



Adore

Accessibility in Digital Communication Higher Education Curricula



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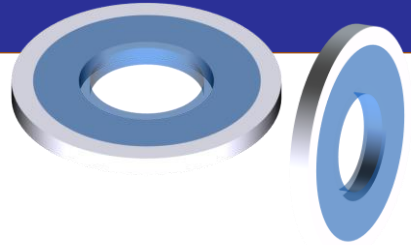
Module A, content:

1. What is accessibility - this document
2. User needs
3. Policy and legislation
4. Accessibility standards
5. Web accessibility basics



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1 What is accessibility



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Accessibility

Products and services that can be used by **all people, regardless of their abilities**



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Accessibility refers to the design and provision of products, services, environments, or information that can be easily used, understood, and accessed by individuals, regardless of their abilities or disabilities. The concept of accessibility aims to ensure that people with various physical, cognitive, sensory, and other impairments can participate fully and equally in all aspects of society.

In the context of technology and the internet, accessibility focuses on making digital content, websites, software applications, and other online resources usable by all individuals, including those with disabilities. This may involve implementing features such as screen readers, keyboard navigation, captioned videos, alternative text for images, and other adaptive technologies to accommodate users with diverse needs.

In a broader sense, accessibility also extends to physical environments, public spaces, transportation, educational facilities, and any other areas where people interact or seek services. By promoting accessibility, we strive to create an inclusive and equitable society that allows everyone to live with dignity and independence, regardless of their abilities or limitations.

Focus on user needs

- Everyone has different needs and abilities
- Provide flexibility to meet different needs



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Focusing on user needs is a fundamental principle in the design and development of any product, service, or system, including digital technologies and online resources. This approach centres around understanding and addressing the requirements, preferences, and limitations of the end-users, ensuring that the end result is not only usable but also valuable and meaningful to them.

All individuals have their specific needs, and to make sure as many as possible can use a product or service, or understand the message you are communicating, it is important to take a wide range of user needs into account. Text – or words – are often the first we think about when the topic is communication, but as many people have difficulties reading, it is important to not rely on text alone, but also provide visual support like for example illustrations, video or audio. This way of providing content in more than one format is called multimodality, and it is a key aspect of accessibility.

User groups and situations

- Persons with disabilities
- Older adults
- Not native language
- Temporary disabilities
- Situational disabilities



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Accessibility is targeting different user groups and situations:

- **Persons with disabilities:** This user group includes individuals with various physical, sensory, cognitive, or mental impairments. Designing for accessibility ensures that they can fully engage with products and services, regardless of their disabilities
- **Older adults:** This demographic comprises seniors who may experience age-related limitations or challenges in using technology. Taking their unique needs into account results in products that are more age-friendly and easy to navigate.
- **Not native language:** Users who are not native speakers of the language used in a product or service may face difficulties in understanding content. Making interfaces clear and straightforward benefits these users, promoting inclusivity and ease of use.
- **Temporary disabilities:** This category encompasses individuals with temporary impairments, such as a broken arm or temporary vision loss. Designing with their needs in mind accommodates their situational limitations during the recovery period.
- **Situational disabilities:** Users facing situational limitations, such as holding a phone while carrying groceries, may have temporary difficulties interacting with devices. Creating adaptable designs helps overcome such challenges and enhances overall usability.

Temporary barriers and disabilities



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Let's have a look at some examples of situations which involve impairments of abilities in everyday life which you may not immediately think of:

- Mobile use creates several impairments.
 - You navigate using a small screen in different situations, for example on a shaky bus, larger click areas would be good in this case.
 - Another example can be seen when you are using the mobile in different light conditions, for example on the beach or by the pool in the sun which makes it hard to read the text on a screen. In this case, good contrast is essential.
- Finally, think about what happens if your hands are busy, for example if you are carrying a child, then a door that opens automatically when it detects movement nearby is good.

Why is accessibility important in communication?



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Accessibility is crucial in communication because it ensures that information and messages reach a diverse audience, including individuals with various abilities, disabilities, and circumstances. There are several reasons why accessibility is vital in communication:

1. **Inclusivity:** Accessible communication ensures that all individuals, regardless of their abilities or disabilities, can access and understand the information being conveyed. It promotes inclusivity and prevents any form of discrimination based on a person's limitations.
2. **Equal Participation:** By making communication accessible, we enable everyone to actively participate in discussions, conversations, and the exchange of ideas. This fosters a more diverse and inclusive society where all voices are heard and valued.
3. **Compliance with Legal and Ethical Obligations:** Many countries have laws and regulations that mandate accessibility in various aspects, including communication. Organizations and institutions need to comply with these legal requirements to ensure equal opportunities for all citizens.
4. **Effective Communication:** Accessible communication enhances the effectiveness of the message delivery. When information is presented in a clear and understandable manner, it is more likely to be absorbed and retained by the intended audience.
5. **Broader Reach:** Accessibility broadens the reach of communication efforts. By accommodating diverse needs, a message can reach a larger audience, including people with disabilities and those who speak different languages or have varying

levels of literacy.

6. **Social Responsibility:** Inclusivity and accessibility are ethical responsibilities for individuals, businesses, and institutions. Emphasizing accessibility in communication reflects a commitment to social responsibility and human rights.
7. **Positive Brand Image:** Organizations that prioritize accessibility and inclusivity in their communication are viewed more favourably by the public. It enhances their brand image and reputation as socially responsible entities.
8. **Innovation and Creativity:** Embracing accessibility in communication can drive innovation and creativity. It encourages designers, content creators, and communicators to think outside the box and find innovative ways to convey messages effectively to diverse audiences.
9. **Empowerment:** Accessible communication empowers individuals with disabilities by providing them with equal access to information, education, job opportunities, and other aspects of life. It can contribute to breaking down barriers and reducing stigmas associated with disabilities.

Overall, accessibility in communication is not only a legal and moral obligation but also a strategic choice that leads to a more inclusive and equitable society. It fosters a sense of belonging and ensures that everyone can fully participate in the modern world of information and communication.

The audience is diverse

- 35% Very good reading skills
- 40% In the range between small and big difficulties
- 25% Greater difficulties, issues with concentration, memory etc.

Source: OECD

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According to the OECD, grown up readers in most western countries can be divided into three groups.

35% of the users have very good reading skills. When communicating, you don't need to worry much about them, as they will most probably understand your message no matter how you present it.

The group you should focus on is the 25% who have difficulties reading, understanding, who experience difficulties with concentration and focus, memory etc. To make sure that this group have the best possible opportunities to read and understand your message, you need to provide accessible formats and alternatives.

The middle group of 40% who may have trouble with specific content or in a specific context, often benefit from accessibility features as well, despite not being in the core target audience for accessibility.

Disability statistics - hard to estimate!

- WHO: 15% of the world population
- EU: 87, 100 or 135 million ...?
- 30 million visually impaired
- 51 million hard of hearing
- 26 million motor impaired
- 10 million cognitive impairments



Sources: WHO, Eurostat, EBU, EFHoH

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Disability statistics are difficult. Some disabilities have medical definitions, others depend on tests or individual estimations. Personal data on abilities is very sensitive and in many countries, hard to get. One way of measuring disabilities is to look at the use of assistive technology like wheelchairs, but large user groups don't use assistive technology. The Organisations representing Persons with Disabilities may not have the financial resources to carry out scientific research.

According to the World Health Organisation, around 15% of the population - worldwide - has a disability. You can also find sources claiming 20 or even 30%. It all depends on how you measure.

According to Eurostat, 19% of young people (aged 15-24 years) reports physical or sensory limitations. This share was higher for successively older age groups, peaking at 68% among people aged 65 years and over.

The European Blind Union estimates that there are over 30 million blind and partially sighted persons in geographical Europe. This means that on average, 1 in 30 Europeans experience sight loss. There are four times as many partially sighted persons as blind persons. Women are more at risk of becoming blind or partially sighted than men.

Sight loss is closely related to old age. One in three senior citizens over 65 faces sight loss. 90 percent of visually impaired persons is over the age of 65.

The European Federation of hard of Hearing estimates that 51 million, or 9% of EU

citizens experience hearing loss, but WHO estimates it to be 15%. About one-third of older adults have hearing loss, and the chance of developing hearing loss increases with age.

The numbers for motor impairments and cognitive impairments are even harder to determine. The point is - a lot of people are affected by accessibility!

Rationale

- Engage the widest possible audience
- Accessible information is easier for everyone to understand
- In the EU: legal obligations



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Engaging the widest possible audience and making information accessible are essential goals for any communication strategy. By ensuring that information is easily understood by diverse individuals, including those with disabilities, language barriers, or varying levels of literacy, you can create a more inclusive communication – and thereby an equitable society. Accessible information benefits everyone, not just those with specific needs, as it promotes clarity, simplicity, and ease of comprehension.

By enforcing legal obligations related to accessibility, the EU seeks to create a more inclusive digital environment, where all citizens can access information, services, and participate fully in society without any discrimination based on disabilities or other limitations. These legal measures also encourage businesses, organizations, and service providers to adopt accessibility best practices voluntarily, extending the benefits of accessible information to a broader audience beyond just the public sector.

Reflection / discussion

- Have you experienced having a disability?
- Do you know someone who has a disability?
- Were you surprised by the statistics, or was it the number you expected?

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Let the students reflect on how we determine what a disability really is.

Resources

- European Disability Forum, EDF
<https://www.edf-feph.org>
- World Health Organisation WHO
<https://www.who.int>
- Eurostat
<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat>

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