



STM Guidelines: access for people with print disabilities

Introduction

Roughly 10% of people in the developed world, and 15% of people in developing countries, have a print disability. By a person with a print disability we mean any reader who is blind, whose vision cannot be improved sufficiently by the use of corrective lenses, who is unable to hold or manipulate a publication, who is unable to focus or move the eyes, or who is dyslexic. In addition there are a range of disabilities that can impact the way people access, navigate, read, and use electronic publications.

There are good commercial, ethical, and legal reasons for publishers to increase the accessibility of all their publications whether print or digital.

The Challenge

Every product and service could be more accessible, and a good starting point is to do an accessibility and usability audit. These can be done in-house but might usefully be commissioned from an organisation with expertise in supporting people with print disabilities. Obtaining a confidential warts-and-all assessment is the best way to understand the scale of the challenge, and also to get some practical advice about how to get started.

Broadly stated your goal as a publisher is to find ways to ensure that each of your publications is available in all of the following formats:

- Braille
- Large print
- Unabridged audio (for example text-to-speech or synthetic audio)
- Digital formats where the user can change the font size/style/colour and the line spacing while listening to the text being read aloud by a synthetic voice

Ensure that the text is well-structured so it can be easily navigated by people who cannot see visual clues such as chapter headings and paragraph breaks. Provide descriptions of images, tables, and other embedded objects to aid those who cannot see.

Here are some top tips to get you started...

1. **Listen to your customers** - ensure you are able to obtain feedback from disabled readers who may be experiencing difficulties. For web-based publications establish usability testing or a feedback mechanism whereby users with disabilities can give feedback about website challenges. Liaise with the support services within libraries and universities as these experts will understand how to meet the needs of their disabled students. For example, the JISC

TechDis service has recently published accessibility guidance¹ for academic e-books which highlights that e-book content is generally accessible but the software services around the content can throw up challenges to disabled users when they log on, search, navigate, access, or export the e-book content.

2. **Understand and follow industry accepted accessibility guidelines** – there are a wide array of accessibility guidelines for websites, and most important of these are from the World Wide Web Consortium at <http://www.w3.org/WAI/guid-tech.html>. We recommend that every publishing company strive to gain at least an AA rating for web-based products and services. Accessibility guidelines are beginning to emerge for other types of publications. [EDiTEUR](#) is our industry's international standards body, and it has recently received a 3-year grant to develop good practice guidelines for publishers. Watch its website for developments. Decide who will be responsible for implementing these guidelines within your business.
3. **Assign staff to be accountable for supporting accessibility** – It may not be feasible to make all of your products fully accessible today, so it is essential to identify at least one member of staff who can champion the issue internally, drive changes forward, and is empowered to resolve requests from those living with, or supporting people living with, disabilities. The Publishers Association has a terrific guide to meeting permissions requests from people with print disabilities (see <http://www.publishers.org.uk/en/home/accessibility/>).
4. **Work in Partnership** – Help is at hand: you do not have to try and do everything yourself. Seek out partners, for example a national organisation supporting the blind may be best placed to produce Braille versions of your titles. There are also a wide array of commercial and not-for-profit intermediaries and an evolving network of 'Trusted Intermediaries' accredited by publishing organisations to work together internationally to efficiently solve access problems for people with print disabilities. These organisations can be discovered by scanning the pages of the Publisher Accessibility Newsletter (http://publisherscontentforum.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=21&Itemid=17).
5. **Tell Others** – Publishers are terrific at promoting their books and journals, but are rather modest and sometimes forget to tell others about all the good work they themselves do. It is especially important to broadcast the accessibility features in your products and services (see <http://www.guardian.co.uk/help/accessibility> for an example 'accessibility statement' on a newspaper publishers website). Also be sure to let the world know who and how to contact your point person for accessibility inquiries. You can do this by registering their details in the Publisher Lookup service (<http://www.publisherlookup.org.uk/>). Last but not least, explain on your website what accessibility is, why it is important to your company and customers, and what your company does to provide it.

¹ *Towards Accessible e-Book Platforms : Good Practice Guidance on Future Developments* ([text only version](#), [PDF \(print only\) version](#), and the [full report](#)). See http://www.techdis.ac.uk/index.php?p=9_33_3 for an overview of the underpinning research.