CREATING ACCESSIBILITY

A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR CONTENT CREATORS

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1.

INTRO TO ACCESSIBILITY

Accessibility in marketing and communication involves designing, creating, and delivering content that is available to people of all abilities. Materials that don't take into account the diversity of the human experience can unintentionally exclude students with differing abilities, leaving them unable to access to your messaging, programs, services, or facilities. Creating content with accessibility in mind helps to ensure that color palettes, artwork, fonts, videos, and more are easily understood by all.

As the University of Miami continues to foster a culture of belonging where all 'Canes feel valued and have the opportunity to add value, all content creators have a responsibility to ensure that written materials, graphic designs, and other marketing and communication content is accessible to all members of our community.

This guide provides guidance and practical tips to help make your materials accessible to all students. Together with the Office of Disability Services, Student Affairs Communications and Marketing can help review your materials with these best practices in mind. To request assistance, contact sacomms@miami.edu.

Disability and Impairment

Shaped by the 1980 World Health Organization's definition of a disability as, "an attribute of a person," disabilities were historically considered the result of an individual's condition and were, therefore, that person's problem and responsibility to overcome.[1]

However, the WHO recently redefined a disability as a mismatch between the needs of an individual and a product, service, or social structure offered.[2] As a result, an impairment is a difference in ability that may prevent someone from doing something, whereas a disability is the additional disadvantage added by an unaccommodating society. By changing the definition to reflect the point of interaction between a person and their environment, an organization should now consider a person's impairment through the lens of accessibility rather than as that person's problem to sort out on their own.

While the definition may have altered how organizations provide accommodations to those with various impairments, there still exists an unconscious bias that all impairments can be seen (i.e., a person using a wheelchair). However, the majority of impairments aren't visible.[1] Chronic illness, cognitive or mobility issues, vision loss, and many other impairments often have no visible indicators but can still lead to various disabilities in our modern world.

Therefore, it is critical that we create marketing and communication content that is accessible for all individuals, regardless of any impairments—both seen and unseen.

Key areas of Impairment

COGNITIVE

Students with learning difficulties, including neurological, psychological, or attention deficit disorders are among the most common impairments at colleges and universities around the country.[3] Students with cognitive impairments often need the same types of communication accommodations as those with visual and/or hearing impairments such as using plain language,[3] designing content with a clear structure, and selecting appropriate fonts and colors.

VISUAL

Visual impairments are among the most common in adults in the United States, with more than 32.2 million people having visual impairments and 1.2 million people deemed "legally blind".[4] Many students with vision loss are not legally blind and use a combination of accommodations such as screen readers or high-contrast color modes on websites.

HEARING

Approximately 15 percent of the US population is deaf or partially deaf, with one in eight people aged 12 years or older having hearing loss in both ears.[5] Although some adjustments should be considered for messages that include audio, communicating with this group via written messages and visual design can be straightforward.

2.

INCLUSIVE GRAPHIC DESIGN

Graphic design, at its core, aims to condense information into visually attractive and easily understood visual content. The principles of graphic design that exist today (balance, contrast, emphasis, hierarchy, scale, etc.) work together to create visual content that is clear and concise to viewers, regardless of any visual impairments.

Since the principles of design rely on concepts such as logical organization, intentional color choices, and legible fonts, it is often true that "good design" is by default accessible. However, inclusive graphic design homes in on these elements to pay special care in how viewers with certain visual impairments receive and process content.

"BUILDING IT IN, NOT BOLTING IT ON"

Rather than evaluating a design after it is complete to determine if it is accessible, assess how you can intentionally consider accessibility from the very beginning.

Text Readability

There are several principles to consider for increased text readability.

COLUMNS

Columns can help to organize the layout of a design, especially large sections of text. However, if columns are too narrow, words may be awkwardly spaced or cut off. On the other hand, if columns are too wide, readers can lose their place across a line of text.

SPACING

Most design software is preinstalled with optimum defaults for the space between lines of text as well as the space between words and letters. It is often best to keep those settings at the default, only adjusting slightly if needed.

ALIGNMENT

Left-justified text is easiest for most people to read. With the exception of page titles or section headers, it is often best to avoid using right- or center-justification since the mismatched ends of the lines of text can make it difficult for the brain to comprehend.

TEXT SIZE

Avoid using font sizes below 12 pt. for body copy, and design according to what the deliverable and messaging is.

What determines an accesible font?

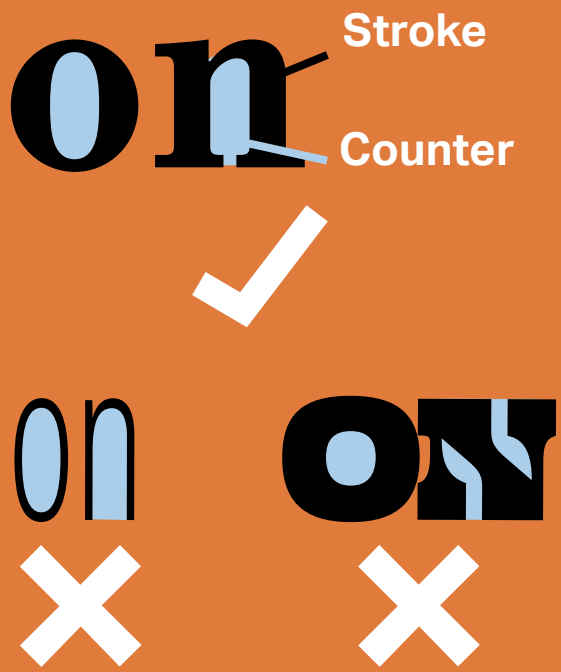
SHAPE/WEIGHT

In addition to the size of the text, a font's shape and weight can greatly impact its legibility for those with and without visual impairments.

A font's shape is determined by the positive or negative space formed by the letters. The positive shape—called the stroke—is what you see in a letter, whereas the negative shape—the counter—is the empty space within and around the stroke.

Legible and accessible fonts have proportional strokes and counters, while fonts with imbalanced strokes and counters are difficult to read and are likely illegible to those with visual impairments. Keep in mind that although a highly decorated font may look appealing and fit the theme of a design, heavily ornate fonts may not be effective at communicating clearly.

A font with a balanced stroke and counter is often easier to read than one with disproportionate positive and negative space. Designers must consider that readers with a visual impairment may not be able to read a message written in an overly ornate font.



Hello

Bombarda

Hello

Averbury

Hello

Frutiger

Hello

Libre Baskerville

Display fonts like Bombarda and Averbury are ideal for headlines or section headers, but fonts like Frutiger and Libre Baskerville were designed to be legible at smaller sizes and are best used for sections of text.

STYLE

Font styles can vary widely. Fonts are commonly identified as display fonts or text fonts.

Display fonts can be decorative and appeal to a design's visual aesthetic. However, when using display fonts, it is important to use them sparsely since they can be more difficult to read, especially for someone with visual impairments. Text fonts are used for larger portions of the words, so it is important to select an easily recognizable text font for your sections of written text.

COLOR AND CONTRAST

Color serves as an important element of design. However, color alone should never be used to fully convey information or indicate action. Instead, designs should provide alternatives in the form of text, icons, or symbols. For example, using only red text to indicate that something is not allowed could be strengthened by combining it with an icon.

What are color cones?

Each color on the color spectrum has a specific wavelength that the eye processes via “color cones”. These cones translate the electromagnetic waves of light into colors that the brain can process.[6] Normal color vision is known as “trichromacy” because the eye usually has all three types of cones (red, green, and blue) to interpret color. Color blindness results when the color cones do not properly interpret wavelengths to certain colors.[6]

Shifted Color Waves

Shifted color waves occur when all three cones are active, however, one or more type of cone misinterprets the wavelength of a certain color.[6]

Missing Color Waves

When all three color cones are impaired to the point that they cannot interpret wavelength of light, colors are translated as shares of gray, black, and white.[6]

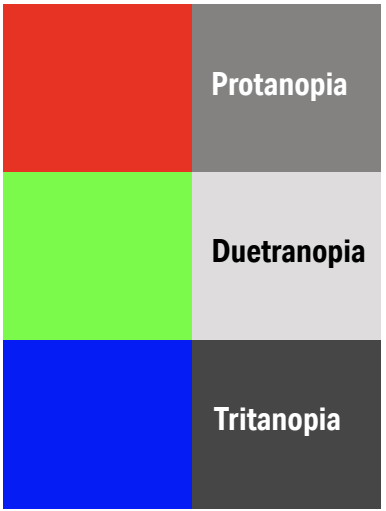
What color blindness looks like

Color blindness, one of the most common visual impairments, limits a person’s ability to distinguish between certain colors and/or shades of colors.[7] Good design should use a variety of colors and create enough contrast that allows any viewer to differentiate one color from another.

Shifted Color Waves

True color

Missing Color Waves



True color

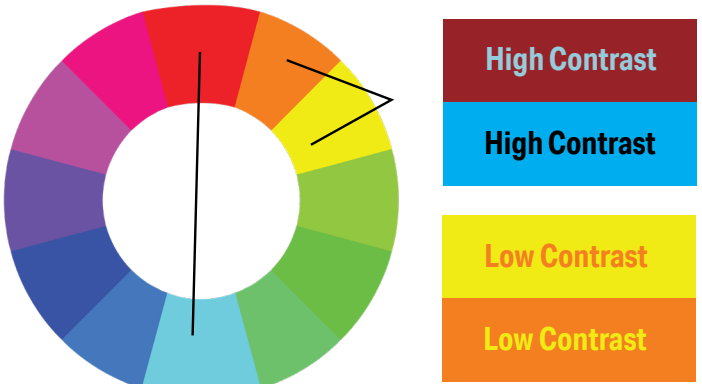
Designing with color blindness in mind

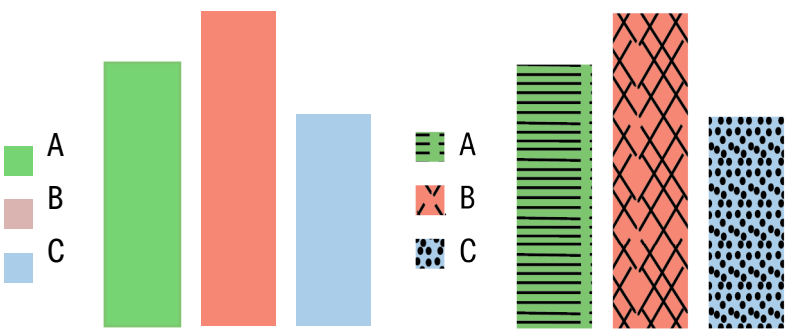
Focus on creating a diverse spectrum of contrasting colors to allow everyone to differentiate one color from another, regardless of any visual impairments.

For example, ensure there is enough contrast between a background color and the color of the text. Similarly, if using a color palette based off a single color—known as monochromatic—apply textures or patterns to the design.

Low contrast refers to the difference between colors that are too similar to each other on the spectrum order. Maintaining high contrast throughout your designs is key in order to make visual cues legible.[8]

If you are uncertain about your design, visit coolors.co to check if your color selection is accessible.





Here is an example of how color and another visual cue (like a pattern) can elevate and make simple graphics distinct.[9]

A Reliable Palette

Below are examples of how colors from University's primary and secondary palettes can be combined to create an accessible scheme for a design, with enough contrast between all of the colors.

hex: e07b3c
CMYK: 9, 62, 87, 0
RGB: 224, 123, 60

hex: 9fca8b
CMYK: 40, 3, 58, 0
RGB: 159, 202,139

hex: aacee9
CMYK: 31, 9, 2, 0
RGB: 170, 206, 233

hex: 224f34
CMYK: 83,43, 84,44
RGB: 34, 79, 52

The Palette

Effective Color Combinations

3.

PRODUCING VIDEO

Videos can be particularly effective at communicating complex information or compelling stories in an engaging and entertaining format[10]. Since videos employ both audio and visual content, special care should be made during the planning, filming, and editing processes to ensure that all parts of a video can be received and understood by people with various types of impairments.

As with graphic design and color selection, be careful not to rely solely on a video to communicate your message. Be prepared with written text or other forms of communication to ensure your message is accessible to everyone.

"DISABILITY IS NOT THE PROBLEM, IT'S ACCESSIBILITY."[10]

Interpreting the new definition of disability by the WHO, content creators should hold themselves accountable to ensure their materials are accessible to all audiences.

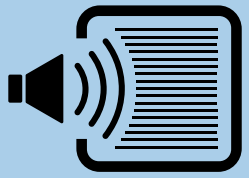
Video Accessibility Aids

AUDIO DESCRIPTION

If a video includes other essential visual information (such as graphics or specific environments/scenes) that add to the context of the message, include an audio description. More information about how to input audio descriptions is available on the references page.[11]

CAPTIONS

To ensure the message can be received by people with hearing impairments, a video with speech or other essential audio should include captions. Although automatic captioning on popular social media channels makes the caption creation process more efficient, they must be edited to ensure accuracy. It is equally important to note via captions if a video does not include any sound so that a viewer is aware that no audio is being played.[11]



TRANSCRIPTS

A transcript is a word-for-word written version of any speech within a video that someone can read as a separate document. Make sure the transcript is easily available and organize it logically with headings and links for user-friendly navigation. Indicate different speakers by using indents or bold/italicized fonts.[11]

SIGN LANGUAGE

In special circumstances, such as live video streams or videos with overly technical/ complex information, consider if a sign language interpreter is necessary.[12]

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[12] Disability Language Style Guide, The National Center on Disability and Journalism. https://ncdj.org/style-guide/

In addition to the topics covered in this guide, the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) develops international standards for the websites and online content. Learn more at w3.org/WAI.

For other resources on accessibility in communications, you can learn more at www.plainlanguage.gov

For questions regarding disability services, student accommodations, and campus accessibility at the University of Miami, contact the **Office of Disability Services** at disabilityservices@miami.edu.

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