

## Archives and Records Association – Digital Accessibility Guidelines

The Archives and Records Association (UK & Ireland) (ARA) works to ensure that its membership, organisations that manage records, and the users and stakeholders that we work with and serve, reflect the diversity of our society. Part of this commitment in relation to our users and stakeholders is to advise and work with the wider record keeping sector to make all digital content accessible by anyone, anywhere in an equal way.

At least 1 in 5 people have a long-term illness, an impairment or a disability. Many more will have a temporary or situational disability. Health conditions can impact a person's ability to understand a message, either because of a cognitive impairment, or because they are unable to see, hear or otherwise access the information.

This document provides practical guidance for record keepers creating a wide range of widely accessible digital content and resources.

### Writing accessible content:

- Stick to 25 words or under per sentence and avoid large chunks of text
- Simplify your message and [use free online readability testing tools](#) to quickly test the readability of your content
- Use line breaks to create space across your content – spreading out your copy and making it clearer to read
- Avoid using bold, italicised or capitalised text in your posts – contrary to popular belief, they make things more difficult to read
- Avoid using non-standard symbols (for example mathematical symbols) as substitutes for words and messages, as these can confuse screen reading software.

Example, “Maintaining accessibility is everyone’s business”

Instead of “Maintaining accessibility = everyone’s business”.

### Make emojis more accessible

- Never use emojis to communicate a core message – the ‘official’ meaning of an emoji may not match with what you are trying to convey
- Limit emojis to 2 or 3 per post
- Do not repeat the same emoji more than once (for example multiple thumbs up one after another)
- Most text-to-speech and screen reader software will read out emoji descriptions that are included in your standard alt text. However, if you are publishing to a platform that doesn’t provide an alt text feature, you should include a description of the emoji in your main post copy immediately after the icon for example [Green Leaf Emoji].

### Make hashtags accessible

- Limit hashtags to 2 per post
- Feature hashtags at the end of the post so as not to disrupt the flow
- Use capital letters at the start of each word in the hashtag.

For example #AccessibilityAwareness instead of #accessibilityawareness will allow screen readers to interpret the hashtag easier.

### Make links accessible

- Use full links and avoid shortened versions (for example bit.ly links) – the majority of social media platforms do not count links towards your character count, and compress them for you automatically.
- Ensure calls to action provide a clear onward journey for example. 'Read more about accessibility + link'. Links that say 'click here' or 'read more' without any additional context are particularly bad for screen reader users.
- Limit links to one per post as people who navigate via keyboard shortcuts often find it frustrating to navigate to multiple links.

### Designing and producing accessible social media assets

#### Accessibility, colour and contrast

- Don't use colour to convey a key message in isolation (for example to describe an action)
- Avoid pale colours on pale or white backgrounds (and dark colours on dark backgrounds)
- Low contrast is difficult for many people to read. Use a [WebAim colour contrast checker](#) or this [Colour Contract Checker](#) to check the contrast between your background, text and other components – it should have a minimum ratio of 4:5:1
- Think about using a smaller colour palette or check intersecting colours individually when using more than 3
- Gradients can be confusing or distracting – use block colours instead.

#### Accessible fonts

- Avoid using bold, italicised or complex fonts which can be difficult to read
- Do not use small font sizes to try to crowd content onto social media graphics as a solution to too much copy. Instead, challenge the brief to see whether the information and message can be simplified.
- Minimise use of text in graphics using standard best practice for font size and alignment
- Do not justify text – ensure text is left-aligned, in line [with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG 2.0\)](#) and make things clearer for people with cognitive disabilities
- A visual that uses fewer words with larger fonts can be more punchy in a social feed and therefore have greater impact.

## Video Content

Videos which do not include audio should include a plain English description and a voiceover describing the key visual elements of the content

- Avoid moving images behind text which can be challenging for screen reader users
- There should be a minimum of 20db difference between background music and voiceovers on video content
- Social media platforms such as [YouTube allow you to add subtitles and captions easily for free](#), but should always be manually checked for errors
- YouTube subtitles are created as SubRip Subtitle (“SRT”) files. These are plain text files that show the sequential number of subtitles alongside start and end timecodes. [SRT files can be downloaded](#) and used to apply subtitles to other video file types or create transcripts.
- Apply the best practice on font sizes and colour contrast described above when designing video captions
- Ensure key guidance messages are included in post copy as well as/rather than within a graphic
- Avoid sharing images of printed letters and documents or – where unavoidable – be sure to include a link in the post to an HTML copy of the content in full (not a PDF – that may be inaccessible)
- Do not use multiple columns to share critical information in small graphics. And remember, just using bullet points doesn’t fix this issue.
- Avoid flashing images as that can cause seizures. Nothing should flash more than 3 times a second.
- Check transition times on gifs, videos and animations to ensure the audience can follow the content. As a guide, the average person reads approximately 200-250 words per minute, but be mindful of your audience and be aware that some cognitive impairments allow for a lower comprehension rate

## Alt text

Where possible, any important information in an image needs to be described in alternative text (“alt text”) for visually impaired users. Most social media and web editing tools have options to add alt text.

Keep the alt text description short and specific, and don’t include ‘image of’ or ‘picture of’. Try to imagine how you would explain the information in a picture over the phone. The less text you use in an image, the less you will have to describe in the alt text. Remember, any words that feature in your image must also be described in the alt text.

### Adding alt text to Facebook

1. Upload your image to Facebook
2. Click 'edit photo'
3. Click 'alt text' (you will be shown an automatically generated text)
4. Click 'Override generated alt text'
5. Populate the alt text and click 'save'.
6. Share as normal.

More [information about adding alt text to Facebook](#).

### Adding alt text to Instagram

7. Upload your image to Instagram
8. Apply any filters or edits as required and then click 'next'
9. Click 'advanced settings' at the bottom of the screen
10. Click 'Write alt text'
11. Populate the alt text and click 'done'
12. Share as normal.

More [information about adding alt text to Instagram](#).

### Adding alt text to Twitter

13. Click 'compose tweet'
14. Attach your image (see note 1)
15. Click 'add description'
16. Populate the alt text and click 'done'
17. Complete your post
18. Share as normal

More [information about adding alt text to Twitter](#).

Twitter doesn't currently have a built-in feature for alt text on videos. That means if you're creating video for Twitter it's very important to build accessibility into how the video itself is produced – as described earlier in this guide.

It's better to create your videos in accessible formats from the beginning.

### Adding alt text to LinkedIn (desktop only)

19. Click 'create post'
20. Click the camera icon to share an image
21. Attach your image
22. Click 'add alt text' in the top right corner
23. Populate the alt text and click 'save'
24. Share as normal.

More [information about adding alt text to LinkedIn](#).



Archives & Records  
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UK & Ireland



**ARA Diversity  
& Inclusion**

### Publishing to YouTube

When publishing content to YouTube you should ensure that your videos include clear titles and descriptions. The character limit for YouTube descriptions is limited, but if you are hosting your video elsewhere – such as on a campaign website – you should publish [a full written transcript](#) there and link to it in the YouTube description to help users with hearing impairments.