



DESIGNING FOR ACCESSIBILITY

8 DOs and DON'Ts



DESIGNING FOR ACCESSIBILITY

You've created a beautiful, impactful design. You've employed compelling copy and attention-getting visuals. And now you're ready to publish. But wait! Have you considered how different users will access your design?

User populations are diverse. Some have visual impairments, hearing loss, and mobility issues. They may not be able to see all the text you've placed over the hero image, to hear your app's alerts or notifications, or to click through all your links.

For authoritative information about designing for accessibility, visit [w3.org](https://www.w3.org). There, you'll find details on **Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG)**.

Using accessibility standards early in your design process will remove barriers to communication and help you strongly convey your message.



1. DON'T use fancy or stylized fonts when accessibility is key.

CHOOSE THE RIGHT FONT

Type is one of the most important considerations when designing for accessibility. Choosing the right font will help ensure your content gets read; choosing the wrong one can make content hard or impossible for some users to comprehend.

Avoid fancy or cartoon-like fonts because they're irregular in both size and shape. Users can find them hard to read or see clearly. Even serif fonts can look blurry in digital content.

Keeping text sizes at a minimum of 12pt to 16pt type will help ensure content is accessible to most users.

SANS-SERIF FONTS

Choose fonts that users can easily see, read, and understand. The most widely accessible and available fonts include Arial, Helvetica, Verdana, and Tahoma. They are legible and free of flourishes that can diminish comprehension.

Choose accessible fonts that aid in comprehension.



Serif fonts have small lines that can cause screen readers to misread words.

This is Comic Sans, 8pt.
This is Apple Chancery, 8pt.
This is Brush Script MT, 8pt.

 Not Accessible

This is Arial, 8 pt.
This is Tahoma, 8 pt.
This is Verdana, 8 pt.

 Accessible

While some decorative fonts may look artistic or unique, they are more difficult to read and should be avoided.



Steps to Campaign Success

Visit our website for more information: dragonflyeditorial.com

01 **Define Campaign Goals**

02 **Evaluate Campaign Climate**

03 **Chart Your Course**

04 **Choose Influence Strategy**

05 **Message for Impact**

Keep body text at a minimum of 12pt to 16pt type for readability. In this layout the headers are 14pt and the body copy is 12pt.

Most users find that **sans-serif** fonts are easiest to comprehend. They don't have the small lines or flourishes. Source Sans Pro, a widely accessible font, was used in this example layout.

Limit designs to **1 or 2 fonts**. Multiple fonts can slow down comprehension.

2. DO choose colors that meet WCAG standards.

Color is an important consideration for your design. It sets the visual tone and mood, guides users along, and enhances content. But it can become a roadblock for users with disabilities.

COLOR CONSIDERATIONS

For example, red-green and blue-yellow color blindness is common and creates perception difficulties when those tones are placed next to each other.

Roughly 3.4 million Americans age 40 years and older are blind or visually impaired, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.¹

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020, June 12). *Vision Loss: A Public Health Problem*. https://www.cdc.gov/visionhealth/basic_information/vision_loss.htm

Evaluate your brand colors. If there are a lot of pale hues or pastels, have a designer develop a more accessible, supplemental palette that gives you more options.

Make adjustments to color for better accessibility.



WCAG 2.0 level AA requires minimum 4.5:1 contrast ratio for normal text.

*In this example, the original color palette was tested by reviewing contrast ratios for white text on color. Adjustments were made to achieve a palette that passed **WCAG AA standards**.*

Contrast checker tools can help you adjust an existing brand palette to meet accessibility standards. Visit w3.org for more tools and information.

3. DO maintain high contrast between text and background.

To ensure copy is accessible, there needs to be enough contrast between the text color and the background color.

The WCAG has established a ratio of 4.5:1 for this purpose. The first number measures the luminescence from 1 to 21, with white and black being the highest at 21:1.

Visit w3.org for more detailed information on color contrast and access to a contrast checker tool.

Note: For fonts 18pt or greater (for bold, 14pt) the minimum ratio drops to 3:1 (instead of 4.5:1). There's no minimum contrast ratio for text within a logo, brand name, or logotype.

Higher color contrast combinations help users see more clearly.



white text

white text

white text

FAILS WCAG AA Standard

The white text applied over these elements may appear readable enough, but the images fail to meet WCAG minimum guidelines.

black text

black text

black text

PASSES WCAG AA Standard

The black text applied over these elements passes WCAG AA guidelines.

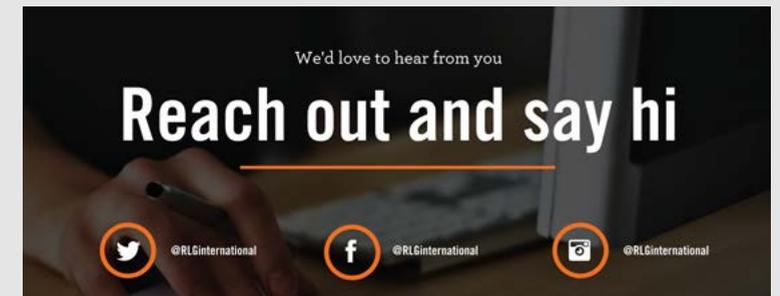


FAILS This text (8pt) has a color of #009ed4 on a white (#FFFFFF) background. It fails WCAG 2.1 AA contrast criteria.

PASSES Increase to 18pt or larger and it passes.

PASSES Increase to 14pt or larger and add bold styling to pass.

Sometimes increasing the type size or adding bold styling can mean the difference between passing and failing the WCAG accessibility standards.



In this example, a dark overlay was used to increase the contrast between the background photo and text. The overlay allows the contents of the image to be seen while maintaining readability.

4. DON'T rely on just color in your design to convey information.

Users with impairments — color blindness, low vision, blindness — will have difficulty navigating content if color is the only differentiator.

ALTERNATIVES TO COLOR

Text, icons, borders, and patterns can also be used to emphasize content and make it easier for users to navigate data and identify calls to action and information hierarchies.

Add asterisks, similar symbols, or directional text for required information in form fields. Bold text, italics, and underlining can further enhance accessibility.

Because nonvisual and visual users will access your content, you should provide textual alternatives to color to communicate effectively and inclusively.

TESTING DESIGNS IN GRAYSCALE

Is there enough contrast? Is everything readable? Is the visual hierarchy clear? Evaluating without considering color forces you to look at how your content is prioritized and arranged.

Use a variety of elements to help convey information.

Benefits

We treat employees like family

Comprehensive benefits provide a fuller life

El id quis ut faccupit istrum a cori con rendit event volestem aut et laudem. Ume consecea cone doloreperrum.

Top 3 benefits employees cite most
sedit, cum quo qui ad quiam ex est, voluptatur.

Benefit	Percentage
Time Off	58%
Pay	30%
Medical	12%

We're happy you're here
sedit, cum quo qui ad quae. Tem nihictam qui siteseque consequ atquatem re volore perit.

Email us with questions

Your email address*

your@email.com

Your message*

What can we help you with?

*Required information

In addition to the color blocking in this example, consistent use of icons and headline styling helps users understand this is a unique section in the document.

Visual labels and placeholder text help users understand what's required.

Use **semantic HTML form elements** like `<form>` or `<button>` and **focus styling** behind the scenes so users can see which field is active and easily tab through all form fields.

Charts and graphs using shades or tints of just one color are often more accessible than those using multiple colors.

5. DO use paragraph styles and tags to create a logical outline of the content.

Ultimately, the goal of paragraph styles is to provide organization to your content and help users visualize levels of importance or hierarchy.

When you consistently use heading styles — such as Heading 1, Heading 2, Heading 3 — you create visual consistency and an outline of your content that is easier to understand. This structure is vital to users of screen readers, which can move quickly between headings and reveal the hierarchy of the content.

TAGS

To enable screen reader functionality, you must map your heading styles to heading tags. Tags identify the type of content for assistive technologies such as screen readers.

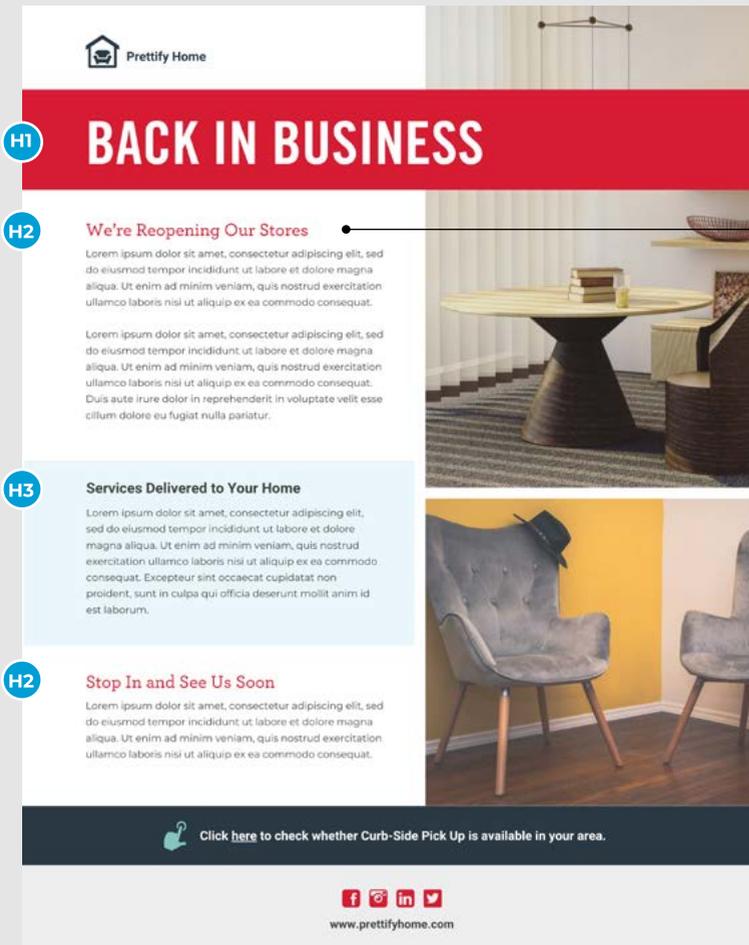
Avoid using the formatting toolbar to apply styling like bold or italics. You risk losing the accessibility features built into your paragraph styles.

While this process differs depending on your software, you're basically matching your paragraph style to its corresponding heading tag. For example, "Heading 1" would be mapped to "H1," "Heading 2" would be mapped to "H2," and so on.

Properly structured headings help keep content organized.

Use a single H1 on each page, as it usually describes what the content to follow is all about.

You may be wondering why there is an H2 after the H3 above. The H3 represents a subsection of the previous H2. Because this section is new, it requires an H2. Remember, H2 tags represent a new (or major) section.



H2 represents a major change in sections. Headings should be introduced in sequential order.

To be accessible, the structure of your headings should closely match your visual presentation while creating a logical outline for the content.

Breaking up content into recognizable headings and subheadings will allow users to quickly scan your information.

6. DO make charts and graphs easy for everyone to understand.

One of the best ways to convey complex information is with charts and graphs. Pie charts and column, bar, and line graphs are some popular alternatives to boring tables. But if you choose the wrong chart, color, or texture, or leave out details, some readers will lose key information.

ALT TEXT

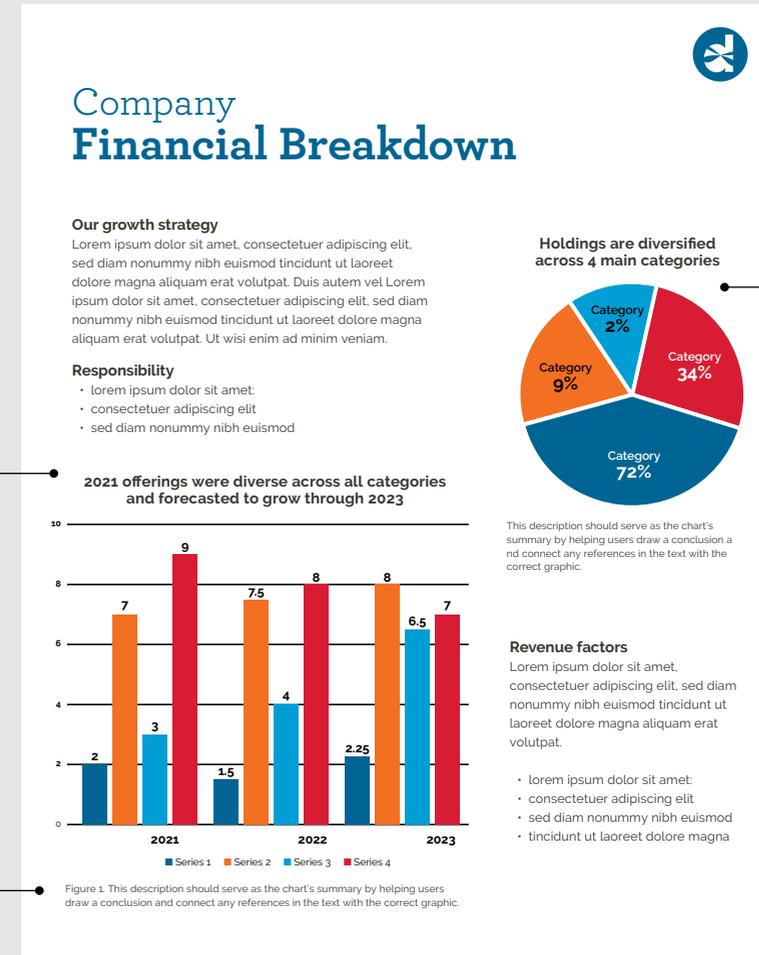
Include alt text so that screen readers can convey data that images alone cannot. Alt text descriptions should summarize the key content of a chart or graph.

Try using SVG formatted charts and graphs, since they allow for better scaling across different display sizes (e.g., desktop vs. mobile).

LABELS

Add labels directly onto charts or graphs so that users don't need to refer back to a legend for understanding. This facilitates quicker comprehension and benefits users who navigate your content in Zoom software.

Take extra steps to ensure data is clearly communicated.



A strong chart or graph **title** clearly describes and provides context for the information that follows.

Include a **description** that helps users understand the information.

Place labels as close as possible to the data they represent, instead of using a traditional legend.

Don't add a traditional **legend** unless there's no room directly on the chart for labels.

With obvious labeling, users don't have to flip-flop between the legend and data points to understand the data.

7. DO include alternative text for images.

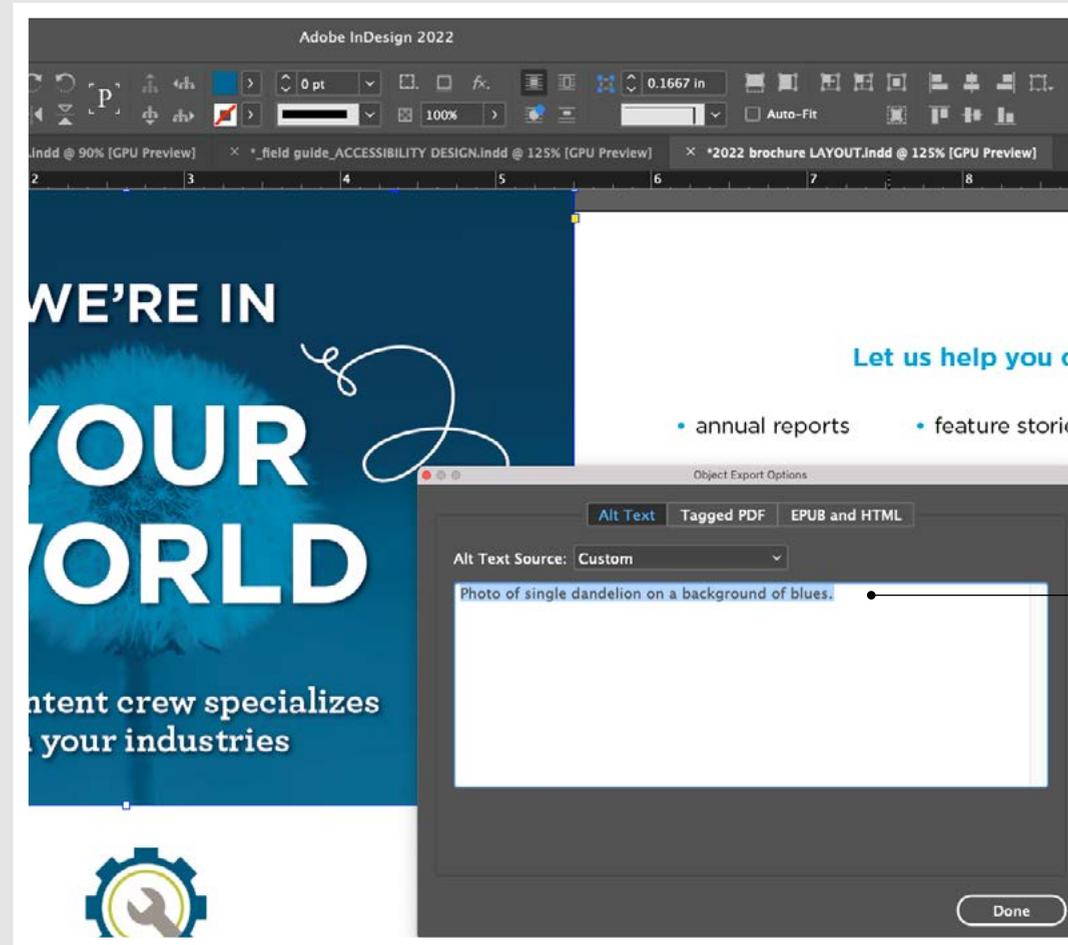
Alt text isn't just for data-based graphics like charts. It's also used to describe photos and other imagery.

When the screen reader comes across a photo or illustration, it will read any alt text provided in the <alt> attribute for that particular image. Without alt text, the user will hear nothing or perhaps hear the word "image" or whatever you've named the file.

It's a best practice to use an empty <alt> text attribute for images that aren't important to the content, such as logos. This will allow screen readers to skip over those images.

Ensure your designs include concise, descriptive alt text for photos, illustrations, and captions, to provide context for how these elements relate to the rest of the content.

Alt text helps users perceive your image.



In this example, **alt text** is being entered via Adobe InDesign's Object Export Options to describe the dandelion image shown in the blue overlay.

The method you use for alt text in your designs will depend on the software you use.

8. DON'T think of your content as “one and done.”

Technology keeps evolving and your content is likely always changing. Periodically review your materials to ensure they meet the latest accessibility standards.

It's critical to remain compliant with industry standards if your organization is required to do so. This ensures you'll be prepared for future optimizations as they become available.

Don't wait for an audit or legal action to become compliant — get ahead of these challenges now.

COSTLY DELAYS IN COMPLIANCE

Equal access to information online is becoming increasingly important. There can be legal ramifications for not providing such access, depending on your organization or industry.





Struggling with accessibility? Not sure where to start?

We understand that navigating all the concepts and standards of accessibility can be confusing and overwhelming. Our mission is to clarify those complex topics. Contact Dragonfly Editorial today for help editing and creating content that's not only accessible, but creative, too!



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