

# Better web accessibility today

Bradley Dilger, Department of English & Journalism  
<http://faculty.wiu.edu/CB-Dilger/> <cb-dilger@wiu.edu>

This presentation provides an introduction to web accessibility and six tips to help you boost the accessibility of your web sites quickly. I won't be encyclopedic—plenty of comprehensive books and sites already do that. I hope you'll build on this success to integrate attention to accessibility into your site development process.

## ***Getting started***

You need a definition. Here's mine: "An accessible web site provides information and/or services which function effectively for a wide variety of users, with minimal differences in delivered content."

You also need a web accessibility standard to guide your evaluation, and to provide best practices. The Illinois Information Technology Accessibility Act (see below) applies to most Illinois government web sites.

## ***Short term: six quick fixes***

Get started making your sites more accessible with these techniques. Links to more information about each one are available on the back of this handout.

### **One: add an accessibility statement**

Ensure your desire for web accessibility is visible.  
Provide contact information, and offer alternative formats.  
Describe your methodology. Ask for feedback.

### **Two: make content-rich links**

Avoid short links. Keep links distinct. Links should work out of context.

### **Three: provide document structure.**

Offer search. Organize web pages as outlines: headings, subheads, lists, etc.  
Include a unique title for every page.  
Standardize navigation and other design elements whenever possible.

### **Four: provide textual equivalents for multimedia**

Add captioning to video. Include transcripts for audio.  
Do not convey information with sound alone.  
Describe images using "alt" attributes or in-document text.

### **Five: use color wisely**

Use contrasting foreground and background colors.  
Avoid bright colors for text. Do not convey information with color alone.

### **Six: use automated accessibility verifiers**

Use services like the Functional Accessibility Evaluator (FAE) to check your page or site automatically, providing a report on accessibility.

## **Long term: best practices**

As you make a commitment to better web accessibility, I suggest these techniques:

- Complete Mark Pilgrim's superb *Dive Into Accessibility* online short course—just 30 minutes a day for 30 days. See below.
- Use templates of some kind—Dreamweaver site management, server side includes, etc.
- Learn enough markup to add accessibility affordances and create structural markup.
- Learn how your web authoring software facilitates accessibility.
- Move toward an integrative process where web accessibility as important as visual design, site mapping, or content development. Commit to this kind of development for any redesign.
- Don't assume using (or avoiding) XHTML, CSS, PDF, tables, forms, JavaScript, Flash, etc., means your site is (or isn't) accessible. Consider your use of each technology separately.
- Use a screen reader like JAWS to hear your pages—change your perceptions!
- Test for accessibility—ask a friend, student, or client who uses assistive technology to use your site and point out what works and what needs improvement.

## **Links**

### ***Web Accessibility: Web Standards And Regulatory Compliance***

<http://www.jimthatcher.com/book2.htm>

An excellent collection of essays on web accessibility theory and practice.

### **My techniques for these quick fixes**

<http://wrecking.org/write/index.php?title=waintro>

More information about making links accessible, using alternative text, adding accessibility affordances, and using automated accessibility validators.

### **Jez Lemon, “Writing a Good Accessibility Statement”**

<http://juicystudio.com/article/writing-a-good-accessibility-statement.php>

Help for the first quick fix I discuss in my presentation.

### **Mark Pilgrim, *Dive Into Accessibility***

<http://diveintoaccessibility.org/>

A superb introduction and online short course which provides excellent background as well as coding techniques and other best practices.

### **Illinois Information Technology Accessibility Act**

<http://www.dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?item=32765>

All Illinois web sites should follow these guidelines and best practices.

### **Functional Accessibility Evaluator**

<http://fae.cita.uiuc.edu/>

Automated site-wide accessibility testing. Developed by the University of Illinois.

### **My del.icio.us for accessibility**

<http://del.icio.us/dilger/accessibility/>

My annotated list of accessibility resources, which I continually expand and update.