5 Simple Ways to Create More Accessible Social Media Content

What does "accessible" social media mean?

Simply put, accessibility means that the content you are putting on your social media channels is usable by all people regardless of their disability status. Principles of accessibility are not limited to physical spaces (such as stairs or curbs) – the same principles apply to online content, including social media sites.

If you are using social media as a channel to distribute your research and content, the following are reasons why your social media content should be made accessible:

- ⊘ It is easy to do and the right thing to do
- ⊘ This will increase access of your research to people with disabilities
- ⊘ You will be abiding by Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)
- 🧍 Accessibility is also included in the Section 508 Standards. These standards are mandated for Federal departments and agencies, including federally funded research.

Many people with disabilities use assistive technology to access digital content or need content in alternative formats for it to be fully accessible to them. Some of the most common assistive technologies include screen readers or voice-to-text technologies (for those with low or no vision) and closed-captioning (if they are hard of hearing or deaf). When creating social media content, your goal is to make it accessible to as many people as possible, using a variety of adaptive technology. When you make your research &

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product content more accessible, your work can reach more people.

If you are using Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn or any other social media platforms to share your research and the work you do, you want to apply these five simple ways to make sure your work is as widely accessible as possible. We've listed these in order of ease.

1: Make Sure Your Hashtags are Understood by Text to Voice Apps

Hashtags are a great tool to help people search social media and find posts related to a topic that they are interested in. That is why we like adding them to the bottom of a social media post.

- Text to voice tools need to be able to understand individual words to be able to read them out loud.
- Upper case letters indicate the beginning of a new word or sentence.
- If you use hashtags that include multiple words, simply upper case the first letter of each word in the hashtag. (Sometimes this is called #CamelCase.)
- Additionally, put your hashtags at the end of your post, to reduce any confusion and make it easier for those with text to voice

apps to understand.

ℹ️ **Not Accessible:**
#mentalhealthmatters
#employmentresearch
#knowledgetranslation

ℹ️ **Accessible:**
#MentalHealthMatters
#EmploymentResearch
#KnowledgeTranslation

2: Use Emojis and other Characters Sparingly and at the End of Your Post

- Screen readers and text to voice tools read the descriptions of emojis out loud as they appear throughout your text.
- This can make your content difficult and confusing for your reader if emojis are spread throughout your social media post.
  - ℹ️ To make your content more accessible and easier to understand, use emojis sparingly and put them at the end of your written content. See the example below.

Not Accessible Post: 🙂😄😃 Research Subjects Wanted: Are you feeling depressed 😟, anxious 😫, or have difficulty sleeping 🛌? Apply to our research 🧐 study and help us learn how gardening 🌸🌺🌹 can improve your mental health.

➡️ **What someone with a Screen Reader or text-to-voice app would hear:** "Smiley face beaming face with smiling eyes grinning face with big eyes Research Subjects Wanted. Are you feeling depressed worried face anxious distraught face with tightly closed eyes or have difficulty sleeping person sleeping on a bed? Apply to our research serious face with monocle study and help us learn how gardening cherry blossom hibiscus rose can improve your mental health."

Accessible Post: Research Subjects Wanted: Are you feeling depressed, anxious, or have difficulty sleeping? Apply to our research study and help us learn how gardening can improve your mental health. 🌸

➡️ **What someone with a Screen Reader or text-to-voice app would hear:** Research Subjects Wanted: Are you feeling depressed, anxious, or have difficulty sleeping? Apply to our research study and help us learn how gardening can improve your mental health. Cherry blossom.

⚠️ **HINT:** Use the Accessibility Settings on your phone to enable the Text-to-Voice function and listen to some social media posts so you can experience this first hand.

3: Use Plain Language for Your Written Content

Plain language means that you are writing in a way that can be easily understood the first time it is read or heard by your intended audience. There are many basic principles of "plain language" writing, but they all come down to making your writing easy to read and understand.

Your writing should:
- Be clear, concise, and well-organized.
- State major points before going into details.
- Be written with your audience in mind.
- Be written at the intended audience's reading level.
- Use everyday words, not technical jargon.
- If you must use technical terms, explain them in the first reference.

We have listed examples of plain language writing on the next page.

Plain Language Example

Plain Language should be clear, useful and understandable.

Before: If you think you qualify for the study and need assistance in the process of completing the application form and submitting it, you may contact our organization at the phone number listed below.

After: If you'd like to apply and need help filling out the application, call us at this number:

4: Fill in the ALT-TEXT Field for Images

If you use images in your social media, be sure to fill in the Alt-Text field to describe the image. All social media sites (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.) allow you to add an image to your post. But for those with low or no vision, who are using a screen reader to hear their social media feeds, your images aren't "heard". Therefore, almost all social media platforms now offer a field called "Alt-Text" or Alternative Text for images in your post. Here you enter a text-based description of your image which allows your fans and followers using a screen reader to hear the image description you entered, thus giving them a fuller experience of the content you have created.

Alt-Text broadens the reach of your social media posts. While Tactics 1 and 2 above are very easy changes to make, mastering Alt-Text can take time and practice. Try starting with your most popular social media channel, keeping your Alt-Text descriptive, yet short and clear. You can continue to improve this aspect of your social media as you go along.

Alt-Text Example

Alt-Text: Profile drawing of the upper body of a woman with her head in her hands with an overwhelming "thought bubble". The image conveys the feeling of being overwhelmed by too much going on in the person's head.

⚠ HINT: If the photo or image you add to your social media post includes written text in it, (or "flattened text"), be sure to add this content to the text-based portion of your post (or your Alt-Text), because screen readers cannot read text that is flattened in a picture. Remember, text-to-voice tools have no idea what your picture looks like, so you need to describe its contents somewhere. For example, if you post a picture of a flyer announcing a webinar on your research findings, make sure you add the contents of that flyer into the caption field or the Alt-Text of your post.

⚠ HINT: If you typically have used a flyer type of image for social media, it is much better to design a simple image/graphic with minimal text and then have the rest of the content in the post and include a link to the webpage or form with more information. Don't forget to add the image text to the Alt-Text for the image or include the text in your post.

Flattened Text Example

Content of the post should include:

Blogging on Adulting: In Our Voice. A Podcast series by the Transitions to Adulthood Center for Research

5: Close Captioning or Providing Text Transcripts of Videos

When you publish videos with sound, use the auto closed captioning feature during the upload process, have a vendor provide professional closed captioning that is up-loaded, or provide a text-based version of the dialog as a link to a document with the written transcription.

ⓘ **NOTE**: Do not use strobe effects or flashing lights in your animations or videos. They can be harmful to some people with disabilities.

If you follow these five tactics we've outlined, you are assuring that your social media posts will reach people that are using adaptive technologies for their disability. For more ideas and ways to make your social content more accessible check out these resources.

Resources

[Accessibility on Social Media](https://therealalexa.com/accessible-social)
(https://therealalexa.com/accessible-social)

[Social Media Accessibility Checklist by Alexa Heinrich](https://img1.wsimg.com/blobby/go/e9ad5084-b178-4cf1-8084-916bfbf09e31/Accessibility-Checklist-0002.pdf)
(https://img1.wsimg.com/blobby/go/e9ad5084-b178-4cf1-8084-916bfbf09e31/Accessibility-Checklist-0002.pdf)

[YouTube Videos on how to add Alt-Text on each social media platform](https://therealalexa.com/images)
(https://therealalexa.com/images)

[How to add Alt-Text on Facebook posts](https://www.facebook.com/help/214124458607871)
(https://www.facebook.com/help/214124458607871)

[How to add Alt-Text on Twitter posts](https://help.twitter.com/en/using-twitter/picture-descriptions)
(https://help.twitter.com/en/using-twitter/picture-descriptions)

[How to add Alt-Text on Instagram Posts](https://help.instagram.com/503708446705527)
(https://help.instagram.com/503708446705527)

[How to add Alt-Text on LinkedIn Posts](https://www.linkedin.com/help/linkedin/answer/109799/adding-alternative-text-to-images-for-accessibility)
(https://www.linkedin.com/help/linkedin/answer/109799/adding-alternative-text-to-images-for-accessibility)

[Top 10 Principles for Plain Language](https://www.archives.gov/open/plain-writing/10-principles.html)
(https://www.archives.gov/open/plain-writing/10-principles.html)

[FAA Plain Language Course](https://www.faa.gov/about/initiatives/plain_language/basic_course/)
(https://www.faa.gov/about/initiatives/plain_language/basic_course/)

[Plain Language Writing Checklist](https://www.sickkids.ca/contentassets/92c5abda231e44b6832f5e3effeacdf8/plain-language-checklist_jan2017-sickkids-kt-program.pdf)
(https://www.sickkids.ca/contentassets/92c5abda231e44b6832f5e3effeacdf8/plain-language-checklist_jan2017-sickkids-kt-program.pdf)

[Additional Plain Language Resources](https://umassmed.edu/cekter/resources/plain-language/)
(https://umassmed.edu/cekter/resources/plain-language/)

[Automatic Readability Checker](https://readabilityformulas.com/free-readability-formula-tests.php)
(https://readabilityformulas.com/free-readability-formula-tests.php)

BOSTON UNIVERSITY   University of Massachusetts Medical School   UMASS   CeKTER   NiDILRR National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research