

Starting to Think About Web Accessibility: A Short Introduction and Beginning Questions

Conducting an accessibility review of a website is a complex task. This document only is intended as a very brief introduction to thinking about this issue. As of 2016, there are no regulations from the Department of Justice that explicitly detail web accessibility under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

However, from the Department's enforcement actions to date, it seems clear that web architecture available to the public must be accessible as is the case with physical architecture. In [its settlement agreements and consent decrees](#), the Department of Justice has consistently required Title II public entities (state/local government and all related instrumentalities) and Title III public accommodations (businesses and nonprofit organizations open to the public) to apply the [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\) 2.0](#) AA as a measuring stick for compliance. WCAG is a standard created by the [Web Accessibility Initiative](#) (WAI) which is a subgroup of the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C), an international body that strives to create through consensus standards for the World Wide Web.

The intent of web accessibility is to allow the maximum number of people to interact with and contribute to the web. In order for this to happen, people with disabilities must be able to perceive, operate, understand, and navigate the environment. WCAG is a standard designed to be flexible and testable. In WCAG 2.0, there are three levels of conformance: A which is the lowest, to AA which is moderate and means most items are accessible, to AAA which is the highest and most difficult to achieve. These levels are progressive so AA conformance means that level A has also been achieved and AAA conformance means that A and AA have been met. WCAG 2.0 is based around four principles: perceivable, operable, understandable, and robust.

The following short series of questions based on the WCAG 2.0 can be the start of mapping a website's accessibility. The more affirmative answers imply a greater level of accessibility for individuals with disabilities. This is a beginning only however, and much more must be considered when conducting a web accessibility review. Automated accessibility tools such as those found on the WAI's [Web Accessibility Evaluation Tools List](#) page provide important and useful information, but user testing is equally important to the process. To learn more about [How to Meet WCAG 2.0](#), visit the resources available from W3C, the WAI, and the [Northeast ADA](#).

1 Perceivable: Can a person with a disability perceive the content and functionality of a website. This can include individuals using assistive technology such as a screen reader.

Does a website:

1.1 Provide text alternatives for any non-text content so that it can be changed into other forms people need, such as large print, braille, speech, symbols or simpler language.

1.2 Provide alternatives for time-based media?

1.3 Offer content that can be presented in different ways (for example simpler layout) without losing information or structure?

1.4 Make it easier for users to see and hear content including such things as separating foreground from background, offering captioning for video content, changing the size of font, etc.

2 Operable: Can an individual with a disability navigate and interact with a website?

Does a website:

2.1 Make all functionality available from a keyboard.

2.2 Provide users enough time to read and use content.

2.3 Avoid using design content in a way that is known to cause seizures.

2.4 Provide ways to help users navigate, find content, and determine where they are.

3 Understandable: Can an individual with a disability understand and interpret a website?

Does a website:

3.1 Make text content readable and understandable in the simplest language appropriate to its context.

3.2 Make Web pages appear and operate in predictable ways.

3.3 Help users avoid and correct mistakes.

4 Robust: Can an individual with a disability approach a website using different modes or browsers? Will that accessibility continue?

Does a website:

4.1 Maximize compatibility with current and future user agents, including those employing assistive technologies.