Accessibility checklist for social media

While not all social media platforms have built-in accessibility functionality, there are techniques and features that social media creators can use to ensure their content is as accessible as possible. Creating accessible content will ensure that your social media posts are available to the widest possible audience.

Here is a list of things you should consider when writing social media content to make sure that it is accessible to everyone:

- Keep text clear and direct. Avoid ambiguous messages and keep the message line length short to improve readability.
- Use standard fonts – imported fonts or fonts that render as graphics can produce unsatisfactory results when used with assistive technology such as screen readers.
- Make sure you use an adequate font size.
- Don’t overuse upper-case letters (full-caps).

A high contrast level between text and background will make it easier to read for people with visual impairments.

Choose colours with a contrast over 4.5:1. You can check colour contrast using the Color Contrast Analyser on AppsAnywhere or an online tool, such as WebAIM’s Contrast Checker.

Avoid colour combinations that are difficult to read, such as green and red.

If you overlay text on an image, use a solid background or opaque overlay. Text placed directly over a picture or patterned background can be difficult to read.

Emoji symbol descriptions will be read aloud by assistive technology. That means people using text-to-speech software will hear things like “hands clapping”, “loudly crying face” or “face with closed eyes and stuck out tongue”. This can be very annoying when several emoji are used together and text can become difficult to understand if emoji are inserted in the middle of sentences to replace specific words.

When hashtags contain several words joined together, capitalise each word. This makes hashtags more legible and avoids the individual words being misread by screen reading software.

For example: #isstraining could be read as ‘ISS training’ or ‘is straining’. Using camel case, such as #issTraining, clarifies the individual words.

Punctuation marks are read aloud by screen readers, so hashtags (#) or mentions (@) in the middle of the text can disrupt the reading flow.

People with visual impairments rely on captions or alt-text to provide descriptions of images. Some social media platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter allow you to add alt-text to images, but these fields are not provided by default.

Facebook and Instagram add automatic alt-text when you post a picture, but it is unlikely to be accurate or useful. You need to edit the alt-text manually to make sure it provides an appropriate description of the image.
Twitter requires you to enable image descriptions in the app settings.

On other sites, make sure to provide a descriptive caption for the image in the text.

- Convey the content and functionality of the image. There's a huge difference between alt-text saying “Chart,” and “Bar chart illustrating that the number of cat pictures posted online has doubled every year since 2010”.
- Do not use phrases like “image of” or “photograph of” in alt-text. The screen reader software already knows that it is an image.
- Mention colour if it’s relevant.
- Descriptive text doesn’t have to be overly formal.
- If the image includes text, make sure you include it in the description.
- Alt text is read aloud by screen readers, so read it aloud yourself to hear how it sounds.

A meme is an image with text overlaid. GIFs are short video clips or image sequences that auto-loop. Both are widely used on social media.

However, memes and GIFs are often not accessible for people with a visual impairment, as screen-readers just view them as images.

To make memes and GIFs accessible, add a description in the body of the post, such as ‘this meme shows...’ or ‘this GIF shows...’

People who are blind, have low vision, or are colourblind may struggle to understand information that is represented solely by colour. For example, using green text for positive responses and red text for negative responses in a document would be unsuitable for someone with red/green colourblindness.

Adding captions to videos makes them easier to use for people with hearing impairments, but they can also be beneficial for people who have English as a second language.

Platforms such as YouTube allow you to upload closed caption files and can provide automatic captioning and caption editing tools for your videos. Closed captions are added as a separate file and can be overlaid onto the video at the user’s request.

Some platforms, such as LinkedIn, require the captions to be burned into the video file, as there is no option to add a closed caption file. Burned in captions are embedded into the video, so are viewed by everyone and are permanent.

Providing a descriptive transcript can be beneficial if captions can't be provided.