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The ULTIMATE Checklist for
ACCESSIBILE
LINKS

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OVERVIEW

When it comes to the accessibility of your website, one factor that oftentimes gets overlooked is **link accessibility**.

From screen readers for those with visual impairments to speech recognition software for those who have difficulties using a mouse, there are many accessibility programs and other technologies that can only work correctly if the links on your site are optimized.

(Remember, the goal is to make your website user-friendly for ALL. Not the opposite.)

To help you in your accessibility journey, we've created this comprehensive checklist to improve your site's links.

Let's get started.

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7 KEY FACTORS TO CONSIDER

When Improving Link Accessibility on Your Website

LINK TEXT

LINKING URLs

IMAGE LINKS

ADJACENTS LINKS

NON-COLOR REQUIREMENTS

STYLES WITH LINKING

LINK SIZING

Link Text

Your link text must make sense — even without the surrounding context.

This means that you should avoid common but vague phrases like "click here," "learn more," or "read more."

Using non-descriptive phrases can confuse users, particularly those who rely on screen readers or speech recognition software. When read aloud, these phrases don't provide enough information to help users understand where the link will take them.

Instead, it's best to use unique and specific phrases that clearly convey the purpose of the link. For example, you could use "download the eGuide" or "request a free discovery call."

By using descriptive language, you can help users quickly understand what to expect when they click on the link.

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Linking URLs

If you are using a URL as a link, we always say, "The shorter the better".

Keep in mind that the user will listen to the entire URL if they are using a screen reader. By keeping your URL concise, users won't have to listen to a lengthy URL (which can be frustrating, to say the least).

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Image Links

The "accessibility rule of thumb" is to avoid using an image as a link.

BUT, if it's necessary to use the image as a link, be sure to optimize the image's alt text for the link.

The alt text should describe both the destination (location) and the purpose of the link, making it clear to all users what will happen when the image link is clicked.

In this case, it's better to treat the image as a link rather than a visual element.

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Adjacents Links

In website accessibility, it's considered a mistake to have multiple links that lead to the same location placed consecutively. This can be confusing and frustrating for users who rely on assistive technology to navigate your website.

To combat this, consider consolidating all of the links into a single element. This will make it easier for users to understand the purpose of the links and navigate the page more efficiently.

By grouping the links together, you can provide a more streamlined and organized experience for all users, including those who use assistive technology.

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Non-Color Requirements for Links

It's important to note that simply changing the color of linked text from the body text is not enough to make a link distinguishable.

In addition to color, adding an underline to the link is a common non-color consideration to ensure colorblind and cognitively impaired users can also identify the link.

Pro Tip: To make things even easier for your user, ensure that the underline or an icon is displayed WITHOUT the need to hover over the text!

As per the strict **WCAG guidelines**, other non-color considerations include:

- The contrast ratio between the **surrounding text and the background:** Must be at least 4.5:1
- The contrast ratio between the **link and the background**: Must be at least 4.5:1
- The contrast ratio between the **link and the surrounding text**: Must be at least 3:1

By keeping these non-color requirements at top of mind, you can ensure that you are not only making your website accessible — but in alignment with WCAG guidelines as well.

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Styles with Linking

For keyboard-only users, users will use the tab key to sift through links and other elements on your site.

To showcase what element is tabbed, it's important that there is a default focus style on that element. This will generally display itself as a thin dotted line or a faint glow. The key here is to make the element stand out from other text on the page.

As a bonus, you can also make various hover styles that will give a stylistic differentiation to users who hover over the text. This will continue to provide users with a great overall experience on your site.

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Link Sizing

When designing your website, it's important to consider the size of your links.

You want your links to be large enough for users with coordination issues to easily tap on them. As a rule of thumb, aim for links that are at least 44px wide and 22px tall.

On the other hand, it's equally important to strike a balance between size and usability. Links that are too large can be a problem, especially on mobile devices. They can make it easy for users to accidentally tap on the wrong link, leading to a frustrating experience.

All in all, it's crucial to ensure that your links are big enough to be easily tapped but not too big to cause usability issues.

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KEY TAKEAWAYS

By optimizing links for accessibility purposes, you will ensure a seamless user experience on your website.

As a recap, by following the accessibility checklist and implementing measures such as using clear and descriptive link text, providing alternative text for images, and making sure the links are easily distinguishable, you can guarantee that all users (including those with disabilities) can navigate your site effortlessly.

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*If you are a developer looking to code for link accessibility, use the "**Yale University Usability & Accessibility for Links: Developer Techniques**" section to learn more.

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