How Do I Make my Online Ad Accessible?

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Sometimes, our design decisions create barriers that make it difficult for people with disabilities to access the content in a digital ad. When designing your ad, please consider how you can make design choices that support equal access for everyone.

- Someone with low vision may need magnification software to view an enlarged version of your ad.
- Someone who is colorblind may be unable to distinguish certain shades of colors, like red or green.
- Someone with a reading disorder may get frustrated trying to understand ads with too much content.

This article lists some common design choices that create barriers for people with disabilities and explains how to avoid them.

Display Size

One size does not fit all displays. For example, an ad designed for a large digital monitor may not work as a small ad when placed on a website. You may need to create different versions of your ad for different displays.

Reduce Information and Visual Clutter

Keep your digital ad message simple. Include the basics, like:
- title
- short description
- logistics
- call to action (e.g., Register Now, Join us, Find out more)

Include only the minimum vital details; the ad can link to more information.

Do This:

This is an Interesting Event Title

This is the body text. It might contain a description or details like:
- the date
- the time
- the location

This is some small print that you might need to share.

Not This:

This is an Interesting Event Title

This is the body text. It might contain a description or details like:
- the date
- the time
- the location

Follow us on social media!
- FaceBook
- Twitter

Here's more information that creates more clutter and confusion in the ad.

This is some small print that you might need to share, and extra info you probably don't.

Italics, Script and Decorative Fonts

Make sure each letter in the font is easily recognized as a specific letter.
- Limit or avoid the use of italics, script, & decorative fonts.
- Avoid fonts that have thin strokes.
- Avoid fonts that have a deep slant.
- Limit italics to a word or short phrase.

Don't use italic, script, & decorative fonts to format:
- essential information
- an entire paragraph
- small text (text smaller than 18 px / 14 point)
- email addresses or contact information

The most accessible fonts are Arial, Verdana, or Times New Roman.

Don't Do This:

Font Size

Larger text helps all readers read text faster, regardless of disability.
- Body text: 14 points (18 px) or larger.
- Title: Larger than the body text.
- Small text: Avoid using text sizes smaller than 12 points (16 px).

If you design your ad at a large size and plan to resize it to a smaller size, make sure the font sizes meet accessibility best practices in the smaller ad.

Don't Do This:

Condensed Text

Don't squeeze text and words closer together to make all your content fit into a small space. Squished text is difficult to read.

Character and Word Spacing

As a general rule, letters should not touch.
Only use ligatures if you have a specific reason.

Line Spacing

There must be some visible space between each line of text.
- Lines of text should not touch or overlap.
- Decorative titles using large fonts may have less line spacing if the content is still readable and each letter can be clearly defined.

Don't Do This:

It is Difficult to Read Text When There is Not Enough Spacing Between Each Line

Don't squeeze small text together to fit lots of content in the ad. People with low vision or reading disorders will have difficulty distinguishing between letters and words. Lots of "white space" will help all your readers understand your message faster and more accurately

This is the body text. It might contain a description or details like the date, the time, and the location. Here's more information that creates more clutter and confusion in the ad.

This is some small print that that is to small for people with low vision to read.

All Caps

All caps are hard to read because every letter has the same box shape.
Use sentence case and title case.
Reserve all caps for:
- short phrases (one to three words)
- short call to actions like, "REGISTER NOW", "SIGN UP", "LEARN MORE", ETC.
- acronyms

Text Margins

Text must not touch the edges of the ad.
- There should be a margin of at least 15 pixels between the body text and the edge of the ad.
- Decorative lettering may touch the edge of the image; make sure the letter shape is recognizable.

Justification

Use left, right, or centered justification. Don't use full justification.

Don't Do This:

Color Contrast

Not everyone sees color the same way. Some of your audience may not be able to differentiate between colors easily.

- Avoid colors similar in value. Ensure there is a good light and dark contrast between your text and its background.
- Avoid yellow/white combinations. Yellow and white color combinations rarely pass a color contrast test.
- Avoid pastel colors / white combinations. Pastel colors contain a lot of white, so it is difficult to pass a contrast test against white.
- Use a color contrast checker to test that the combination of your text and background color passes WCAG standards A and AA levels.

Don't Do This:
The blue background (#6D98DE) and white text don't pass color contrast testing.

Backgrounds

Be careful when layering text on top of photos or patterned backgrounds; the busy photo will compete with your text.

Background Photos: Photo backgrounds create color contrast issues because photos have multiple colors in them, and it's difficult to find a single text color that has a good contrast with all of them.

Background Patterns:
- If a pattern has too many colors, it's like a photo. It is difficult to find one text color that will contrast well with all the color variations.
- If a pattern is too busy, it will compete with the text, and the user may be unable to distinguish between letter shapes and the pattern.

Don't Do This:

How to improve contrast for text layered on top of a photo or pattern background.

Place a block of dark solid color behind the text. If you wish, you can make the color block slightly transparent.

Do This: Use a dark solid block of color behind the text.

Do This: Use a slightly transparent block of color behind the text.

Revised by Laurie Trayers