

# Improving the accessibility of your website

***SUPERCool.***

# Foreword

Our websites are doors into our organisations for both new and existing audiences. But whilst a door can be an entrance, it can also be a barricade. It's important to think carefully about who we're keeping out, and why.

Inclusive Design is about looking at every decision we make, and actively looking for any barriers we can take down. This takes empathy, imagination and radical acts of openness.

Accessibility is an act of creative empathy, of imagination, of moving outside your own experience. As an arts professional, you work in a creative environment. You are particularly suited to being able to create this culture in your own organisation.

You don't need big budgets and huge resources to make significant improvements to the accessibility of your website. There are things you can do in-house to help [create an access culture](#).

There's a lot to think about – but there's also a lot of help available. If it's just due to inertia or inattention, we can start to change that right now, today.



**Sally McGrath**

Developer and Access Specialist at Supercool

# Why Access is important

Typically, we think of Web Accessibility as concerning the needs of 'disabled' users – They may suffer from visual impairment, hearing loss or limited motor skills.

Whilst this may first seem like a small, but important, subset of your audience, this is often the majority of users to your site, and this group is growing.

There are around 2,000,000 people in the UK living with sight loss, and 7-in-10 people wear glasses. By the age of 51, most people have [presbyopia](#), which particularly affects how we see and read computer screens. So, many of your audience – your website's users – have some kind of vision impairment.

Accessibility isn't just about considering a disability. For many people in the UK, English isn't their first language. Some users may be restricted by slow network connections whilst others may be stuck using older devices and browsers.

Accessibility is about allowing for complexity and diversity. Crucially it's about imagining – and welcoming – difference.

## EXERCISE

The next time you add a feature or some content to your website, ask yourself, could I understand this if:

- I couldn't see like I see?
- I couldn't hear like I hear?
- I didn't move, touch, speak, or understand like I do?

# Creating an access culture

You're likely to have personal insight into some of the different challenges your users face. It's important to consider those needs at every stage of planning, design, implementation and testing of any new content or feature.

We use the acronym 'POUR' when designing and developing. It stands for:

## **Perceivable**

As a user:

Can I see it? Can I read it? Can I hear it?

## **Operable**

Can I touch it? Can I trigger it? Can I find the part I need? Do you know where you are? Can you get to where you need to go easily without a mouse? What about on a phone?

## **Understandable**

Can I understand it? Does the interface help me when I make a mistake? Are special terms explained?

## **Robust**

Is it easy for content editors to maintain? Does it work across devices and in different scenarios?

# Getting Started

As part of the [AMA Conference](#) this year we ran a series of [one-to-one consultancy sessions](#) about online accessibility.

Our reviews focused on things you can do now to make accessibility improvements, without the support of your web developers. Here's a rundown of the most common themes, and some of the stats to help you benchmark your website.

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## Language

The average reading age needed to understand copy on the websites we reviewed was 25.

To put that in context, the average reading age of adults in the UK is 9.

This might sound low to you. But the UK population is all kinds of diverse; English isn't everyone's strongest skill or first language. Keeping your writing easy to understand is important.

### What's the challenge?

A lot of feedback we got from AMA delegates is that they don't have control over web copy. Event and exhibition copy comes from external artists and promoters. And organisational copy is usually written by committee and/or senior management.

### How can we do better?

We suggest sharing [Hemingway App](#) with your colleagues and external partners. Have a goal for the reading age of your website (e.g. Grade 10), and encourage people to review – and edit – their own copy to meet that goal.

It won't always work! But with both creative control and the tools to review what they've written, at least some people will be encouraged to write simpler copy. (Which will be easier for everyone to understand.)

# Images and Videos

None of the websites we reviewed had alt text on every image.

Missing alt text, text as part of imagery, videos without subtitles ... we saw these no-nos on every site we reviewed.

It's great that our websites are becoming more image-led, and that we can produce good quality videos on a budget. But if you can't see the picture or hear the video, you'll miss out.

## What's the challenge?

Adding alt text to an image takes seconds. And adding subtitles to video is simple to do with the right tools. So why don't we do it more often? Frequently, it's down to habit. We're failing to ask ourselves "Could I understand this content if I couldn't see like I see, or hear like I hear?".

## How can we do better?

Consider having an organisational wide 'pass' test for images and video content: Does it have alt text? Is the file name understandable? Does the video have subtitles?

Start small. Ensure all key images on your website have alt text, and that video content has subtitles. (Or has a written transcription available.) Key pages to review may include Your Visit, How to Book, and event pages.

You can then build on this. Remember; sharing the load and keeping alt text short and simple will help. And take pride in the fact people can understand your image and video content, regardless of how they access it.

# Colour

Every website we reviewed had a least one inaccessible colour combination.

Colour plays a significant role on most websites. Whether it's a way for you to communicate your brand, theme content, or indicate strands of work.

## What's the challenge?

There are two issues here. First, brand colour palettes. These have often been developed for use in print, so they might not work online.

The second issue is the level of flexibility. A lot of the websites we reviewed had the option for admins to change colours. This means we can be led by artistic ideas, rather than practicalities.

## How can we do better?

First, consider how colour is used on your site. Does it sit behind text? How big is that text? What colour is it? Does colour feature on key calls-to-action (e.g. 'Book' buttons)?

Once you've reviewed how colour is used, test the contrast using a [contrast checker](#). If colour features on vital information, make sure it passes contrast checks.

If your brand colours aren't accessible online, consider ways to use showcase them that don't make key actions on the site difficult. For example; use words as well as colour-coding for event categories.

# Celebrate Success

As a sector, we care about the accessibility of our websites. The good news? There's a lot you can do that won't cost money, won't take much time, and can feed-in to other areas of your business.

We've pulled-together a few handy tips and links to help you improve the accessibility of your organisation's website: [Access Resources](#)

And if you'd like a review of your website to see how you compare, get in touch with me at [kate@supercooldesign.co.uk](mailto:kate@supercooldesign.co.uk).

## Quick Wins

Here are a few quick wins that will improve the accessibility of your website:

- Add '[alt text](#)' to all images (including logos) so that any visuals can be described by screenreaders.
- Make sure linked text makes sense out of context. People may be reading through a list of all the links on a page, so avoid phrases like 'click here' and 'follow this link'.
- Be an advocate for your audiences by considering whose needs aren't currently being met by your website – and what could be done to change that.
- Run free online assessment tools (such as [Lighthouse](#), [ChromeVox](#) and [NoCoffee](#)) periodically to identify any easy-wins that will go towards making your website more accessible.
- Celebrate and share what you've done! Small changes have a big impact, so encouraging others to follow your lead will help to improve online accessibility in the arts.

# Resources

## Useful tools, articles and plug-ins

### Chrome Extensions

#### Google Lighthouse - quickly audit your website

<https://supercooldesign.co.uk/blog/how-to-run-a-lighthouse-audit>

#### WAVE - quickly audit your website

<https://chrome.google.com/webstore/detail/wave-evaluation-tool/jbbpln-pkjmmeebjpijfedlgcdilcofh>

#### No Coffee - mimic what your website looks like if you have a visual impairment

<https://chrome.google.com/webstore/detail/nocoffee/jjeeggmbnhckmgd-hmgdckeigabjfbddl>

#### Chromevox - hear your website read aloud by a screen reader

<https://chrome.google.com/webstore/detail/chromevox/kgejglhpjiefppelpmljglcjhbhoiplfn?hl=en>

#### Vimium - nifty keyboard shortcuts

<https://chrome.google.com/webstore/detail/vimium/dbepggeogbaibhgn-hhndojpepiihcmeb?hl=en>

# Sites and Articles

## **Supercool's resources**

<https://supercooldesign.co.uk/access-resources>

## **Snook Colour Contrast Checker**

[https://snook.ca/technical/colour\\_contrast/colour.html#fg=33FF33,bg=333333](https://snook.ca/technical/colour_contrast/colour.html#fg=33FF33,bg=333333)

## **Explanation of visual disabilities**

<https://www.affordablecollegesonline.org/colleges-helping-blind-partially-sighted-students/>

## **Web Accessibility in Mind**

<https://webaim.org>

## **W3C**

<https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG20/>

## **All about vision**

<https://www.allaboutvision.com/conditions/presbyopia.ht>

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