



Guideline on Making Communications Products and Activities Accessible

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Guidelines on Making Communications Products and Activities Accessible

1. About these guidelines

- 1.1 These guidelines support the Government of Canada's direction to ensure that departments consider accessibility when planning and developing communications products and activities. A communications product is any product produced by or on behalf of the Government of Canada that informs the public about policies, programs, services and initiatives, as well as dangers or risks to health, safety or the environment. Communications products can also aim to explain the rights, entitlements and obligations of individuals.

2. Application

- 2.1 These guidelines are intended for all Government of Canada departments subject to the *Policy on Communications and Federal Identity*.

3. Context

- 3.1 The *Accessible Canada Act* aims to make Canada barrier-free by January 1, 2040, by identifying, removing and preventing barriers in federal jurisdictions. To respond to the Act, the *Accessibility Strategy for the Public Service of Canada* was launched in 2019.
- 3.2 These guidelines support requirements for accessible communications found in the *Policy on Communications and Federal Identity* and the *Directive on the Management of Communications*.
- 3.3 These guidelines apply to communications products and activities aimed at internal and external audiences.
- 3.4 These guidelines should be read in conjunction with the *Guideline on Making Information Technology Usable by All* and the *Canada.ca Content Style Guide*.

4. Guidelines

The following information is intended to help departments when creating accessible communications products and activities.

Planning

Departments are strongly encouraged to:

- 4.1 Ensure processes are in place to make communications products available in various accessible formats; and
- 4.2 Ensure visual representation of Canada's diverse society by including images of persons with disabilities in everyday situations, fulfilling various roles.

Designing and developing

Departments are strongly encouraged to:

- 4.3 Write for the widest audience in plain language by:
 - 4.3.1 Ensuring a maximum reading level of Grade 8 (Secondary 2 in Quebec);
 - 4.3.2 Using simple and common words;
 - 4.3.3 Using short and simple sentences and paragraphs;
 - 4.3.4 Using the active voice;
 - 4.3.5 Putting statements in a positive form;
 - 4.3.6 Avoiding jargon, idioms and expressions;
 - 4.3.7 Using descriptive links;
- 4.4 Provide a plain language summary of specialized material written above the Grade 8 (Secondary 2 in Quebec) reading level;
- 4.5 Consider translating the summary of communications products into American Sign Language (ASL) and langue des signes québécoise (LSQ) (for example, executive summary of a departmental plan);
- 4.6 Use clear and consistent layouts by:
 - 4.6.1 Using fonts and font sizes that are easy to read;
 - 4.6.2 Using colours that provide high contrast between the text and the background;
 - 4.6.3 Using titles and headings that describe the topic or purpose;
 - 4.6.4 Starting with the most important information;
 - 4.6.5 Avoiding the use of emojis instead of text;
 - 4.6.6 Using short, bulleted lists when possible;
 - 4.6.7 Using tables to organize complex data;
 - 4.6.8 Using more than colour when conveying information visually, for example, using patterns for different areas in charts and graphs;

- 4.6.9 Limiting flashing elements in visual products and ensuring that products do not have anything that flashes more than three times in one second;
- 4.6.10 Capitalizing each word in a hashtag;
- 4.7 Build in accessibility features for audio and visuals products by:
 - 4.7.1 Writing alternative text (alt text) for informative visuals;
 - 4.7.2 Including null alternative text (alt text) for decorative visuals;
 - 4.7.3 Writing long descriptions for complex visuals when the information is not fully captured in the surrounding text;
 - 4.7.4 Providing audio descriptions or text descriptions for videos when important visual information is not fully captured as part of the audio;
 - 4.7.5 Including closed captions when posting videos to websites and social media, and open captions when closed captions are not an option; and
 - 4.7.6 Writing transcripts of audio and video products.

Testing

Departments are strongly encouraged to:

- 4.8 Consult with accessibility subject-matter experts to have users with lived experience test content and provide feedback on best practices; and
- 4.9 Use automated tools to analyze accessibility features.

Implementing

Departments are strongly encouraged to:

- 4.10 Inform audiences that alternative formats are available; and
- 4.11 Consider using a real-time speech-to-text interpreting service such as communications access real-time translation (CART) for events about government policies, programs, services and initiatives.

5. References

5.1 External standards and specifications

- [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\)](#)

5.2 Legislation

- [Accessible Canada Act](#)
- [Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms](#)

- [Canadian Human Rights Act](#)
- [Public Service Employment Act](#)

5.3 Related policy instruments

- [Values and Ethics Code for the Public Sector](#)
- [Policy on Communications and Federal Identity](#)
- [Policy on Access to Information](#)
- [Policy on Official Languages](#)
- [Policy on Service and Digital](#)
- [Directive on the Management of Communications](#)
- [Standard on Web Accessibility](#)
- [Government of Canada Digital Standards](#)
- [Guideline on Making Information Technology Usable by All](#)

5.4 Government of Canada resources

- [Nothing Without Us: Accessibility Strategy for the Public Service of Canada](#)
- [Canada.ca Content Style Guide](#)
- [Office of Public Service Accessibility GCpedia page](#) (accessible only on the Government of Canada network)
- [Digital Accessibility Toolkit](#)

6. Enquiries

For questions, contact [Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat Public Enquiries](#).

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