

Quick Tips :: Choosing Accessible Software

When considering software for delivery of course content, it is important to ask questions related to accessibility. Many companies offer similar products and it is important to purchase from the company that has taken accessibility into account. Typically when asked about product accessibility, a company will answer yes; however, accessibility is broadly defined and it may be helpful to ask specific questions. The following are twenty-nine questions on accessibility offered through the Department of Justice, Section 508 website.

KEYBOARD ACCESS

1. Does the software provide keyboard equivalents for all mouse actions, including buttons, scroll windows, text entry fields, and pop-up windows?
2. Does the program provide clear and precise instructions for use of all keyboard functions as part of the user documentation?
3. Are instructions regarding keyboard use widely available for all users in your component?
4. Does the software have a logical tabbing order among fields, text boxes, and focal points?
5. When navigating screens and dialog boxes using the keyboard, does the focus follow a logical tabbing order?
6. Is there a well-defined focal point that moves with keyboard navigation? (e.g., can you use the arrow keys to navigate through a list followed by pressing the ENTER key or space bar to select the desired item)?
7. Are shortcut keys provided for all pull-down menus?
8. Does the software support existing accessibility features built into the operating system (e.g., sticky keys, slow keys, repeat keys in Apple Mac OS or Microsoft?)

TIMING

9. If timed responses are present, does the software allow the user to modify the timing parameters of any required timed responses?

SCREEN ELEMENTS

10. Are all descriptions or labels for fields positioned immediately to the left or directly above the control, and do they end in a colon, so that it is easy for screen reading software to associate the labels with the corresponding fields?
11. Does every window, object, and control have a clearly named label?
12. Does the software application use standard controls rather than owner-drawn or custom controls?

ICONS

13. Does the software have a user selectable option to display text on icons, i.e., text only icons or bubble help?
14. Is the use of icons consistent throughout the application?
15. Are menus with text equivalents provided for all icon functions or icon selections on menu, tool, and format bars?

SOUNDS

16. If there are audio alerts, are visual cues also provided? (Note: Most operating systems handle this issue in the client/server environment; the question is most relevant in a dumb terminal environment.)
17. Does the software support the "show sounds" feature where it is built into the operating system?
18. Can the user disable or adjust sound volume?
19. If information is provided in an audio format, is it also capable of being displayed by the user in a visual format?

DISPLAY

20. Is the software application free of patterned backgrounds used behind text or important graphics?
21. Can a user override default fonts for printing and text displays?
22. Can a user adjust or disable flashing, rotating, or moving displays?

COLOR

23. Does the software ensure that color-coding is never used as the only means of conveying information or indicating an action?
24. Does the application support user-defined color settings system-wide?
25. Is highlighting also viewable with inverted colors?
26. If the software application draws its own screen elements, does it pick up the size settings that the user has selected in the Control Panel?

DOCUMENTATION

27. Are all manuals and documentation provided in electronic format as well as ASCII text files, including text descriptions of any charts, graphs, pictures, or graphics of any nature?
28. Can a user choose to have any report generated by the software made available in a "print to ASCII file" format?

TRAINING

29. Is special training provided for users with disabilities that will enable them to become familiar with the software and learn how to use it in conjunction with assistive technology provided as an accommodation?