



Guidelines for Creating Visually Accessible Content

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Prepared by the ASCE Philadelphia YMF JEDI Committee

Creating inclusive content is important, especially in a digital world. Accessible media ensure that as many Civil Engineers as possible have full access to ASCE Content. To accomplish this, we recommend using the tips below as a guide when drafting emails, Word documents, PDFs, social media posts, and other digital content.

Use camel case when typing out hashtags

Capitalize the first letter of each word in a hashtag. Using all lowercase letters may result in screen readers misreading or stringing together words. For example, use **#MentoringDay** instead of **#mentoringday**

Include hashtags and mentions at the end of a post

Special marks such as the “at” symbol may be read aloud by screen readers. To ensure clarity of your message or post, do not include hashtags or mentions inline with your text, but rather at the bottom of your post. (See image below.)

Have a clear call-to-action

Do not simply post links into the body of your text. Direct users to click a link if one is provided. Also describe where the link goes. An example call-to-action may read “Click the link below to register for this event.”

Below are some examples of social media posts illustrating some of the above points.

Not Recommended:

This image of a post on LinkedIn shows an inline mention at the beginning of the paragraph and several hashtags using exclusively lowercase characters. This formatting is not recommended as it may be confusing for users that utilize a screen reader or other assistive technologies.



Suggested Best Practice:

This image of a post on LinkedIn shows no inline mentions in the body of text. The hashtags also utilize camel case, capitalizing the first letter of each word. The mention has been moved to the end of the post. Also take note of the descriptive call-to-action directing users to the link listing job openings.



Use a consistent font size

Do not switch back and forth between font sizes. Using larger fonts to denote titles and headers is acceptable, but body text should be consistent and at a reasonable size for the medium you are working with.

Avoid overuse of all caps

Text in all caps can be difficult to read and visually recognize. Screen readers may not interpret all caps with the correct tone. Use title case and sentence case as much as possible.

Minimize use of emojis, special characters, and nonstandard fonts

These characters are read aloud by screen readers, so users may hear something like “clapping hands” or “loudly crying face” in the middle of a sentence. It is also possible the screen reader may read each letter of a word individually if using a nonstandard font. Use sans-serif fonts that don’t have extraneous flourishes, such as Arial, Calibri, or similar.

Avoid run-on sentences

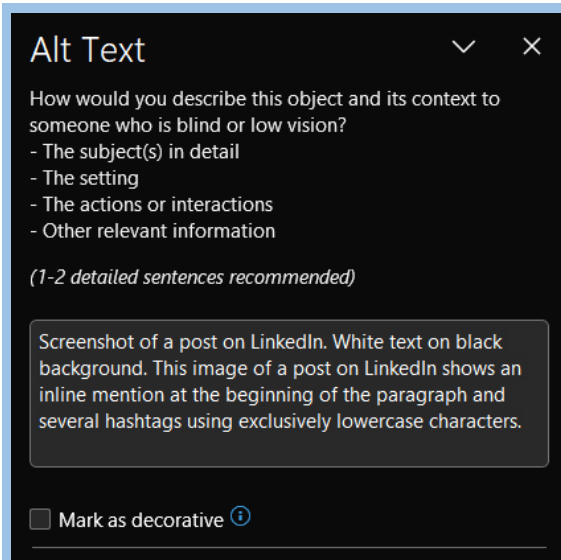
These should be avoided regardless but can further complicate reading comprehension and lead to unintelligible read outs from screen readers.

Be wary of email marketing tools

Software suites like Constant Contact and Mail Chimp provide fast and easy ways to compose and send bulk emails, but the final product may be difficult for screen readers to navigate. Emails generated by these services may also not properly scale text and buttons when viewed on mobile devices. Send a test email to yourself first to check for any possible issues.

Provide descriptive image captions

Lack of descriptive text leads to persons with low vision or blindness to miss out on vital content. Many social media platforms provide a place to add alt text to an image. Modern versions of Microsoft Office also include built-in alt text functions. If these tools are not available to you then include a description of the image in the body of your text.



Example of an Alt Text Tool:

The image to the left shows a screenshot of the alt text tool found in Microsoft Office. The tool prompts you asking how would you describe your content and its context to someone who is blind or low vision. This tool can be accessed by right-clicking on an image or graphic within your Office document.

Tools like this can also be found on many social media sites such as Twitter and LinkedIn. Look for an “alt text” button whenever posting an image.

Note: At the time of writing these guidelines, LinkedIn has a 300-character limit for alternative text.

Avoid pertinent information in images

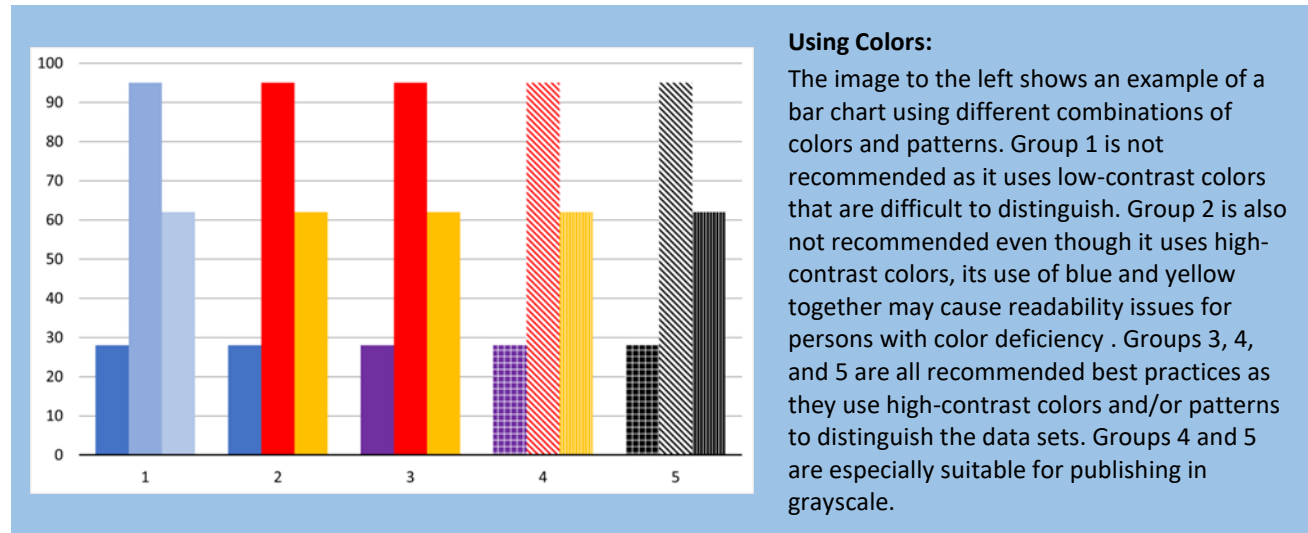
If creating a flyer that is ultimately saved as an image, be sure to avoid placing pertinent information only in the image (such as date, time, location, etc.) If this info is included in the image be sure to also include it in the accompanying body of text.

Do not place text on top of images

Text should be placed on a solid color background. Avoid placing text on top of any sort of image regardless of how busy (or not) it may be.

Use high contrast colors and patterns

Place dark-colored text on a light-colored background and vice versa. When creating charts, tables, or graphs, consider using differing patterns and line styles to denote different data sets rather than a rainbow of colors. Be sure patterns and line styles are scaled large enough to be easily differentiated.



Be mindful of colorblindness or deficiencies

Avoid red-green and blue-yellow color combinations. Also test your color palette in greyscale to ensure a high contrast between colors when viewed or printed in greyscale.

Do not use color alone to convey meaning

If color means something specific in a graphic, accompany it with text.

Write in plain language

Use simple, clear language that is direct and conversational.

Check before you post or send

Check your content for accessibility issues before posting. Send your text, graphics, and images to a trusted colleague knowledgeable in accessibility for feedback. Also utilize tools like the Accessibility Checker in Word and Outlook. There are many other tools available online used for checking readability and color contrast as well as generating alt text. For access to a free screen reader, please visit the following website: <https://www.nvaccess.org/>.

Closing Thoughts

These guidelines are intended to be living and regularly updated as technology and outreach techniques change. If you have any questions, comments, or suggestions regarding these guidelines, please reach out to the Philadelphia YMF JEDI Committee.

For additional information, please visit ASCE's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion website at <https://www.asce.org/diversity-equity-and-inclusion>.

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Sources

Content within this guide has been adapted from the following sources:

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