Basic Accessibility Checklist

Accessibility should be considered in degrees of user-friendliness for all audiences. The goal is to provide a similar degree of ease-of-use for everyone. This can be achieved for most web pages by paying attention to some basics. Naturally accessibility becomes more of a challenge the more complex your web pages are but with forethought and observing some general guidelines, most web sites can be greatly improved.

The Evaluation Checklist gives you some pointers for evaluating how user-friendly a web site will be for various audiences. Paying attention to these details will greatly benefit everyone, not just disabled users.

The Accessibility Best Practices offers you some general techniques and resources to help you build your web pages.

Evaluation Checklist

Items preceded with **[SS]** indicate a "show-stopper". These items stop a disabled user in their tracks, they will not be able to continue. These items must be fixed first when making a web page or application accessible.

1. **[SS]** Using ***only*** the keyboard, not the mouse, can you navigate, operate and interact with all the elements on a web page, (menus, navigation and dynamic objects like slide-shows)? You can use the tab key, space bar, arrow keys and enter/return key. You should not rely on keyboard shortcuts since these can vary based on operating system and may require prior knowledge.
2. **[SS]** When you use just the keyboard, can you easily tell where you are at on the page (visual focus), similar to when you mouse over a link and it changes?
3. **[SS]** Does the web page rely on color alone to convey information?
4. **[SS]** Is the contrast of text adequate for visually challenged audiences to read? Does the text standout from the background? Low vision and color-blind users may not be able to see important content.
5. **[SS]** Are videos captioned? Is a text transcript available so that deaf audiences can understand what's going on?
6. **[SS]** Do form fields and buttons have valid "programmatic" labels? This can only be determined by looking at the code to see if the LABEL tag is present on input fields.
7. **[SS]** Images that convey information or meaning must have descriptive alternative text. Charts and graphs may also require additional detailed descriptions so that users can understand their purpose.
8. Are header tags (h1, h2, h3...) present and being used in hierarchical order? (Header tags should not be skipped over.)
9. Does the design use good "link text"? Links like "Click here" or "More..." are bad. Links should be descriptive by themselves.
10. Have tables been used for layout? (You can figure this out by looking at the code. Layout tables are almost always a bad idea.)
11. The reading and tab order for a web page or application must be visually logical. (You can detect the tab order by watching the focus as you tab through the page. Tab order should not jump around the page.)
12. Can you still understand and read the page if you switch to high-contrast color mode. (This is available in most browser settings.)

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Accessibility Best Practices

The following list provides suggestions for accessibility practices that will make your web sites/applications much easier for all users. These items often overlap with usability and search engine optimization techniques.

- Keep content (text), presentation (style), and function (scripting) separate. Keeping each layer distinct from the other allows the content to always come through in the absence of design or dynamic scripting. This is especially helpful in terms of mobile design, and it also makes maintenance of a site easier.
- Always use ARIA landmark roles. When you use ARIA to mark off regions of the page, be sure to encompass everything on the page, don't leave anything outside an ARIA landmark role. See the Resources section below for helpful reference pages on ARIA.
- Use HTML elements in a way that matches their semantic meaning. For instance, don't use header markup (h1, h2, h3) simply because it's large, bold text. Assistive technology relies upon the default semantic meaning that is associated with HTML elements.
- The h1 tag is reserved for denoting the page's purpose. It should match all or part of the page's title tag. Subsequent headers like h2, h3 and so on should be used for headlines or to mark a section.
- Use lists to group similar information, such as links in navigation menus. Lists promote "chunking" of information, which is easier for users to consume, and they preserve semantic associations for blind users. Lists are well supported with assistive technology.
- Use fieldsets and legends when organizing forms. Fieldsets, similar to Lists, are a great way to group similar information, like demographics or preferences. Legend text provides a label for the fieldset and should be unique.
- Link text must make sense when read by itself. Do not use link text like "Read more..." or "Click here".
- Do not use tables for layout. If it's impossible to avoid them, then make sure the information within the table will linearize logically and is marked, `role="presentation"`. Do not nest tables (placing a table within a table).
- Avoid using CSS sprites and background images for controls, such as buttons, where a visible text alternative is not present. High-contrast modes on some platforms turns these images off.

Resources

Tools
- Functional Accessibility Evaluator (FAE) - (fae.disability.illinois.edu/)
- WebAIM Wave - (wave.webaim.org/)
- Accessibility Bookmarklets (accessibility-bookmarklets.org)

Plugins
- AInspector Sidebar - (addons.mozilla.org/en-US/firefox/addon/ainspector-sidebar/)
- Web Developer 1.2.13 (chrispederick.com/work/web-developer/)

References
- Technology Services Accessibility Examples (cites-illinois.github.io/accessibility/#)
- OpenAjax Alliance Accessibility - (oaa-accessibility.org)
- Illinois Information Technology Accessibility Act - (www.dhs.state.il.us/IITAA)
- W3C Web Accessibility Initiative - (www.w3.org/WAI)
- Section 508 - (www.section508.gov)

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