# Guide Dogs.

# Accessibility and Inclusivity Guidelines for Tourism and Events Operators

—
**Guide Dogs Queensland**
**2024**

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## CEO Foreword

Now more than ever governments and industry leaders are recognising the social and economic benefits of improving accessibility. For more than 60 years, Guide Dogs Queensland has enabled a lifetime of independence, participation, inclusion and wellbeing for people with low vision or blindness and their families. We put our clients and their families at the heart of everything we do.

Every day, we empower people to find the solutions that will make the biggest differences to achieving their goals. Guide Dogs is proud to deliver this Accessibility and Inclusivity Guidelines for Tourism and Events Operators as part of our commitment to improving the lives of Queenslanders with low vision or blindness.

**What do we mean when we say the words 'accessible tourism'?**

Inclusive and accessible tourism is not just about abiding by legislation. It is an aspiration for a tourism industry that ensures our enviable destinations and experiences across Queensland are available to all travellers, regardless of ability. With demand for accessible tourism growing, accessibility and a spirit of inclusiveness needs to be at the heart of all staff training, design decisions and the development of new tourism services and products.

At Guide Dogs, we recognise how hard tourism operators and event organisers work towards creating unique and special memories and experiences for tourists the world-over. It is our hope that these guidelines prove to be a valuable resource for those in the tourism industry in embracing the opportunities inclusiveness presents for their business, while providing some useful tools for ensuring tourism experiences are designed to be accessible to all in our community.

We wish to thank and acknowledge the Queensland Government for their support, without which our vision for producing an accessible tourism toolkit would not have been possible. On behalf of Guide Dogs and all tourists with low vision or blindness, I thank you for taking the time to improve your understanding of accessible tourism, and how small changes can make a big difference to many.

**Jock Beveridge**
CEO

## Acknowledgment of Country

Guide Dogs Queensland acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Australians. We recognise their cultures, histories and diversity and their deep connection to the lands, waters and seas of Queensland and the Torres Strait. Guide Dogs Queensland respectfully acknowledge the First Australians as the Traditional Owners of the land on which we operate. We pay our respects to the Elders past, present and emerging, for they hold the memories, the traditions, the culture and hopes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across the state.

# Introduction

**Across the tourism and events industry, visitors living with low vision or blindness are often faced with a variety of challenges or obstacles that prevent them from experiencing all that Queensland has to offer. From ordering off a menu to accessing a bushwalking trail, tourism experiences the world over are often designed with sighted people in mind.**

At Guide Dogs, our mission is to empower people with low vision or blindness to achieve independence, participation, inclusion, and wellbeing in their communities. As the Queensland Government's peak body for low vision, Guide Dogs is uniquely positioned to support tourism and event operators to better understand low vision and blindness and how small changes can ensure their business is accessible to all.

These guidelines aim to be a one-stop-shop for all things 'accessibility' for anyone working in the tourism and events industry. The guidelines aim to make tourist attractions and events in Queensland more accessible.

It has been developed with consideration of the low vision or blindness experience, best practice, and relevant legislation and is supported by a range of complementary resources including checklists, factsheets and training material.

# What is accessibility?

**Accessibility is a fundamental human right for everyone to have an opportunity to experience the same services, physical spaces, digital content, and products in the community.**

Accessibility or inclusive design for low vision or blindness means designing an environment for easy usability, navigation, and interaction through senses such as hearing, touch and speech without relying on vision.

Accessibility is also more than just the environment; it is about the way we interact with people with low vision or blindness.

# Accessibility tools for low vision and blindness

Thanks to advancing technology, there are more tools available than ever before to help people with low vision or blindness to access information, navigate safely, stay connected and experience everyday activities.

## 1. Mobility aids

**A primary mobility aid** is the main tool that people with low vision or blindness use to stay safe and maintain independence in travel. For example, a long cane or Guide Dog.

A long cane is a tactile mobility device that allows a person to safely navigate through their environment around hazards and obstacles. There are a variety of canes which are used for various purposes.

The white and red cane is the international symbol of low vision or blindness, however long canes no longer have to be white. It is now common to see customised canes in all types of colours, including rainbow canes. In Spain a white, red, white, red colour combination on a cane signifies that the user is deaf as well as blind.

**A secondary mobility aid** is only used in conjunction with a primary mobility aid to provide the user with additional information about their environment. For example:

- Miniguide – handheld ultrasonic obstacle detector

- Stellar trek – GPS guidance system



## Did you know?

In Australia* there are:

- approximately 575,000 people with low vision

- over 70% of these people are over the age of sixty-five

- there are 66,000 people reported to have total blindness

*Data source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2021

## 2. Everyday tools

**Audio description** is the auditory narration of visual representations such as television programs, films, and live performances. During gaps in dialogue, it describes visual elements such as scenes, settings, actions, and costumes.

**Smart phone applications** are downloadable on smart devices and are often low cost or free. There are hundreds of apps that exist that can assist people with low vision or blindness, it is about finding the app that is right for the person's need to improve accessibility. Applications will have different functions such as navigational apps, apps that read out menus or documents, or identify colours. Popular smart phone apps include Seeing AI, Be My Eyes, Navilens, and VIP Code Reader.



**Screen reader technology** is a form of Assistive Technology (AT) that allows for text to speech reading of a computer or phone screen. Screen readers are available on most devices. Smart phones have built-in screen readers, as do gaming consoles, TVs, and computers. There is also third-party screen reader software available for those devices that do not have the technology built in.

Popular third-party screen readers include:

- JAWS (Job Access with Speech)

- NVDA (Non-Visual Desktop Access)

- Windows Narrator

- VoiceOver (Apple devices)

- TalkBack (Android accessibility)

- VoiceAssist (Android accessibility)

**Reading technology** refers to the various devices designed to assist a person with low vision or blindness to read text such as signs, menus, and documents. These devices come in various forms such as handheld, wearable or desktop devices.

These devices make use of Object Character Recognition (OCR) which converts typed, handwritten or printed text into machine-encoded text. Some devices are also fitted with Artificial Intelligence (AI) software.

Popular reading devices include:

- Orcam range (MyEye, Read)

- Envision glasses

**Speech recognition software** converts spoken words into a machine-readable format and is used in many everyday technologies including smartphones, smart assistants, TVs and computers.

Popular speech recognition software include:
- Siri
- Google assistant (Google Home, smart phones)
- Dragon
- VoiceOver dictation

**Magnification** can be used to increase the size of text and the size of images. This can be achieved with a handheld device, like a smart phone, a magnifying glass, video magnifier or through screen magnification software. Popular screen magnification programs for computers include ZoomTex, Windows Magnifier, and SuperNova.

### 3. Tools for the home environment

**Talking devices** such as talking scales, talking clocks and diabetic monitors can be used by someone with low vision or blindness.

**Google Home/Alexa** are useful tools for timers, calendars, the voice control of lights, dishwashers, laundry etc.

### 4. Environmental

**Braille signs** are often used in public places such as bathrooms to help people with low vision or blindness identify the purpose of the room or to provide directional information.

**Audio tactile systems** such as the push button systems at traffic lights that make a noise and vibrate when it is time to cross the road.

**Tactile Ground Surface Indicators (TGSIs)** are textured plates installed into the ground to assist pedestrians with low vision to safely navigate public spaces. TGSIs provide directional guidance or warn people of impending hazards such as stairs or a pedestrian crossing.

**Electronic signage** is a digital information screen that displays video or multimedia content for information or advertising purposes. It is used at such places as bus stations, train stations and airports to provide visual information on arrival/departures and platform numbers/gate numbers.

# Chapter Highlights

**1** ▶▶

Accessibility is a fundamental human right for everyone.

**2** ▶▶

Accessibility is also more than just the environment; it is about the way we interact with people with low vision or blindness.

**3** ▶▶

Mobility aids refer to tools that assist a person to navigate in the world, including the long cane or a Guide Dog.

**4** ▶▶

Advancing technologies assist with everyday tasks such as screen readers, smart phone applications, magnifiers, audio description, and talking devices.

**5** ▶▶

Environmental tools can include the use of braille signage, tactile ground surface indicators and audio tactile systems.

# Guide Dogs

**Guide Dogs provide more than just mobility benefits to their handlers. They enhance the social participation, well-being, and independence of people with low vision or blindness.**

Working Guide Dogs have a legal right to access any event, business, public premises, public transport or rideshare services in Queensland. Their right to enter these places is protected under the **Guide, Hearing and Assistance Dog Act 2009 (the Act).**

Under the Act, a guide, hearing or assistance dog is defined as a dog trained to perform identifiable physical tasks and behaviours to assist a person with a disability to reduce the person's need for support.



## Where can Guide Dogs go?

Guide Dogs can go almost everywhere their handler goes including:

- Cafes, restaurants, and places of accommodation such as a private rental arrangement or holiday accommodation
- Travel on any form of public transport, including taxis, buses, planes, rideshare, vehicles, trams, and trains
- Hotels, private rental arrangements, or holiday accommodation
- Any public place e.g. theatres, concert halls, galleries
- Healthcare or medical suites
- Retail stores (including supermarkets and food stores).

There are only a few exceptions for when a Guide Dog and its handler are not permitted to enter. These include:

- Certain parts of a health service facility, including:
    - an in-patient ward
    - labour wards
    - procedure rooms
    - a recovery area
    - an area in which the standard of hygiene is maintained at a significantly high level for the purpose of preventing infection or the spread of disease
    - an ambulance.
- A part of a public place or public passenger vehicle where food is normally prepared for example, a food van

- Any venue may exclude a guide, hearing, or assistance dog from its facility if the dog's behaviour - barking or growling at other people - poses a direct threat to the health or safety of others.

## The difference between a Guide Dog and comfort dog or pet.

For a dog to be approved or certified under the Act, it must:

- Be able to be used as an aid by a person with a disability
- Have recently passed a public access test that has determined the dog is safe and effective in a public place or public passenger vehicle and is able to be controlled by its handler
- Not be a restricted breed as defined under the Local Government Act 1993
- Be de-sexed and vaccinated
- Have not been declared a dangerous dog under a local law.

A pet or a comfort dog does not qualify as a certified dog.

### Remember!

There is no such thing as a 'no dogs' policy when it comes to certified guide, hearing, assistance, or trainee support dogs clearly displaying an approved guide, hearing and assistance dog badge. The Act provides them with a right of access.

# Chapter Highlights

**1** ▶▶

Working Guide Dogs have a legal right to access any event, business, public premises, public transport or rideshare service in Queensland.

**2** ▶▶

Their right to access is protected under the Guide, Hearing and Assistance Dog Act 2009 (the Act).

**3** ▶▶

A pet or a comfort dog does not qualify as a certified dog.

**4** ▶▶

There is no such thing as a 'no dogs' policy when it comes to certified guide, hearing, assistance, or trainee support dogs.

# About low vision

**Whether it be through accident, illness, injury, genetic inheritance, birth deficit or an ongoing condition, anyone can experience vision loss at any time in their lifetime.**

Vision is a broad spectrum between fully sighted and totally blind.

Often, people imagine someone with a vision condition cannot see anything, but this is not usually the case. In fact, people who are legally blind often have some form of functional vision e.g. light perception.
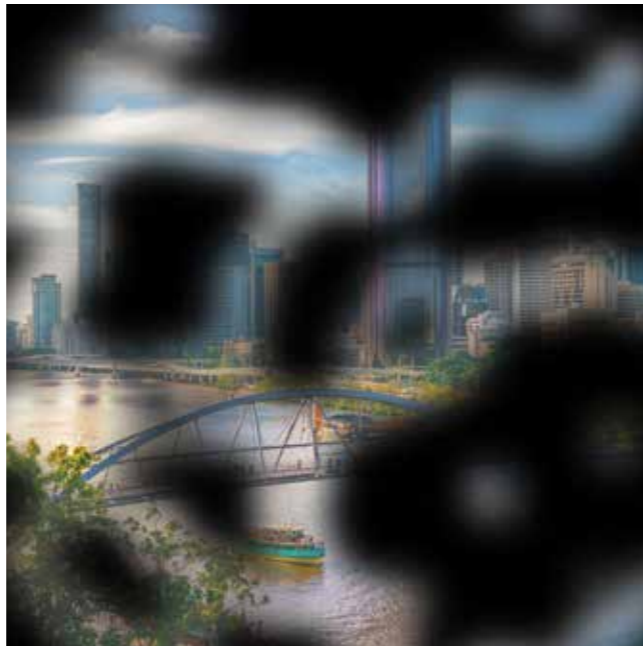
# Vision Conditions

Below is a summary of the common conditions that cause vision loss and how they affect Australians.

## Diabetic Retinopathy

This is a common condition caused by diabetes. It damages the small blood vessels of the retina and if left untreated remains one of the most common causes of vision loss despite the extensive treatment options available. Regular eye checks are crucial to reducing the risk of vision loss. People diagnosed with diabetic retinopathy often talk about how the "blobs"/floaters can move and sometimes look like spiders or something coming into their vision, which can impact a person's mobility and ability to detect objects.



## Age-related Macular Degeneration (AMD)

A degenerative condition which affects the central area of the retina. Symptoms are initially minimal however they can worsen over time. People with AMD can maintain peripheral vision but do not have central vision, making tasks like driving, recognising faces, and reading difficult. People with this condition may not look straight at you while talking because they are looking at you through their peripheral vision.



## Glaucoma

Glaucoma is an eye condition which involves damage to the optic nerve resulting in significant vision loss or complete blindness. A major risk factor for glaucoma is increased pressure in the eye, known as intraocular pressure (IOP). The first symptom of glaucoma is often a loss of peripheral vision. Tunnel vision can develop, resulting in only being able to see objects that are directly in front and extremely close.



## Cataracts

A cataract is the clouding of the lens of the eye. When the lens becomes opaque, the amount of light that gets through the eye becomes more difficult to see. Blurry vision and glare sensitivity are common symptoms and colours may appear warped or distorted.

## Refractive Error

Refractive errors are when the shape of the eye disrupts the focussing ability of the eye, leading to blurry vision. These errors can cause a range of vision related issues including near sightedness, far sightedness and uneven focus.



## Trachoma

This condition is chronic conjunctivitis through repeated exposure to chlamydia trachomatis via hands, hard surfaces and flies. This infection causes a roughening of the inner surface of the eye lids causing pain to the eyes, damage to the cornea and possible permanent blindness. Poor sanitation, crowded living conditions and lack of toilets can cause increase of the disease.



## Retinitis Pigmentosa (RP)

This is a progressive degeneration of the retina caused by the retina not receiving the required protein to remain healthy. The condition affects night vision and peripheral sight; however, the condition is degenerative which can result in permanent loss of vision.



## Neurological Vision Impairment (NVI)

Neurological vision impairment may result in a hemianopia. A hemianopia is a vertical loss of vision on either the left or right and cannot be corrected with glasses and causes the person difficulties reading, avoiding obstacles and crossing the road safely. This condition is typically due to stroke or traumatic brain injury.



### Additional resources

To learn more about low vision conditions, please refer to the additional resources section of these guidelines.

# Chapter Highlights

## 1 ▶▶

Vision loss can occur through accident, illness, injury, genetic inheritance, birth defect or an ongoing condition.

## 2 ▶▶

Anyone can experience vision loss at any stage in their lifetime.

## 3 ▶▶

Vision is a broad spectrum between fully sighted and totally blind.

## 4 ▶▶

People who are legally blind often have some form of functional vision such as light perception or peripheral vision.

## 5 ▶▶

A range of conditions can affect vision and no one's personal experience with vision loss is the same.

# How to make your environment more accessible

**Think about your business as it is currently. Imagine entering your business under blindfold. Are the walkways and entrances clear of protruding obstacles? Is your venue well-lit or includes high contrast colours to help identify doors from walls? Do you have tactile or clear signage to help people navigate your venue?**

These are the types of environmental aspects of your business that are important to consider when ensuring your tourism experience is accessible to all.

Good vision enables a sighted person to walk around a building without too much thought about steps, lifts, corridors or avoiding bumping into other people, and use "wayfinding" clues to get around. Wayfinding clues may include floor numbers, signs, room numbers or novel landmarks such as artwork or other features. People with low vision or blindness may not be able to use this same visual information, so wayfinding is a lot more challenging.

People with low vision or blindness are required to maintain a high level of concentration when navigating new spaces.

**Small changes to an environment can often make your business safer and more accessible.**

## Corridors, walkways and thoroughfares

All corridors, walkways and entrances should be kept free of protruding obstacles. This includes windows that open out into walkways, fire hydrants, bins, notice boards, bags, lockers, and furniture. These obstacles should be moved where possible or have protective barriers placed around them.

## Doorways and gates

Doors that are left ajar can be potential hazards for people with low vision. All doors and gates should remain either fully opened or closed. If door hooks or clips are available, they should be used to keep the doors open and secured. Self-closing mechanisms that control the speed at which doors can be opened and/or closed may assist to reduce risk or injury.

Doors that contrast in colour to the doorframe are easier to identify. Contrasting door handles in relation to the door are also advisable. Signage such as push or pull will also assist in anticipating which way the door opens.

## Glare/lighting

Areas with inconsistent or poor lighting can be difficult to negotiate obstacles, such as bags, steps, bins and poles can go undetected.

Adjusting to vision fluctuations due to changing lighting conditions (i.e. when moving from inside to outside) is often slower for someone with low vision. It may be necessary to keep indoor lighting on, especially in darker or dimly lit areas where natural light is reduced, such as in stairwells.

It is important to have adequate lighting in areas where tasks are performed such as desks, kitchens, and bathrooms. Adequate lighting for cupboards to ensure a person can find items easily is also important. A simple solution such as strip lighting or sensor lights can make a major difference.

Glare can also create as much difficulty as insufficient lighting. Measures need to be taken to maintain or increase levels of lighting but reduce the glare, such as:

- avoiding shiny or reflective surfaces, and
- using loose weave blinds, shade cloth, tinted windows, or venetian blinds where the angle of light and amount of light entering can be controlled.

## Pedestal objects and head height obstacles

Pedestal objects are things that protrude from the wall or that are raised off the floor, or objects which are mounted on bases which are narrower than their own width. These items are difficult to detect, even with a mobility aid such as a long cane and can potentially injure a person. Examples of these are fire hose reels, locker doors, or power boxes and can also include the space underneath stairwells.

If possible, remove pedestal objects where they pose danger. Or you can try implementing the following:

- Mark them in a contrasting colour to the surrounding environment making them more visible.
- If there is less than a two-metre clearance space underneath, the area can be enclosed, or barriers can be placed.
- Install warning Tactile Ground Surface Indicators (TGSIs) to indicate the overhead hazard as a last resort.
- Overhanging tree branches or shrubs along pathways pose similar dangers and should be kept trimmed.

- Locker doors should always remain closed when not in use or being attended to.

## Poles and bollards

Poles that are within walkways should be marked with colour to increase their contrast against their background. This can be achieved by painting the whole pole, or marking with a minimum strip of 75mm within a height range of 1200mm to 1600mm from the ground.

Consideration should be taken for the height of the intended users of the area. These also include poles within high activity areas such as the post for a basketball hoop. Padding on these kinds of poles may also be considered.

## Steps and staircases

Steps and staircases that are hard to see pose a significant hazard to people visiting your business. The edge of the tread (horizontal surface of the step) of all steps and stairs should be highlighted with a 50-75mm wide solid strip of non-slip paint — such as yellow — which is brighter than the rest of the step surface.

When contrast is provided in this way, it can greatly assist a person who does not have depth perception. Alternatively, commercial step edgings of a contrasting colour are also available. Ensure the contrasting colour applied on steps and staircases is regularly maintained so it doesn't fade.

Continuous handrails should be present on both sides of all stairways and landings and be set at the height as specified in the Australian Standard. The standard also specifies how far the handrail is to extend past the end of the stairs, at the top and bottom. However, it should not encroach into the walkway and the ends should turn towards the ground or completely return to the wall or end post.

Where there are no tactile environmental cues present to indicate a drop-off or step-up, warning TGSIs can be installed. Their placement, type and contrast will be prescribed by the relevant Australian Standard.

## Signage

Good signage is clear, concise, and easy to read and if prescribed when large print is too difficult and slow to read, includes braille and tactile information. Signage such as room names and numbers should be placed on the latch side of a door at a height between 1,200mm and 1,600mm. Signs should be well illuminated and kept free of items of furniture, plants or posters that may cause visual clutter and make it difficult to easily notice the sign.

Signage should be located at any set down area, car park or on directional pathways to buildings, at any non-accessible entrances directing users to the nearest accessible entrance, as well as inside building entrances.

Keep in mind that glass or glossy lamination over important signs can also promote glare, making it difficult to see.

## Uneven ground surfaces and trip hazards

Ensuring the ground is as free as possible from trip hazards is important for everyone's safety, but especially for visitors with low vision or blindness.

Badly damaged paving should be replaced, while some areas of uneven paving can be ground down to make the edges flush with adjacent sections.

Pathways and paved areas should be kept clear and free from tree litter and other obstacles. A person using a long cane will tend to follow a building line, edge of a path or wall to locate a certain entrance, path or other facility and this is called "shore lining".

## Mats

All mats should be rubber backed or secured to the ground to reduce risk of slips or falls. Mats should be routinely checked and replaced if they are worn or have frayed, which could pose a trip hazard.

# Chapter Highlights

**1** ▶▶

Pathways, entrances and paved areas should be clear and free from tree litter and other obstacles.

**2** ▶▶

Inconsistent or poor lighting can be difficult to negotiate. Strip lighting or sensor lights are a simple solution.

**3** ▶▶

Doors and gates should remain either fully opened or closed and painted a high contrast colour to help identify doors from walls.

**4** ▶▶

Signage should be clear, concise, and easy to read and where possible include the use of braille and tactile.

**5** ▶▶

Apply contrasting colour on steps and staircases.

**6** ▶▶

Install continuous handrails on both sides of all stairways and landings.

**7** ▶▶

Remove pedestal objects such as fire hose reels, locker doors, or power boxes where they pose danger.

**8** ▶▶

Poles and bollards should be marked with colour to increase their contrast against their background.

# Assisting a person with low vision or blindness

**There are many ways you can support and assist a person with low vision or blindness, whether you know them well or meeting for the first time.**

The following practical tips will assist you and your staff in how to be respectful and helpful when interacting with a person with low vision or blindness.
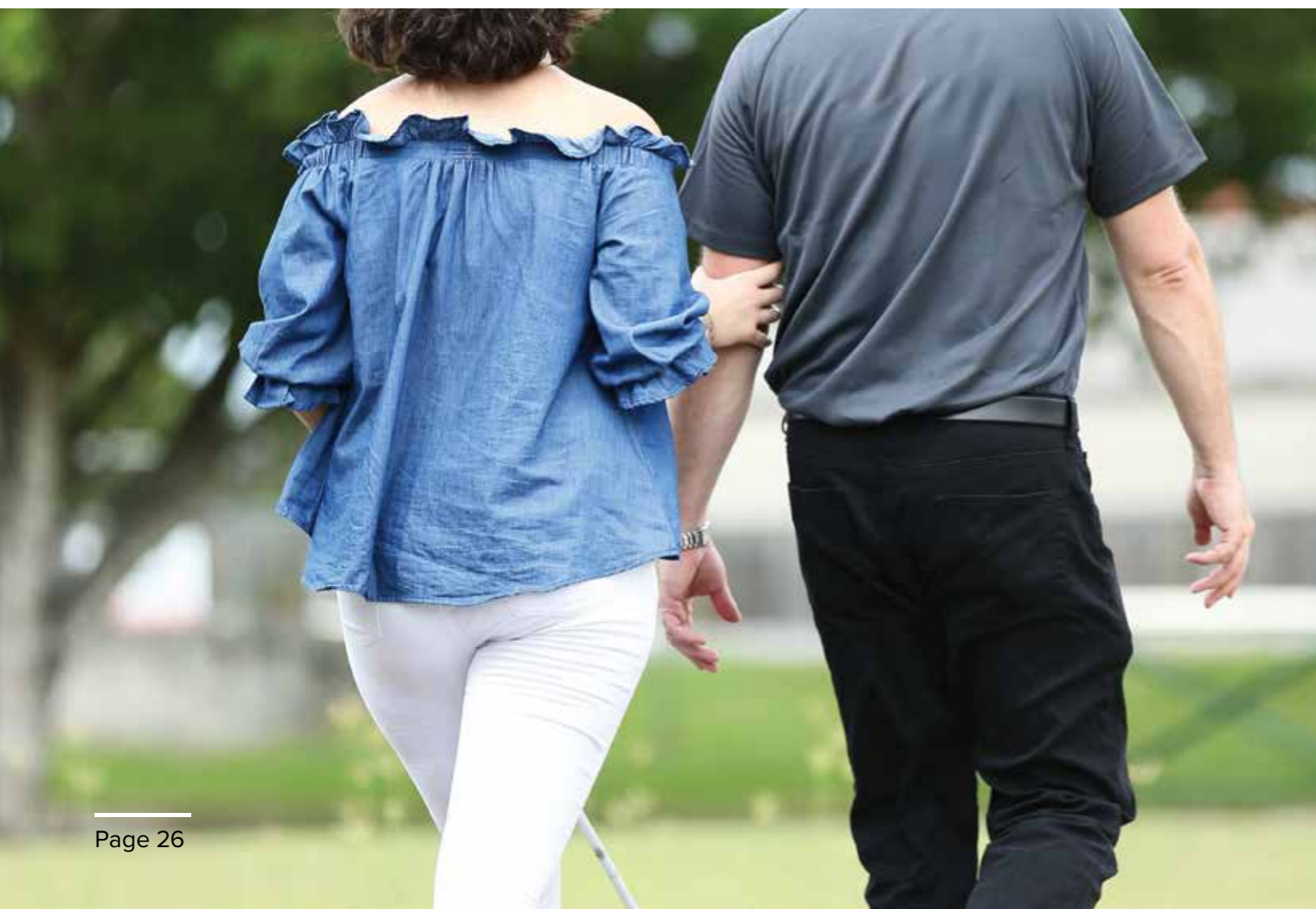


## Greeting and first impressions

**Never assume a person with low vision or blindness requires assistance** without first asking them: "Would you like help?"

**Greet the person out loud** to alert them to your presence, introduce yourself, as well as any other people in the room. Address the person by name so that they know you are talking to them. For example, "Hi Dianna, it's Jess here and Jeremy has just come in behind me."

**Let the person know when you are walking away** from them or leaving the room.



## Tips for talking

**Speak naturally,** use your natural voice and your usual volume of voice.

**Be specific.** Avoid using vague words like, 'here' or 'over there' and do not gesture by pointing. It's okay to use words like, 'see', 'look' and 'watch' in general conversation. People with low vision or blindness use those words themselves.

**Use directional words** like 'left' or 'right'. You can also use a clock-face reference system to describe directions or location. For example, the ticket office is located at 11 o'clock, or in a dining setting, your drink is at two o'clock.

**Give a clear word picture** when describing things. Include details such as colour, texture, shape and landmarks.

## Assisting Guide Dog handlers

**If the person has a Guide Dog, focus all your attention to the person** and ignore the dog. Do not pat, feed or distract the dog when it is wearing a harness and working. Guide Dogs have an important job of guiding their handlers but when they are distracted this can lead to unsafe situations.

In a dining setting, **when the handler is seated, ensure there is enough space for the Guide Dog to** lie down, and not be in a thoroughfare or a trip hazard. Guide Dogs are trained to tuck under the handler's seat or table.

## In a dining situation

**Offer to read the menu** starting with the headings. Further details of choices could be provided under specific headings. If the menu is available on your website, assist with using a QR code (if available). The person may be able to read the menu digitally on a smart phone or similar device using voice over, an app or by enlarging the print.

**Describe any items you bring to the table.** Avoid over filling drinks or food so that they are easier to manage and less likely to spill.

**Inform a person with low vision or blindness if you give them something.** For example, if you give them a drink, say "I am putting a cup next to your right hand".



## Safely guiding

In some circumstances, it might be appropriate for you or a member of your staff to assist a person with low vision or blindness to navigate your place of business.

This is known as 'safely guiding' or 'sighted guiding' and there are a few key principles to keep in mind:

**Ask a person if they need assistance first.** If yes, let the person know you will move your hand for them to find it. Touch the back of your hand to theirs. The person will then hold your arm just above the elbow. Walk at a comfortable pace while avoiding potential hazards.

**When approaching narrow spaces,** tell the person, slow down and move your guiding arm behind your back. The person will be able to step behind you and through the narrow space.

**If you are assisting a person to a seat,** place your guiding hand on the chair, the person will be able to find the chair and sit down.

**If you are not sure what to do, do not be afraid to ask.** Good communication is the key to being a good guide.

**If guiding someone with a Guide Dog:**

- **Stand on the opposite side** of the Guide Dog and offer your arm.

- **If the person wants to follow you,** Guide Dogs are taught the word 'follow'.

- **Stay a few steps ahead** and try not to call out to the dog and never grab a Guide Dog's lead.

# Chapter Highlights

**1** ⏩

Never assume a person with low vision or blindness requires assistance, always ask: "Would you like help?"

**2** ⏩

Greet the person and introduce yourself using your natural voice and your usual volume of voice.

**3** ⏩

Be specific, avoid using vague words like 'here' or 'over there' and do not gesture by pointing.

**4** ⏩

Use a clock-face reference system to describe directions or locations.

**5** ⏩

Give a clear word picture when describing things and include details such as colour, texture, shape and landmarks.

**6** ⏩

Focus all your attention to the person and ignore the Guide Dog. Do not pat, feed or distract the dog when it is wearing a harness and working.

**7** ⏩

Ensure enough space for the Guide Dog to lie down under the handler's seat or table.

**8** ⏩

Provide a large font menu or offer to read the menu starting with the headings. If the menu is available on your website, assist with using a QR code (if available).

**9** ⏩

Describe any items brought to the table.

**10** ⏩

Ensure all staff are trained in how to safely guide.

# How to make your print and online material more accessible

**Access to well-designed documents, menus, emails, and online content is important to everyone.**

The more inclusive the design and readable the content the easier it is for everyone to navigate and find information about your facilities and services.

The following section provides a range of guidelines for how to make your print and online material for your business accessible to all.

## Use Word documents

Microsoft Word documents are the recommended format for providing accessible content. Word documents are easier to read with screen readers than PDFs.

To help reduce unwanted edits or changes to your Word documents, save them as 'read only' versions, restrict any editing and mark as 'final'.

You can learn how to do this by visiting the Microsoft website.

### Remember!

This does not stop someone from making a new copy of the document and saving it with changes. If you are concerned about unwanted changes, we recommend providing both a Word and PDF version of a document. That way there is always a point of reference for what the original document should include.

## Readability

There are a few things you can do to improve the readability of your content, particularly for a person who uses a screen reader or other device in order to access information.

- Ensure the content is easy to comprehend, by using short, concise sentences and being as clear as possible.
- Avoid using acronyms unless necessary, and always expand each acronym the first time it is used.
- Use dot points where possible to help space out your information, making it easy to read.
- Use short sentences and paragraphs where possible.
- Avoid using full capital letters.
- Avoid using underline with text.
- Use left aligned text.
- Use heading styles, where Heading 1 is the broadest level of content and each heading after that becomes more specific.
- Provide alternative text for any images. Alternative text provides a written description of what the image is. This can be done in most word processing applications.
- When using images make sure that they are positioned in line with text.
- Check the colour contrast of text and images.
- Use a table of contents in a long document so people can jump to the information they want.

- When adding a link to a document make sure it is an accessible link - that means adding alternative text that indicates where the link will direct a person to. It also means being mindful of how you introduce the link in your text. A good example to follow is: 'Click here' to visit our booking page on our website.

## Font and styling

- Use a font that is solid and easy to read, ideally a sans serif font. For example: **Arial** is a sans serif font. **Times New Roman** is a serif font.
- Align text to the left and avoid indenting paragraphs.
- Spacing between the lines of text should be at least 25-30% of the point size.
- Use the line spacing options section under the 'Home' tab in a Word document. If using the 'Enter' key in a Word document to make the spacing, screen readers will read out "new line, new line" and that can get frustrating for a user. Use equal spacing between words, generous spacing between paragraphs and ensure letters are well spaced.
- Size is different for everyone, however 12 to 14 point font size allows magnification users the ability to read information and screen reader users more information per line before having to scroll down.

- Avoid using colour alone to convey information. For example, rather than highlight a section red to indicate importance, use additional words to describe the intent of your information.
- Avoid excessive use of italics, bold, using uppercase and underlining.

## Colour contrast

Did you know black text on a white background is more accessible?

Here are some other hints on colour contrast to ensure your information is as accessible as possible:

- Ensure foreground and background colours have a minimum contrast ratio of 4:5:1 for normal text or 3:1 for large-scale text.
- Consider your colour choices when designing a new document.

For example, avoid using pale colours on a pale background as this can be difficult for screen readers to differentiate.

For example, if the background colour is white and the foreground colour is a light grey, this would be a lower contrast.

- To learn more about colour contrast in websites, visit the following resources:

  https://webaim.org/resources/contrastchecker or
  https://color.a11y.com

## Lists

Lists are a great way to present information quickly and succinctly. When using a list, be mindful of the layout and remember to be consistent. Try to use the same bullet point type throughout.

When using a screen reader, a person will hear the font name of the bullet points as the list is read, so ensuring the same bullet point type is used throughout your document avoids confusion.

## Headings

Using informative headings in your documents makes it easy for a person using a screen reader to access information quickly.

Use true heading and list styles and do not rely on formatting such as using large, bold font to make text look like a heading.

Guide Dogs recommend using Heading 1 for the first heading on the page. This conveniently tells someone using a screen reader that this is the first heading at the beginning of the document.

**To create a heading in Word**

To apply a heading style, follow these steps provided by Microsoft:

1. Select the text that you want to add a header to.
2. Select Home > Styles (or press Alt+H, then L), and then select the heading you want, such as the Heading 1 button.
3. Word applies a font and color change to help make it clear that this is a title. The next heading type is Heading 2.

To view these instructions online or learn more about heading styles and accessibility, visit the Microsoft website.

## Tables

The trick with ensuring your tables are accessible is to keep them simple. Avoid complex tables with lots of merged cells, and instead opt for multiple, smaller tables where possible.

Make sure you visually identify the column headers of tables. For websites, this is best implemented by using Cascading Style Sheets (CSS) and ensuring header cells are marked-up as table header elements. Avoid excessive use of blank characters or table cells.

> ### Did you know?
>
> Microsoft provides a built-in accessibility checker to help review your content in Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and Outlook?

## Check your formatting with an accessibility checker

Follow the instructions provided by Microsoft below to check the accessibility of your documents:

1. On the ribbon of the Microsoft Office app, select the Review tab. (Note: If you are using Outlook, you will only see the Review tab when writing or replying to messages).

2. Select the upper part of the Check Accessibility split button. The accessibility pane opens to the right of the screen and the accessibility ribbon activates at the top of the screen.

3. In the accessibility pane, review and address the findings.

To view these instructions online or learn more about using the accessibility checker, please visit the Microsoft website.

## Pictures and images

To make pictures and images in your document accessible, simply add alternative text.

Alternative text is easy to create and gives screen readers the ability to read and identify pictures.

To add alternative text to images in Microsoft Word, PowerPoint, Excel, and Outlook:

1. Insert your image or object.

2. Right click the image or object.

3. Select the option called Edit Alt Text.

4. A popup box will appear for you to write a description of the image.

5. In the Alt Text box, type one to two sentences in the text box to describe the object or image, and its context to someone who cannot see it.

> ### Remember!
>
> Alternative text is sometimes automatically applied to images; however, they are auto generated and not as descriptive as they could be, so always double check.
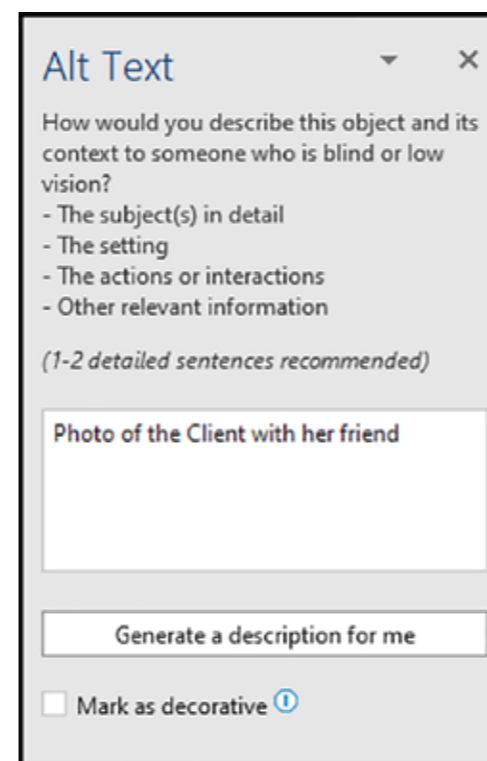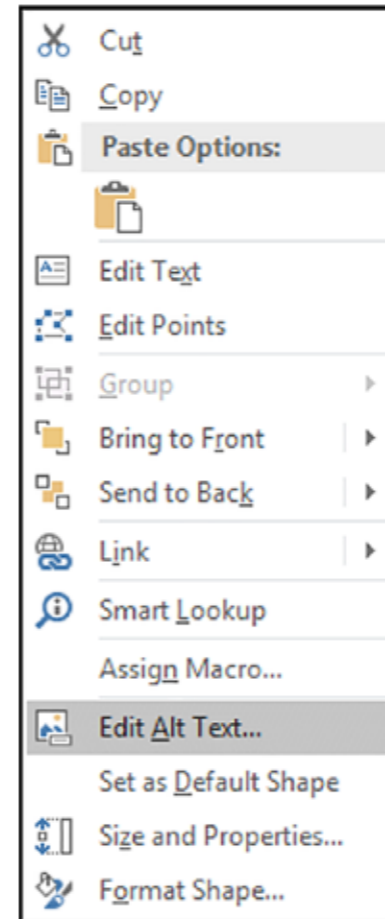




## The difference between alternative text and image descriptions

Alternative text is a written description of an image that is not visible to everyone but provides useful information for people using screen readers.

If you have included a picture in your document that does not have alternative text, a screen reader will announce it simply as "image" which does not provide any context of what the image is and can leave the reader confused.

An image description is a more detailed option for providing written information about images or video. It appears like an image caption, providing additional information and detail of the entire image often used in emails, under photos in a document, or in website content.

**Image Description:** "A white Labrador dog is lying on grass, looking at the camera. The dog wears an orange harness that has the words 'Guide Dogs' on it."

**Alternative text:** "A picture of a white Labrador dog lying on grass wearing a Guide Dog harness."

## Audio description

Providing audio descriptions for different visual elements can help your content and information be consumed in new ways, which are accessible to all.

Audio description describes body language, movements, expressions, and the visual scene to make a video clear through sound.

You may choose to add audio descriptions to videos to help explain what is appearing on the screen.

Audio description can be added to a handheld device that plays audio at the same time as the larger sound system. The device would include the sound that is playing out loud for all and include the audio description.

Audio guides, that are often used for the general public in museums are also a form of audio description, where visual artifacts are described through sound. Or you may provide a hand-held device that can explain different signs and information at your location.

### Learn more

To learn more about adding audio descriptions, visit the Social Media Accessibility and Resources sections of this guideline.

# Chapter Highlights
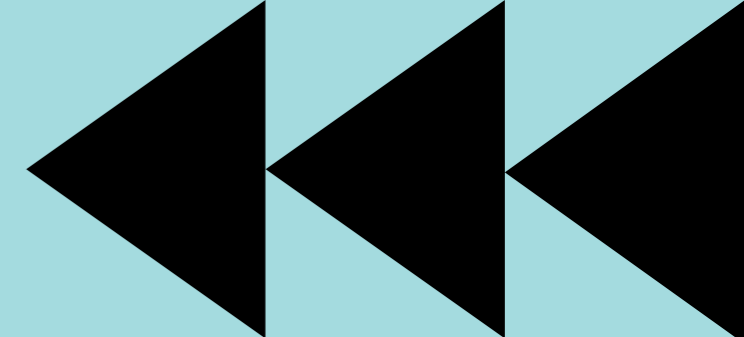
**1** ▶▶

Ensure document content is readable and easy to comprehend.

**2** ▶▶

Use a sans serif font such as **Arial** or serif font such as **Times New Roman.**

**3** ▶▶

12–14 point font size allows magnification users the ability to read information and screen reader users more information per line before having to scroll down.

**4** ▶▶

Avoid excessive use of italics, bold, uppercase and underlining.

**5** ▶▶

Use black text on a white background and avoid using pale colours on a pale background.

**6** ▶▶

Use Microsoft's built-in accessibility checker to help review content in Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and Outlook.

**7** ▶▶

Add alternative text to make pictures and images accessible in Word documents, PowerPoint, Excel, and Outlook.

**8** ▶▶

Provide audio description to videos or handheld devices to explain signs and information at your location.

# Social media accessibility

**Social media provides a great opportunity to build authentic connection and engagement with your customers and your community.**

There are simple things you can do to ensure your social media content is accessible for everyone.
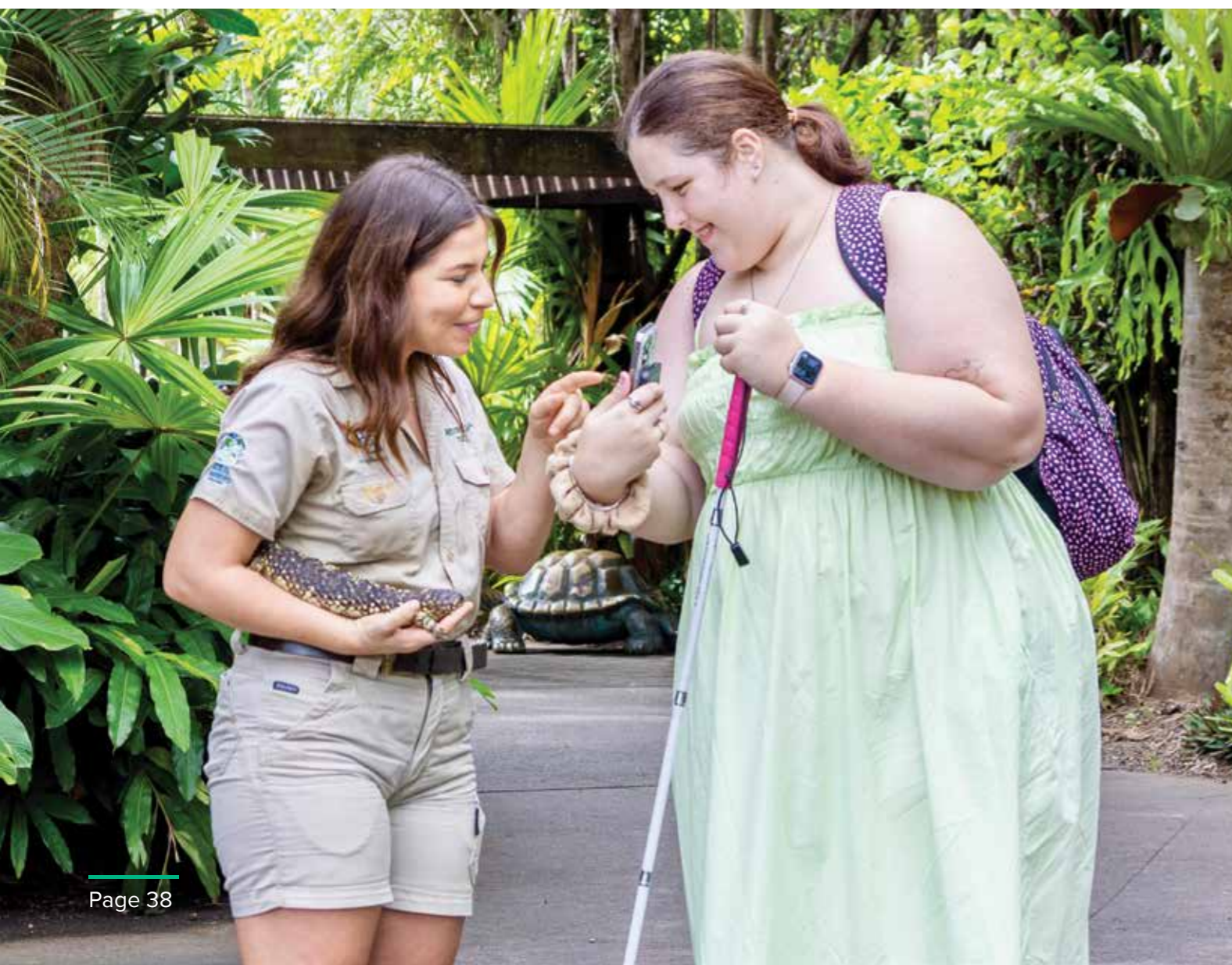
## Alternative text on Facebook

Follow these instructions from Facebook to edit alternative text for a photo before you post it:

1. Click Photo/Video at the top of your news feed.

2. Select the photo you want to add.

3. Hover over the photo and click the pencil Edit icon.

4. The automatically generated text will show on the left-hand side of your photo. Click Override generated alt text to edit it.

5. Write your alt text in the box. To change back to the automatically generated text, click Clear.

6. To save your alt text, click Save in the bottom left.

To change the alternative text of a photo after you have posted it:

1. Click the photo to open it.

2. Click the three dots in the top right and select Change alt text.

3. Click Override generated alt text or change the alt text in the text box. You can also click Clear to change your edited alt text back to the automatically generated text.

4. Click Save.

Search 'Help' on Facebook to view these instructions online.

## Alternative text on Instagram

Follow these instructions from Instagram to see and edit alternative text for a photo before you post it:

1. Start by taking a photo or uploading an existing photo to Instagram.

2. Choose a filter and edit the image, then tap Next (iPhone) or the arrow icon (Android).

3. Tap Advanced settings at the bottom of the screen.

4. Tap Write alt text.

5. Write your alt text in the box and tap Done (iPhone) or select the tick icon (Android).

To change the alternative text of a photo after you have already posted it on Instagram:

1. Go to the photo and tap the three dots in a line.

2. Tap Edit.

3. Tap Edit alt text in the bottom right.

4. Write the alt text in the box and tap Done (iPhone) or select the tick icon (Android).

Search 'Help' on Instagram to view these instructions online.

# Include image descriptions

Image descriptions provide more information and context about the images used in a social media post.

They are included in the content that is visible to the audience, and either included in the post itself, or in the first comment if there are content limits.

The image description should include any words featured in an image or video followed by a description of the content itself.

Image descriptions should be contained in square brackets to start and end the alternative text to make it clear that they are image descriptions.

For example, on the social post here, there were two images, with two image descriptions included:

1. [Image description one: Photo of Guide Dog Graduate, Izzy sitting in a brown harness. Izzy is a yellow Labrador.]

2. [Image description two: Photo of Guide Dog Graduate, Edwin sitting in a brown harness. Edwin is a black Labrador.]



# Cut the capitals

While it can be tempting to use capital letters or slang in your social media content to seem more relaxed and approachable, this makes your content more difficult for screen readers. Stick with plain language and good grammar so it is understood by everyone.

# Limit your emojis

Emojis can be a fun way to show emotion quickly, however they are often read out by a screen reader and can be easily misinterpreted or provide an awkward interruption to your message. For example, having a 😦 emoji will read out as a 'sad face' which may not be as impactful as the visual element.



# Watch how you use hashtags

Hashtags are a terrific way to help your content get more reach. Here are a couple of tips to help you use hashtags in a way that works for everyone:

• Capitalise the first letter in multi-word hashtags as these make them more legible and allow screen readers to pronounce them correctly. For example: the hashtag #socialmediaadvice is not as easy to read as #SocialMediaAdvice

• Put your hashtags and mentions at the end of your content. Punctuation marks are read aloud by screen readers and can interrupt the message of your content.

# Caption your video and story content

Increasingly, social media content is delivered through short videos and stories. To ensure your content is accessible, be sure to include auto-caption and audio descriptions.

To learn more about adding auto captions to social media posts or to see further examples of audio descriptions, check out the Additional Resources section at the end of this document.

# Chapter Highlights

## 1 »

Make sure your social media posts include alternative text for any images posted.

## 2 »

Image descriptions for all images posted on social media are helpful in providing further context and should be contained in square brackets at the end of your post.

## 3 »

Stick with plain language and avoid slang where possible – this helps screen readers to make sense of your content.

## 4 »

Emojis are fun but can be difficult for screen readers to interpret.

## 5 »

When writing multi-word hashtags, capitalise each new word so screen readers can pronounce them correctly.

## 6 »

Ensure your video content is accessible by adding auto-captions and audio descriptions where possible.

# Email accessibility

**If email is a big part of how you advertise your business or take bookings, then ensuring your emails are accessible to everyone is also important.**
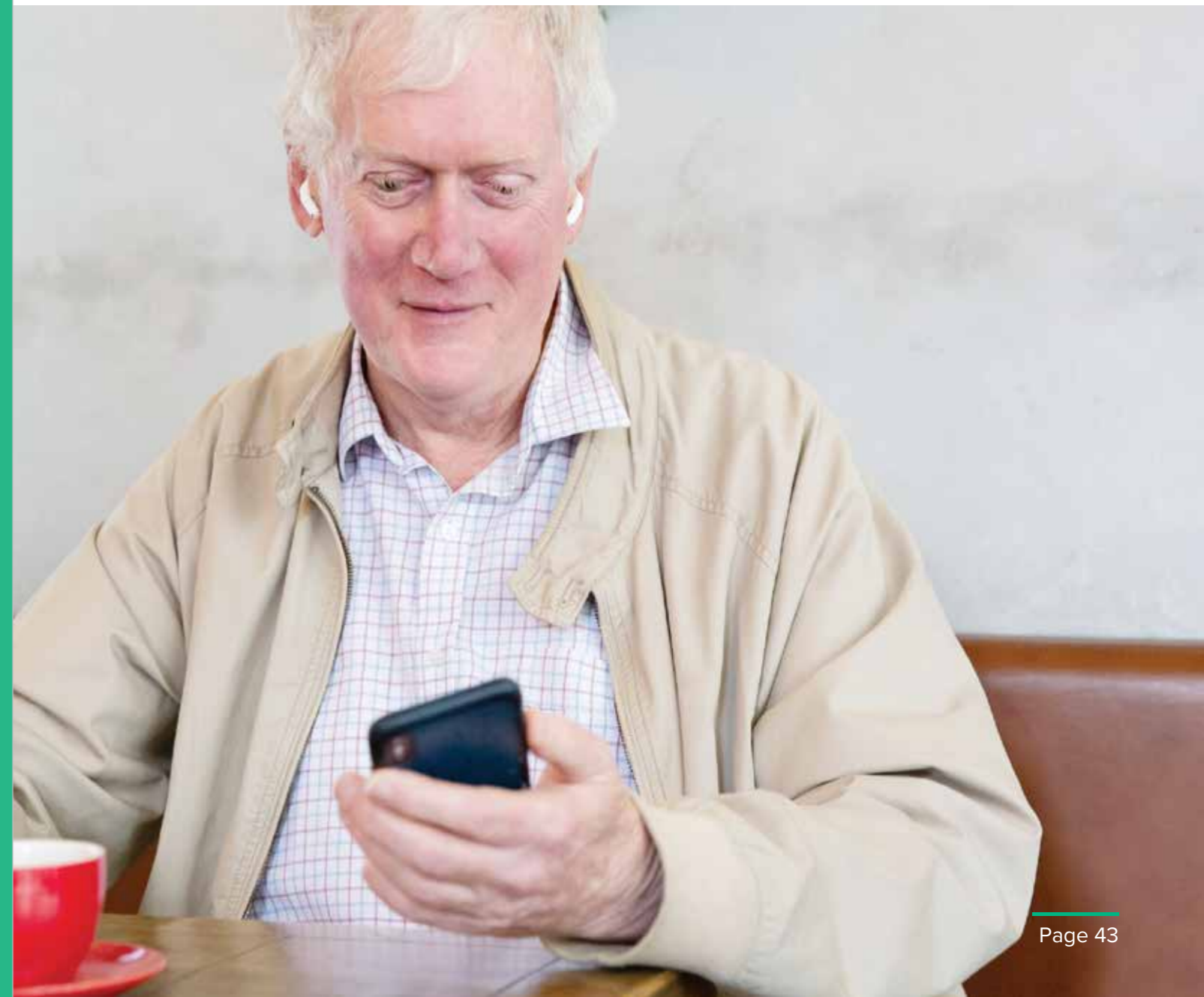
# Website accessibility

**Having a website that is accessible helps all potential customers find out about your business easily and quickly.**

Follow these simple guidelines to help ensure your email communications remain accessible for all:

- Subject lines should be brief but descriptive and give the recipient an accurate idea of what content is in your email. Effective subject lines are not only good for accessibility, but they also tend to increase overall reader engagement.

- Links should convey clear and accurate information about the destination. Instead of just saying "Click here," add context about what they need to do, such as a call to action, and where the link will take them. For example, "Click here to view our holiday products."

- The email text should be readable in High Contrast mode so people with low vision or blindness can see. White and black colour schemes make it easy for people who are colourblind to distinguish text and shapes.

- If you use a paid email campaign program, check to see if they offer any tools which allow you to assess your colour scheme. MailChimp, for example, has a Colour Contrast Analyser tool available under the Inbox Preview tool:

  https://mailchimp.com/en-au/help/test-with-inbox-preview/

- If you are sending your email through Microsoft, Microsoft Office has an accessibility checking tool you can use to check your emails. To learn more about this tool, visit the Formatting Documents and Resources sections of this guideline.

## Describe your images

**Include alternative text** on all visual elements, including images, icons, logos, and graphics.

**Where relevant, also consider including image descriptions or visible captions** to help provide additional information about what the image is.

To learn more about alternative text and image descriptions, refer to the *How to make your print and online material more accessible* section of this guideline.

## Design for different reading speeds

Not everybody reads or consumes content the same way. That is why it is important to consider the layout and format of your website. Helpful hints to make your website content more accessible include:

- Use heading styles to break up the text.
- Use bullet points.
- Allow white space in-between blocks of text.
- Use short, simple sentences.
- Use a free online 'readability' tool below to check your content:

https://readable.com/

https://www.webfx.com/tools/read-able/

https://datayze.com/readability-analyzer.php

## Use helpful hyperlink text

Make sure the hyperlinks in your website content provide clear and accurate information about where the user will go when they click the link.

You can do this by simply describing where the link will take the user and what the context is. For example, rather than writing "Learn more," use a concise, descriptive hyperlink that provides information on the link, such as "Learn more about our attractions."

## Understand the standards for website accessibility

It is a legal requirement to make websites accessible under the Australian Disability Discrimination Act (1992).

There are further guidelines and information on website accessibility available in the World Wide Web Consortium's website accessibility guidelines:

https://www.w3.org/WAI/standards-guidelines/wcag/

This is a useful resource for any organisation looking to improve their website accessibility.

WCAG is endorsed by the United Nations, and is the standard used by the Australian Government.

# Chapter Highlights

**1** ▶▶

Email subject lines should be concise but descriptive to give the recipient an accurate idea of what to expect in the email content.

**2** ▶▶

Use terms like 'click here' to make it very clear where to find further information and be descriptive of where the link will take them.

**3** ▶▶

Use the Microsoft accessibility checking tool to check your emails before you hit send.

**4** ▶▶

Use alternative text for all images used in your emails and across your website.

**5** ▶▶

Include image descriptions for images in your emails where possible.

**6** ▶▶

Using heading styles, bullet points, and short, concise sentences all help make your online content more accessible.

# Accessibility specialists

**If you have limited time or knowledge, sometimes it can be easier to speak with someone who is an expert in accessibility.**

Accessibility specialists can work with your business or organisation to identify opportunities for improving the accessibility of your spaces, communications, and can offer advice for staff training.

Guide Dogs Access Consultants are highly skilled and have a qualified understanding of the legislation and standards on the functional use of buildings, facilities and services.

We often work with other access consultants, disability groups and government and industry partners at all phases of a project, including design, prototype and implementation.

Guide Dogs offer a service where our Access Consultant will visit your place of business to:

- identify and improve functional access challenges relating to people with low vision or blindness

- identify and recommend indoor and outdoor wayfinding (navigation) solutions

- meet and exceed relevant legislation and Australian Standards, including those relating to Tactile Ground Surface Indicators (TGSIs), braille/tactile signage and luminance contrast

- provide consultation at the planning stage of an event or festival

- offer 'walk-and-talk' opportunities to establish whether a full access appraisal is needed

- deliver a professional report with recommendations.

# Additional Resources

If you would like to find out more about accessibility we have collated numerous additional resources on our website which you can access here: **qld.guidedogs.com.au/operator-resources**

These resources include:
- Low vision information and statistics
- Smart phone accessibility
- Formatting documents
- Website accessibility and alt text
- Social media accessibility
- Email accessibility

# Guide Dogs.

## Further support

We hope the Accessibility and Inclusivity Guidelines for Tourism and Events Operators was useful in building your awareness of the range of things you can do to ensure your tourism business remains accessible to all visitors, no matter their ability.

If you have any questions or would like further accessibility support, please contact our friendly team. We are here to help.

**For more information please contact:**

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