

12 Point Design Checklist for Accessibility

With the goal of providing a single, shared web standard for inclusion, usability, and accessibility for persons with disabilities, the current Web Content Accessibility Guidelines provide a consistent frame of reference for developers and designers.

Promet Source created the following checklist for designers, to guide compliance with WCAG 2.1.

1 **Is there sufficient color contrast being used?**

Text should have sufficient text-to-background contrast ratio to help users with partial vision loss and those with color-blindness. Text under 18 points should have a contrast ratio of 4.5:1 or higher. Larger text that is 18 point or 14 point bold and higher requires a ratio of at least 3:1. Likewise, user interface (UI) elements such as menus and buttons should have a minimum 3:1 contrast ratio with adjacent colors used in the UI. Try using an online color contrast tool to test your color combinations.

2 **Are there instances where color alone has been relied upon to convey meaning?**

In addition to using sufficient color contrast for text, color should not be the sole indicator of meaning, such as “all required items are in red.” Imagine that your designs will be as effective in black and white and not rely on color as a functional element.

3 **Do font size and spacing meet WCAG criteria?**

A simple equation can be used once the body font size is established: spacing between lines needs to be at least 1.5 times the font size; spacing following paragraphs is at least 2 times the font size; spacing between the letters (tracking) is at least 0.12 times the font size; and spacing between words is at least 0.16 times the font size.

4 **Are links easily detectable?**

Hyperlinked text is required to have two indicators, such as a different text color and an underline, to signal that the text is a link. Additionally, hover states on a hyperlink are required to show two state changes, such as the text changing to bold with a stronger underline, a color change, or a highlight.

5 **Have you considered how hover states will appear?**

Elements that a user can interact with will have a hover state to indicate to users the status of the interaction, often indicating whether it is: inactive, active, or clicked. Consider creating a style guide to view all the necessary states at a glance for buttons, links, menus, and other interactive elements.

6 **Is Call-to-Action text or link text descriptive and not repetitive?**

Instead of "READ MORE" OR "MORE," text such as, "See schedule of events," "See the recent ruling," provides helpful context and differentiation among links for screen readers that may be reading buttons as isolated elements. Your design mockups should include wider buttons and links with more descriptive placeholder text.

7 **Are titles and section headings being accounted for in the design?**

Headings and titles are needed to help organize the content and to describe the topic or purpose of the pages and sections within each page. Does your design demonstrate how page titles are to be used in descending order of header classes? Create a style guide that effectively presents your header class levels (H1, H2, H3, etc.) and call out font selection and font size for each header to ensure the needed header options are available for developers and content editors. Also, keep in mind that all fields for a form must be labeled with a title.

8 **Do pages have a consistent structure and easy-to-use layout?**

A predictable layout provides good usability and ease-of-use, not only for screen readers, but for people with a range of cognitive disabilities and computer literacy. Make sure elements (buttons and links) are large enough and far enough apart from each other to accommodate touch screens and avoid "fat finger" errors.

9 **Is text used in images or graphic elements only decorative or necessary?**

Only use text in an image if it is for pure decoration (such as ornaments) or is essential to the user's understanding of the image (such as the word "dictionary" shown on the cover of a book). This does not apply to logos, or charts containing significant visual information where the text is essential to the information that is being conveyed on the image. When text does appear in an image, be sure to indicate the text is in the "Alt Text" field for the image, unless it is decorative only.

10 **Is navigation consistent on every page?**

Ensure navigation components and menus occur in the same order on each page. This helps create a mental model for users to easily find their way.

11 **Has the possibility of user error factored into the design?**

Identify pages where users may encounter an error, such as filling out a form, and design error states that helps them more easily complete the task.

12 **Have you conducted user testing on your web designs among people with disabilities?**

WCAG 2.1 guidelines are only a starting point. The objective is to optimize inclusivity and including people who have disabilities in user testing is an important step toward ensuring the site design accommodates a range of abilities.

WCAG 2.1 AA guidelines are an essential framework, but creating a truly accessible and user-friendly site involves more than checking off boxes. A commitment to accessibility also requires upfront user testing, the assurance that developers are deploying accessible code, collaboration among stakeholders, manual and automated audits, and perhaps most importantly, an empathetic understanding of how and why the humans for whom the site is designed will engage with it.

Contact Promet Source at ignite@prometsource.com or **(773) 525-8255** for a consultation or for further information on implementing WCAG 2.1 guidelines and user testing to ensure accessible online experiences.



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