



Top 10 things to consider when designing for accessibility



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Introduction

The standards regarding accessibility for online content continue to be refined and updated, which is why it is important to stay up to date with changes around the requirements as you design courses.

The term accessibility covers a wide range of disabilities comprising visual, auditory, physical, speech, cognitive, language, learning, and neurological disabilities.

The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) was created to provide an explanation of how to make web content more accessible to people with disabilities. The legal requirements for accessibility in Australia are found under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992.



1. Know your accessibility requirements

The first critical step when designing for accessibility is knowing the requirements. The current referenceable technical standards ([WCAG 3.0](#)) contains guidelines on four different testing principles: perceivable, operable, understandable, and robust. Each guideline sets out testable success criteria for organisations to meet at three levels: [the basic level A](#), [mid Level AA](#), or [highest Level AAA](#).

Many government organisations are required to meet the highest level AAA, which includes the highest number of success criteria. Many businesses and medium-sized organisations are required to meet level AA. Once you have confirmed with your organisation your level of conformance, you can focus on the criterion in that list to make content accessible. Learn more at the [Web Accessibility Initiative International Laws and Policies Australia](#) website.



2. Review Legacy Content

You may be wondering what to do with websites, elearning content, and other training media that was created prior to WCAG requirements. Well, the good news is the Australian government recognises updates take time. However, you should start the process of converting content you want to use with WCAG 2.1 since most likely in the near future it will be mandatory for all digital content to meet level AA of the WCAG.

3. Tailor your design for your learners

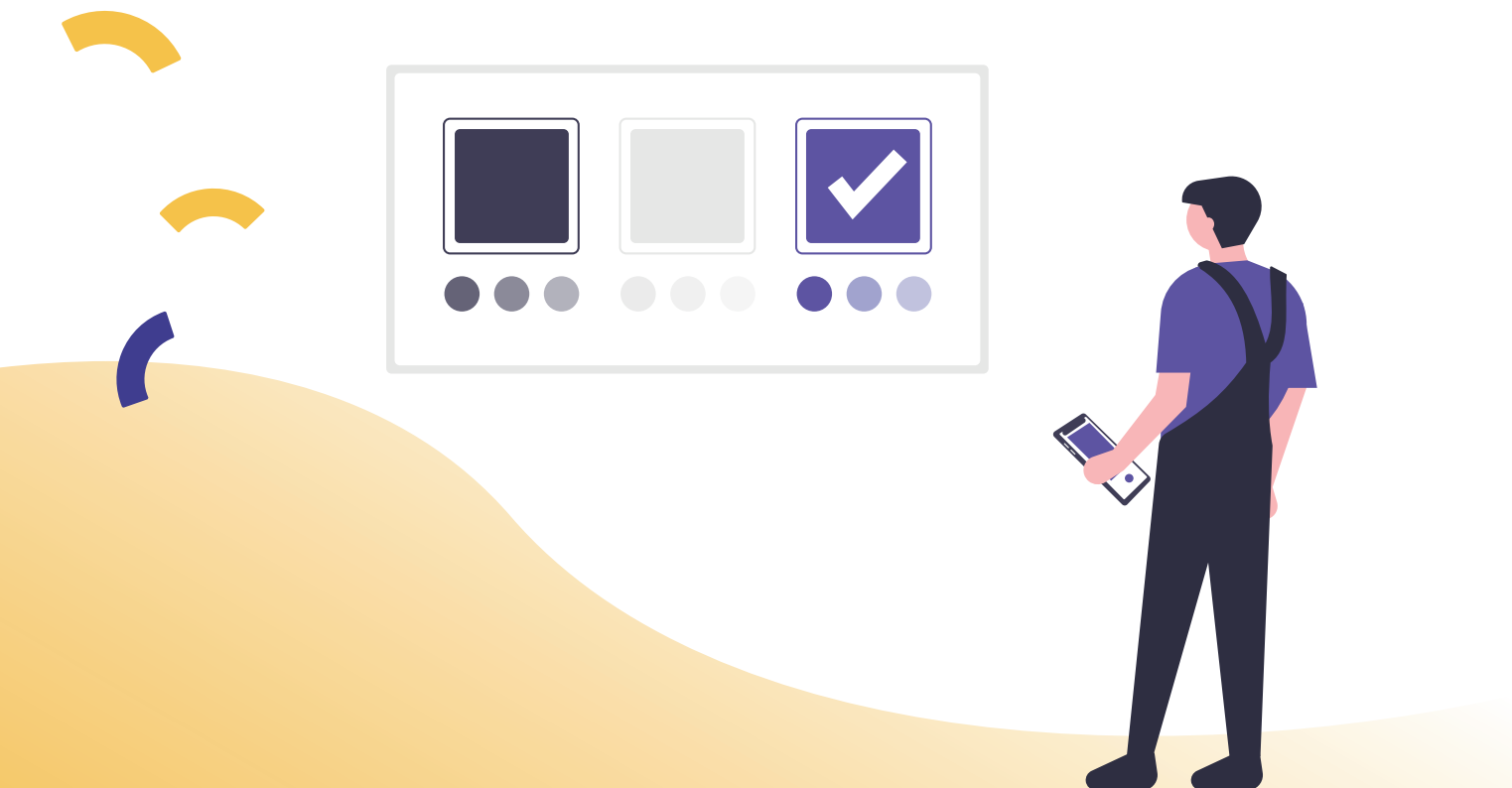
In order to effectively design accessible content, you need to know who you are designing for. Accessibility covers several user needs and is designed to make content accessible for users with visual, auditory, motor, and cognitive disabilities, as well as users who experience seizures, to name a few.

You may be designing for a user who is unable to use a mouse and must rely on a keyboard to navigate a webpage. Some users cannot see the content, so both visual descriptions and captioning need to be provided. You may be surprised to learn how many users require accessible design functions. In 2018, the Australian Bureau of Statistics reported: 4.4 million (just under 1 in 5) Australians living with a disability.

4. Turn on accessibility checkers at the start

You will be glad to find that there are quite a few accessibility checkers built into popular software. You can save a lot of time by turning these on as soon as you start designing your content. You can then act on any notifications about possible accessibility errors as you develop the content, and most checkers will provide information on how to fix the accessibility issue.

For example, Microsoft Word has a built-in [Accessibility Checker](#). You will also find that popular learning management systems such as Canvas also offer a feature equivalent also entitled, [Accessibility Checker](#).



5. Put yourself in your learners' shoes

There is no better teacher than experience and in the case of accessibility experiencing accessibility challenges as a user is a great way to gain perspective. To simulate some of the more common accessibility challenges, try the following approaches to test your design:

- Unplug your mouse to simulate the environment of a user with limited mobility
- Turn off your computer colour to simulate the environment of a colour-blind user
- Close your eyes and turn on a screen reader to simulate the environment of a blind user
- Turn off the sound on videos and use only the captions to simulate the environment of a deaf user



6. Build accessibility into development

To ensure accessibility is not overlooked, make your accessibility development and review an integral part of your content development process. In the discovery stage of development, you may want to be thinking about colour contrast, interactions, fonts, and structure.

As you begin to prototype, you will want to build in your alt text, hyperlinks, navigation, browsers, and captions. Alt text (alternative text) is a keyword or sentence that can be inserted to tell web site viewers the nature or contents of an image. The alt text typically appears in a blank box that would normally contain your image. Before your content goes live set aside time for usability testing to ensure your content meets the required WCAG guidelines.

7. Keep track of graphics

Several components of the WCAG criterion relate to the use of graphics. Avoid using text in graphics as screen readers will not be able to recognise the text. You will also want to write up a description of any informational graphics you use. You will also want to note which images are decorative so you can add this into alt text as well.

8. Build-in usability testing

For complex content like elearning courses or videos, you will want to run the content through usability testing. There are several checklists available online, such as the one on the [WUHCAG](#) site that you can use as the basis to develop your own usability checklist. It is best to choose a detail-oriented team member who has not seen the content complete the test so they can provide a fresh perspective and pick up on accessibility issues.

9. Stay up to date on requirements and tools

Both the WCAG guidelines and legal requirements for accessibility will continue to change. These laws and guidelines will affect any organisation that publishes digital content. You can stay up to date by subscribing to newsletters, blogs, and checking the [WCAG](#) website.



10. Approach interaction carefully

The term 'interaction' may immediately conjure images of high tech video games and web pages, but most often, this includes simple tasks users do every day online. It is easy to overlook the challenge that simple interactions may pose for some learners. These are just a few interactions that may need to be eliminated or designed differently to improve accessibility.

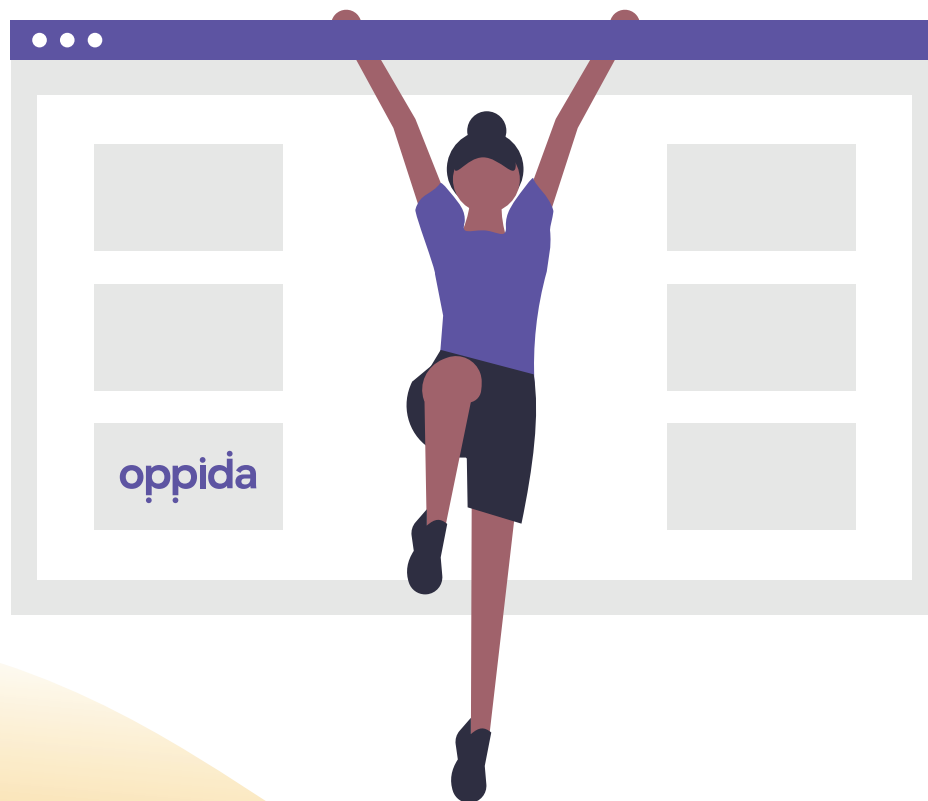
- Online forms
- Navigation on a web page
- Drop-down menus
- Checkboxes

These guidelines are not exhaustive in addressing the accessibility of web content on different devices but should help improve the foundations of your design process for your learners going forward. Following these steps and staying up-to-date with the WCAG will help in the joint effort to make web content more accessible to users in general.

Join us in Oppida's continued efforts to raise the bar in digital education by taking steps to improve your content accessibility.

At Oppida, we believe in creating dynamic learning environments through learning management systems which engage with your learners on a deeper level. Whether you're at project inception or you're struggling knee-deep to manage content deliverables, Oppida will tailor learning design support for you.

Setup a quick consultation with a member of the Oppida team and discover how we can help you project manage, design, develop and enhance your online courses from any stage in the course's lifecycle. Also, sign up for our FREE Designing Digital Learning Course to better understand how to design for digital.





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