

Testing Websites for Usability

Beyond 508 and WCAG Compliance

Testing websites for accessibility with the WAVE toolbar and other automated tools is helpful for identifying basic problems, but it only goes so far. For example, it can detect whether images have alt text, but not whether the alt text is helpful. At times, a website could be coded accessibly, but still not usable to a screen reader user. In order to identify pitfalls that could make an “accessible” website difficult or confusing to use, websites should also be tested using only a keyboard along with a screen reader such as [nvda](#) or [JAWS](#) on PC or [VoiceOver](#) on Mac.

Following are questions to guide a user-driven website evaluation.

General Navigation

- Which Operating System, browser, and screen reader are you using?
- On arriving at the website, how long does it take you to determine the purpose of the page?
- How long does it take you to navigate to the main content?
- If you are looking for specific information on the page, can you find it without listening through everything?
- Do the heading levels seem appropriate to the importance of the information given?
- Does the keyboard focus get stuck anywhere?
- Does the keyboard focus get lost? (For example, the focus suddenly shifts outside of the browser or back to the title of the webpage).

Frames

- If there are frames on the page, can you get from one frame to another?
- Can you tell which frame contains the main content?

Links

- Are the links organized and easy to understand?
- Are the links repetitive?
- Are there any pop-ups or links that take the focus away from the main page? If so, can you get back to where you started?

Non-Text Elements (Images, Tables, etc.)

- Does the alternate text add understanding to the content?
- Is the alt text redundant considering the surrounding information given?
- Is the alt text enough in more complex cases?
- If audio or video exists, are you able to control how it plays? (e.g. stop, pause, rewind)
- If Flash elements exist, are they accessible?
- If Java elements exist, are they accessible? (e.g. can you activate them with the keyboard?)

Forms

- If there is a form, is the tab order logical? Are the fields labeled well?
- If the page times out on a form and the page refreshes, do you have to re-enter information?

Documents

- Are there links to documents, such as PDFs? If so, what is your experience interacting with the documents?
 - Does the link alert you that this is a document download?
 - Is it simple to download?
 - When opened in the browser, can you access the document?
 - Is the document itself accessible?
 - Is more than one file-type made available for the document? (e.g. PDF, Word, html)

Wrap-Up

- Are there any other page items that you are confused about, or that you cannot access?
- Do you feel like you are missing anything after you navigate the page?
- What is done well about this page?