



Federal Regulations - Section 508

A Mandatory Reference for ADS Chapter 501

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Federal Regulations—Section 508

http://www.usaid.gov/info_technology/xweb/toolkit/federal_regs.html#508

Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act requires that USAID-funded web sites are accessible to users with disabilities. Please view these mandatory standards here.

In 1998, Congress amended the Rehabilitation Act to require Federal agencies to make their electronic and information technology accessible to people with disabilities. **Section 508** was enacted to eliminate barriers in information technology for people with disabilities. The law applies to all federal agencies when they develop, procure, maintain, or use electronic and information technology. Under Section 508, agencies must give disabled employees and members of the public access to information that is comparable to the access available to others.

Before reading these federal requirements, it may be helpful to read "[Disabilities and internet use](#)".

Listed below are the Section 508 guidelines as they apply to web-based intranet and internet applications. Additionally the *Federal Requirements* contain a section on video and multimedia products (§ 1194.14). The mandates themselves are vague, so we attempted to elaborate on some of the items, please see the italicized sections below each item for additional information.

For additional information on web accessibility, please read [The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 1.0](#). These guidelines, developed by the W3C Web Accessibility Initiative, explain how to make web content accessible to people with disabilities.

Section 1194.22 Web-based intranet and internet information and applications

- a. **A text equivalent for every non-text element shall be provided (e.g., via "alt", "longdesc", or in element content).**

Non-text elements such as photographs, icons and other graphics need to contain a text description. Also, this provision requires that when an image is used to represent page content, the image must have a text description accompanying it that explains the meaning of the image. Commonly, the "ALT" attribute is used to provide a text description of a non-text element. An example HTML source code example is .

- b. **Equivalent alternatives for any multimedia presentation shall be synchronized with the presentation.**

Multimedia files that include videos, audio and flash need to provide alternate text. This can be accomplished by providing synchronized captions. Synchronized captioning allows someone to read the captions or watch the speaker and associate relevant body language with the speech. Text-based transcripts are an acceptable alternative for audio presentations but should not be used as an alternative for multimedia presentations that contain audio and video.

- c. **Web pages shall be designed so that all information conveyed with color is also available without color, for example from context or markup.**

This provision means that when color is used to emphasize important information you should also use some type of non-color indicator, such as an asterisk () or other symbol. Also, when designing a page, remember to use colors that provide good contrast. A good way to test for good contrast is to print a test page on a black and white printer.*

- d. **Documents shall be organized so they are readable without requiring an associated style sheet.**

The safest and most useful form of style sheets is to use "external" style sheets, in which the style rules are set up in a separate file as opposed to using internal style codes. Some users may set up their own user-defined style sheets to be able to view pages and to compensate for their disabilities. Style sheets are typically used for color, indentation and other presentation effects. When a page that utilizes a style sheet is turned off, it should still be readable and understandable. If information is missing or information is confusing, then the style sheet should be updated.

- e. **Redundant text links shall be provided for each active regions of a server-side map.**

You should be able to accomplish most of your image maps on the client-side; however, if a server-side image map is used you must provide separate text links outside of the server-side image map that allows the same access to the image map hotspots.

- f. **Client-side image maps shall be provided instead of server-side image maps except where the regions cannot be defined with an available geometric shape.**

This provision suggests that you should not use a server-side image map if a client side image map will suffice. Also, remember to use the "alt" attribute to describe all non-text elements.

- g. **Row and column headers shall be identified for data tables.**

Data tables must have the column and row headers properly identified, using the <th> tag

- h. **Markup shall be used to associate data cells and header cells for data tables that have two or more logical levels of row or column headers.**

Table cells should be associated with the appropriate headers, i.e., with the use of "scope" or "id" tag. See [Creating Accessible tables](#) for more information

- i. **Frames shall be titled with text that facilitates frame identification and navigation.**

***Note:** USAID has an existing policy against the use of frames which subsumes this requirement.*

- j. **Pages shall be designed to avoid causing the screen to flicker with a frequency greater than 2 Hz and lower than 55 Hz.**

Some graphics or video presentations can flicker at very high rates (an example may be a banner ad that is trying to get your attention) and can induce optical seizures in some individuals with photosensitive epilepsy.

- k. **A text-only page, with equivalent information or functionality, shall be provided to make a web site comply with the provisions of this part, when compliance *cannot* be accomplished in any other way. The content of the text-only page shall be updated whenever the primary page changes.**

If, for some reason, you cannot make your site content accessible, you must provide a text-only version. The text-only version should be the functional equivalent of the "main" version and should be updated with the "main" version. This means you must provide text equivalents for any component that is not accessible in the "main" site.

- l. **When pages utilize scripting languages to display content, or to create interface elements, the information provided by the script shall be identified with functional text that can be read by assistive technology.**

When scripts, such as javascript, are used on a page it must be able to be detected by a browser with assistive technology. Providing keyboard accessibility is a good measure of this. Also, information within the scripts should be text-based, if they are not, then a text alternative should be supplied.

- m. **When a web page requires that an applet, plug-in or other application be present on the client system to interpret page content, the page must provide a link to a plug-in or applet that complies with §1194.21(a) through (l).**

The Adobe Acrobat reader is an example of a typical plug-in. If you provide PDF files on your site, then you must provide a link so that the Acrobat Reader can be downloaded.

Note: *USAID has an existing policy against the use of applets which partially subsume this requirement. Content providers for the USAID site should provide links to Adobe Reader at <http://www.adobe.com/readstep.html> on all pages that have links to PDF files. According to the comments about this section of the regulations, "This provision places a responsibility on the web page author to know that a compliant application exists, before requiring a plug-in." In addition, content providers should provide descriptive text and file size of any downloadable documents that indicates the format of the document and approximate download time. This will allow the user to ensure that it is a format type they will be able to open once downloaded and that the download will not tie-up their machine for an unacceptable period of time.*

- n. **When electronic forms are designed to be completed on-line, the form shall allow people using assistive technology to access the information, field elements, and functionality required for completion and submission of the form, including all directions and cues**

Note: *In conjunction with this requirement, USAID will start to require that when a web page contains dropdown boxes, radio buttons, checkboxes or similar functionality coded in HTML, the author of the page provide the following text alerting the user of those features. It has been found that various screen readers and browsers interpret these features differently. In order to alert the user that these features are on the page, the following text should be provided:*

"This page contains [dropdown boxes, radio buttons, checkboxes] which may be ignored by some forms of web browsing technology. In these cases, this information can be accessed by using the keyboard instead of the mouse (i.e.: Tab key, Enter key, Arrow keys, Spacebar, etc.)."

USAID Developers should not use select options that will automatically send a user to a page upon selection. Provide the user with a "submit" button that will allow them to confirm a selection once made.

- o. **A method shall be provided that permits users to skip repetitive navigation links.**

The USAID site currently provides a method to skip the top navigation bar using white text above the links. Content providers should consider using a second option to skip redundant or repetitive left-hand navigation that will allow users to skip over the links in the left-hand navigation to the content of the page on the right. See "[Skipping Repetitive Navigation](#)" for more information.

- p. **When a timed response is required, the user shall be alerted and given sufficient time to indicate more time is required.**

