National Center on Accessible Educational Materials

Making Our Documents More Accessible

In order for every learner to be able to access the information in a document or web page, there are a few steps we can take to improve accessibility.

Include Alternative Text for Images

Images can add visual appeal to a document, and they can help bring the content to life for those who have a preference for visual learning. However, not everyone reading a document has full use of his or her eyes. Some readers may have low vision, or they may be completely blind, in which case they may use a tool called a screen reader: software that reads the text in a document aloud. Screen readers can only process text, and they will ignore any images that are embedded in a document if they don't have a text alternative.

[AEM Center: how to add alternative text to images.](#)

What makes good alt text? [WebAIM](#) and the [DIAGRAM Center](#) provide resources to help you build your image description skills.

Use Headings to Break Up Long Documents

Headings can break up long documents into smaller sections that are easier to process for some readers. A heading basically signals a break for the reader: it tells the reader that we are ready to transition to a different point or big idea. In this way, headings reveal how the information is organized to readers. Headings also provide additional navigation for readers who are blind, as they can use a shortcut in their screen readers to navigate to a specific section of the document.

Throughout this document, headings let you know what each section is about.

[AEM Center: How to create proper headings in a document.](#)

Make Sure Links Work Out of Context

With most screen readers, it is possible to use a keyboard shortcut or a special gesture to access a list of all the links on a document or web page. When the text link only reads "click here" or "learn more" the person hearing the list of links does not have enough information to determine if he or she has selected the correct document or web page. By making the link more descriptive (i.e. "Learn more about Accessible Documents") we provide helpful contextual information that makes the link more accessible. It is also important that we do not include a full URLs as the hyperlink. As the Web has grown, hyperlinks to individual web pages have not only become longer but more confusing. In order to make them unique, these web addresses often include long strings of numbers and special characters which can be confusing for a screen reader user when they are read aloud. To improve the usability of hyperlinks, it is better to select some descriptive text and make that the link, instead of including the full URL on the document or web page.

[AEM Center: How to create links that work out of context.](#)