

ACCESSIBLE
FORM
INSTRUCTIONS

Overall form instructions

Where relevant, instructions that apply to the entire form **should be provided before the <form> element.**

For example, indicate any required fields, allowed date formats, and password limitations.

```
<p>All form fields are required.</p>
```

```
<form action="#">
```

```
...
```

```
</form>
```

Inline instructions

There are times when individual form fields **need additional information** in order for users to understand how to fill them in correctly.

These instructions **need to be programmatically associated with the form control**, so that they are announced to screen readers along with the label content.

Three methods

There are **three different methods** that can be used to programmatically associate instructions with their relevant form fields.

Method 1:
Inside the label

Using this method, information can be associated with form fields by **placing it inside the `<label>` element.**

This method only works if the `<label>` element **wraps around the label content, form control and instructions.**

```
<label for="one">
  <span class="label-content">Phone number</span>
  <input id="one" type="text">
  <span class="hint">Make sure to include a 10
  digit number</span>
</label>
```

This technique is **stable across all web browsers and assistive technologies** so is the recommended solution.

Method 2:

Using `aria-describedby`

Using this method, the `aria-`
`describedby` attribute can be used to
**associate instructions with form
controls.**

In this example, the `<input>` element **has**
an `aria-describedby` **attribute** with a
value of `instructions2`.

The `` element, which contains the additional instructions, **also has an ID value of instructions2.**

```
<label for="one">Phone number</label>
<input id="one" type="text"
  aria-describedby="instructions1">
<span id="instructions1">Make sure to include a
10 digit number</span>
```

This technique has **good support** across all modern web browsers and assistive technologies.

It can be used in cases where it is **not possible** to wrap the `<label>` element around the form control.

Method 3:
Using `aria-labelledby`

Using this method, the `aria-labelledby` attribute can be used to **associate instructions with form controls.**

In this example, the `<input>` element **has**
an `aria-labelledby` **attribute** with a
value of `instructions2`.

The `` element, which contains the additional instructions, **also has an ID value of instructions2**.

To **ensure backward compatibility**, the `<label>` element also contains an `ID` value which is referenced by the `aria-labelledby` attribute.

```
<label for="one" id="label1">Phone number</label>  
<input id="one" type="text"  
  aria-labelledby="label1 instructions1">  
<span id="instructions1">Make sure to include a  
10 digit number</span>
```

This technique has **only acceptable support** across all modern web browsers and assistive technologies and is therefore not recommended.

Method 4.

Using placeholder

This method involves using the `placeholder` attribute to display simple instructions **directly in the form field.**

```
<label for="one">Phone number</label>  
<input id="one" type="text"  
  placeholder="Make sure to include a 10 digit  
  number">
```


This method presents **two accessibility issues:**

1. These instructions **disappear** as soon as the user types a character in the field, or tab to the field.

For some users, especially some types of cognitive impaired users, this can present a challenge **as the instructions are no longer available.**

2. The placeholder text is often **presented in a very soft gray color** which is well below acceptable WCAG color contrast ratios.

Even though this text can be styled with CSS, many developers do not do this, so **it can be inaccessible to anyone with vision issues.**

For these reasons, the `placeholder` method **should be avoided**.



Russ Weakley

Max Design

Site: maxdesign.com.au

Twitter: twitter.com/russmaxdesign

Slideshare: slideshare.net/maxdesign

Linkedin: linkedin.com/in/russweakley