Designing Inclusive Experiences

An audit aimed at building more accessible, inclusive, and equitable products

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Contents

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Section 1
Introduction

Why design inclusive experiences?

It's good for **all** users

Although this audit has specific user needs in mind with each question, designing inclusive experiences helps all users by presenting content in a more meaningful and simple way.

It's good for business

The more users that can effectively and easily use a product, the bigger the potential user base.

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It's not always clear where to start

We might set an intention to make sure our designs are as usable as possible, but in practice it's really hard to slow down with tight deadlines and many aspects of equity to consider.

Let's start with specific accessibility concerns.

By focusing on users with diverse abilities and barriers, we can ask questions that allow us to check our design work.

Visual
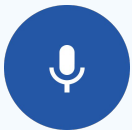
Examples: colorblindness, blindness, low vision

Auditory

Examples: hard of hearing, deafness, watching videos in a loud place

Physical

Examples: reduced dexterity, limb difference, situational physical limitations

Speech

Examples: communication disorders, stuttering

Cognitive

Examples: autism spectrum, anxiety, limited attention

This audit is not exhaustive

It's important to remember that the list of questions in this audit are not exhaustive. People are complex and have intersectional identities that may not be addressed on the first pass.
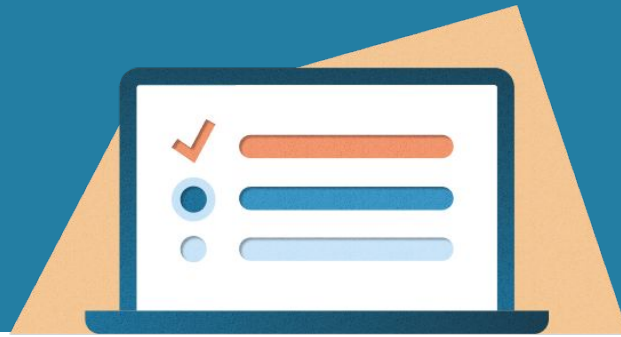
This audit is also focused on design and content rather than implementation to catch issues as early in the process as possible.

Like our understanding of human centered design, this list is meant to grow as we learn more.

Section 2
WCAG standards

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines

Many organizations have already committed to WCAG 2.1 AA compliance as part of their country's legal requirements.

These guidelines can be overwhelming and hard to understand, especially when designing quickly. Let's break it down into a checklist.

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Is the page meaningful...

❏   **...without color?**

Designing with people who are **colorblind** in mind.

Green alone might not mean go. Different types of colorblindness prevent [3 million or 4.5% of people](#) from using colors as key indicators for a message.

❏   **...without images?**

Designing with **users of screen readers** and people with **low vision** in mind.

If you want to use images that convey meaning, make sure they have parsable text alternatives or captions.

❏   **...without sound?**

Designing with people who are **deaf** or **hard of hearing** in mind.

Provide closed captioning or transcripts for audio clips or video so audio is required to understand the content. Closed captioning for both audio and video content is required for users who are deafblind.

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Does a user know when they're making a mistake…

❏ **…without visuals?**

Designing with people with **low vision** and **users of screen readers** in mind.

Text should accompany visual error indicators like color or images.

❏ **…without animation?**

Designing with people with **low vision**, **users of screen readers**, and people with **photosensitive epilepsy** in mind.

Pages shouldn't contain anything that flashes more than three times in any one second period or require animation for meaning.

❏ **…with the option to recover after making a mistake?**

Designing with people with **anxiety** in mind.

Give users an option to undo their mistakes without repercussions.

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❑	**Does the page have sufficient contrast?**

Designing with people with **low vision** in mind.

Insufficient contrast between text and background colors makes content hard to read. Similarly, insufficient contrast between UI elements and backgrounds can be difficult to see.

Use [Contrast](#) or [Stark](#) Figma plugins that check contrast ratios in your designs.

❑	**Is content order and context meaningful?**

Designing with people who are **low vision**, **users of screen readers** or those who are **hard of hearing** in mind.

Ensure that if content is read through a screen reader, that it makes sense and is easy to follow. Use landmarks and headings.

❏ **Can the screen be magnified?**
Designing with people with **low vision** in mind.
Screen magnification can help optimize the visual experience for people who have low vision. Magnification softwares like ZoomText and MAGic can also help users adjust color schemes if they experience difficulty, or even pain, from viewing bright lights.
❏ **Can tasks be completed without voice input?**
Designing with people with **low vision**, **users of screen readers,** or those who are **hard of hearing** in mind.
Ensure that content read through a screen reader makes sense and is easy to follow. Use landmarks and headings.

| ❏	**Is content meaningful with or without a touch screen?**
	Design with people with **motor disabilities** or people using **touch screens** in mind.
	Users may not always experience your products on the device you expect. Add alternatives to hover states to convey information. Give interactive elements enough space for someone to click. Design for keyboard or speech-use-only use. Provide shortcuts to avoid a lot of typing or scrolling.

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Section 3
Neurodivergence

Neurodivergence

[Neurodivergence](#) is the term for people whose brains function differently in one or more ways than is considered typical. Some common examples include autism, ADHD, dyslexia, or chronic mental health illnesses.

This section covers questions not included in WCAG standards that can be used to design better experiences for everyone, especially neurodivergent people.

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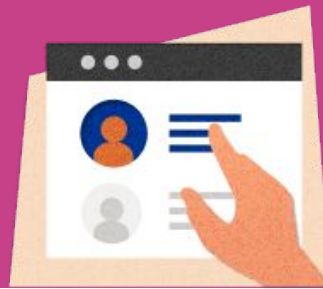
❏ **Is the content easy to scan with limited distractions?**

❏ **Is text supported by images or diagrams?**

Designing with people who are **dyslexic** in mind.

 Using large blocks of text can be difficult to scan.

❏ **Is content short and clear with simple colors?**

Designing with people who are on the **autism spectrum** in mind.

Removing unnecessary words, using bulleted lists, and avoiding bright colors can be less easier to take in.

❏ **Is important information easy to identify?**

Designing with people with **anxiety** or **ADHD** in mind.

Provide closed captioning or transcripts for audio clips or video so audio is required to understand the content. Closed captioning for both audio and video content is required for users who are deafblind.

❏	**Is typography and content simple?**
❏	**Is content easy to scan?**
	Designing with people with **dyslexia** or **limited attention** in mind.
	Use a consistent layout with left aligned text, or right aligned text for languages that use right-to-left scripts.
❏	**Is text decoration meaningful?**
	Designing with people with **dyslexia** in mind.
	Underlines, italics, or uppercase can be hard to read.
❏	**Is content written in plain language?**
	Designing with people with **autism**, **limited attention**, or those who **may face negative stereotypes** in mind.
	Avoid figures of speech, idioms, hidden messages, or acronyms.

❏ **Is content transparent and clear?**

❏ **Are there explanations after completing tasks?**

Designing with people with **anxiety** in mind.

Include next steps and timeframes to explain what happens after a task.

❏ **Can users check their work before submitting?**

Designing with people with **anxiety** or **limited attention** in mind.

Avoid leaving users questioning what answers they gave.

❏ **Are actions descriptive?**

Designing with people with **autism**, **limited attention**, or those who **may face negative stereotypes** in mind.

Users might feel uncertain about the consequences of their actions if labels aren't clear.

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❑   Does the user have enough time to complete an action?

Designing with people with **anxiety**, **dyslexia**, **motor disabilities**, or **limited attention** in mind.

Give users enough time to complete an action. Avoid time limits, and be clear about how long a task will take to give people a better opportunity to complete the action. If sessions time-out, warn users before time expires with the option to extend time.

❑   Is there support if users get stuck?

Designing with people with **physical disabilities** or **anxiety** in mind.

Let users ask for their preferred communication to complete a task. Make alternative support easy to access.

❑   Are there accelerators and nudges?

Designing with people with **limited attention** or **dyslexia** in mind.

Like the usability heuristic, "[Flexibility and Efficiency of Use](#)," accelerators like autocomplete can help people overcome barriers and save time. Prevent errors by prompting review and sending reminders to complete tasks.

Section 4
Stereotype threat

Stereotype threat

Stereotype threat is a situational phenomenon that arises when people face the prospect of being viewed or evaluated in light of a negative stereotype about a group to which they belong.

All people are vulnerable to stereotype threat because every individual has at least one social identity that is targeted by a negative stereotype in some situation.

People are especially vulnerable when they're aware of a stereotype and they are engaged in a task that feels evaluative, that is challenging, or that they care about performing well.
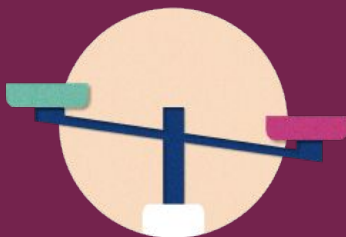
❏   **Does the design unintentionally prime a negative stereotype?**

Designing with people who may experience **negative stereotypes** in mind.

❏   **Is any default language exclusionary?**

Default content to be gender and ethnically neutral. Use "they" pronouns and multicultural names. Avoid heteronormative language and language that overindexes on the status quo like "culture fit."

❏   **Is any default imagery exclusionary?**

Incorporate imagery that centers people from a diverse set of backgrounds. Additionally, make sure roles are represented by counter-stereotypical identities based on their regions or job markets.

❏ **Does the design encourage the user if they make a mistake?**

Designing with people who may experience **negative stereotypes** or **anxiety** in mind.

❏ **Is there an option to submit a new response?**

Give users an option to undo their mistakes by submitting a new response. Give users options to recover instead of dead ends.

❏ **Are there accelerators and nudges?**

Allow systems to accept responses past posted deadline in case the deadline is overlooked or missed.

❏ **Are demographic data questions phrased to reduce anxiety?**

Designing with people who may experience **negative stereotypes** in mind.

❏ **Is "prefer not to say" an option?**

Users might want this option for questions on topics connected to historical oppression or judgment. They may fear a negative impact for answering. Or they may not want to reveal—or think about—certain information about themselves.
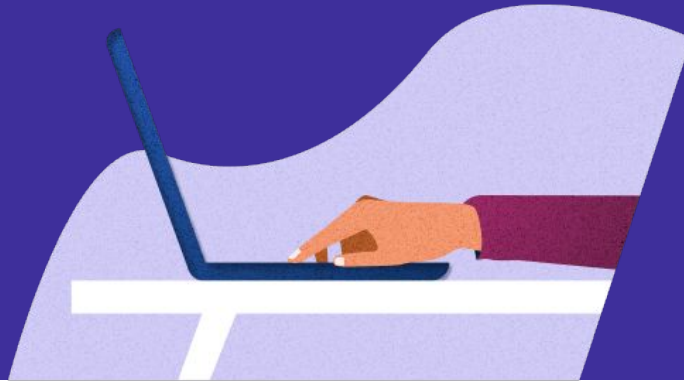
❏ **Is there an explanation for why need the information?**

A user might wonder, "why do I need to know this information?" If there's no good explanation, it may be a sign to remove the question.
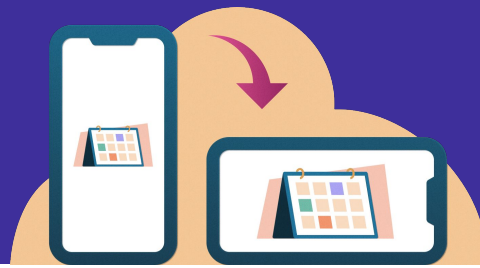
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Section 5
Technology

Technology

Digital experiences can be drastically different depending on the device someone has available. Don't let technological limitations prevent people from having a positive experience.

❏   **Is the experience accessible through less performant devices?**

❏   **...like older devices?**

Check if users are able to complete workflows on older devices.

❏   **...like smaller screens?**

Design experiences that can be resized to smaller laptops or tablets.

❏   **...like slower internet connections?**

Use alternatives to content that might require a lot of data or a high internet speed.

Let's learn and grow together

Do you have additional questions to add or suggestions for questions that should be re-examined?

Please find indeed.design on social media!

Contributors

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Resources

- Using Behavioral Science to Make Designs More Equitable
- Building an Accessibility Library
- Designing for accessibility posters
- Inclusive UX in the era of anxiety
- The a11y project

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