Tip Jar for PHSA web & POD editors

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Digital accessibility is crucial since we rely on the web to do day-to-day life activities. Check out these tips on how to make your content more accessible for anyone visually impaired, particularly for those that rely on screen readers.

Screen readers explained

A screen reader is a piece of assistive technology used by those who have difficulties seeing, accessing and interacting with digital content. This tool converts text on a webpage into audio, allowing visually impaired users to listen to the text or read the output through a Braille display.

Click on the image below to watch a quick tutorial on how a screen reader works.

As a web editor, it is important to optimize your content for screen reader users. By creating content designed with accessibility in mind, you can ensure that screen readers work effectively for all users, regardless of their level of visual impairment.

Small changes can go a long way! These resources can help guide you:

Plain language:

- Editor Hub: Plain language tips and examples
- Tip Jar: Top misspellings, acronyms and abbreviations

Text formatting:

- Editor Hub: Write for the web
- Tip Jar: The dos and don'ts of inputting text

Page layout:

- Editor Hub: Pages
- Tip Jar: Webpage layouts

Meaningful link text

Screen readers can detect code that identifies a hyperlink. Although it may be tempting to use phrases such as "click here" or "read more", they are not descriptive and provide little to no context for the user.

Here are some examples of good link text:

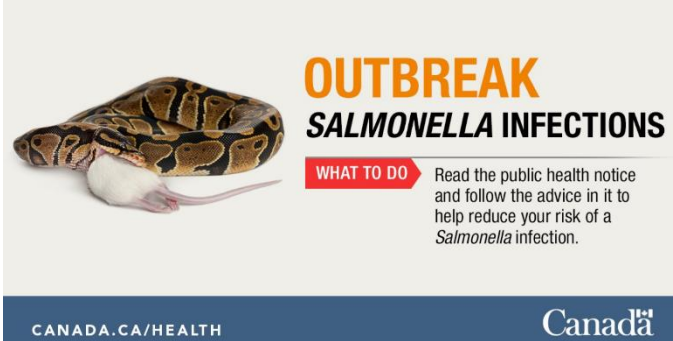| Good link text	Reason
Learn more about our accessibility services.	This link text accurately describes the purpose of the link and provides useful information to the user to help them decide whether they want to navigate to the link or not.
Download this brochure for more information on our programs.	This link text provides specific information about the content of the linked page or document, and how you can use it.
Contact us to schedule an appointment.	This link text describes the action the user can take by clicking the link.

Why alt text matters

As well as reading text, screen readers can convert images and other non-text elements. This is where alternative (alt) text comes in, by using text to describe the image so that screen reader users can better understand all components on the page.

The purpose of alt text is to provide alternative information about an image that can be read by a screen reader, or displayed if the image cannot be loaded. Without alt text, a screen reader may simply announce the filename or the text of the broken image link, which is not helpful for the user.

Here are some best practices for writing alt text:

1. **Be descriptive.** Alt text should accurately describe the content of the image and convey its purpose. You may want to describe the people, objects, location or emotional tone.
2. **Keep it concise.** Avoid using overly long descriptions that could be difficult to follow. Aim for a brief, concise description that provides the most important information about the image.
3. **Avoid using "image of" or "picture of".** This is redundant as the screen reader will automatically announce it as an image and it does not provide any additional information about the image.

Check out these examples of helpful or weak alt text:

Image	Weak alt text	Helpful alt text
Source: Getty Images	Photo of someone holding a stethoscope	A doctor with their arms crossed while holding a red stethoscope
Source: Getty Images	A child getting a vaccine	A baby smiling as they're being held by their mom while a doctor gives them a vaccine.
Source: Health Canada	Outbreak on salmonella infections and what to do.	A snake eating a rodent. Text: Outbreak Salmonella Infections. What to do: Read the public health notice and follow the advice in it to help reduce your risk of a Salmonella infection.

Your action

Before publishing your web pages, use our guidelines to write meaningful text and alt text to better optimize your content for screen reader users.

Created by the Web Strategy Team (PHSA Communications)

No longer a POD or web editor? Questions or comments? Please email webhelp@phsa.ca.

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