A Guide to Accessible Social Media

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Introduction

This document is to assist you with creating accessible content on four social media platforms:

- Facebook

- Instagram

- LinkedIn

- Twitter

As you make your way through the document, if you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me at matisse@queddo.com.

Common issues across all platforms

No matter what platform you're using, there are several items that tend to cause issues for content creators. They are:

- Alternative (alt) text
- Captioning
- Described video
- Hashtags
- Emojis
- GIFs

Alternative (alt) text

Alternative (alt) text are the words you use to describe an image. This is usually embedded within the image itself through using the social media platform.

When you're writing your alt text, you want to make sure you're describing the information being projected by the image, not just the picture.

For example, you wouldn't describe the Instagram logo as:

"A white outline of a circle with a white dot outside its top righthand corner, surrounded by a rounded outline of a white square. This sits one a radial gradient comprising blue, purple, pink, orange, red and yellow."

Instead, your alt text would simply be "Instagram logo".

The rule of thumb is to keep your alt text within one to two sentences. If you're looking for more information on how to write alt text, [visit WebAIM for more details and examples](#).

Captioning

Simply put, captions are a video's audio content turned into text. This is great for someone with hearing loss, or even just the general public when they want to watch a video without the sound on.

There are two types of captioning: **open** and **closed.**

Open captioning is when you embed the text directly into the video. When your video is open captioned, the end-user or viewer, will be unable to turn them off since they are burned directly into the video. When you're uploading the video onto a platform, it will only be the one file, unlike with closed captioning.

With closed captioning, you're working with two files: your video and the captions. When you're uploading your video to the platform, you'll upload it along with a separate caption file (usually a .SRT file). This way of captioning allows the viewer the option of turning the captions on or off.

If you're unsure about the best practices around captioning, visit the [Described and Captioned Media Program's Caption Key Guidelines](#) for everything you need.

Described video

Accessible Media Inc. defines described video (DV) is the narrated description of the non-verbal elements that can include surroundings, costumes, and body language.

There are three types of described video: **post-production described video, integrated described video** and **live described video.**

With post-production described video, there is typically a separate audio track that is added to the video after the filming and editing is complete. The descriptions are added during pauses in dialogue, and it enables people to form a mental picture of what's happening within the video. The **Post-Production Described Video Best Practices Guide** will help you in composing your DV.

Integrated Described Video (IDV) is a new method where the description is incorporated from the ground up in the production process. It identifies key visual elements throughout the pre-production, production and post-production phases, ensuring that traditional DV is not needed. This style of description doesn't require a separate audio track. The **Integrated Described Video Best Practices Guide** will help you in creating a video with IDV.

Finally, Live Described Audio is similar to post-production DV, but is performed in real-time during a live event. This is a great tool for when you're livestreaming an event on any social media platform. The **Live Described**

[Video Best Practice guide](#) will help you understand how to better describe your next event.

Hashtags

The Oxford English Dictionary defines hashtags are a word or phrase preceded by a hash sign (#) to identify messages on a specific topic.

To make sure your hashtags are accessible, there are a few things to know:

1. **Write them in camel case**

   When writing a hashtag with multiple words, you need to capitalize the first letter of each word within the hashtag. This is called camel case.

   For example, with the hashtag #SomethingLikeThis, you capitalize the "S" in "Something", the "L" in "Like" and the "T" in "This".

   The reason why you use camel case is so that a screen reader or other text-to-speech software reads don't read the full hashtag as one word, instead, it will read each word separately. This makes it easier for the end-user to understand what the hashtag is all about.

2. **Avoid using acronyms**

   Acronyms like ICYMI (in cased you missed it) and DYK (did you know) are not programmed within

screen readers. Wen you use them, someone with sight loss won't hear the individual letters or what they stand for, but rather it will attempt to read the acronym as a single word.

From time to time, this can get you into trouble. Using the example from above of DYK, a screen reader will not read it as D-Y-K or "Did you know", but rather, it will read it as "dick".

Best practice is to avoid using acronyms.

3. Avoid abbreviations

Like acronyms, abbreviations can cause screen readers some difficulty. Depending on what language preference the user set their screen reader to, the abbreviation can have multiple meanings. For example, using the abbreviation of "Gov", a British English setting will interpret it as "government", while the American English setting will read it as "governor".

It's for this reason that it's considered best practice to avoid them whenever possible.

4. Limit the number you use

Using a number of hashtags in one post can cause any user of text-to-speech assistive technology to get lost within the post. Try to limit the number of hashtags whenever possible.

5. Place them at the end

Whenever you're using hashtags, keep them to the end of the post, as this will help followers using assistive technology better understand your message.

Emojis

Emojis can be a fun graphical way to show your mood or feelings within a post. However, someone using text-to-speech software will have a hard time consuming the content. Each emoji used will be read out with a description, which can be very time consuming and, at time annoying, for the end-user if you have six or seven emojis in a row.

If you're planning on using emojis, try to limit it to one and have it at the end of your post.

GIFs

GIFs are considered inaccessible. The reason they're inaccessible is because you can't add post-production described audio, you can't caption them if they are missing it, and you can't add alternative text.

However, this doesn't mean that you can never use them. If you are wanting a GIF in your post, you simply have to pre-plan, and make sure your post provides your followers with all the information about what's happening within the GIF.

The platforms

For the purposes of this guide is to help you create accessible content on the following social media platforms: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn and Twitter. In this section, you'll be provided with:

- Step-by-step information on how to post items; and

- What additional considerations are needed for the content to be accessible.

Facebook

Facebook, arguably one of the biggest platforms, allows users to create a variety of content. This section will review how to make those types of posts plus ensuring the content you post is accessible.

Making a status update

1. **Open Facebook**. Open Facebook by visiting the website or tapping on the app.

2. **Click or tap into the post box**. This is at the top of the News Feed. There will generally be a phrase like "Write something" or "What's on your mind" in the box.

3. **Add text to your post.** Type the text of your post.

4. **Post.** Click or tap on the post button in the bottom right-hand corner of the status update window.

Making a status update accessible

To make your status updates accessible, you should:

- Keep your sentences short and simple.

- No more than 20 words per sentence.

- Keep your hashtags to the end of the post.

- Limit the number of emojis.

  - If you're using them, keep them to the end of the post.

Photo status updates

1. **Open Facebook**. Open Facebook by visiting the website or tapping on the app.

2. **Click or tap into the post box**. This is at the top of the News Feed. There will generally be a phrase like "Write something" or "What's on your mind" in the box.

3. **Add text to your post.** Type the text of your post.

4. **Add a photo.** By clicking or tapping on the "Photo/Video" button, you'll be able to select the photo you want to add to your post.

5. **Add alternative text.** When using the desktop version, click on the paintbrush icon on the photo you wish to add. In the new window, click on the "Alt Text" button on the left-hand side. Facebook will automatically generate alternative text for the image, but it's not the greatest. You'll need to click on the

"Override generated alt text" button. A new text box will appear. Type your alt text in there and click "Save".

If you're using the phone app, you'll first need to post the status update with your photo and then go back in to add the alt text. Tap and hold your finger on the photo in the post. From the options that appear, tap on "Edit Alt Text". Next, tap on the "Override generated alt text" button and populate your alt text into the text field. When you're done, tap "Save".

6. **Post.** Click or tap on the post button in the bottom right-hand corner of the status update window.

Making photo status updates accessible

In addition to adding alt text as mentioned in Step 5, you'll also need to add alt text to your written post. The reason we do both is so someone with low vision who doesn't use a screen reader can still read what the image is about. Since they may have the image zoomed in on their screen, they may lose the essence of them image. By having the alt text within your status, it provides them with an opportunity to read what the image is about. Someone using a screen reader can simply bypass the information when it's being repeated.

If you forget to add alt text to either the photo, the post or both, don't worry, you can always go back and add it in.

Status updates with a link

1. **Open Facebook**. Open Facebook by visiting the website or tapping on the app.

2. **Select "Add Photos/Video".** You can find this option at the bottom of your status bar on your News Feed. Select all the images you'd like to add. If you mistakenly only add one, you can click or tap on the grey dotted square outline with a plus sign in it. This will let you add more images.

3. **Add text to your post.** Type the text of your post.

4. **Paste the link into your status.** Copy or type the link you'd like to share. Include the "http://" section of the URL. Press the spacebar and wait while Facebook automatically links the URL and adds a preview image and paragraph to the link.

5. **Post.** Click or tap on the post button in the bottom right-hand corner of the status update window.

Making status updates with a link accessible

Same rules apply as the status update mentioned above, but now you'll also write a sentence or two of alternative text to describe the image preview. This will be within your actual post since you can't add alternative text to the actual image being previewed.

Facebook photo albums

1. **Open Facebook**. Open Facebook by visiting the website or tapping on the app.

2. From your News Feed, click your name in the top left to go to your profile.

3. Click **Photos,** then click **+ Create Album**.

4. Select photos or videos from your computer to add to your album, then click **Open**.

5. Enter an album title. You can also:

   - Add a description or location.

   - Add contributors.

   - Tag friends.

   - Select a new privacy.

6. Click **Post**.

Making Facebook photo albums accessible

This is probably the most time-consuming piece to make accessible, but I promise, the end user will appreciate it.

First and foremost, make sure you name the album in a descriptive way. Naming it "Bae and Me Forever" isn't the best way of naming an album. Try to think of a title that encompasses everything the album is about.

Secondly, my research showed that you should have alt text and descriptive captions added to all the photos within the album within 24 to 48 hours of posting.

Finally, as soon as you post the album, make sure you write an all-encompassing description about what it's about. This will help add additional clarity to your album name. Think of the five Ws: Who, What, Where, When and Why.

Video status update

1. **Open Facebook**. Open Facebook by visiting the website or tapping on the app.

2. Click or tap on the "**Photo/Video**" at the top of your News Feed to timeline.

3. Choose a video

4. Click **Post.**

Making video status updates accessible

When you're creating the video, make sure you follow the Described video items mentioned in the previous section.

As for captions, Facebook allows you to upload an SRT file for closed captioning, or you can add a video with open captions. This is a personal preference.

Finally, as for the post itself, you'll follow the same rules, but you'll also add an image description of the video preview and describe what the video is all about.

Livestreaming

1. **Open Facebook**. Open Facebook by visiting the website or tapping on the app.

2. Click **Live Video** at the top of your News Feed.

3. Write something about your live video.

4. Click **Go Live**.

Making livestreaming accessible

The latest trend is to livestream events or meetings using Facebook's Livestream feature. When you're livestreaming, make sure you or the person livestreaming is adding live descriptive audio to help viewers with sight loss understand what's happening.

You'll also want to have live captioning taking place during the livestream for anyone who may be watching who may have hearing loss.

Once it's over, make sure you provide a descriptive transcript of the "event" as well.

Instagram

Instagram is a social networking app that allows users to share photos and videos using their smartphones. Understanding the visual nature of this platform, Instagram joined the "accessibility revolution" in 2018 when it add the alternative text feature.

Making a post on Instagram

1. **Open Instagram.** Tap the Instagram app icon, which resembles a multicolored camera front. This will open your Instagram home page if you're logged in.
   If you aren't logged in, enter your Instagram account's email address (or username, or phone number) and password before continuing.
2. **Tap the + button.** It's at the bottom-centre of the screen. Doing so brings up the camera interface.
3. **Select an upload option.** Tap one of three options at the bottom of the screen:
   a. Library/Gallery – Opens a list of your saved photos and videos from your phone.
   b. Photo – Opens a camera for you to take a new photo.
   c. Video – Opens a camera for you to take a new video.
4. **Take or select a photo or video.** This will open the photo or video in Instagram's editing window. If you select a photo or video, tap Next in the top-right corner of the screen before continuing. When selecting a photo, rather than picking one, you can select multiple photos by tapping the overlapping squares on the right side of the screen and then tapping up to nine more photos to post at once. This will create a slideshow of photos that people can scroll through.
5. **Select a filter.** Tap a filter that you want to apply to the photo or video.

6. **Add a caption.** Tap the text field at the top of the screen, then type in the caption that you want to use. You can also tag Instagram friends in the photo or video by tapping **Tag People,** tapping the photo and selecting friends. To add a location tag to the photo, tap **Add Location**, then select the location.
7. **Tap Share.** It's in the top-right corner of the screen. This will post your photo or video to your Instagram page.

Making your Instagram posts accessible

Make sure you add alternative text to your images. If you forget to add your alt text when you were making your post, you can add it after posting thanks to the edit feature. When you select to edit your post, on the bottom right-hand corner of the image, there will be text that says, "Edit Alt Text". Tap on that and you can add it in.

Add alt text as part of your caption as well. Again, this provides more accessibility for people who with low vision.

Don't rely on colour to tell your message. This rule really applies to any of the platforms, but I'm noticing more and more, people are posting graphs and charts on Instagram to help show statistical information related to different political topics. However, this can be tough for someone with sight loss, low vision or who is colour-blind to understand the information.

Make sure your videos are described. Upload videos that have open captioning, as Instagram doesn't allow you to add an SRT file to offer closed captioning.

And finally, leave your hashtags to the end of the post.

LinkedIn

LinkedIn is the professional social media network. It's that professional nature that makes LinkedIn to be a great tool to showcase your dedication to creating accessible content to other industry leaders, your connections and more.

Note: You have a text limit of 1,300 characters.

Making a post on LinkedIn

1. Open LinkedIn.

2. Click on **Start a post.**

3. Type the content of your post in the **What do you want to talk about?** field.

   If you're adding a link, paste or type the URL into the text field.

   If you're adding a photo or video, click on the **Camera icon** or the **Video icon** within the share box.

4. Click post.

Making your LinkedIn posts accessible

Like Facebook, think about plain language. Keep your sentences short and sweet, so under 20 words each and be as descriptive as possible.

Add alt text to any images as well as the alt text to your post itself.

If you're sharing a website link, provide a description of the preview.

And for any videos, they should be described and have open captioning.

Now, LinkedIn does allow for users to upload an SRT file to allow the video to have closed captioning, but this if very buggy, so I recommend uploading a video with the captions already embedded. You don't want to wait the 15 minutes for your video and SRT file to load only to get an error message.

Twitter

Making a tweet

Twitter is a social network where people communicate in short messages (280 characters or less) in tweets. With 100 million daily active users and over 500 million tweets sent daily, it's imperative that you make sure your content is accessible.

1. Sign into **Twitter**.

2. Begin comprising your Tweet above the feed or click on the new Tweet button at the top of your screen.

3. Compose your Tweet with less than 280 characters.

4. Include a #hashtag so relevant followers can find your account.

5. Tag a person using '@' followed by their twitter handle.

6. Follow a Tweet formula as a starting point for ideas.

Enabling image descriptions on Twitter

1. Click on your **profile** icon and select **Settings and privacy** from the dropdown (or press the "g" key quickly, followed by the "s" key).

2. Click **Accessibility** from the list of settings.

3. Find the **Compose image descriptions** checkbox.

4. Check the box to turn the setting on or off.

5. Click **Save changes**.

Making your tweets accessible

As with all the other platforms, make sure you're adding alt text to your images. You have 440 characters to describe the image.

But since you only have 280 characters to work with in your tweet, it can be tricky to add the description.

Instead, make your overall tweet as descriptive as possible regarding the image you're incorporating.

Your videos should be described and with open captions.

Your hashtags should use camel case and make sure to put the mentions and hashtags at the end to make it easier for people to navigate.

Conclusion

I hope you found the **Like, Share, Retweet** session at the University of Guelph's Accessibility Conference useful, as well as this guide. The goal of both is to educate more users to be more accessible in the content they create on these platforms.

As social media continues to grow and evolve, what's discussed in this guide will also change. To keep up to date on these and other platforms, please don't hesitate to reach out to me at matisse@queddo.com.

You can follow me on:

Twitter: @MatisseNelis

Instagram: @MatisseNelis

Facebook: facebook.com/Matisse.Nelis

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