SCDE Accessibility Guidelines

Pursuant to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973;
the Americans with Disabilities Act, 1990;
the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), 1997; and
Section 255 of the Telecommunications Act of 1996

Updated June 2025

Ellen E. Weaver
State Superintendent of Education

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Introduction

The Importance of Accessibility

Communicating information about initiatives at the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) is extremely important. As a department of South Carolina's state government, the SCDE must meet accessibility guidelines. It is a compliance issue.

Accessibility is federal law. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Sections 504 and 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and Section 255 of the Telecommunications Act all describe federal and state-level accessibility laws where people are given supports to make equal access possible. The ***usability.gov*** (2017) website makes the connection between compliance and the value of making accessibility a priority.

Requirements/ Legislative Mandate

Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 29 U.S.C. § 794d, requires agencies that receive federal funding to ensure all users, regardless of disability status, can access digital information technology that it develops, procures, maintains, or uses, unless certain exceptions apply. This includes information provided through websites, presentations, emails, etc. When information technology is 508 compliant, it is accessible to all users, and the ease of access is comparable to those who are not individuals with disabilities. This means the information is presented in a manner that is compatible with assistive technology, such as screen readers.

Section 508 standards address access for people with disabilities. The standards contain criteria to cover software applications and operating systems, web-based information and applications, computers, telecommunications products, video and multi-media, and self-contained closed products. In other words, if digital information is available and accessible to persons without a disability, it must also be made comparably accessible to persons with disabilities.

The SCDE Accessibility Statement

The SCDE is committed to making its digital and information technologies accessible to individuals with disabilities by meeting or exceeding the requirements of Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act (29 U.S.C. §794d). Section 508 is a federal law that requires agencies to provide individuals with disabilities equal access to digital information and data comparable to those who do not have disabilities unless an undue burden would be imposed on the agency.

The SCDE Accessibility Guidelines

This document provides guidance based on best practices and addresses the specific concerns that SCDE employees may need to know about in creating memoranda, letters, webpages, web content, videos, standards, guidelines, and emails in their daily work. Please refer to these guidelines for detailed information about meeting agency accessibility requirements.

There is an SCDE Micro-credential, *Make Documents Accessible*, and an associated screencast that can help you learn the basic requirements for creating accessible documents and presentations.

Types of Accommodations

As we work to make our information accessible, there are many categories to consider. The following categories are discussed in greater detail online at **webaim.org** (2023):

> *Visual disabilities* include colorblindness, presbyopia and cataracts, macular degeneration, and blindness. They may struggle with color, contrast, font, and font size and benefit from accessibility features like Zoom, color contrast software, etc.

> *Auditory disabilities,* speech*,* and/or cognitive disorders may cause people to struggle with unclear, unnatural, or lengthy word choices. These learners may benefit from text to speech, highlighters, and making sure that the end user has enough time to complete tasks.

> *Motor disabilities* include things like muscular dystrophy, spinal cord injury, or persons with mobility issues that require the aid of a cane or in a wheelchair. They may be unable to use a mouse, have slow response time, and/or limited fine motor control.

> *Cognitive Disabilities* include neurological disorders*,* like cerebral palsy, epilepsy, Parkinson's disease, and ALS – also learning disabilities and traumatic brain injuries. They may cause affected persons to experience difficulty with small text or complex text, too many steps in a series of actions, or too many clicks to get to a piece of information.

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.1

The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.1 (WCAG 2.1), published by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C), build on and extend WCAG 2.0, which are the most widely known and adopted web accessibility standards. They explain, in broad terms, how to make web content more accessible to people with disabilities. When a website meets WCAG 2.1, users with disabilities will generally have access to the same functionality and information as the users without disabilities (LevelAccess.com, 2021).

See [Appendix A](#) for more information, and remember, if the end user cannot access your content, then you have not communicated.

The SCDE Accessibility Standard

In these guidelines, a document is defined as a piece of written or verbal material that provides information. Common SCDE documents include letters, memoranda, reports, guidelines, newsletters, videos, and presentations.

Agency staff primarily use Microsoft Office applications and Adobe Acrobat Pro. These applications have a built-in accessibility checker function that will identify accessibility issues; therefore all agency documents must meet the agency's minimum standard of accessibility which is:

- *ALL* documents must be checked for accessibility using built-in accessibility checker tools. (Adobe Acrobat Pro, Excel, Outlook, PowerPoint, and Word). Any accessibility issues identified need to be addressed.

- Creating webpages to provide content on the agency website is preferred over content provided as links to PDF documents.

- Closed captions are required for any recording shared outside the agency or posted on the agency website. (Use the *Communications Request Form* on the P drive.)

- All registration forms need to ask if participants need accommodations to attend. (See *Procedure for Ensuring Accessibility of a Meeting* if you need assistance with providing accommodations.)

- Turn on Live Captions in synchronous online meetings.

- Post any non-accessible, public-facing document that has been provided by an outside vendor (e.g., test manual or proprietary website) with a separate, accessible version of the document as a printable version or a viewable link. *If this happens the situation must be carefully considered, and attempts made to involve the vendor in making the content accessible.*

- All technology purchases must go through the Chief Information Office.

- The Office of Procurement has language to be used in technology contracts that recommends requesting an accessibility compliance report (ACR). *The purpose of ACRs is to describe all the accessibility features being requested of a vendor prior to a contract being issued and are intended to ensure that the products used by the SCDE meet our accessibility standard.* For more information on ACRs, see the SCDE Accessibility Policy 301.3

- All content produced or used by the SCDE (text-only, verbal, visual, and/or recorded) is considered public record under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). Efforts should be made to ensure accessibility of documents that may only be intended for use within the agency since there is the likelihood that they will be shared publicly and outside the agency.

Procedures for Ensuring Accessibility

Ensuring Accessible Face to Face Meetings

Knowing your purpose and your audience will inform your meeting setup. Meeting hosts should plan all meetings with accessibility needs in mind.

- Every registration form or invitation should include the following question,

  "Do you need any of the following accommodations to attend this SCDE meeting? ASL interpreter, Braille materials, large format, captions, other If so, please contact [organizer's name here] at least a week in advance so that arrangements can be made."

- Review input from attendees. If you do not need to make any accommodations, proceed with planning your meeting.

- If accommodations are requested, contact the SCDE ADA Coordinator in Human Resources for help in setting up the requested accommodations.

Ensuring Accessible Virtual Meetings

SCDE staff all have access to Microsoft Teams. You can easily extract any files shared in the meeting after it is over and meeting organizers can set the Meeting options to record then easily extract an attendance roster, recording and transcript after the meeting.

- Refer to [Appendix C](#) for guidance on captions. If you need help with using Microsoft Teams, send an email request to TechnicalTraining@ed.sc.gov

- Every registration form or invitation should ask,
  "Do you need any of the following accommodations to attend this SCDE meeting? ASL interpreter, Braille materials, large format, captions, other If so, please contact [organizer's name here] at least a week in advance so that arrangements can be made."

- Review input. If you do not need to make any accommodations, proceed with planning your meeting. If you do need accommodations, contact the SCDE ADA Coordinator in Human Resources.

- Create a written script to ensure that you cover your topic completely.

- Speak clearly and not too quickly in plain English. Most online technology creates captions from your spoken words and machines do not understand jargon or acronyms.

- You are required to provide captions for any content posted or shared online.

Creating Accessible Print Materials

All staff are expected to follow Agency guidelines for accessibility and style when creating agency materials. When creating text-documents, staff members must:

- SCDE branding guidelines and current templates are available in the [Branding section of the agency Intranet.](#)

  o *Do not* cut and paste from old documents – instead, copy and paste as text only, then apply formatting using the Microsoft Ribbon.

- Review or have the document reviewed using the appropriate SCDE accessibility checklist.

- Run the originating program's accessibility checker and correct identified accessibility issues.

- Route your document in the Agency Routing System (ART) if approvals are needed.

  o Make any ART changes in the source application (Word, Excel, PowerPoint), check accessibility once more, and save the final version in ART.

- **IF CONVERTING TO PDF, correct errors in the source program first then convert to PDF.**

  o *Do not convert to PDF unless you have Adobe Acrobat Pro* and know how to correct accessibility violations. Your office Web Content Specialist can assist if needed or submit a ticket to eSupport@ed.sc.gov

Creating Accessible Online Content

Most documents on our ed.sc.gov website are posted in the PDF format. Content Creators should follow this process to create accessible online written content:

- Download [the correct, most current SCDE template from the agency Intranet](#)and create the content.

  o *Do not* cut and paste from old documents – instead, copy and paste as text only, then apply formatting using the Microsoft Ribbon.

- Review or have the document reviewed using the appropriate SCDE accessibility checklist.

- Run the originating program's accessibility checker and address any issues listed in the Inspection Results.

- Route your document in the Agency Routing System (ART) if approvals are needed.

  o Make any ART changes in the source application (Word, Excel, PowerPoint), check accessibility once more, and save the final version in ART.

- Send to your office Web Content Editor or submit an eTicket request to post the content to the agency website.

To create accessible audiovisual content:

- Have privacy and security issues been addressed? There should be no personally identifiable information (PII) in content posted on the public website.

- Do you need assistance with editing a video? Submit an eSupport ticket.

- Prior to publication, ensure that any verbal component is captioned. The SCDE Captioning Process for Videos is described in [Appendix C](#).

The SCDE Web Content Approval Process

The SCDE produces a significant amount of public information. While much of this content is specifically created for the agency's website, a substantial portion is also archived there. Since the content may eventually be published online, all staff are expected to understand and adhere to fundamental accessibility guidelines.

Staff who create content for the agency website should create the content with accessibility in mind so that anyone who would like to read it may do so. Content should be well written, free from spelling and grammatical errors, and checked for accessibility using the built-in accessibility checker tools that are available in most Microsoft 365 applications (Word, PowerPoint, Excel, etc.).

Documents posted to the agency website are in PDF format to ensure that they retain the original design and for ease of access across devices. Accessible documents can be converted to PDF for posting to the website if the staff member has an Adobe Acrobat Pro license. The licensed version also provides an Acrobat Accessibility Checker that allows the author to make changes to ensure PDF accessibility.

If office staff need assistance in making these changes, they may request assistance by submitting a ticket via eSupport.

SCDE Accessibility Resources

The agency has provided the following agency resources to staff to support the creation of accessible content. For detailed information see the [Resources page](#) listed at the end of this document.

Agency Templates

SCDE branding guidelines and current templates are available in the [Branding section of the agency Intranet.](#) This is the current list of available templates:

- PowerPoint slidedeck (dark version or light version)
- Microsoft Teams background (white or blue)
- SCDE Certificate (Word or PDF format, **for print only, not online**)
- Letter template
- Memorandum template
- Report template (portrait or landscape orientation)
- Operating Manual template
- Instruction Document template (portrait or landscape version)
- Attendee List (**for print only, not online)**
- Event Sign (**for print only, not online)**
- Name Tent (single or double sided)
- Name Tag
- Return Address Labels (30 per sheet)
- Shipping Labels (30 or 10 per sheet)

Agency templates work best if you turn on the paragraph formatting marks so that you can observe how the pages of your document are laid out. Click the ¶ symbol on the Home tab> Paragraph section to see all formatting marks.

Agency Accessibility Checklists

Agency Checklists are compiled from a variety of reliable sources in an effort to be as thorough, concise, yet basic as possible. They are available in the [Training section of the Agency Intranet.](#) There are accessibility checklists of Microsoft Word, Microsoft Excel, Microsoft PowerPoint, and Adobe Acrobat PDF.

Accessibility Checkers in Agency-Supported Software

Before sharing content, [use the built-in Accessibility Checkers](#) to ensure content is easy for people of all abilities to access. They exist in Microsoft 365 and desktop applications of Word, Excel, Outlook, OneNote, and PowerPoint, will identify most accessibility issues, and offer suggestions on how to resolve any identified issue. Just look for the CHECK ACCESSIBILITY button in the **Review tab** on the **Microsoft Ribbon**.

There are some issues that an accessibility checker is not able to detect. You will always need to review reading order and color contrast in order to determine their appropriateness as situations vary. To learn more, go to Accessibility Checker limitations.

Captions for Video or Recorded Meetings

Many offices host web meetings that are informational in nature and may be of interest to a wider audience. If you plan to post a recorded meeting, then it must be captioned. Audio description is important if you are captioning content with images and/or sound and is also useful if you have multiple speakers in a conversational setting. To prepare a recording for posting on the website, please follow the process in Appendix C.

Designated Personnel to Assist with Accessibility Questions

- **For onsite meeting resources, The SCDE ADA Coordinator**
  Title II of the ADA requires public entities with more than 50 employees to designate at least one employee to coordinate ADA compliance. The ADA Coordinator is responsible for coordinating agency efforts to comply with Title II and investigating any complaints of violations. Their name, building address, and phone number are required to be provided to interested persons. The SCDE ADA Coordinator is Lisa McCloud, Director of Human Resources, 803-734-8511.

- **For school related issues:**
  The Office of Special Education Services (OSES) uses data-based decision making, quality instruction using evidence-based practices (EBPs), family and community engagement, and fidelity of implementation. The goal is to assist districts in developing the infrastructure, capacity, and sustainability needed to provide students with disabilities equitable access and opportunity to meet the profile of the South Carolina graduate (world-class knowledge, world-class skills, and life and career characteristics).

  OSES provides consistent, collaborative, proactive direction and support focused in the areas of academics, social emotional learning, early childhood development, and post-secondary transition. The OSES Ombudsman handles any complaints related to school situations (lcox@ed.sc.gov)

- **For technical assistance with agency supported technologies:**
  The Information Technology Office has dedicated staff to support SCDE employees in creating accessible digital documents and web content. The agency intranet has the latest information about branding, templates, and digital accessibility. Any questions may be directed to TechnicalTraining@ed.sc.gov or via an eSupport ticket.

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Web accessibility depends not only on accessible content but also on accessible Web browsers and other user agents.
- Essential Components of Web Accessibility
- User Agent Accessibility Guidelines (UAAG) Overview

Authoring tools also have an important role in Web accessibility:
- Authoring Tool Accessibility Guidelines (ATAG) Overview

Appendix A: Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.1

The *Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1* define how to make Web content more accessible to people with disabilities. Although these guidelines cover a wide range of issues, they are not able to address the needs of people with all types, degrees, and combinations of disability, but they do make Web content more usable by older individuals with changing abilities due to aging, and often improve usability in general.

WCAG 2.1 was developed using the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) process in cooperation with individuals and organizations around the world, with a goal of providing a shared standard for Web content accessibility that meets the needs of individuals, organizations, and governments internationally. WCAG 2.1 builds on WCAG 2.0 and is designed to apply broadly to different Web technologies now and in the future, and to be testable with a combination of automated testing and human evaluation. It has thirteen accessibility guidelines organized under four principles of accessible design:

- **Perceivable:** Able to be seen by a person with visual impairments (through a screen reader, screen magnifier, or other assistive technology), or heard by a person who is hard of hearing or deaf (through captions, written transcript, etc.).

- **Operable:** The technology can be operated by a user with a disability, for example, a website can be navigable by keyboard shortcuts for someone unable to use a mouse.

- **Understandable:** The technology can be operated by users with varying cognitive abilities.

- **Robust:** The technology is compatible with current assistive technology and is prepared to upgrade for future iterations of AT.

There are testable WCAG 2.1 success criteria listed under each principle and guideline. that allow us to test our level of compliance – our goal is level AA – and can help when we are writing design specifications, purchases, regulations, and contractual agreements. Guidance about meeting these the success criteria in specific technologies, and general information about interpreting the success criteria, is provided online by W3.org in their Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) Overview.

Web Content specialists in each agency office are responsible to developing the content for their area of interest and expertise. Read about constructing a POUR website on WebAIM.org.

Appendix B: The Adobe Acrobat Pro Accessibility Checker

Create and Verify PDF Accessibility with Adobe Acrobat Pro

1. Choose **Tools** > **Accessibility**. The Accessibility toolset is displayed in the secondary toolbar.

2. In the secondary toolbar, click **Full Check/Accessibility Check**. The Accessibility Checker Options dialog box is displayed.

3. In the **Report Options** section, select options for how you want to view the results. You can save the results as an HTML file on your system or attach the results file to the document itself.

4. Select a page range if you prefer to check individual pages of a document. When you have a large document, running a full check/accessibility check one page at a time can be more efficient.

5. Select one or more of the **Checking Options**.

6. Click **Start Checking**. The results are displayed in the **Accessibility Checker** panel on the left, which also has helpful links and hints for repairing issues. If you created a report in step 2, the results are available in the selected folder.

7. Because the **Full Check/Accessibility Check** feature cannot distinguish between essential and nonessential content types, some issues it reports don't affect readability. Review all to determine which ones require correction.

   Logical Reading Order and **Color Contrast** always require a manual ("human") check. Unless you are experienced in correcting for accessibility requirements it is recommended that you use another tool to ensure that those requirements are met.
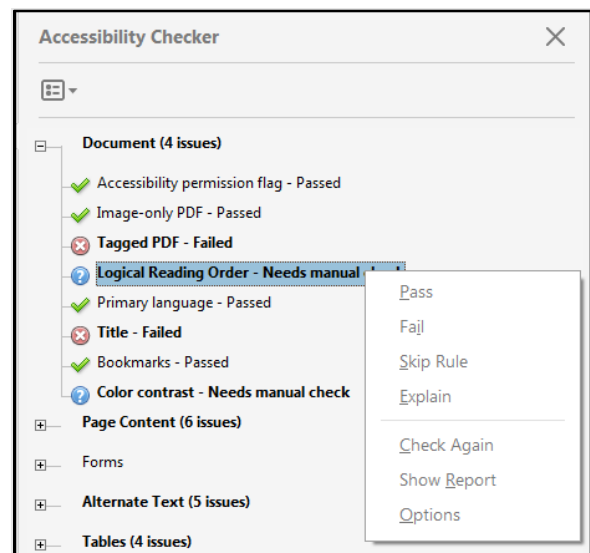
8. The report displays a status for each rule checked:

- **Passed**: The item is accessible.
- **Skipped By User**: Rule was not checked because it wasn't selected in the Accessibility Checker Options dialog box.
- **Needs Manual Check**: The Full Check/Accessibility Check feature couldn't check the item automatically. Verify the item manually.
- **Failed**: The item didn't pass the accessibility check.

In addition to **Full Check/Accessibility Check**, Acrobat provides other methods to check PDF accessibility:

- Use [Reflow view](#) to quickly check the reading order.
- Use [Read Out Loud](#) to experience the document as readers who use the text-to-speech conversion tool experience it.
- Save the document as accessible text and then read the saved text file in a word-processing application. This exercise enables you to emulate the end-user experience of readers who use a braille printer to read the document.
- Use the [Reading Order tool](#), Order, Tags, and Content panels to examine the structure, reading order, and contents of a PDF.

How to Fix Accessibility Issues in Acrobat Pro

To fix a failed check after running **Full Check/Accessibility Check**, right-click (Windows) or Ctrl-click (Mac OS) the item in the **Accessibility Checker** panel. Then choose:

Fix: Acrobat either fixes the item automatically or displays a dialog box prompting you to fix the item manually.

Skip Rule: Deselects this option in the **Accessibility Checker Options** dialog box for future checks of this document and changes the item status to **Skipped**.

Explain: Opens the online **Help** where you can get more details about the accessibility issue.

Check Again: Runs the checker again on all items. Choose this option after modifying one or more items.

Show Report: Displays a report with links to tips on how to repair failed checks.

Options: Opens the **Accessibility Checker Options** dialog box, so you can select which checks are performed.

Appendix C: The SCDE Captioning Process for Videos

SCDE Video Captioning Process
Communications Office

SCDE accessibility guidelines state that all recorded items posted to the SCDE website or shared from the agency must be accessible. Federal law requires this compliance, and it is safest to assume that anything sent out may be shared with a wider audience than one might intend. Staff can accomplish this by ensuring that all recordings are captioned, and by including an associated script or transcript.

Videos that need captions before external sharing or posting on the agency website should be sent to the Office of Communications using the **Office of Communications Project Request form**. Once the form has been completed, a member of the Communications Office will contact the form completer to initiative the transfer of the recording file. In order to ensure videos are captioned in a timely manner, the Communications Office requests that the aforementioned form and file transfer is completed no less than 72 hours prior to the date the final captioned video is needed. Once the video has been captioned, requesters will receive a YouTube video link that can be linked, shared, and/or embedded.

Steps to Have Your Recording Captioned

1. Complete the Office of Communications Project Request form at least 72 hours prior to needed completion date.

2. Office of Communications staff will contact the requester by email once form has been completed to initiate the transfer of the video recording file.

3. Once file has been received, Communications Office staff will caption the file and upload to YouTube. Requester will be sent a YouTube link that can be linked, shared, and/or embedded.

If you have any other questions or concerns, please contact the Communications Office staff below.

Contact
Derek Phillips, Public Information Officer
dphillips@ed.sc.gov , (803)734-0782