



CHECKING A WEBSITE FOR BASIC ACCESSIBILITY

If you are recommending websites to students as reading or research materials there are a few basic checks you can make to ensure that your students will be able to access the content even if they use older browsers from home or use assistive software to access and interpret electronic materials because of a specific disability.

The following checks can be carried out on any website you find using your standard desktop browser and they should be enough to set your mind at ease or alert you to potential problems.

Use a standard browser (such as Internet Explorer or Mozilla Firefox) to view the site you have found. Examine a selection of the pages while adjusting your browser settings as follows:

CHECK ALTERNATIVE TEXT (ALT TEXT) HAS BEEN APPLIED TO IMAGES

Turn off images in your browser, and check whether appropriate alternative text (ALT text) is available.

To do this in Internet Explorer:

- Select **Tools** from the tool bar at the top of your browser window.
- Select **Internet Options**
- Select **Advanced** from the tabs across the top.
- Use the scroll menu bar to move down the selection items until you get to '**Show Pictures**' or '**Show Images**' – **uncheck** the box this will tell the browser not to load the images when you request a page.
- Click **Apply** and then **OK**.
- **Refresh** your browser.

To do this in Firefox:

- Select Firefox **Tools, Options** and **Content**
- Untick '**load images automatically**'
- You will also need to clear your cache, select **Tools**
- Click on '**clear private data**'.
- Untick everything except '**cache**' and click '**clear private data now**'.

To turn off images on Firefox pc

- Select **Tools** and **Preferences**
- Untick '**load images automatically**'.
- You will also need to clear your cache. Select **Tools**
- Click on '**clear private data**'

- Untick everything except '**cache**' and select '**clear private data now**'.

ALT text is one of the fundamental requirements for accessibility and should be applied to every image that appears on your pages that conveys some information to a user. This is especially important for users with visual difficulties, users of screen reading software and those using text only browsers.

TURN OFF ALL SOUND

A very simple test, turn off the speakers on your computer. If you have any audio content that conveys information either about your site or gives content, the audio content must be available in text equivalents.

VARY FONT SIZE

Use browser controls to vary font-size: verify that the font size changes on the screen accordingly; and that the page is still usable at larger font sizes. Font sizes should be resizable and should not be restricted by absolute font sizing in the code. A user should be able to use the features within their browser to resize text in order for it to be easily read by them. To check if your text size changes correctly and is still usable when increased follow the instructions below:

To do this in Internet Explorer:

- Select **View** from the tool bar.
- Select **Text Size** from the drop-down menu.
- **Select a size** from the menu given (the default should be medium, large will increase text size, small will decrease etc) It is important that your site is still usable if text size is changed by a user to suit their needs.

To do this in Firefox:

- Select **View** from the tool bar.
- Select **Zoom** from the drop-down menu.
- Increase or decrease the size by selecting '**Zoom in**' or '**Zoom out**'.

TEST SCREEN RESOLUTION

Test with different screen resolutions, and/or by resizing the application window to less than maximum, to verify that horizontal scrolling is not required.

COLOUR CONTRASTS AND BACKGROUND IMAGES

Print out pages in gray scale or black and white and observe whether the color contrast is adequate. To take a screen shot press **PrtSc** on your keyboard and paste into a graphics package. This will give you an image of what was on your screen.

If you can clearly read all text on all parts of the page and all images are clear then the colour contrasts are ok. If however you find it difficult to see text or make out information on screen then you need to alter colour combinations used. Colour blindness is one of the most common visual impairments and can make seemingly clear pages very hard to read if the contrasts are not sufficient. This is also a good test

if you have any background images on pages. Often these are over used and can make it very difficult to read text that is written over them.

TAB THROUGH LINKS

Without using the mouse, tab through the links and form controls on a page, making sure that you can access all links and form controls, and that the links clearly indicate where they lead.

VOICE BROWSER AND TEXT BROWSER TESTING

Use a voice browser (such as JAWS, Window Eyes or Home Page Reader) or a text browser (such as Lynx) and examine the web site while answering these questions:

1. Is equivalent information available through the voice or text browser as is available through the standard visual browser?
2. Is the information presented in a meaningful order if read serially?

Problems can occur when tables are nested and complicated when used to visually format a page. Voice browsers, screen readers and text browsers read tables from right to left one cell at a time..

Open the Lynx emulator: (<http://www.delorie.com/web/lynxview.html>) and put the URL of one of the pages into the box and select View Page. As a general rule if a site is still usable in a text browser it will be probably score well in most accessibility tests. Text browsers are great for showing missed ALT text, how descriptive ALT text is on links and images (how useful) and what functionality is missing if the page relies on client-side scripting (JavaScript for example) for navigation etc.

If you cannot use your site or it doesn't make sense in a text browser then it will not be very accessible and you should think twice about including it in your reading list.

JUDGE THE CONTENT

Even if you discover that a website you want to recommend fails some of these tests that does not mean you definitely cannot use it. In many cases the value of the information and content on the site may be significant to your teaching and your students' learning. This is a judgment only you can make. You should be aware, however, that some students have difficulty accessing some materials and if the learning content on the site is significant to the course you teach you should be prepared to make it, or equivalent, available in other ways.