Heuristic Accessibility Review Guide

Use this guide to check a website for accessibility. It is intended to be:
- quick
- easy
- doable without technical knowledge
- done by any team member

A heuristic review is not a comprehensive audit but will identify many issues that will affect people with access needs, so you can seek fixes.

Only once you have done a heuristic review should you consider testing usability with people who use assistive technology. Otherwise you run a significant risk of them encountering avoidable problems.

Select elements to review

Identify a complete typical user journey or else a representative sample of pages with a range of features. For example pick the start page plus pages that have a form, a video, a lot of text and any interactive elements.

Examine each page using the techniques and criteria below.

Criteria

Easily readable and understandable text

Check the all the text on the page is:
- Left aligned
- Non-justified – has ragged right side
- Short line lengths
- Appropriate self-explanatory headings
- Jargon/acronyms free or these are explained
- Concise

Meaningful and relevant alternatives to non-text elements

Examine all the non-text parts of the page, such as icons, images and graphs. For each one, check that:
- The information conveyed visually is also available in text or audio
  - For example the function of an icon/link, what an image depicts or the data of a graph.
- If little or no information is conveyed, ensure the alternative is 'null' or the image will not be encountered by screenreaders

Check that audio and video has (as appropriate to the service's users):
- captions

- transcript
- audio description
- British Sign Language interpretation
- player controls that be operated with a keyboard (see below)

Consistent and correctly tagged elements

Look at the tab in the web browser. Check the title accurately describes that specific page and no others on the site.

Check the page has a link to 'Home' (not including a logo), or if it is part of a sequence a 'Back' link.

Use an accessibility testing tool (such as WAVE) to check:
- There is one and only one H1 heading; it is appropriately the title of that specific page and no others on the site
- Lists, forms, tables, headings etc. are coded with correct semantic HTML
- Headings and links are distinctive, perform out of context and meaning is front loaded
- Headings levels are sequential and not skipped

Complete and efficient keyboard only usage

Stop using a pointing device such as a mouse to control a cursor. Use only a keyboard to operate the computer.

Use the tab key to move between focusable elements such as links, buttons and form fields. Check that:
- the element currently focused upon is very clearly highlighted at all times
- the order in which elements become focused upon is sensible and matches visual layout
- a 'Skip to main content' link is available very early in the focus order if common elements appear before the specific page content
- all user journeys can be completed.

Sufficient colour contrast & non-colour cues

Check that text/shape/pattern/position, not just colour is used signify:
- Links and navigation
- Status
- Data ranges

Use a testing tool (such as Vischeck) to check that text fore/background colours meet WCAG 2 contrast guidelines

Re-check in colour blindness simulators and your operating system's high-contrast mode.

Automated accessibility testing tools

These tools are very useful to quickly find issues. There is a variety available depending on whether you want to use them: online, as a browser extension, as an installed application or for continuous integration.

However note that they [only assess a fraction of WCAG checkpoints](#).

They also require you to determine false positives and negatives.

Beyond heuristic reviews

To test more thoroughly you should try for yourself how easily can tasks be completed with assistive technology. This includes screen magnifiers or readers built in to computer operating systems, such as:

- On Mac: Zoom and Voiceover
- On Windows: Magnifier and Narrator

Also test with adjusted colours and font sizes and in various browsers and devices.