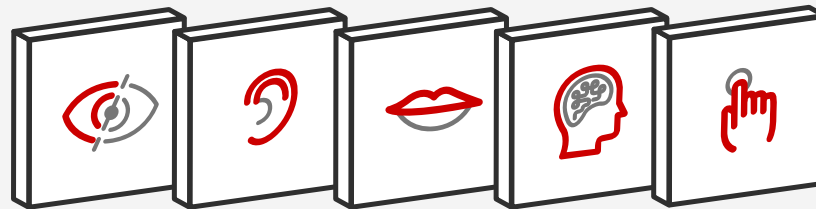




Making Sense of Digital Accessibility



What is accessibility?

Digital accessibility practices focus on making the web and digital products easier to use for everyone, regardless of their ability.

About [15% of the world's population](#) – more than 1 billion people – have some type of disability, which can make it difficult or even impossible to use digital products.

When digital products are built with accessibility in mind, they can provide equal access and opportunities to all users, including those with visual, speech, auditory, cognitive, and motor disabilities. Additionally, accessibility support often overlaps with other best practices, including improved semantic content, search engine optimization (SEO), usability, and mobile web design. Put simply, designing a product that works for more people ultimately results in a better overall product.

The Overlap Between Best Practices and Accessibility



Semantic Content

Making your content more accessible involves the use of proper semantic tags.



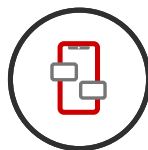
Search Engine Optimization

Many markup best practices that improve accessibility also optimize your site for search.



Usability

Steps to make a website more accessible improves the overall usability for all users.



Mobile Web Design

Optimizations such as touch target size that impact accessibility also improve the mobile experience.

Some common types of disabilities include:



Visual

This includes people who are blind, have low-vision, or are colorblind.



Speech

This includes people who are not able to speak or have difficulty forming words.



Auditory

This includes people who are deaf or hard of hearing.



Cognitive

This includes people who have conditions such as attention deficit disorder (ADD), dyslexia, or epilepsy.



Motor Control

This includes people who have limited or no use of their hands.

Digital Accessibility Guidelines

While not laid out specifically by law, the [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines](#) (WCAG) 2.1 are the most recent and relevant accessibility standard for digital products. Published by the [Web Accessibility Initiative](#) (WAI), and in cooperation with individuals and organizations around the world, these guidelines aim to establish a shared standard for making web content more accessible.

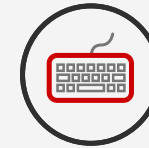
Principles of Web Accessibility

The WCAG is broken down into four principles that serve as foundational guidelines for designers and technologists as they create accessible products. Digital products must address these principles to be considered accessible:



Perceivable

Users must be able to perceive information and user interfaces (UI) in some way, using one or more of their senses.



Operable

Users must be able to control UI elements using some type of input device – mouse, keyboard, voice command, etc.



Understandable

The content must be readable and appear in consistent, predictable patterns to users.



Robust

The content must be developed using web standards that work with current and future browsers and devices.

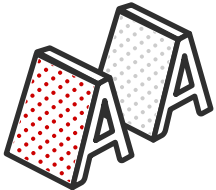
Success Criteria

Within the WCAG there are three levels of success criteria for each principle: A, AA, and AAA. These levels build on one another. For instance, to be considered level AA compliant, all success criteria under levels A and AA must be met.



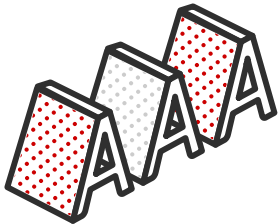
Level A

Sets a minimum level of accessibility but does not cover broad accessibility support in many situations. Success criteria at this level are considered **essential**.



Level AA

Provides stricter standards specifically around content, color, and assistive device support, making it easier for a wide variety of users with disabilities to access digital products. Includes all success criteria from level A.



Level AAA

The most comprehensive application of the guidelines and includes all success criteria from level A and level AA. It adds stricter success criteria on the overall design, as well in specific sub areas, such as screen reader support and content writing. While working towards this level has a positive impact on accessibility support, attaining Level AAA compliance may be challenging or impossible based on the content of your digital product.

Current Status of the Law

In 2018 there were over [2,250 web accessibility lawsuits](#) filed. Generally, legal rulings and settlements point to WCAG 2.0 (2.1) AA as a universally accepted standard of web accessibility in the U.S.. They reference the [Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\)](#) as the legal basis for these lawsuits.

The ADA was enacted in the U.S. in 1990 to protect the rights of people living with disabilities. All organizations operating in the U.S. are subject to its requirements, but it has not been updated to specifically define the rules for digital properties, such as websites and applications.

The legal debate over digital accessibility has centered around two questions:

1. Does the ADA apply to web and digital products?
2. If so, to what extent does the ADA apply?

Both questions lack straightforward answers. As it stands, any business or organization that receives funding from the U.S. Federal Government, including all government agencies, must be accessible under the [Section 508 Refresh](#), which references the WCAG.

The law isn't quite as clear-cut for private companies, however. One notable case was more recently brought by Guillermo Robles against Domino's Pizza for failing to provide adequate website and app accessibility for users with visual impairments.



Litigation of this particular case is expected to continue, but the [Supreme Court's recent rejection of Domino's appeal](#) leaves in place the lower court's decision, which cited [Title III of the ADA](#) and stated that **companies cannot discriminate against individuals with disabilities in the "full and equal enjoyment of the goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages, or accommodations."** This signals to companies that like their physical spaces, digital spaces must be ADA compliant as well.

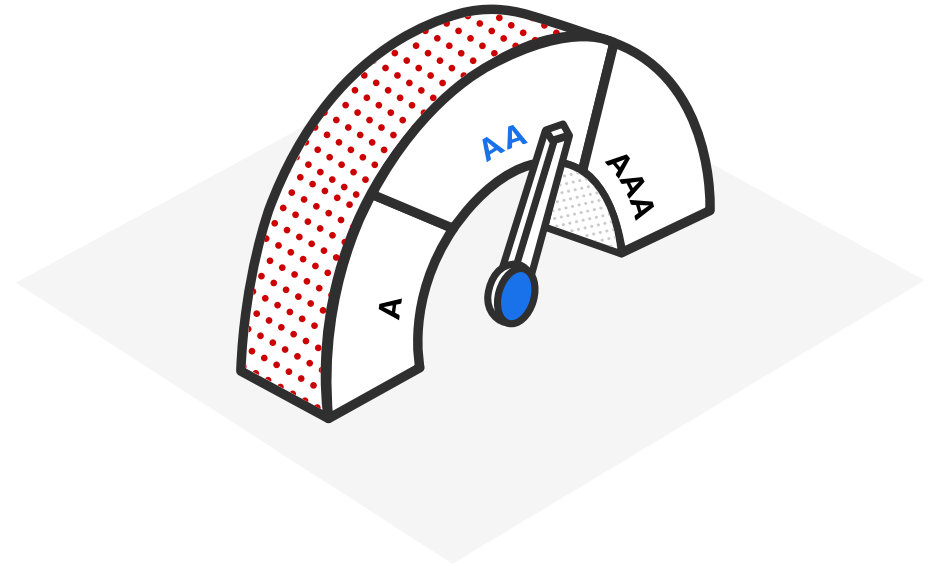
In the absence of a federal ruling on ADA digital property laws – currently slated for 2021 – the WCAG 2.1 AA are the guidelines to follow.

Target Compliance Level

At O3 World, **we recommend targeting level AA compliance** when designing and developing digital products because this level contains all of the essential aspects of level A, but introduces many key experiential benefits to a wider variety of users with disabilities. In addition, by meeting the success criteria at this level your digital product is considered to be in compliance with accessibility from a legal standpoint.

A Note About AAA Compliance

Level AAA compliance is a worthy goal, but it's not always possible based on the content of the digital product. Certain success criteria at this level can heavily affect both design and development. Level AAA success criteria can also require additional time and budget to meet. You can choose to address certain AAA criteria and while you may not qualify as AAA compliant, every item you address in this category makes your digital product that much more accessible.



Connect With Us

We believe in the importance of digital accessibility, and we're passionate about helping our clients create equitable experiences for all users.

Whether you're starting a project from scratch or looking to improve upon an existing online experience, O3 World can help. Learn more about our work at www.o3world.com.

[Subscribe to our newsletter](#) or follow #O3a11y to stay up to date on accessibility tips and tricks.

Have a quick question? DM us at @O3World.

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CONTACT

(215) 592-4739

info@o3world.com

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