

Demystifying Digital Accessibility

Small Changes that Make A Big Difference

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Agenda

- Common Misconceptions
- The Legal Landscape
 - What *is* and *is not* covered
- Access in Context
- Small Changes → Big Impact
- Wrap-Up and Key Takeaways



“Digital accessibility refers to the inclusive practice of *removing barriers* that prevent interaction with, or access to *websites, digital tools* and *technologies*, by people with disabilities.”

Georgetown University, School of Law



Myths

1. Accessible digital content cannot be engaging.
2. Making things digitally accessible only benefits people who are blind.
3. I need an IT degree for this.



The Population We Serve

- **70 million** Americans
- **23.6%** of adults aged 18–44
- **43.9%** of adults aged 65 and older
- Educational Attrition
 - **20%** more likely to withdraw/drop-out
 - **34%** lower graduation rate
- **Invisible disabilities** can be print-related too
 - LD, ADD/ADHD, Psychological, Chronic Health
- **10%** of men are color blind
- Only **62%** of adults with a disability own a desktop or laptop
 - vs **81%** of adults without a disability



Digital Barrier	Prevalence on Top 1M Sites	Primary Populations Excluded	Civil & Human Rights Impact
Low Contrast Text	79.1%	Users with low vision, color blindness, or aging eyes	Denies access to written journalism, public health alerts , and educational resources.
Missing Image Alt Text	55.5%	Blind users relying on screen readers	Erases visual context, making independent navigation and multimedia learning impossible .
Missing Form Labels	48.2%	Users with cognitive or visual impairments	Prevents autonomous participation in commerce , voting registration , and healthcare portals .
Empty/Broken Links	45.4%	Users navigating via keyboard or assistive tech	Traps users, destroying digital autonomy and freedom of movement.

The Impact of Communication Barriers



70% of online users with a disability will immediately abandon a website that they find difficult to navigate



The Legal Landscape



Current U.S. Laws

- Civil Rights Act of 1964 – added rights for PWD in 1973 – **Disability Rights are Civil Rights**
- **Rehabilitation Act 1973**
 - Section 508 – applies to US government entities (fully government funded)
- **Americans with Disabilities Act as Amended 1990/2008**
 - Title 1 – Employment
 - **Title 2 – Public Accommodations**
 - Title 3 – Private Accommodations
 - Title 4 – Equity in Communication



Updated ADA Title II

- April 8, 2024 – “Attorney General Merrick B. Garland [...] signed a final rule under Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) to **ensure the accessibility of web content and mobile applications (apps) for people with disabilities.**”
- Requires *proactive* conformance to the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) version 2.1 at the AA level.
- Applies to US Federal and State Governments, Agencies, and Entities receiving government funding (e.g. public school districts, public colleges and universities, public libraries, government funded agencies, organizations fulfilling government contracts)
- **Deadline:** April 24, 2027 (≥50,000 people)



Perceivable: Available to the senses (vision and hearing primarily) either through the browser or through assistive technologies (e.g. screen readers, screen enlargers, etc.)

Operable: Users can interact with all controls and interactive elements using either the mouse, keyboard, or an assistive device.

Understandable: Content is clear and limits confusion and ambiguity.

Robust: A wide range of technologies (including old and new user agents and assistive technologies) can access the content.



Perceivable



Operable



Understandable



Robust

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG)



5 Exceptions

1. Archived Web Content
2. Pre Existing Conventional Electronic Documents
3. Content Posted by a 3rd Party
4. Individualized Documents that are Password Protected
5. Preexisting Social Media Posts

Safe Harbor

A small element of a site is not accessible but a person with a disability can still access the same information, engage in the same interactions, conduct the same transaction, and otherwise participate in the same services, programs, and activities as a everyone else.



Content that Must Be Accessible

- Videos
 - Auto-generated captions are not enough
- Webpage and App Content and Navigation
- Online Documents
 - *Must meet PDF/UA*
- Images/Graphs/Charts
- Audio-only/Visual-only Content
- Online Exams/Quizzes
- Forms
- Hyperlinks
- Online Systems and Processes
- New Social Media Posts
- 3rd Party Software and Content (Data Management, GIS, etc.)



Access in Context

Small Changes for *Big* Wins

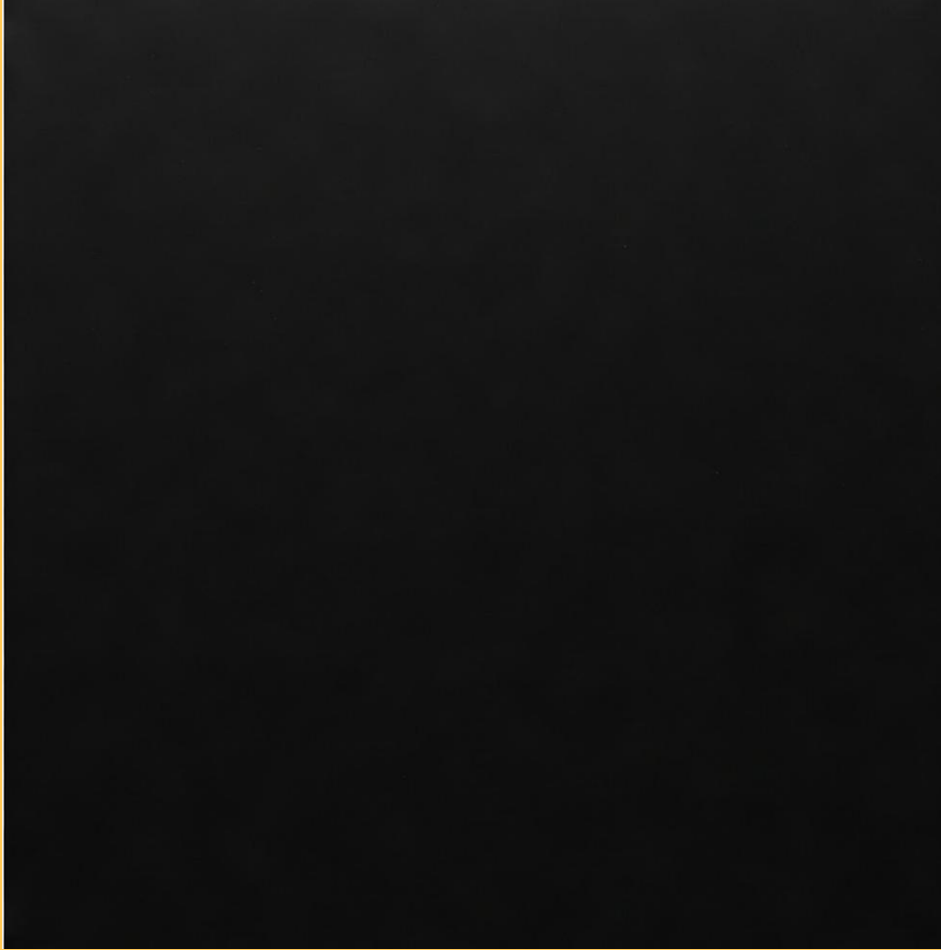


A Community Engagement Example

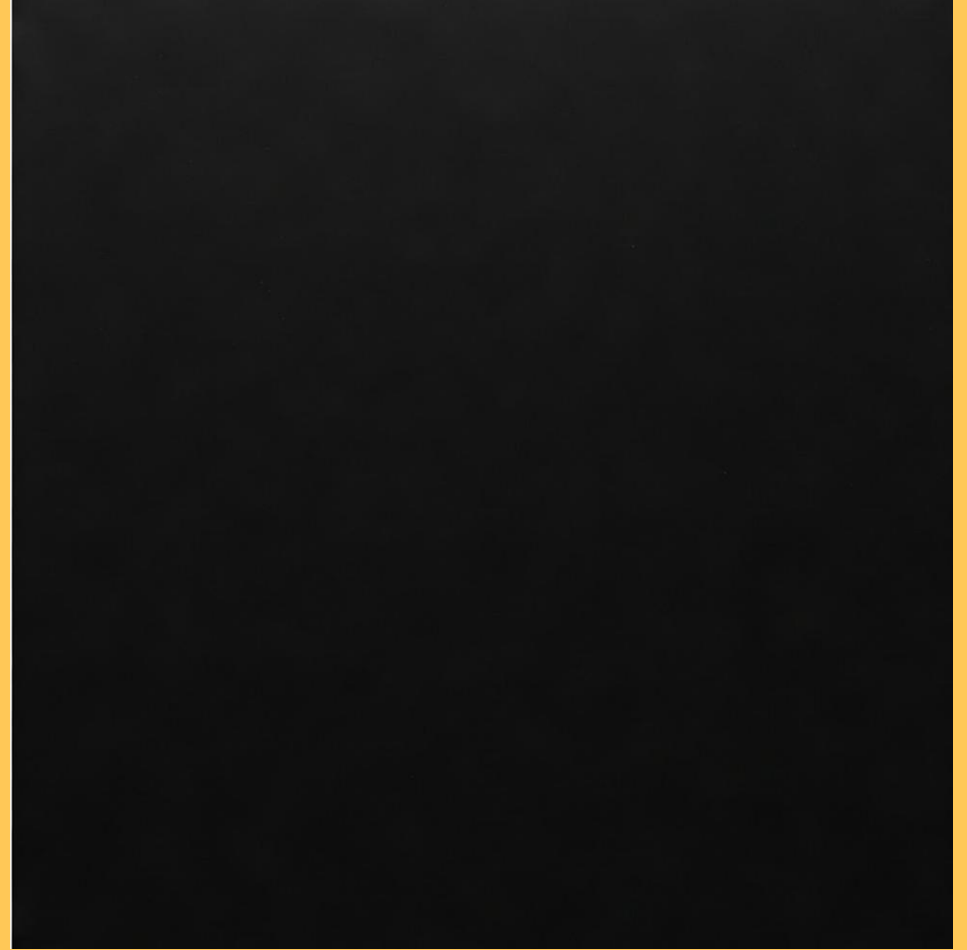
**We Want to Hear
From You!**



Option A



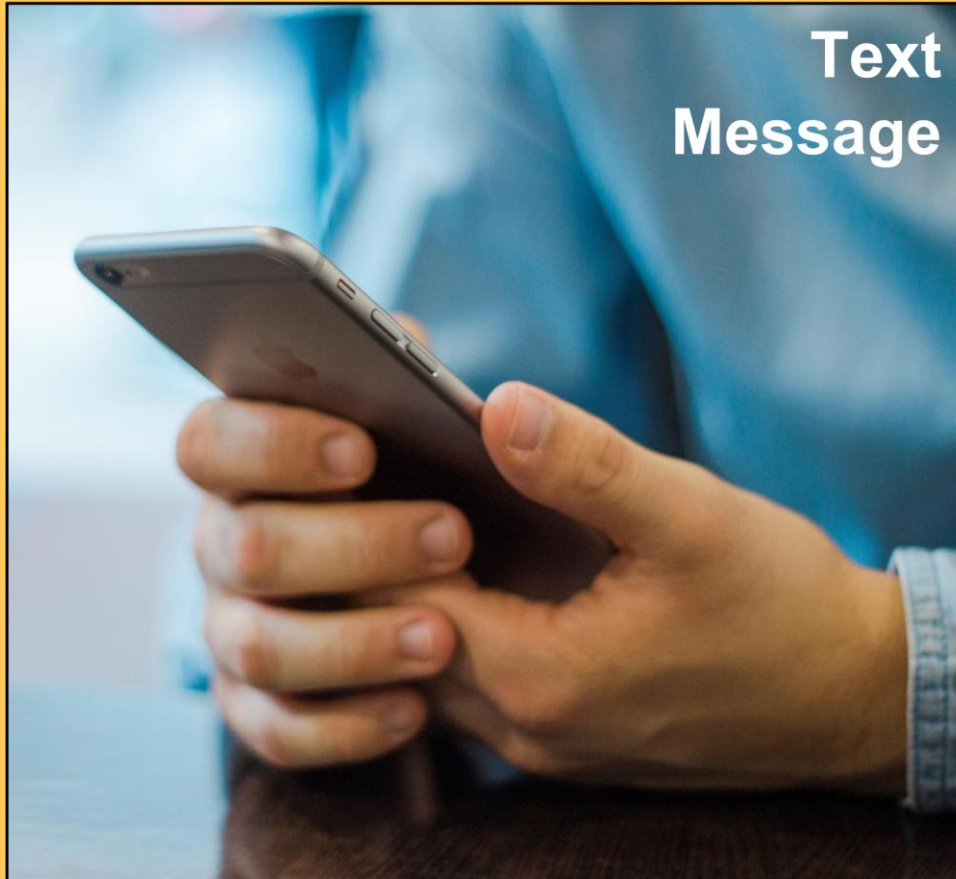
Option B



Notification Options



Option A



Option B



How About These?



Option A

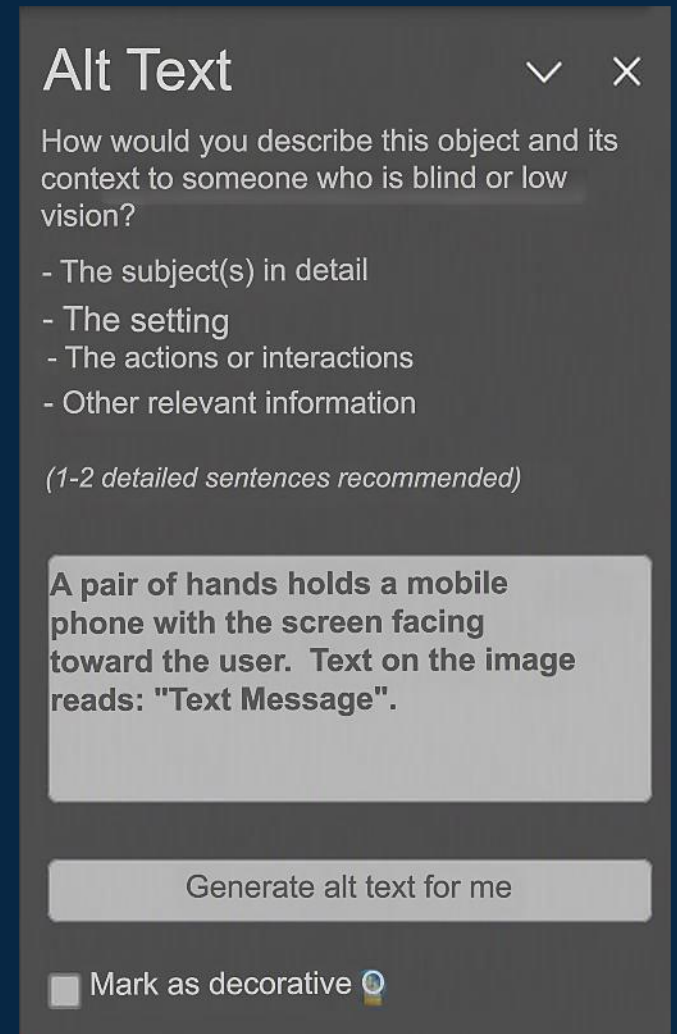
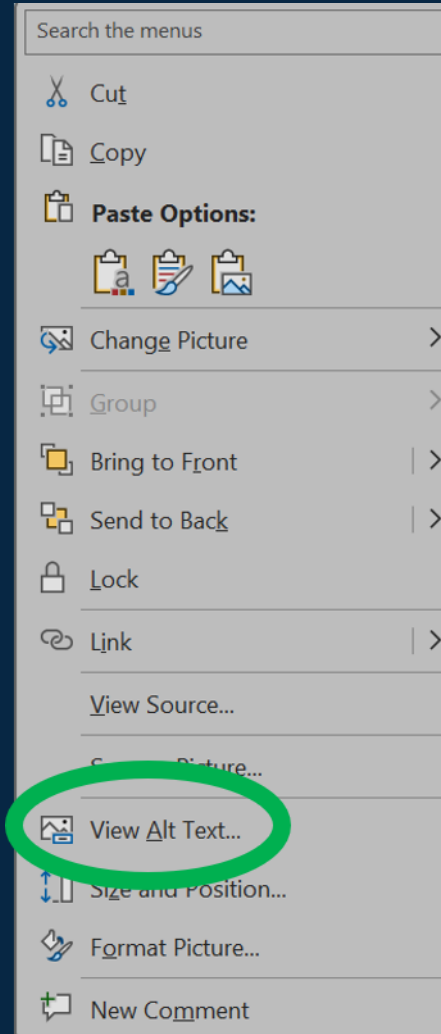
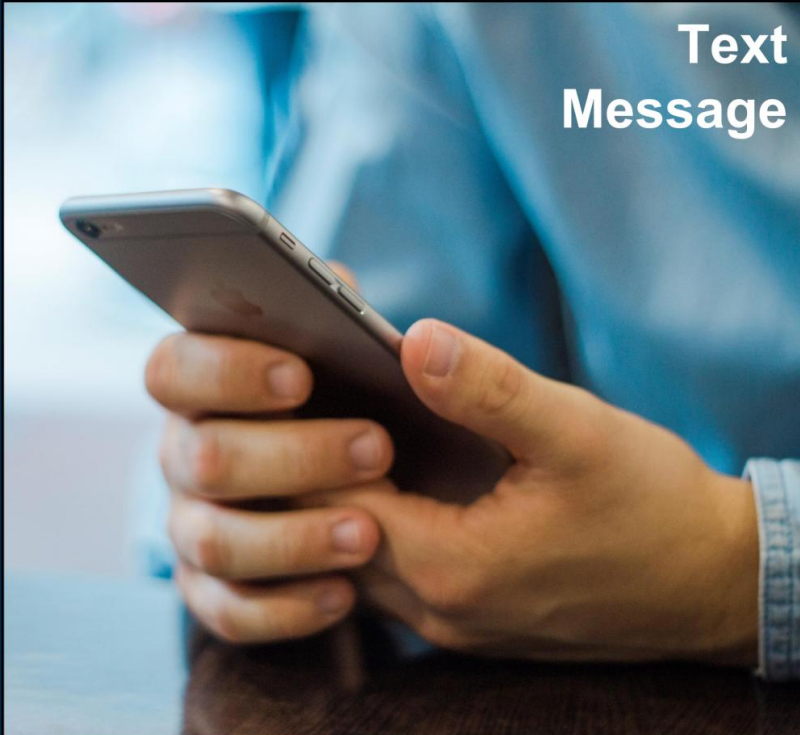
A pair of hands holds a mobile phone with the screen facing toward the user. Text on the image reads: "Text Message".

Option B

A pair of hands types on a laptop. The laptop screen shows the standard email icon surrounded by other communications icons and the text "Email".

Notification Options with ALT





Making the Small Change



Good ALT

- Is it informative?
- Be descriptive and specific.
- Keep it Concise.
- Avoid Redundancy and Unnecessary Phrases.
- Consider the Image's Purpose.
- A description of the **content** in the **context** it is being used.



blurry

We all see things the same way.
We see words in groups or phrases.
The print is more dominant than the background. The print shows no movement. The printed letters are evenly black. Black print on white paper gives the best contrast for everyone. White_

halo

We all see things the same way..
We see words in groups or phrases.
The print is more dominant than the background. The print shows no movement. The printed letters are evenly black. Black print on white paper gives the best contrast for everyone. White_

rivers

We all see things the same way.
We see words in groups or phrases. The print is more dominant than the background. The print shows no movement. The printed letters are evenly black. Black print on white paper gives the best contrast for everyone. White background looks white.

seesaw

We all see things the same way.
We see words in groups or phrases.
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shaky

We all see things the same way.
We see words in groups or phrases.
The print is more dominant than the background. The print shows no movement. The printed letters are evenly black. Black print on white paper gives the best contrast for everyone. White background looks white.

swirl

We all see things the same way.
We see words in groups or phrases.
The print is more dominant than the background. The print shows no movement. The printed letters are evenly black. Black print on white paper gives the best contrast for everyone. White background looks white.

What a Person with a Learning Disability *May* See



Content Matters

Avoid:

- Large blocks of italics
- Fully justified text
- Underlining text that is **not** a hyperlink
- Generic link text e.g. “Learn more”, “Click here”, “Read more”
- Smaller than 12pt font
- Jargon and abbreviations with no explanation

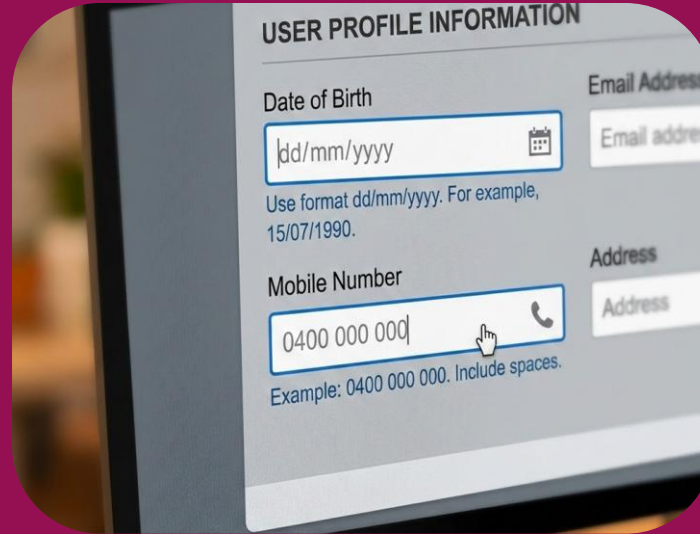


Accessible Forms



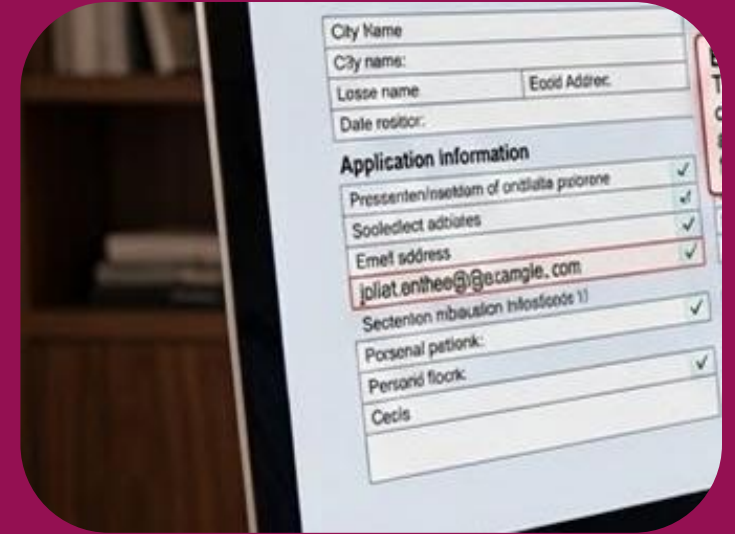
Labels

Visual and programmatically descriptive labels for every input field.



Instructions

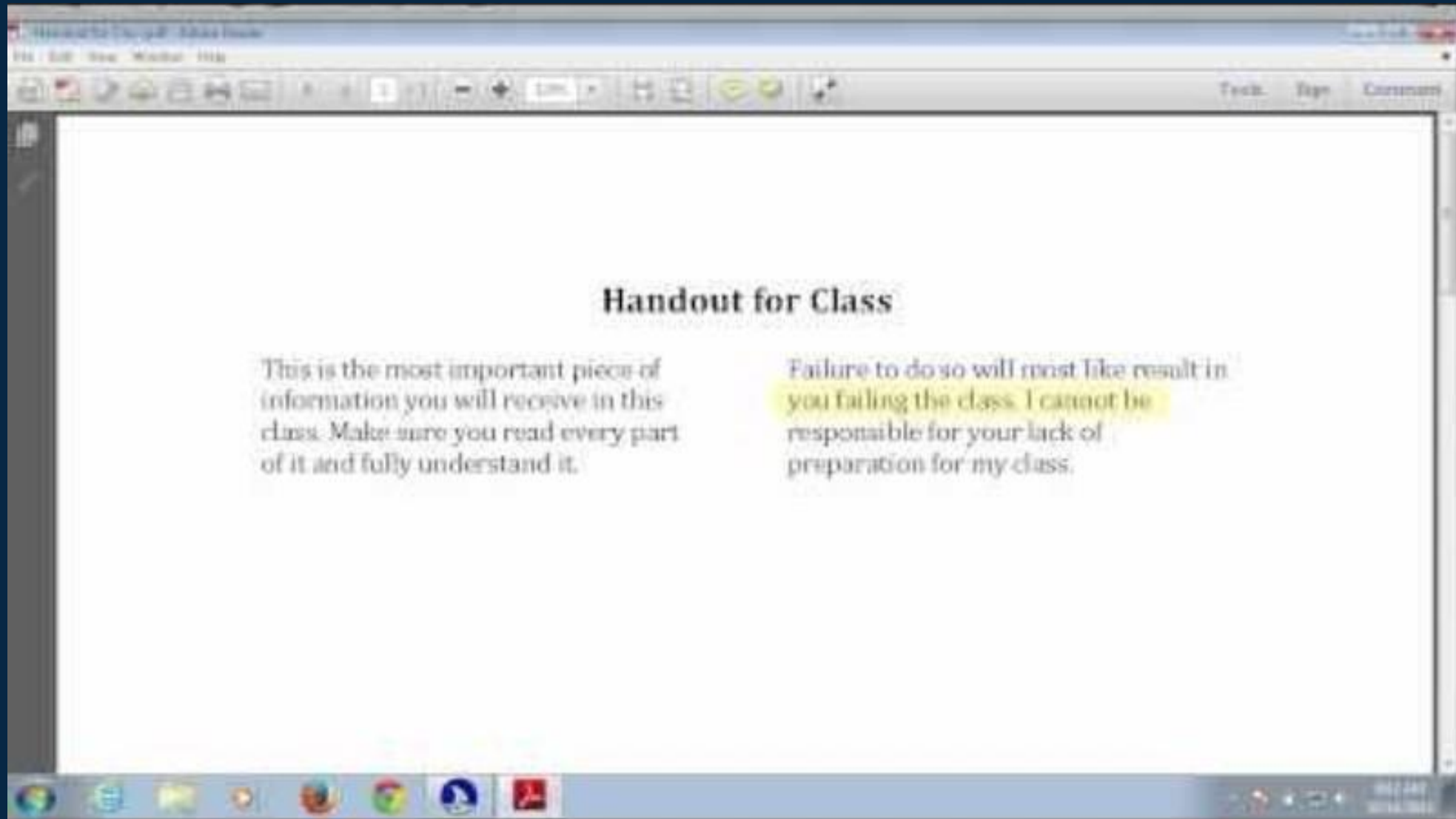
Clear, upfront instructions for required fields and data formats



Error Handling

Helpful, text-based error messages that identify exactly what went wrong.





Inaccessible PDF Example



Providing Structure

- Headings provide structure to a page, screen, or document
- They are visually distinct, breaking up content and should be coded or tagged with heading tags <H1>, <H2>, <H3> etc.
 - Use “Styles” in MS Word or Google Docs
- Provide easier navigation
- Web pages and documents typically should have one H1 (the main purpose or title of the page)
- Use the “Layout” tab in Microsoft



Video and Audio Recordings

- Accurate captions are a must
- Provide the transcript
 - (just download the captions)
- Making your own video?
 - Let AI do the work for you! (Canvas, Teams, Zoom, WebEx)
 - *Edit the auto-generated captions*
- Avoid flashing content at all costs
- Using YouTube?
 - No “captions are auto-generated”
- Is any information only visual or only audio?
- Not sure?
 - Watch the video without sound, then listen without picture
 - What did you miss?



(A Few More)
Small Changes → Big Impact



Top Tips for Plain Language

1

Brevity

Keep sentences under 15–20 words. Focus on one main idea per sentence.

2

Familiarity

Use active voice and common words. Avoid industry jargon, complex acronyms, and **abbreviations**.

3

Clarity

Front-load your information. Put the most important action or point at the start of the paragraph.

4

Call to Action

Make button and link labels explicit (e.g., "Submit Application" vs "Submit").



Color Contrast

- Avoid **color alone** to convey information
- Regular Text
 - <14pts bold or <18pts
 - Minimum 4.5:1 ratio
- Large Text:
 - ≥14pts bold or ≥18pts
 - Minimum 3:1 ratio
- Use a **FREE** Color Contrast Checker
 - QR code for the FREE Grackle Color Contrast Checker to the right.



<https://bit.ly/grackle-contrast>



Social Media

- ***ALL images*** get ALT text
- Callouts, Emojis, and Hashtags *go at the end* of the post
- Emojis
 - Already have ALT (yay!)
 - Are not bullet points
 - Should not replace a word
 - Use sparingly
- Hashtags use #PascalCase
- ***ALL videos*** and REELS get good captions (and audio description if needed)
- Include an Image Description at the end of the post



Key Takeaways



What You Need to Know

- Address access issues at the source
- Good AI with Human Intervention is a great strategy!
- Not all accessibility tools are equal
 - AI/Software-based web scans, while helpful, are no more than 30% accurate
 - Auto-captioning tools (*without human intervention*) are not accurate enough for WCAG
 - Accessibility checkers can lie – so use the right ones!
- Avoid overlays at all costs



Digital Accessibility is a Marathon, not a Sprint

One step at a time...



FREE Resources

- PDF/UA Checkers
 - GrackleGO or PAC
- For Word, PPT, Excel
 - MS Accessibility Assistant
 - Grackle Office (free trial)
- Website Scans Chrome Add-Ins
 - WAVE
 - Grackle Check
- Auto-Captioning (then edit it)
 - Zoom, Teams, WebEx, Google Meet



<https://bit.ly/Grackle-GO>



How to Implement Accessibility

Step 1: Conduct an accessibility assessment of your digital footprint.

Step 2: Train employees on accessibility best practices.

Step 3: Establish an internal accessibility policy.

Step 4: Engage with the disability community for feedback.

Step 5: Regularly test and update content to remain compliant.





Thank you!

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Citations

- **U.S. Disability Demographics (70 million / 28.7% overall, 13.9% cognitive, 12.2% mobility, age correlations):** Sourced from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) 2022 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) data, as reported in the Disability and Health Data System (DHDS).
- **Website Accessibility Failure Rates (roughly 95% overall failure):** Sourced from the WebAIM Million report, an annual accessibility analysis of the top one million website homepages globally. Recent 2025 and 2026 data indicates between 94.8% and 95.9% of homepages fail basic Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG).
- **Specific Digital Barriers (79.1% low contrast, 55.5% missing alt text, 48.2% missing form labels):** Sourced directly from the 2025 WebAIM Million report detailing the most common WCAG failures across the internet.

