPTIONS TO VIDEO

Select an editing software to add captions to your video. The process will vary based on the platform. Some will require the creation of a transcript as an SRT file, others will provide auto-generated captions. When using auto-generated captions, always review the captions and make edits to ensure completeness and accuracy. When creating an SRT file, [follow the 3Play instructions hyperlinked in the transcripts section](#), transcribing dialogue and sounds as well as providing time stamps.

For videos within social media posts, instructions are available on the given platform's accessibility page.

An **audio description** is a secondary audio track for videos, with verbal narration for audiences with low or no vision. This accessibility feature helps people imagine what is happening on screen and allows other viewers to multitask while consuming the content. Audio description also provides narration of important visual elements during periods of silence and gaps in dialogue. For an example of a well-crafted audio description, check out [Current Global's Accessible By Design Video](#).

HOW TO ADD AN AUDIO DESCRIPTION TO VIDEO

Integrating audio description from the start results in more accessible videos from the get-go, but you can improve the accessibility of videos you already have by adding audio description at a later stage. Regardless of which approach you take, here are some tips:

- **Start with your goal.** Your video was conceived to persuade someone to think, feel, or do something. Identify which visuals help convey your argument and objectively provide audio description for these visual elements.
- **Focus on storytelling.** Recognise the story your video was intended to tell and what visuals communicate this story. Include descriptions for these visual elements.
- **Use the present tense in an active voice** while providing third-person narration. For example, *Tim arrives home and unlocks his door*. Use complete sentences when possible.
- **Consider tone.** Determine the desired tone of your video. Incorporate this tone when choosing the words to describe your visual elements and selecting the voice to record your audio description track.
- **Strategically insert descriptions.** Review the screen play for your video and plan pauses in the dialogue to insert your audio description. Describe actions, objects, and people while or slightly before they appear on screen. Avoid recording your description over dialogue unless reading subtitles.
- **After recording** your audio description and integrating it within your video, listen to it with your eyes closed to assess whether you missed anything. You can also make changes post production.

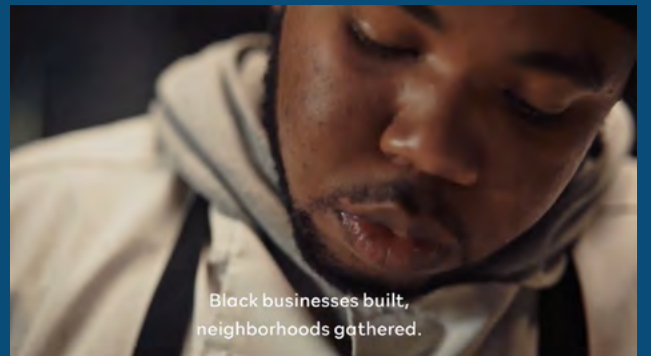
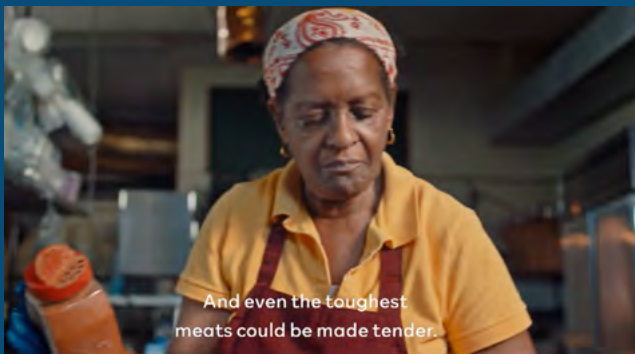
FOR ALL VIDEOS AND ANIMATED GRAPHICS, YOU SHOULD:

- Always include a transcript, closed captions and audio descriptions.
- Provide the option of switching captions on or off while watching a video.
- Ensure strong contrast between text and background so people with low vision can see and use the content; ideally use dark text on a white or off-white background or reverse it and use white text on a dark background.
- Enable the *Stop/Pause* feature when a video plays automatically for more than 5 seconds.
- Avoid graphics shifting significantly and at different rates than text or other elements.
- Do not use flashing lights: this could trigger a seizure among individuals with epilepsy.

- Host content in an accessible player, such as Able Player, Vimeo and ONE player, that supports accessibility features like closed captions, audio-description, various contrast themes, etc.
- If shooting video, do not use non-disabled actors and models portraying disability as substitutes for people with disabilities. This misrepresents the disabled community.

CASE STUDY: Kingsford “Preserve the Pit” Campaign

Closed-captioning placed on video content produced for Kingsford “Preserve the Pit”.



TEXT AND WRITTEN COPY

It might surprise you to learn that the average American reads at the 7th to 8th-grade level (or aged 12–14), and that 20 percent of the population reads at below a fifth-grade level. [67 million people in the US speak English as a second language](#). Of those, 13 million speak English ‘not well’ or ‘not at all’. In the UK, as many as [7 million people have ‘very poor literacy skills’](#). [Average reading age in the UK is 9 years old: The Guardian has a reading age of 14. The Sun a reading age of 8](#). It is important to understand therefore that the accessibility message should also encompass readability. A website or any piece of digital content should be technically accessible but if the language is complex the message may be misunderstood. To ensure the broadest accessibility across the cognitive spectrum, simplicity is paramount.

These two articles from Texthelp provide useful advice about readability: [Best practice advice: what is readability](#) and [Blog: 8 writing tips for improving readability of blog post content](#).

FOR ALL TEXT AND WRITTEN COPY, YOU SHOULD:

- Wherever possible use at least size 12 font.
- Wherever possible use a San Serif font such as Arial or Verdana to make your content easier to read for individuals with print-related disabilities, including low vision and Dyslexia.
- Wherever possible, consider using [Dyslexie font](#), which improves readability for people with Dyslexia.
- Write concisely in plain language and the active voice
- Use headings and spacing to group related content.
- Avoid the use of abbreviations and jargon.
- Use high colour contrast text.
- Avoid more than two lines of centred text.
- Avoid more than one line of italics.
- Consider creating an audio version of any article, blog post, and news release to help those with visual impairments.
- Always use meaningful display names for hyperlinks. This helps people who use screen readers, keyboard navigation and voice recognition software by clearly and concisely communicating the function and purpose of a link when read out of context.
- When selecting hyperlink display names, choose specific short and easy to say names, which indicate where the link will take someone. To avoid confusion, do not duplicate display names or use ambiguous names such as “Click Here” and “Read More.”

- Use appropriate disability-inclusive language which affirms the human dignity of people with disabilities; the [National Centre for Disability in Journalism](#) provides guidelines for writing positively about people with disabilities.
- Be thoughtful. Use people-first language when referencing someone with a disability, e.g. “a person who is hard of hearing” or “an individual who uses a wheelchair” rather than “a hard of hearing person” or “a wheelchair user.” However, use ability-first language if the individual or sub-group of the disabled community prefers (e.g., “the autistic community”). For further guidance, use this [Disability Language Style Guide](#).
- Eliminate ableist language from your writing. It dehumanises and stigmatises the disabled community and is a form of discrimination and social prejudice. Example language includes “dumb”, “stupid”, “lame”, “crazy”, and “insane”: words that fail to clearly and effectively articulate negative feelings towards someone or something while harming the disabled community.
- Avoid using words that describe disability and the disabled community such as “blind”, “deaf” etc. as part of figurative language to convey negative meaning. For example, blind is sometimes used to describe individuals who are unaware or ignorant: *The blind leading the blind produces problems*. More direct language should be used instead for a clearer meaning: *When ignorant people lead others who are also poorly informed, it produces problems*.

ORGANISE DOCUMENTS WITH HEADINGS

When you add headings to a document, you improve the navigation experience for people who use a screen reader because headings communicate how the content in a document has been organised.

It also supports individuals who are neurodiverse and/or those with learning differences, as headings enable them to easily find essential information and anticipate what else to expect in the document.

When creating headings, ensure headings are at least two points larger than body text to make it easier for individuals to differentiate between the two.

A word about literacy.

The need to promote literacy in communications is not unique to one industry, although the implications may be different across different fields.

- Health literacy is vital to making informed decisions for yourself and your family.
- Digital literacy impacts your ability to use innovative technologies to improve your work and personal life.
- Financial literacy impacts your economic well-being and that of your family, potentially for years to come.

Literacy extends to numeracy – the ability to understand and work with numbers.

Mathematical equations within an image unknowingly deny access to people with Dyslexia and/or low vision, who rely on an optical character recognition (OCR) software, a screen reader, and/or Braille.

To remedy this, use the computer programming language Mathematical Markup Language or Math ML, which maintains the format of mathematical expressions and enables people to consume content with adaptive technology.

PDFs

[Microsoft's Accessibility Checker \(check page 35\)](#) is a great tool for flagging accessibility issues that need addressing in both Microsoft Word and PowerPoint. PDFs, however, can cause issues for people with visual impairment as assistive readers can't access the format, and the Accessibility Checker can't be run over a PDF either.

If it is necessary to produce a document in PDF format, it is strongly recommended that you publish a companion version in another format as well, such as Word.

These short [PDF training videos from Microsoft on YouTube](#) share the steps to making PDFs accessible; the [University of Washington's website](#) also offers an extensive guide on creating accessible PDF documents.

EMAIL

Writing accessible emails is critical for our profession. Through emails, we consult and collaborate with clients and colleagues, and coordinate media outreach. If our emails are not accessible, we risk not being received or understood by all our intended recipients.

An accessible email takes format, font, and signature into consideration.

HTML is the most accessible format for screen readers because it enables headings and Alt Text. Ideally, use a San-serif font (such as Arial or Verdana, which are pre-installed on all operating system platforms). Use a font size that is at least 12-points in size to improve readability for recipients who are neurodiverse or visually impaired.

An accessible signature allows users of screen readers to access contact information.

Always remember to add Alt Text for any visuals you include in emails.

SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT

Each social media platform has its own guidelines and standards for accessibility and inclusivity. Here we cover the basics for each. There are, however, some general dos and don'ts when it comes to making social media posts accessible that are relevant regardless of the platform.

DO:

- DO add or edit Alt Text for your images; check each platform for options/best practices.
- DO caption videos; check each platform for options/best practices.
- When including a hyperlink, DO indicate whether it leads to an [AUDIO], [PIC], or [VIDEO] file.
- DO use a URL shortener to minimise the number of characters in the hyperlink.
- DO place any hashtags at the end of the post and capitalise the first letter of each word.

DO NOT:

- DO NOT accept the machine-generated Alt Text without checking to see if you can provide more context for screen reader users.
- DO NOT use acronyms in posts unless you have previously clarified the unabbreviated name followed by the acronym in parentheses within your post.

Bear in mind that social media platforms impose character limitations, which may prevent you from creating Alt Text with adequate detail. Additionally, some platforms do not allow you to add Alt Text for posts with multiple images. In these situations, add your Alt Text in the body text of your post.

Also, social media platforms do not allow you to add audio description to videos within your post. To make your post accessible to a person who is blind or partially sighted, include a summary of your video within the body text of your post/article.

INSTAGRAM

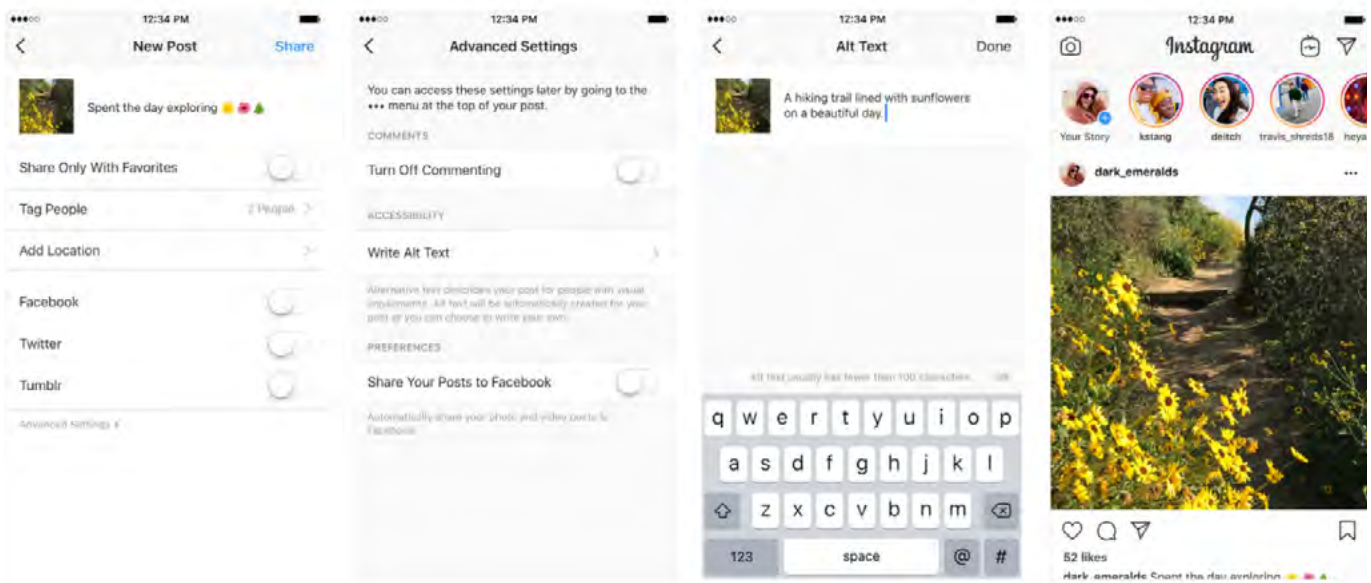
Top tips for making your posts and content accessible for Instagram:

- Automatic Alt Text is rarely effective; it is generally better to replace with your own description that provides more context for an image description.
- Automatic Alt Text uses object recognition technology to provide a visual description of photos for people with visual impairments. Users can hear descriptions of photos through a screen reader within Feed, Explore & Profile pages.
- Try to avoid Instagram Stories for important information.
- Add captions in Instagram Stories with enough information so the person doesn't have to rely on audio.
- To avoid confusion, do not use emojis to replace words. Add any emojis to the end of your copy and limit use to three or less as screen readers read the title of each emoji.



Visit [Instagram's accessibility page](#) to learn how they are further supporting accessible content.

The following images show how easy it is to add Alt Text within Instagram.



TWITTER

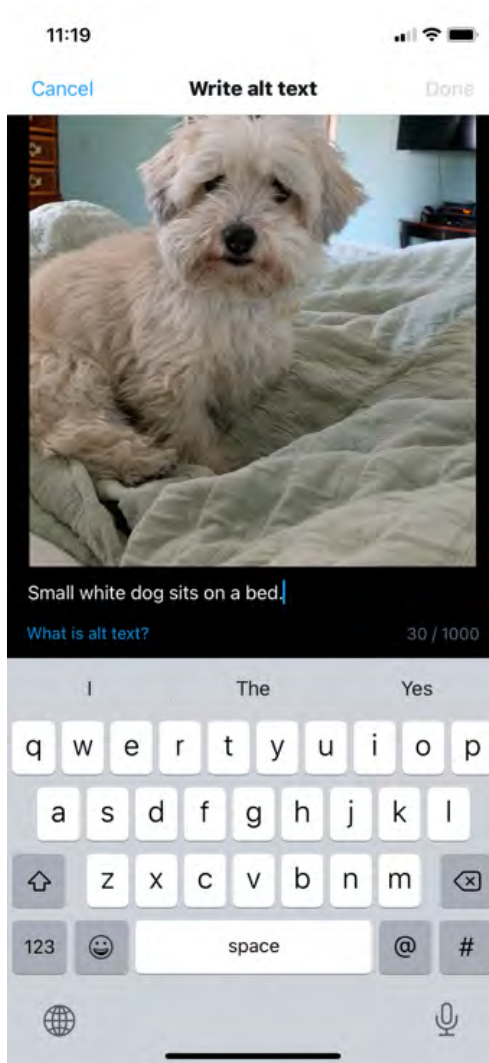
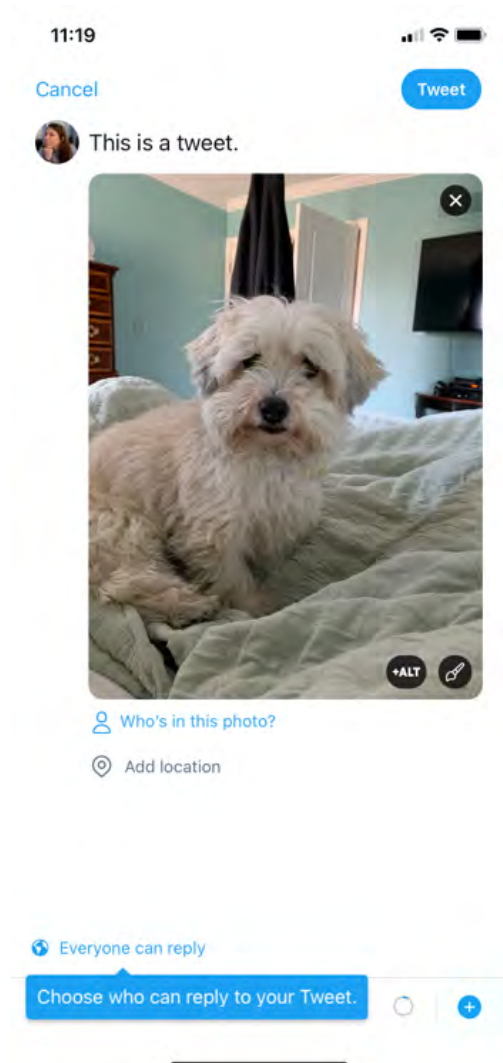
The top things to know when making your posts and content accessible for Twitter:



- When you Tweet photos using the Twitter app for iOS or Android, or on twitter.com, you have the option to add Alt Text so that content is accessible to more people, including those who are blind or have low vision.
- Be sure to turn on Alt Text for images within your Twitter settings.
- Twitter launched a feature that automatically adds captions to video at the end of 2021.
- Limit emojis as screen readers read the title of each emoji.

Visit [Twitter's accessibility page](#) which has easy-to-follow instructions on how to add image descriptions, how to add voice-over, and how to access and use screen readers for people with vision impairment.

The following images show how easy it is to make posts accessible on Twitter.



FACEBOOK

The top things to know when making your posts and content accessible for Facebook:

- You can add captions to a video to make it accessible to a broader audience using the SubRip (.srt) file format.
- If you choose to upload a .srt file, make sure your caption files are correctly named and formatted before you upload them.
- To add captions to an existing video on your Page, find the post on your Page's timeline, click the top-right corner, select Edit Post and follow the steps.

Note: People who watch your Page's video with sound turned OFF will automatically see captions. People who watch your video with sound turned ON will need to turn on captions to see them. The language captions appear in is determined by a user's selected preferred language.

Click on [Facebook's accessibility page](#) to learn more on how to make a post accessible on Facebook.



LINKEDIN

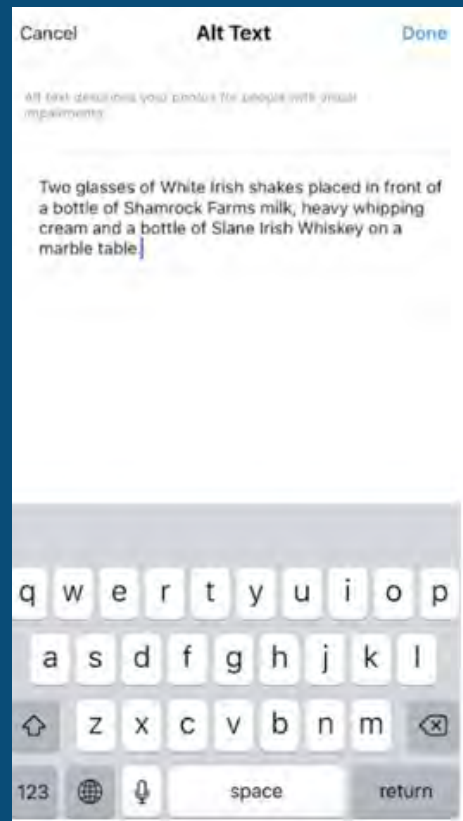
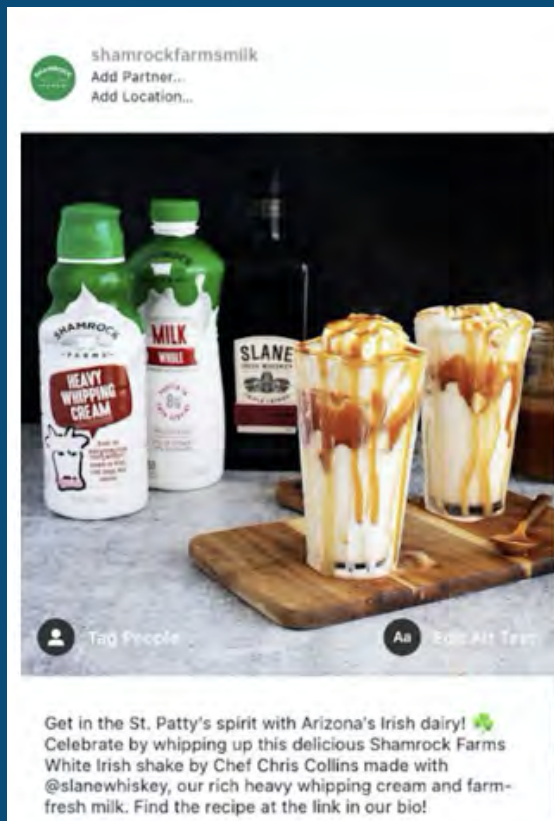
The top things to know when making your posts and content accessible for LinkedIn:

- Add descriptive Alt Text to images in LinkedIn.
- Make sure captions on any videos you include are burned into LinkedIn native video, [visit Hootsuite](#) for more information.
- Click on [LinkedIn's accessibility page](#) to learn more on how to make a post accessible on LinkedIn.



CASE STUDY: Shamrock Farms

Within weeks of committing to accessible communications, Current Global started employing best practices across client activations including adding Alt Text into social content made for its client Shamrock Farms.



INFLUENCER CONTENT

As agency teams are not the only ones creating content for our clients these days, we should be sharing – and encouraging – the same use of guidelines and digital tools with influencers, asking them to be a part of the effort to make communications accessible to all.

Steps to employ:

- Include an ask to do their best to make communications accessible in briefs.
- Share these guidelines or other internal checklists along with the brief.
- Underline the ask and discuss any challenges during content production.
- Consider collaborating with influencers to add accessibility features like closed captions, audio description and transcripts to all projects.
- Work with internal teams to ensure people with disabilities are appropriately represented in partner recommendations.
- When selecting influencers, look to hire disabled creators. Through lived experience they are likely to be in a better position to authentically communicate to the disabled community how a product or service affects them.

PHYSICAL AND VIRTUAL EVENTS

Delivering events is commonplace in our industry – from town hall meetings for internal audiences to press briefings, trade shows, and large-scale gatherings for external audiences. While many venues and event planners are aware of making events accessible for attendees with mobility disabilities, there are several factors that should be considered to ensure your event's communication meets the needs of everyone, whether in-person or virtual.

This space is quickly evolving but a few general guidelines include:

- Use the RSVP form to obtain accommodation requests and understand attendees' needs.
- Communicate to attendees prior to the event about any lighting, use of fog machines or sounds that may be an issue.
- Provide a quiet space to enable the retreat of people who are adversely impacted by over-stimulating sounds and lights such as those with autism or who are prone to migraines or seizures.
- Provide frequent breaks to prevent cognitive overload.
- Include helpful accessibility information on the programme, homepage and running order as a footer on your live events.
- Add closed-captions and audio descriptions to video presentations.
- Verbally describe images and narrate tutorials during a presentation as if you are speaking on a podcast to include individuals who are blind and partially sighted.
- [View this verbally-narrated example](#) on how to check the colour contrast of your slides in PowerPoint.
- Have a sign language interpreter for people with hearing impairments. The disability-advocacy non-profit organisation Disability:In uses ASL services from [Purple Communications](#) at the time of the publication of these guidelines.
- Ensure speaker notes are reviewed for simple language and to catch acronyms or visuals that contain key information but don't have written or verbal descriptions.
- Provide recordings and digital transcripts of the presentations in case things may be missed in the live version. When providing transcripts, include headings and hyperlinks to enable screen reader navigation for individuals who are blind, partially sighted and deaf-blind.

- Instruct event staff how to assist guests who are blind and partially sighted with navigating the event by giving clear verbal directions and offering sighted guide assistance.
- Always ask a blind or partially sighted person if they would like assistance first and never grab or touch them without permission. [For detailed sighted guide instructions visit the Braille Institute's website.](#)
- When providing sighted guide assistance, allow people who are blind and partially sighted to hold your arm while walking a half a step in front of them and providing verbal directions.
- Request that event staff provide paper and writing utensils to assist individuals who have speech disabilities so that they can communicate questions and requests.

HOSTING A VIRTUAL EVENT (INCLUDING VIDEO CALLS AND WEBINARS)

Throughout the pandemic, video calls and webinars emerged as a critical tool for organisations communicating with internal and external stakeholders. Follow these steps to create an accessible and inclusive virtual event experience:

- Provide participants instructions about how to access the virtual platform, including keyboard navigation directions for individuals who are blind, partially sighted and deaf-blind.
- Ask participants to turn on their camera when speaking to enable lip reading for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- Ask speakers to introduce themselves with self-descriptions to give people who are blind, partially sighted and neurodiverse have a verbal description of a presenter's appearance. [Here is a video example of a self-description](#) from Current Global CEO Virginia Devlin.
- Ask participants and speakers to state their name each time they speak to indicate speaker changes to help people who are blind, partially sighted, and/or neurodiverse.
- When reviewing materials during the session, send accessible materials in advance to provide participants of all abilities the time and the opportunity to consume and process the information. When sharing your screen, describe key visual elements within your content to include individuals who are blind or partially sighted.

HELPFUL TIPS AND TOOLS

Good news! Most of the tools we need to produce accessible communications are free and readily available.

Microsoft has a suite of tools within Office 365 that includes an embedded Accessibility Checker tool, and Microsoft Teams offers live captioning.

There is an abundance of how-to videos on YouTube to help make producing accessible content as straight forward as possible. Modern browsers all have the functionality to convert web text and images into speech. Every major social network has a range of accessibility tools. And the list goes on.

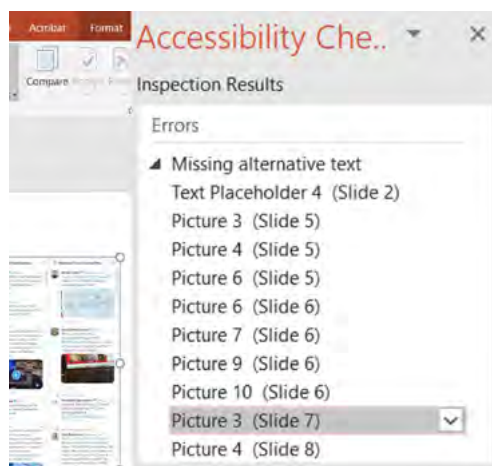
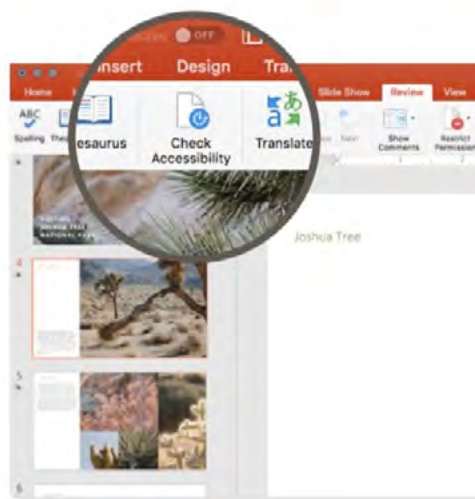
MICROSOFT ACCESSIBILITY CHECKER

Within each of the Office 365 products (Outlook, Word, PowerPoint, etc.) there is an **Accessibility Checker**. This tool automatically reviews your document for any areas that may create an accessibility problem.

HOW TO USE THE MICROSOFT ACCESSIBILITY CHECKER

- Under the **Review** tab in your toolbar, select **Check Accessibility** (on the left-hand side).
- Click on each identified issue that gets flagged and the tool will take you to that location for resolution.
- Issues might include Alt Text missing from images, poor colour contrast with text on a page, titles missing from slides, inconsistent text running order on in a PowerPoint, etc.
- “Errors” that get identified as such should be addressed as they will cause problems to those with sight or hearing impairment.
- “Warnings” however are potential issues rather than must-fix errors.

Please note this is applicable across the suite of Microsoft tools:



MICROSOFT COLOR CONTRAST ANALYZER

People with low vision often have difficulty reading text. The problems can be exacerbated if they also have a colour vision deficiency such as colour blindness that lowers the perceived contrast even further. Ensuring adequate contrast makes it easier for everyone – not just the visually impaired – to read text content.

Microsoft's Color Contrast Analyzer is a feature in [Accessibility Insights for Windows](#) that helps developers and designers investigate contrast ratios. Colour contrast rules apply for video, motion graphics, graphics, and text overlay. Colour contrast must be 4.5:1 for small text (<18pt) or 3:1 for large/bold text.



HOW TO USE THE MICROSOFT COLOR CONTRAST ANALYZER

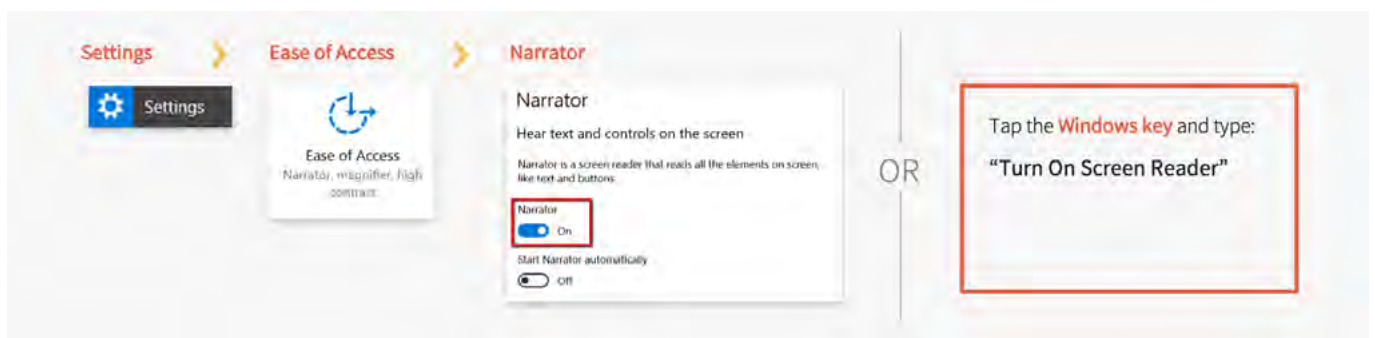
- Visit [Accessibility Insights Color Contrast](#) to get started with this tool.
- Download the app on your desktop.
- Watch this short [Accessibility Insights YouTube video](#) to learn how to use the colour contrast analyser.
- Remember to check the Colour Contrast Analyzer throughout the production of your content.

WINDOWS SCREEN READER

Windows 10 has a built-in, easy to use screen reader called Narrator for people who are blind and partially sighted.

Narrator enables people who are blind or have a visual impairment to navigate websites, apps and Word documents.

This [Microsoft Narrator YouTube video](#) gives very simple instructions for getting started with Narrator, keyboard shortcuts to use and how to navigate through different websites and applications.



CASE STUDY: Microsoft “The Fifth” Campaign

Current Global supported client Microsoft with an EMEA-wide campaign called “The Fifth,” which highlighted the business value of embracing accessibility. To reach European business decision makers, the team created fully accessible assets that drew attention to Microsoft’s built-in accessibility solutions. A series of visuals explored how businesses that are not embracing accessibility are ‘missing a fifth’ of their opportunity, as well as The Worklife Hack series which highlighted Microsoft tools and features useful for all workers, including those with disabilities. Images were amplified across social channels and directed people to other content in the series, including an interactive quiz which further reinforced the importance of accessibility in the workplace.



SECTION 4

EMBEDDING ACCESSIBILITY INTO YOUR COMMUNICATIONS FUNCTION

BEST PRACTICE

While many tools to produce accessible content already exist, the key step-change really comes down to embedding accessibility standards and best practices in your overall approach to creating any kind of content. Clicking on the Accessibility Checker should become as routine as using spellcheck!

WHAT DOES BEST PRACTICE LOOK LIKE?

PUBLISH A MANIFESTO

Once you've decided to commit to making communications accessible, write a manifesto that outlines what you're doing and why you believe it to be important. Share it with colleagues, display it around your office, include it in your credentials or company brochure, post it on your website.

Here's an example from Current Global:

My father is deaf. So is his twin brother, my uncle. Growing up it was always a challenge to communicate with them. But as a family, we always made the effort.

That's what you do.

Sadly, it's not always been my experience in professional communications. Every day content is published that's inaccessible to many, campaigns are launched that aren't designed to be inclusive of people of all abilities. But it doesn't have to be that way.

Over a billion people – one in eight of the world's population – have some form of disability. With an ageing population, more than two billion will need at least one assistive communication, memory or hearing aid in the next 10 years. That's a significant audience to exclude by default or by design.

We have a moral duty to change this, and it makes obvious commercial sense for our clients too. **So, we're making a commitment as an agency.**

When we say we'll develop campaigns that engage everyone, we mean it.

When we make interactive online content, it won't just be for some, but for all.

When we build brands, we'll make sure they can reach every single person.

On behalf of our clients, every piece of communication we develop, curate and publish will meet the highest accessibility standards.

We'll work to build the in-house capabilities of our clients to do the same.

And we'll partner with professional bodies around the world to champion accessibility and promote industry best practice.

Things won't change overnight, but if we make the effort, we hope others follow.

As passionate communicators, it's what we do that matters.

George Coleman
Joint CEO, Current Global

GET YOUR OWN HOUSE IN ORDER

Committing to accessible communications means that all external emails, documents, spreadsheets, presentations, visual content, etc. should be made accessible to all. Don't forget though that this refers to the content and material you are producing internally as well as content for external audiences. Before you 'go live', make sure that your website has gone through all the necessary accessibility checks, and that credentials and templates that teams regularly use have been updated to meet the highest accessibility standards.

Regarding websites, there are several plug-ins available that identify on-going changes required to meet Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.0). Remember, it is the law in many countries for your websites and digital channels to be compliant. For more information, visit the [W3C Guideline webpage](#).

It is important to understand that plug-ins are helpful for identifying some accessibility issues, but it is not enough to ensure the full accessibility of your digital content. Plug-ins are generally not effective enough to ensure compliance with accessibility standards and usability for individuals with disabilities. The reality is that nothing beats investing time in continued manual testing of your digital content from an accessibility specialist.

Recognise that this is a continuous process, particularly to keep up with evolving accessibility standards and changing technologies.

DEVELOP A COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

Let employees know what you're committing to, why it matters and what your expectations of them are in delivering accessible communications. What internal communications channels can you use to spread the word? What training does your team need to understand the tools and requirements? Share regular reminders with staff to use the tools. Share case studies of work where it has been put into practice. Make accessibility training part of your on-boarding for all new employees.

Let clients or other stakeholders know what you are committing to, why it matters, how and when you plan to roll it out, any cost implications and what differences they are likely to see. For agencies, committing to accessible communications as part of your client service offer can often be accommodated within standard fee rates. Additional third-party costs can, of course, be flagged and passed on to clients.

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

Get familiar with the tools included in these guidelines and start using them TODAY! At the start of every project, [reference the checklist at the end of this document.](#)

Cultivate a disability-inclusive culture for yourself and within your firm by adopting accessibility as a habit. Research shows it takes a minimum of 21 days to make a habit. [Visit this link to start a 21-day challenge](#) to learn the fundamentals of accessible communications.

PLAN AHEAD

Build in time to facilitate any extra steps required to make your content accessible. Involve creative, design and production teams early! Give them time to implement what's required, whether that's adding in closed captions for videos or reworking a previously used presentation to reflect the fact that the colour contrast needs to be improved.

CHECKLIST

Use this checklist to help ensure that your work is accessible from the outset.

Share it with all team members, talk it through at the kick-off stage, and keep referencing it until accessibility becomes a natural part of everything you produce.

PROJECT KICK OFF

- ☐ Have I thought about all content that needs to be made accessible?
- ☐ Do I know how to ensure each element is made accessible?
- ☐ Have I alerted my creative, design and/or production team about what's needed?
- ☐ Have I communicated why producing accessible content matters and (if I'm working agency-side) outlined any potential costs to be considered or approved by my client?

MIDWAY CHECK IN

- ☐ Have I checked that we are on course for all content to be accessible?
- ☐ Am I making necessary adjustments along the way as the project develops?
- ☐ Is the creative content being produced with accessibility addressed?
- ☐ Am I reviewing content to reduce jargon and improve comprehension?

PROJECT CONCLUSION

- ☐ Have I delivered on our commitment to make content accessible to all?
- ☐ What lessons can I share for the next project?



