The British Museum

Access Guidelines
Online design, content and communications

Version 02

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Contents

Introduction

It is a strategic priority, moral imperative and legal requirement for the British Museum to be accessible and representative to a broad range of audiences, supporting equality and diversity in our areas of work.

These guidelines identify some key approaches to making online and online digital content accessible to a range of audiences across all our digital media platforms.

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG)[i]
The British Museum aims to make our website content and online resources accessible to WCAG 2.1 AA standard. These guidelines have informed the content of this document.

Social Model of Disability
The British Museum uses the social model of disability when considering the access requirements of our audience:
“The social model of disability says that disability is caused by the way society is organised, rather than by a person’s impairment or difference. It looks at ways of removing barriers that restrict life choices for disabled people. When barriers are removed, disabled people can be independent and equal in society, with choice and control over their own lives.” Scope[ii]

Anyone creating online content should audit their designs to identify potential barriers for disabled people, and then develop strategies to address them.

The Equality Act
The Equality Act[iii] provides a legal framework to ensure that disabled people are not treated less favourably because they are disabled. The British Museum has a legal duty to anticipate the needs of potential disabled visitors and make ‘reasonable adjustments’ to ensure that disabled people are not put at a substantial (more than minor or trivial) disadvantage.

Digital Media

NB. The Exhibitions Department and the Interpretation Team have separate guidelines for digital media in special exhibitions and permanent galleries. This document does not supersede those or cover digital media on-site.

Film

WCAG 2.1 AA Criteria

1. Captions. Prerecorded Digital Media

Captions[iv] are provided for all pre-recorded audio content, except when the media is a media alternative for text and is clearly labelled as such.

Captions can be **open** (always visible) or **closed** (can be turned off and on by the viewer).

On-screen text can also take the form of interpretive captions that explain silent or non-narrated films. As a guiding principle, on-screen interpretive captions should be kept as short as possible.

2. Captions. Live Synchronised Media

For webinars and live synchronized media live captions should be provided through a Speech to Text Reporter or real time captioning service.

Techniques and requirements

Caption requirements should be agreed at the early planning stages for digital media. They should be clearly specified in the brief before it is issued to internal stakeholders or external agencies.

Some digital media may not require on-screen captions, e.g. films with minimal ambient audio. In this instance information can be provided in the credits to highlight ‘this film is silent’ or provide minimal information on the audio

Guidelines for on-screen text

1. On-screen long enough to be read: typically, 3 words per second
2. Limited to no more than two lines, and no more than 16 words (8 per line), at a time
3. Presented as white text on a dark background (minimum 70% contrast), that extends across the full width of the screen
4. In a sans-serif font
5. At a point size that is easily readable, taking into account the size of the screen and the point size of adjacent printed graphics
6. Synchronized and equal in content to spoken words / audio

7. Not obscured by, and does not obscure, visual content
8. Centred on screen
9. Consistent in style and presentation
10. All dialogue and significant audio elements should be captioned e.g. [THUNDER], [♪ BLUES HARMONICA ♪]
11. Silent digital media must state that there is no sound, to assure Deaf and hard-of-hearing people that they are not missing information

Filming requirements

The bottom 20% of the screen should be left as the caption safe zone, with no graphics, and the shot set far enough back that subtitles are not blocking lip reading or visual content. Wherever possible it is beneficial for Deaf and hard-of-hearing audiences to clearly see the person speaking.

Further information and resources

For **further details** on captioning including how to identify multiple speakers, different languages and music, follow the links below.

Digital subtitling best practice guidelines by Stagetext:
http://www.stagetext.org/uploads/Digital_Subtitling_Best_Practice_-_final.pdf

Subtitle guidelines by BBC:
http://bbc.github.io/subtitle-guidelines/

Subtitling online content best practice guidelines by Stagetext:
http://www.stagetext.org/training

Audio Description[v]

WCAG 2.1 AA Criteria

Audio description is provided for all pre-recorded video content in synchronized media.

Techniques and requirements

Embedded Audio Description:
Where all key visual onscreen content is provided in existing audio, no additional audio description is necessary i.e.:

- Speakers identify their name and job title (alongside name captions)
- A visual description of objects / location is given (if integral to an understanding of the DM content)
- Contact information, on screen ‘calls to action’ and credits are read out.

Creating a second user selectable Audio Track
When key information is only provided by offering additional Audio Description:

- Audio Description is either synchronized to the visual content in the pauses in dialogue, or over visual only content as demonstrated here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0I0Bl0B_2zA
- If required, an ‘extended audio description’ is offered by creating pauses in the DM to create more time for Audio Description.

Text alternatives
When it is not possible to record and edit an audio description over the film an audio description transcript in text alternative can be provided. This sits alongside the film (on the website or DM host site) for a blind or partially sighted person to read during, after, or instead of the film. This can include contact information, onscreen ‘calls to action’ and credits. (This technique meets the WCAG 2.1 A standard)

For talking head films and films that contain no integral visual information a short description will suffice i.e.: ‘[interviewee name] talks to camera’

Further information and resources

VocalEyes Guidelines for digital accessibility: film
https://vocaleyes.co.uk/services/resources/guidelines-for-digital-accessibility-film/

For more information on how the above meet Web Content Accessibility Guidelines:
https://www.w3.org/WAI/WCAG21/quickref/

Alternative text for Images and Photography (Alt text or Alt Tags)

Alt Text provides a written description of an image, which can be read out using screen reader software, making images accessible to blind and visually impaired people.

Alt Text is not a caption and in most cases, does not appear alongside the image. In HTML this reads as alt="text of image"

Alt Text should be used anywhere you have images online; on the website, in downloadable documents and across social media accounts.

Techniques and requirements

- Keep your description short, ideally no longer than ten words
- Focus on the visual elements of the image. The image or photo should be accompanied by a caption (which includes title, provenance, materials, date) so there is no need to repeat this information
- Use gender neutral language where possible
- Don't include "image of," "picture of," etc. in your alt text. This will be obvious to the user
- For Spacer and decorative images, leave the alt attribute blank, or empty: alt="". If you leave out the Alt attribute entirely the file name will be read out

NB. Facebook and Instagram posts auto generate Alt Text but you may want to review and add clearer descriptions.

The following examples give an overview of some common images we might use in our online communications including images of the Museum, visitors, objects, logos and graphic images.

alt = "The British Museum Logo"

For The British Museum and other funder logos include the alt text alt = “funder name logo”. If the logo has a function, i.e. The British Museum logo returning visitors to the home page, this should be indicated in the alt text.

Example: alt = “Seated visitor reading a comic book at the Manga exhibition”

Never assume someone’s identity (for example gender, ethnicity, age) and only include if relevant and necessary to the understanding of the image.

Example 1: alt = “Front view of The Rosetta Stone”
Example 2: alt = “Grey stone slab with ancient scripts etched onto its surface”

Alt text should add to information already on-screen. If a caption is included alongside an image providing the name of an object, do not repeat this information. Instead utilise the space to provide a more visually descriptive alt text (see Example 2).

Example: alt = “Visitors standing in the Great Court, British Museum”

Example: art = “Hashed eye symbol”

Graphs and infographics
These should have an alt attribute such as ‘graph showing increase in museum visitor numbers between 2016 and 2019’. Graph data should be available in text format as well.

Accessible Word docs, PDFS and PowerPoint Presentations

Formatting

- Use Headings and Document Styles to create a navigable structure.
  This helps people who are accessing the document via a screen reader to identify Titles, Headers and normal text and ensures the information is read in a logical order.
- Alt Tag images. This gives people who are accessing the document via screen reader software a brief visual description of the image.
- Ensure tables are clear, consistent and avoid merged / split cells.
- **Use meaningful hyperlink text.** If you copy and paste the full URL into your document, the screen reader will try to read out each letter. Creating meaningful links is clearer and more concise for people using screen reader software.
  Identify where you want to add a hyperlink, right-click on the line where you want the link and select to **Hyperlink** (or go to **Insert** and then **Hyperlink**). Copy or type the URL into the address or **link to** text box.
  Include a description under **display** or **text to display.** This is the writing that will be visible in your document, and when clicked it will take the reader to the website of the URL.
- Check the accessibility! Here are some tips:

  Word
  Review > Check Acessibility. This checks the accessibility of your document and highlights any issues with images, tables and general layout.

  Review > Read Aloud. This function enables you to check how the document scans when accessed via a screen reader.

  Options > Proofing > Show readability statistics. This provides information on the reading age of your documents, in

a pop up after a spelling check is completed. For reference a Flesch-Kinard level of 8 is is an average reading age of a 13 year old.

PDFs
If a PDF has been made from an Word document which has a clear structure, utilises the Headings and Document Styles and has been through the accessibility check, it will convert into an accessible PDF.

There are ways to edit the accessibility after it has been converted but it is far better to ensure the original source document is accessible.

View > Read Out Loud > Activate Read Out Loud. If you are accessing a PDF via Adobe Reader you can activate the Read Aloud Function. This function enables you to check how the document scans when accessed via a screen reader.

Powerpoint
Review > Check Acessibility. This checks the accessibility of your document and highlights any issues with images, tables and general layout.
Slideshow > Captions and Subtitles. When delivering your powerpoint you can enable automated captions to appear. NB You may need to upgrade your Powerpoint to access this function.

Design

Fonts
NB. The Exhibitions Department and the Interpretation Team have separate guidelines for temporary Exhibitions and Permanent Galleries. The Marketing team have separate guidelines for printed materials. This document does not supersede those.

- Aim for 12 point minimum fontsize. BM Large print guides are set at 22 point.
- Choose sans serif fonts and avoid hanswritten fonts
- There should be generous spacing between lines
- There should be clear definition between columns of text using a margin or line spacing
- There should be clear hierarchy of information
- Text should be justified to the left with a ragged edge right
- Avoid the use of vertical text
- Avoid text all in capitals

- Italics should generally be avaoided except for quotes, to distinguish a foreign word or for poems
- Avoid using colour or images alone to convery meaning

Contrast

The better the contrast, the more legible the text will be.
Avoid:

- Mid-tones
- Text over an image or patterned background

Reversed out text

To avoid a ‘halo’ effect, use off-white (cream or grey) instead of white text on a black or very dark background.

Language and Terminology Guidelines

It is important we can communicate with respect and confidence when discussing Equality and Diversity across the British Museum in person, on-line and in print.

General tips

- Take the lead from the individual or community group and be open to adapt the language you use based on their feedback. If you make a mistake initially, apologise and move on
- Some individuals and community groups have re-appropriated terminology, which have previously had pejorative connotations (for example Crip, Dyke, Queen). It is best to avoid these terms unless you are confident and familiar with the context
- Ensure the language you use is respectful, understandable and is not emotive
- Avoid generalisations and use of the definite article when discussing people for example ‘the Deaf’ and ‘the elderly’
- Never make assumptions about someone’s identity
- Don’t panic! If you are unsure just ask

Disability

The Social Model of Disability is a framework that was developed by disabled people in the UK in the 1980s and 90s. It states that a person is not disabled by an impairment or medical condition but by barriers in society. This informs the language we choose for example we use the terms ‘disabled’ and ‘non-disabled people’, ‘accessible parking’ and ‘accessible toilets’ (rather than disabled toilets / parking).

A note on ‘Deaf and disabled’

Many Deaf people capitalise the D in deaf because they identify culturally as part of the Deaf community. They may not identify as disabled.

At the British Museum we recognise this distinction and use the term ‘Deaf and disabled people’.

LGBTQ

The BM currently uses the acronym LGBTQ, as a shorthand for Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgender and Queer people.

Sometimes this is also represented with LGBTQ+ to include other spectrums of sexuality and gender such as questioning and intersex.

BAME

Black and Asian Minority Ethnic or BAME is widely used in the UK and is typically used in diversity monitoring. It is always best to ask the individual or group how they like to be addressed, in a particular context.

It is important to know the issues with abbreviations and acronyms:

- They imply that BME/BAME individuals are a homogeneous group
- It is generally perceived that these terms refer only to non-white people, which does not consider white minority ethnic groups
- They can be perceived as convenient labels that are placed on minority ethnic groups of people, rather than identities with which people have chosen to identify.

NB: It is important to recognise the potential differences between ethnic origin and national identity.

Document history

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0.2	23 September 2020	FS	Second revision
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Sarah Saunders	LNP	Review / final sign off
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Sian Toogood		Review / sign off

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[i] For more information go to https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG21/

[ii] For more information about the Social Model – see Scope's webpage: http://www.scope.org.uk/about-us/our-brand/social-model-of-disability

[iii] https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/equality-act-2010/what-equality-act

[iv] Captions are equivalent to the audio and ensure that interpretive content is accessible audience, including those who are deaf or hard-of-hearing. These should be provided auditory multimedia content is present.

[v] Audio Description provides a narration describing important visual details that cannot understood from the main soundtrack alone, and are predmenantly used by blind and v impaired people.