



Accessibility: Guidance and the Law

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Introduction

Web site accessibility is an essential part of web site development. But there's a mass of guidance and legislation – some of it seemingly contradictory.

This paper is an attempt to summarise the key accessibility guidance and law that web site managers should be aware of.

Guidance - W3C Web Standards

Who publishes it?

The Worldwide Web Consortium (W3C)

Who does it apply to?

Everyone.

In a nutshell?

The W3C (World Wide Web Consortium) is the de facto international standards body for the worldwide web. Almost all best practice for web site development is based on W3C recommendations.

- Web site mark-up should [validate to W3C standards](#)
- Cascading Style Sheets (CSS) should [validate to W3C CSS Standards](#)
- Web sites should comply with [W3C Web Content Accessibility Guidelines](#) (WCAG)
- Scripting should use the [W3C Document Object model](#) (DOM)
- Sites should provide a [privacy policy](#).

Where can I find out more?

<http://www.w3.org>
<http://www.webstandards.org/>

Guidance - Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG)

Who publishes it?

The Worldwide Web Consortium (W3C)

Who does it apply to?

Everyone.

In a nutshell?

WCAG1.0, published in 1999, is the existing accessibility standard (split into A, AA and AAA compliance levels, with AAA being the highest). WCAG1.0 sets out 65 checkpoints that aim to ensure a web site is perceivable, operable, understandable and robust. Reaching level A compliance theoretically means that the site is

does not actively exclude any users, although it does not mean that the site is necessarily easy to use for many user groups. Care must be taken when applying the guidelines to ensure that the spirit of the guideline is followed, rather than simply the letter.

WCAG2.0 is still, technically, a working draft, but represents current best practice in accessibility. It is an update to WCAG1.0, and is more applicable to current technologies, future technologies, and non-W3C technologies. Most websites that conform to WCAG1.0 should not require significant changes to conform to WCAG2.0. Key differences include:

- Text must have a [luminosity contrast ratio](#) of 10:1 with its background.
- Access keys are no longer required
- If an [input error](#) is detected, the error is identified and described to the user in text.
- A mechanism is available for identifying specific definitions of words or phrases used in an unusual or restricted way, including idioms and jargon.
- Non-W3C technologies are allowed where they are supported by assistive technologies for disabled users.

Where can I find out more?

<http://www.w3.org/TR/WAI-WEBCONTENT/> for WCAG1.0
<http://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG20/> for WCAG2.0

Guidance - UK Government Guidelines

Who publishes it?

Originally published by the Office of the e-Envoy, it is now held by the Cabinet Office.

Who does it apply to?

All UK government web sites.

In a nutshell?

The UK Government Guidelines 'provide a comprehensive blueprint of best practices for building and managing well designed usable and accessible websites.' Particularly relevant sections are :

Section 2.4 Building in universal accessibility

- Browser-specific HTML or scripting methods should not be used in the website
- HTML page should validate against specified version of HTML
- A consistent text navigation bar should be used along with a 'skip navigation link'

- All web pages must comply, as a minimum, to the World Wide Web Consortium's Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) WCAG1.0 'A' standard

Section 4.6 Scripting and Programming

- Ensure that your website is still usable in browsers that have scripting turned off
- Thoroughly test scripting on a range of browsers and operating systems

Where can I find out more?

<http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/e-government/resources/handbook/introduction.asp>

Guidance - PAS 78

Who publishes it?

Publicly available Specification (PAS) 78 is published by the British Standards Institution (BSI)

Who does it apply to?

Everyone.

In a nutshell?

PAS 78 is a guide to good practice in commissioning accessible websites. The document covers building an accessible website from commissioning and developing it, through to publishing and maintaining it; the importance of accessibility and how to define it; and the involvement of disabled people in requirements gathering, conceptual design and testing processes.

- Developers should follow the lead of the W3C and the current Web Content Accessibility Guidelines: WCAG are the most important accessibility guidelines for web commissioners to be aware of, as they are considered to be the de facto standard for accessible web design (6.4.2.1)
- All relevant W3C guidelines and specifications should be used (7.1.1) and Additional accessibility provisions are not essential and should never replace upholding W3C guidelines and specifications (4.6).
- CSS is explicitly advised: Content should be separated from presentational attributes... Content should be coded using structural languages. Presentational attributes should be coded using style sheets (7.1.2-4).
- Considerable emphasis is placed on involving disabled people at all stages of design and testing, using a user-centred design methodology,
- Annex G is a checklist for those purchasing authoring tools.
- Portable document Format (PDF) should be used to benefit the end user, not the content authors.
 - PDF is good for e.g. government forms where layout integrity is vital for processing
 - PDF should not be used to preserve branding, corporate typefaces etc., or

for simple ease of publishing

Where can I find out more?

<http://www.bsi-global.com/ICT/PAS78/index.xalter>

Guidance - Other Governmental Guidelines

Several EU countries now have guidelines or standards (similar to BSI British Standards) on web development, including Holland, Italy, Germany and Spain. The USA has Section 508, a set of accessibility standards applying to all information technology products, equipment and web services sold to governmental purchasers.

Who does it apply to?

This varies. Spanish standards apply to all web sites, Dutch just to high-level governmental websites, etc.

In a nutshell?

Most country standards are heavily based on W3C WCAG1.0 standards (see sections 2.1 and 2.2). Section 508 requirements for websites, for example, [can be mapped closely to WCAG1.0](http://www.jimthatcher.com/sidebyside.htm)

The recently issued Dutch guidelines are more specific, however, dealing with more general web design good practice. They require:

- Sites to be marked up in valid HTML 4.01 or XHTML 1.0.
- Sites to use CSS and semantic HTML and a full separation of structure and presentation.
- Sites to have a process in place for progressive enhancement.
- Scripting to use of the W3C [Document Object Model](http://www.quirksmode.org/dom/intro.html) (instead of the old Microsoft DOM).
- Site mark-up to use meaningful values of class and id.
- Meaningful alt attributes to be used on all images.
- Scripts that work on links should extend (not replace) the basic link functionality.
- If a link makes no sense without a script, it shouldn't be in the HTML (but be generated by JavaScript).
- Use of forms or scripts as the only means of getting certain information is prohibited
- Removing the focus rectangle on links is prohibited.
- Information offered in a closed format (e.g. Microsoft Word) should also be offered in an open format (e.g. HTML).

Where can I find out more?

Available in Dutch at:

<http://webrichtlijnen.overheid.nl/besluit/tekst-besluit-en-toelichting/>

The Law - Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) Part III

Who does it apply to?

All service providers e.g. businesses, educational institutions, transport vehicle providers, public authorities, private clubs

In a nutshell?

For all service providers:

- Since December 1996 it has been unlawful to treat disabled people less favourably than other people for a reason related to their disability;
- Since October 1999 service providers have had to make reasonable adjustments for disabled people, such as providing extra help or making changes to the way they provide their services;
- Since 2004 service providers may have to make reasonable adjustments to the physical features of their premises to overcome physical barriers to access.

A court has yet to decide whether it would have been reasonable for a particular service provider to make a particular adjustment to their web site to enable access for a disabled person, taking into consideration all the circumstances of the case.

Where can I find out more?

On 26 February 2002, the Disability Rights Commission published a statutory Code of Practice, agreed by Parliament. The status of the Code is that it must be referred to for guidance in court when deciding on Part III DDA cases. The Code is available from:

http://www.drc.org.uk/the_law/legislation_codes_regulation/codes_of_practice.aspx

The Law - Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA)

Who does it apply to?

Providers of education, training and other related services

In a nutshell?

SENDA (2001) is an amendment to the DDA which makes discrimination against disabled students in the provision of education, training and other related services unlawful. It came into force in 2002.

SENDA covers:

- Admissions processes and procedures
- The way in which courses are run and taught
- The physical facilities that are used
- All associated activities and facilities, such as catering and social clubs

Where can I find out more?

http://www.drc.org.uk/the_law/legal_commentary/educating_for_equality_part.aspx

The Law - Disability Equality Duty (DED)

Who does it apply to?

Public authorities

In a nutshell?

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 has been amended by the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 to place a duty on all public sector authorities to promote disability equality.

The Disability Equality Duty came into force on 4th December 2006. A fundamental part of the new duty is that for the first time ever public authorities have a statutory requirement to involve disabled people in achieving disability equality. This new legal duty requires all public sector authorities to actively look at ways of ensuring that disabled people are treated equally. All public sector authorities covered by the specific duties must also produce a Disability Equality Scheme.

Where can I find out more?

http://www.drc-gb.org/employers_and_service_provider/disability_equality_duty.aspx

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