

A REFERENCE FOR DESIGNERS, DEVELOPERS & PRODUCT TEAMS

Accessibility Glossary

WCAG criteria, UI patterns, compliance frameworks and the laws of UX — every term that turns up in an audit, in one place, in plain English.

132

TERMS

11

CATEGORIES

WCAG
2.2

ALIGNED

AA

LEGAL STANDARD

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Rijswijk, the Netherlands · EAA · ADA · WCAG 2.2 · EN 301 549

[joegullo.com / resources](https://joegullo.com/resources)

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HALLO —

The vocabulary of a field that finally has teeth.

Until the European Accessibility Act took force in June 2025, accessibility was something you got around to. Now it's something regulators read out loud in court, citing the same WCAG numbers your auditor cites. The fastest way to keep up is to know the words.

This booklet is a printed copy of the working glossary I keep open during audits and remediation calls. It covers the four POUR principles (Perceivable, Operable, Understandable, Robust), the nine new rules added in WCAG 2.2, the UI patterns that break most often, the compliance frameworks that bind on either side of the Atlantic, and the laws of UX that shape every decision in between.

Every entry is short on purpose. If a team can read one definition aloud in a stand-up and act on it the same day, the booklet has done its job. If you want the long version, every term has a deeper article at joegullo.com/resources/accessibility-glossary — with interactive demos, detection methods, and audit data.

Where a percentage appears next to a term — **84% fail** — that's the share of the WebAIM Million homepages that failed that specific criterion. The numbers are sobering. They're also the cheapest map we have of where to start.

Joe Gullo

Rijswijk, NL · May 2026

HOW TO READ AN ENTRY

Term · WCAG rule number · category · plain-English definition

P Perceivable Can users sense the content?	O Operable Can they interact with it?	U Understandable Can they understand it?
R Robust Does it work with screen readers?	UI UI Patterns Recipes for buttons, menus & forms.	C Compliance Laws, acts & standards.
T Testing Tools & how to check.	D Documents PDF, Word, email.	UX UX Principles Core design principles.
L Laws of UX How people think & behave.	W WCAG Levels The A, AA & AAA levels.	

BY THE NUMBERS

95% of the top million homepages still fail at least one WCAG criterion.

Twelve failure types account for the vast majority of detected errors, and the top six alone cover most audits. If you do nothing else with this glossary, learn these terms, then walk your own homepage. You will fix more than your competitors fix this quarter.

95%	56	40%	300M
HOMEPAGES WITH AT LEAST ONE ERROR	AVERAGE ERRORS PER PAGE	CAUGHT BY AUTOMATION	COLOR-BLIND USERS WORLDWIDE

THE TWELVE MOST-FAILED CRITERIA

webaim million · 2026

01	Color Contrast	1.4.3	84%	02	ARIA Misuse	4.1.2	80%
03	Keyboard Operability	2.1.1	78%	04	PDF Accessibility	DOCS	72%
05	Focus Visible	2.4.7	68%	06	Dialog / Modal Focus	UI	65%
07	Error Identification	3.3.1	62%	08	Info & Relationships	1.3.1	60%
09	Alternative Text	1.1.1	54%	10	Form Input Labels	1.3.1	49%
11	Empty / Vague Links	2.4.4	47%	12	Missing lang Attribute	3.1.1	16%

A

14 · TERMS STARTING WITH “A”

Accessibility Overlays

COMPLIANCE

JavaScript widgets that claim to fix accessibility automatically. They don't — pages with overlays have more errors, not fewer. 25% of ADA lawsuits in 2024 involved overlay widgets. The FTC fined one provider \$1M in 2025 for misleading claims.

Accessibility Statement

TESTING

Public declaration of accessibility commitment, conformance level, known limitations, and contact information for reporting barriers. Required under EAA and many national laws. WAI provides a generator tool.

Accessibility Tree

ROBUST

The parallel DOM that assistive technology reads. If an element isn't in the accessibility tree, it doesn't exist for screen-reader users. Inspect via DevTools → Accessibility tab.

Accessible Authentication

UNDERSTANDABLE

3.3.8

Authentication must not require cognitive function tests (memorizing, transcribing, puzzles) unless an alternative exists. Allow paste in password fields. Support password managers. New in WCAG 2.2.

Accessible Name

ROBUST

Every interactive element needs a computed accessible name. Sources, in priority order: `aria-labelledby` → `aria-label` → `<label>` → text content → `title`. Empty name = invisible to assistive tech.

```
<button aria-label="Close">
  <svg>...</svg>
</button>
```

Accordion

UI PATTERNS

Use `<details>/<summary>` or button + `aria-expanded` + `aria-controls`. Arrow keys optional. Content panel must be associated with its trigger.

ADA & Section 508

COMPLIANCE

US: ADA applies to private sector (case law, 4,000+ lawsuits in 2024). Section 508 applies to federal agencies and contractors. Both align to WCAG 2.1 AA. DOJ Title II rule requires compliance by April 2026.

Aesthetic-Usability Effect

LAWS OF UX

Users perceive aesthetically pleasing designs as more usable — even when they're not. Beautiful design builds tolerance for minor friction. But aesthetics can't compensate for fundamental accessibility failures.

Affordance

UX PRINCIPLES

Visual cues that indicate how an element can be used. Buttons should look clickable (raised, colored, labeled). Links should look tappable (underlined, colored). Flat design often destroys affordance — add it back with shadows, borders, or underlines.

Alternative Text

PERCEIVABLE

1.1.1

54% fail

Every meaningful image needs a text equivalent describing its purpose, not its appearance. Decorative images get `alt=""`. 54% of homepages have images missing alt text.

```

```

ARIA: Use & Misuse

ROBUST 80% fail

80% of homepages use ARIA — and those pages have 2× more errors than pages without. ARIA doesn't add behavior, only semantics. Misused ARIA is worse than no ARIA. Five rules: don't use ARIA if native works.

```
// Rule 1: don't.  
// Native > ARIA  
<button>X</button>
```

Assistive Technology

TESTING

Any device or software that helps people with disabilities use technology. Includes screen readers, magnifiers, switch devices, eye trackers, voice control (Dragon), braille displays, and alternative keyboards. Design and test for the full range.

B

01 · TERM STARTING WITH “B”

Breadcrumb

UI PATTERNS

Use `nav` with `aria-label="Breadcrumb"`, an ordered list, and `aria-current="page"` on the last item. Separators should be decorative (CSS or `aria-hidden`). Helps orientation for all users.

C

12 · TERMS STARTING WITH “C”

Captions & Transcripts

PERCEIVABLE 1.2.2

Pre-recorded video needs synchronized captions. Pre-recorded audio needs a transcript. Live video needs real-time captions (Level AA). Benefits 430M people with hearing loss, plus anyone in a noisy environment.

Audio Descriptions

PERCEIVABLE 1.2.5

Videos must describe important visual content in the audio track for blind users. Required when dialogue alone doesn't convey what's happening on screen.

Automated Testing

TESTING

Tools like axe, WAVE, and Lighthouse catch ~30–40% of WCAG issues automatically. Good for contrast, alt text, labels, ARIA attributes. Cannot catch focus order, reading comprehension, or keyboard traps.

Carousel / Slider

UI PATTERNS

Provide pause/stop controls. Support keyboard navigation (arrows for slides). `role="group"` on each slide with `aria-roledescription="slide"`. Auto-rotation must respect `prefers-reduced-motion`.

Choice Overload

LAWS OF UX

Too many options leads to decision paralysis and reduced satisfaction (the paradox of choice). Limit visible options, use defaults, allow filtering. Directly overlaps with cognitive load reduction.

Cognitive Load

UX PRINCIPLES

Mental effort to process information. More options = slower decisions (Hick's Law). More fields = more abandonment. Chunk content, simplify choices, eliminate unnecessary inputs.

Color Blindness Simulation

TESTING

Tools that simulate color-vision deficiencies: protanopia (no red), deuteranopia (no green), tritanopia (no blue), achromatopsia (no color). Chrome DevTools has a built-in simulator. Use to verify color is never the only indicator.

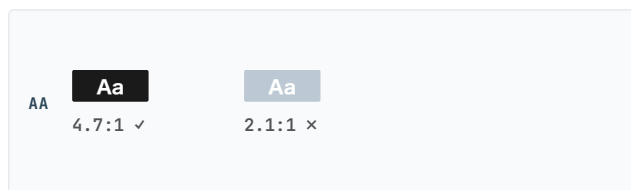
Color Contrast

PERCEIVABLE

1.4.3

84% fail

Text must meet a 4.5:1 contrast ratio against its background (3:1 for large text $\geq$ 18pt / 14pt bold). The single most common WCAG failure — found on 84% of homepages in the 2026 WebAIM Million.



Combobox / Autocomplete

UI PATTERNS

A text input with a popup list of options. One of the hardest ARIA patterns: `role="combobox"` + `aria-expanded` + `aria-activedescendant` + `listbox`. Broken implementations are everywhere — test with screen readers.

Conformance & Claims

WCAG LEVELS

Conformance is per-page, not per-site. Level AA means all A + AA criteria pass on that page. Claims should specify version (2.2), level (AA), scope (pages/processes), and date. Partial conformance exists for third-party content you don't control.

Conformity Assessment

COMPLIANCE

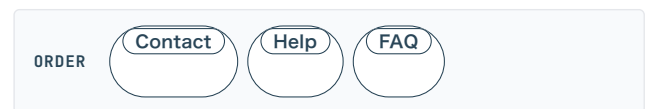
The procedure that shows a product meets EAA requirements. For EAA products it's internal production control (Module A): the maker compiles a technical file, self-assesses, draws up the EU Declaration of Conformity, and affixes the CE marking.

Consistent Help

UNDERSTANDABLE

3.2.6

If help mechanisms (contact info, chat, FAQ link) appear on multiple pages, they must appear in the same relative order. New in WCAG 2.2 (Level A). Does not require providing help — only consistency when you do.



Consistent Identification

UNDERSTANDABLE

3.2.4

Components with the same function must be identified consistently. If "Search" is the label on one page, don't call it "Find" on another.

Consistent Navigation

UNDERSTANDABLE

3.2.3

Navigation mechanisms repeated across pages must appear in the same relative order. Don't rearrange menus between pages.

D

13 · TERMS STARTING WITH “D”

Dark Patterns

UX PRINCIPLES

Deceptive UI tricks that manipulate users: hidden costs, forced continuity, misdirection, confirm-shaming, roach motels, disguised ads. The ethical counterpoint to the Laws of UX. Increasingly illegal under GDPR, FTC enforcement, and the EU Digital Services Act.

Data Table

UI PATTERNS

Use `<th>` with `scope="col" / scope="row"`. Add `<caption>` or `aria-labelledby`. Never use tables for layout. Only 19% of observed tables had valid markup in the 2026 WebAIM Million.

Data Visualization

UI PATTERNS

Charts and graphs need a text alternative — a short summary, a data table, or both. Don't tell data series apart by color alone; add labels, patterns, or direct annotations. Bars, lines, and segments must meet 3:1 non-text contrast.

+ TABLE  + summary and table

Date Picker

UI PATTERNS

Notoriously inaccessible. Must support keyboard navigation (arrow keys for days, Page Up/Down for months). Always provide a text-input alternative. Native `<input type="date">` is often the best option.

Descriptive Page Title

OPERABLE

2.4.2

Each page needs a unique, descriptive `<title>`. Screen-reader users hear this first. Pattern: "Page Name — Section — Site Name". Helps all users with tabs and history.

Designated Authority

COMPLIANCE

The body each EU country names to take complaints, monitor compliance, and impose sanctions under the EAA. Some name a single accessibility authority; others split the job across sector regulators (banking, transport, telecoms).

Dialog / Modal

UI PATTERNS

65% fail

Focus trap inside, Escape to close, focus returns to trigger on dismiss. Use `<dialog>` or `role="dialog" + aria-modal="true"`. One of the most commonly broken patterns.

Disability Spectrum

UX PRINCIPLES

Disability isn't one fixed group. It can be permanent (one arm), temporary (a broken arm), or situational (holding a baby). Solve for one and you extend to many — the curb-cut effect: kerb ramps built for wheelchairs also help strollers, luggage, and carts.

Permanent

Temporary

Situational

Disproportionate Burden

COMPLIANCE

An EAA exemption a provider can claim when conformance would be an excessive burden. Not a free pass: it needs a written, documented assessment weighing cost, organization size, and benefit to disabled users — reviewed at least every 3 years.

Document Language

UNDERSTANDABLE

3.1.1

16% fail

Every page needs `lang="xx"` on the `<html>` element. Screen readers use this to switch pronunciation. Missing on 16% of homepages. A one-line fix with enormous impact.

`<html lang="en">`

Document Structure

DOCUMENTS

Headings, lists, tables, and reading order must be structurally encoded — not just visually styled. Applies to Word, PowerPoint, InDesign, and Google Docs. Export to tagged PDF.

Doherty Threshold

LAWS OF UX

Productivity soars when response time is under 400ms. Interactions that feel instant maintain flow state. Use skeleton screens, optimistic UI, and progress indicators when latency exceeds this threshold.

< 400 ms Response time that maintains flow.

E

07 · TERMS STARTING WITH “E”

EAA Penalties

COMPLIANCE

Sanctions for EAA non-compliance, set by each country and required to be "effective, proportionate and dissuasive." Ceilings vary widely — up to €100,000 per infringement in Germany, for example. Repeat or serious cases can restrict market access.

Email Accessibility

DOCUMENTS 77% fail

HTML email renders across a fragmented stack — Outlook on Windows uses the Word engine, Gmail strips style blocks, Apple Mail enforces dark-mode color inversion. Build with semantic tables for layout, real text over image-only designs, descriptive alt text, 4.5:1 contrast (in both light and dark), descriptive link text, and a declared language. Most marketing emails fail at least one of these.

Dragging Movements

OPERABLE 2.5.7

Any drag operation must have a non-dragging alternative (buttons, form controls). New in WCAG 2.2. Affects users who can't perform precise pointer movements.

EN 301 549

COMPLIANCE

European standard for ICT accessibility requirements. Incorporates WCAG and extends to software, hardware, documentation, and support services. Referenced by the EAA and the EU Web Accessibility Directive.

Error Identification

UNDERSTANDABLE 3.3.1 62% fail

Errors must be described in text (not just color), placed near the field, and announced via `aria-describedby` + `role="alert"`. Specific and actionable: "Enter a valid email", not "Invalid input".

Error Prevention

UNDERSTANDABLE 3.3.4

For legal, financial, or data-deletion actions: let users review before submitting, allow undo, or confirm the action. Reduces the consequences of mistakes for everyone.

Error Recovery

UX PRINCIPLES

Make errors easy to fix, not punishing. Preserve form data on validation failure. Allow undo. Clearly identify what went wrong and how to fix it. Norman's Design of Everyday Things principle.

F

10 · TERMS STARTING WITH “F”

Fitts's Law

LAWS OF UX

Time to reach a target = $f(\text{distance, size})$. Larger, closer targets are faster to hit. Make primary actions big and near the cursor. Applies directly to target-size accessibility (WCAG 2.5.8).

$T = A + B \cdot \log_2(D/W + 1)$ Bigger, closer · faster to hit.

Flow State

LAWS OF UX

Total immersion in a task where challenge matches skill. Design for flow: minimize interruptions, provide clear goals, give immediate feedback, remove unnecessary friction. Accessibility barriers break flow.

Focus Appearance

OPERABLE 2.4.13

Focus indicators must be at least 2px thick around the perimeter with 3:1 contrast between focused and unfocused states. Level AAA in WCAG 2.2 — the criterion that finally defines what “visible” means quantitatively.

2.4.13  ≥ 2px perimeter

Focus Management

OPERABLE 65% fail

Programmatically move focus when context changes: into a modal on open, back to trigger on close, to the next item after deletion, to new content after dynamic loads.

European Accessibility Act (EAA)

COMPLIANCE

EU directive requiring accessible products and digital services since 28 June 2025. Applies to e-commerce, banking, transport, e-books, and more. Non-compliance carries market-access risk.

Focus Not Obscured

OPERABLE 2.4.11

When an element receives keyboard focus, it must not be entirely hidden by sticky headers, cookie banners, chat widgets, or footers. New in WCAG 2.2 (Level AA). The most common new 2.2 failure in audits.

2.4.11 The control you tab to stays visible — never hidden under a sticky bar.

Focus Order

OPERABLE 2.4.3

Tab order must follow a logical reading sequence — typically left-to-right, top-to-bottom. Avoid positive `tabindex` values. CSS layout changes (`order`, `flex-direction`) can break focus order.

Focus Visible

OPERABLE 2.4.7 68% fail

Every interactive element must have a visible focus indicator when navigated to via keyboard. Never use `outline:none` without a replacement. WCAG 2.2 adds 2.4.11 (Focus Appearance) requiring minimum area and contrast.

DEMO  2px outline · 3:1 contrast

Forced Colors & High Contrast

ROBUST

Operating systems let people swap every color for their own palette (Windows High Contrast / `forced-colors` mode). Don't fight it: use semantic HTML, keep meaning out of background images, and check that content still reads after the swap.

SWAP **Aa** → **Aa** user's palette

Form Input Labels

UI PATTERNS

1.3.1

49% fail

Every input needs a visible, programmatically associated `<label for="id">`. Placeholder is not a label. Missing on 49% of homepages. The second most common WCAG failure after contrast.

```
<label for="e">Email</label>
<input id="e" type="email">
```

Fundamental Alteration

COMPLIANCE

An EAA exemption where meeting a requirement would change the basic nature of the product or service. Narrower than disproportionate burden, but the same documentation duty applies.

G

01 · TERM STARTING WITH “G”

Goal-Gradient Effect

LAWS OF UX

Motivation increases as you approach a goal. Progress bars, step counters, and "almost there" messaging accelerate completion. Loyalty cards that start pre-stamped outperform empty ones.

H

03 · TERMS STARTING WITH “H”

Harmonised Standards

COMPLIANCE

Technical standards adopted at EU level and listed in the Official Journal. Following one gives a "presumption of conformity" with the matching EAA requirements. For ICT services that standard is EN 301 549.

Heading Structure

PERCEIVABLE

1.3.1

One `<h1>` per page. Headings in logical order without skipping levels ($h1 \rightarrow h2 \rightarrow h3$, never $h1 \rightarrow h3$). Screen-reader users navigate by heading — 67.5% use headings to find information.

```
/* good - no skips */
<h1>Page</h1>
  <h2>Section</h2>
    <h3>Sub</h3>
```

Hick's Law

LAWS OF UX

Decision time increases with the number and complexity of choices. Reduce options, use progressive disclosure, break complex tasks into steps. Directly supports cognitive accessibility.

$RT = A + B \cdot \log_2(N+1)$ More choices · slower decisions.



05 · TERMS STARTING WITH “I”

Images of Text

PERCEIVABLE 1.4.5

Don't use images of text — use real text styled with CSS. Images of text can't be resized, reflowed, recolored, or read by screen readers. Exception for logos.

Inclusive Design

UX PRINCIPLES

Design for the full range of human diversity from the start — not as a remediation step. Microsoft's framework: recognize exclusion, learn from diversity, solve for one and extend to many.

Info & Relationships

PERCEIVABLE 1.3.1 60% fail

Structure conveyed visually (headings, lists, tables, form groups) must also be conveyed programmatically. If it looks like a heading, it must be a heading element.

Input Purpose / Autocomplete

UI PATTERNS 1.3.5

Inputs collecting personal data (name, email, address, credit card) must have autocomplete attributes. Helps autofill and assistive tech identify fields: `autocomplete="email"`, `"given-name"`, etc.

In-Scope Services (EAA)

COMPLIANCE

The consumer services the EAA covers: e-commerce, consumer banking, e-books and reading software, electronic communications, access to audiovisual media, passenger transport, and 112 emergency communications. Other digital services fall outside it.



01 · TERM STARTING WITH “J”

Jakob's Law

LAWS OF UX

Users spend most of their time on other sites — they expect yours to work the same way. Leverage familiar patterns (nav on top, logo links home, search in the header). Novelty has a cost.

K

01 · TERM STARTING WITH “K”

Keyboard Accessible

OPERABLE

2.1.1

78% fail

All functionality must be operable with the keyboard alone — Tab, Shift+Tab, Enter, Space, Escape, Arrow keys. No keyboard traps. Affects motor-disability users, switch users, power users, and screen-reader users.

L

09 · TERMS STARTING WITH “L”

Label in Name

UNDERSTANDABLE

2.5.3

The accessible name of a component must include its visible text. If a button says "Search", its `aria-label` can't be "Find items". Voice-control users say what they see.

Landmark Regions

PERCEIVABLE

1.3.1

Semantic containers: `<header>`, `<nav>`, `<main>`, `<aside>`, `<footer>`. Screen-reader users jump between landmarks. Every page needs exactly one `<main>`.

```
<header> <nav>
<main>    // one per page
<aside> <footer>
```

Law of Common Region

LAWS OF UX

Elements sharing a bounded area are perceived as grouped (Gestalt). Cards, sections, fieldsets — boundaries create relationships without needing proximity alone. Supports info & relationships (WCAG 1.3.1).

Law of Prägnanz

LAWS OF UX

People interpret complex images as the simplest form possible. Reduce visual noise, favor clean geometry, avoid ambiguous layouts. The brain seeks order — give it order.

Law of Proximity

LAWS OF UX

Objects near each other are perceived as a group (Gestalt). Use spacing to create visual relationships — related form fields close together, unrelated sections further apart. Replaces the need for borders.

Law of Similarity

LAWS OF UX

Similar elements (shape, color, size) are perceived as related (Gestalt). Consistent styling for all buttons, all links, all headings. Breaking similarity draws attention — use intentionally for emphasis.

Law of Uniform Connectedness

LAWS OF UX

Visually connected elements (lines, arrows, shared color) are perceived as more related than disconnected elements. Breadcrumbs, step indicators, and flow diagrams leverage this principle.

Link Purpose

OPERABLE

2.4.4

47% fail

Link text must describe its destination — even out of context. Avoid "click here", "read more", "learn more". Empty links (no text at all) found on 47% of homepages.

Live Regions

ROBUST

A part of the page marked with `aria-live` so screen readers announce changes without moving focus. Use `polite` for routine updates (a results count) and `assertive` for urgent ones (an error). The region must exist before its text changes.

```
<div aria-live="polite">
  3 results found
</div>
```

M

08 · TERMS STARTING WITH “M”

Manual Testing

TESTING

Keyboard-only navigation, screen-reader testing (NVDA / JAWS / VoiceOver), zoom to 400%, check focus order, verify ARIA states. Catches the 60% that automated tools miss.

Market Surveillance Authority

COMPLIANCE

The national body that enforces the EAA against products — it can request documentation, inspect, order fixes, restrict market access, and fine. Member States name a separate authority for service compliance.

Member State Transposition

COMPLIANCE

Each EU country must write the EAA into its own national law. Operators comply with that national law, not the directive directly — so penalties, exemptions, and even covered services can vary by country.

Mental Model

LAWS OF UX

Users carry compressed expectations of how systems work. Mismatches between mental models and actual behavior cause errors and frustration. Research reveals models; design should align with them, not fight them.

Microenterprise Exemption

COMPLIANCE

Service providers with fewer than 10 staff and turnover or balance sheet of €2M or less are exempt from the EAA's requirements. The exemption does not apply to microenterprises that place products on the market — those must still comply.

Miller's Law

LAWS OF UX

Working memory holds ~7 (± 2) items. Chunk information into groups of 3–5. Phone numbers, card numbers, and step indicators all use chunking. Especially critical for users with cognitive disabilities.

7 $\pm$ 2 555 · 0142 · 9988 chunked

Mobile Navigation

UI PATTERNS

Hamburger menus need a `button` trigger (not a `div`) with `aria-expanded`, focus trap when open, Escape to close, focus returns to trigger. Content behind the menu should be inert when open.

Motion & Animation

OPERABLE

2.3.3

Respect `prefers-reduced-motion`. No auto-playing content that flashes more than 3x per second. Parallax, scroll-triggered animations, and auto-play video must be pauseable.

N

02 · TERMS STARTING WITH “N”

Name, Role, Value

ROBUST

4.1.2

Every interactive element must expose its name (label), role (button, link, checkbox…), and state (expanded, checked, disabled…) to assistive technology. The foundation of everything.

NRV **Name** "Save" · **Role** button · **State** disabled

Non-text Contrast

PERCEIVABLE

1.4.11

UI components and graphical objects need at least 3:1 contrast. Applies to icons, form borders, chart segments, focus indicators — anything meaningful that isn't text.

O

01 · TERM STARTING WITH “O”

Occam's Razor

LAWS OF UX

The simplest solution is usually the best. Among designs that solve the problem equally well, prefer the one with fewer elements, fewer steps, and less cognitive overhead. Simplicity is a feature.

P

12 · TERMS STARTING WITH “P”

Pagination

UI PATTERNS

Wrap in `nav` with `aria-label="Pagination"`. Mark current page with `aria-current="page"`. Use meaningful link text ("Page 3"), not just numbers. Previous/Next need clear labels, not just arrows.

Paradox of the Active User

LAWS OF UX

Users never read manuals — they start using software immediately. Design for exploration, not instruction. Progressive disclosure, inline help, and sensible defaults serve active users.

Pareto Principle

LAWS OF UX

80% of effects come from 20% of causes. Focus on the 20% of features, flows, and pages that serve 80% of users. In accessibility: fixing the 6 most common WCAG failures addresses 96% of detected errors.

88/20 Fix 6 criteria → solve 96% of detected errors.

Parkinson's Law

LAWS OF UX

Tasks expand to fill the available time. Reduce form fields and you reduce completion time. Set clear expectations with time estimates. Constrained interfaces (character limits, deadlines) drive efficiency.

PDF Accessibility

DOCUMENTS 72% fail

Tagged PDFs with reading order, alt text, proper structure, and bookmarks. Only 19% of observed tables in PDFs were properly coded. Scan → OCR does not equal accessible.

Peak-End Rule

LAWS OF UX

Experiences are judged by their peak intensity and their ending — not the average. Invest in delightful success states and smooth offboarding. A painful checkout overshadows good browsing.

Plain Language

UNDERSTANDABLE

Write so the widest audience understands on the first read: short sentences, everyday words, one idea per paragraph, and abbreviations spelled out the first time. Helps people with cognitive differences, non-native speakers, and anyone in a hurry.

GRADE 8 Short sentences · everyday words · one idea each.

Pointer Gestures

OPERABLE 2.5.1

Anything that uses a complex gesture — pinch-to-zoom, swipe along a path, two-finger rotate — must also work with a single tap or click. Maps, sliders, and carousels are common offenders. Affects people who can't make precise movements.

+ TAP Every pinch or swipe needs a single-tap alternative.

Postel's Law

LAWS OF UX

Be liberal in what you accept, conservative in what you send. Accept varied input formats (dates, phone numbers, spaces in card numbers). Output clean, consistent, predictable interfaces.

POUR Principles

WCAG LEVELS

The four pillars organizing all WCAG criteria: **P**erceivable (can users sense it?), **O**perable (can they interact?), **U**nderstandable (can they comprehend?), **R**obust (does it work with assistive tech?). If any pillar fails, the content is inaccessible.

P
PERCEIVE

O
OPERATE

U
UNDERSTAND

R
ROBUST

Presumption of Conformity

COMPLIANCE

If a product or service follows a harmonised standard listed in the EU Official Journal, it is presumed to meet the EAA requirements that standard covers. Conforming to EN 301 549 creates this presumption for ICT.

Progressive Disclosure

UX PRINCIPLES

Show essential info first, details on demand. Reduces overwhelm, supports scanning, and aligns with how people actually read (F-pattern). Especially valuable for users with cognitive disabilities.

R

03 · TERMS STARTING WITH “R”

Readability

UX PRINCIPLES 3.1.5

Write at a lower-secondary education reading level when possible (WCAG AAA). Short sentences, common words, one idea per paragraph. Flesch-Kincaid Grade 8 or below is a good target.

Redundant Entry

UNDERSTANDABLE 3.3.7

Don't ask users to re-enter information they've already provided in the same process. Auto-populate or let them select previous values. New in WCAG 2.2. Helps users with cognitive and memory disabilities.

Reflow

PERCEIVABLE 1.4.10

Content must reflow to a single column at 320px wide (400% zoom) without horizontal scrolling. Exceptions for data tables, toolbars, and maps.

320PX Single column at 400% zoom · no horizontal scroll.

S

08 · TERMS STARTING WITH “S”

Screen Reader Basics

TESTING

Software that reads content aloud and enables keyboard navigation. NVDA (Windows, free), JAWS (Windows, commercial), VoiceOver (macOS/iOS, built-in), TalkBack (Android). Each has different behaviors and quirks.

Seizure Safety

OPERABLE 2.3.1

Nothing on the page may flash more than three times in any one second — fast flashing can trigger seizures in people with photosensitive epilepsy. Avoid strobing animation, flashing ads, and rapid red flashes. When in doubt, don't flash.

≤ 3 / SEC No more than three flashes in any one second.

Selective Attention

LAWS OF UX

People focus on stimuli relevant to their current goal and filter out the rest. Important information must be visually prominent — not hidden in dense layouts. Banner blindness is selective attention at work.

Semantic HTML

ROBUST

Use elements for their meaning: `<button>` not `<div onclick>`, `<nav>` not `<div class="nav">`, `<main>`, `<article>`, `<aside>`. The first rule of ARIA: don't use ARIA if a native element works.

```
// ✓ <button>Save</button>
// ✗ <div onclick=...>
```

Sensory Characteristics

PERCEIVABLE 1.3.3

Instructions can't depend on shape, size, position, or sound alone. "Press the round green button on the right" fails for anyone who can't see it — always add a text label: "Press Submit".

+ LABEL × “the round button” ✓ “Submit”

Serial Position Effect

LAWS OF UX

People best remember the first (primacy) and last (recency) items in a series. Place key actions and navigation at the start and end of lists. Mobile bottom tabs leverage recency.

Skip Link

OPERABLE 2.4.1

A mechanism to bypass repeated navigation and jump to main content. Typically the first focusable element on the page. Only ~13% of homepages have one.

```
<a href="#main" class="skip">
  Skip to main content
</a>
```

Status Messages

ROBUST 4.1.3

Dynamic status updates (search-results count, form success, loading) must be announced without moving focus. Use `role="status"` or `aria-live="polite"`.

```
<div role="status"
  aria-live="polite">
  3 results found
</div>
```

T

07 · TERMS STARTING WITH “T”

Tabs

UI PATTERNS

`role="tablist"` → `role="tab"` → `role="tabpanel"`. Arrow keys move between tabs, Tab moves into the panel. `aria-selected` on the active tab. One of the trickiest ARIA patterns to get right.

```
<div role="tablist">
  <button role="tab"...
  <div role="tabpanel"...
```

Target Size

OPERABLE 2.5.8

Interactive targets need a minimum 24 × 24px area (Level AA, new in WCAG 2.2). 44 × 44px at Level AAA. Affects users with tremors, limited dexterity, and all mobile users.

SIZE 24 AA min 44 AAA

Tesler's Law

LAWS OF UX

Every system has irreducible complexity. The question is who bears it — the user, or the system. Good design absorbs complexity so users don't have to. Autocomplete, smart defaults, and wizards are examples.

Text Spacing

PERCEIVABLE 1.4.12

No loss of content when users override line height to 1.5x, paragraph spacing to 2x, letter spacing to 0.12em, and word spacing to 0.16em. Tests low-vision user overrides.

Timing Adjustable

OPERABLE 2.2.1

If content has a time limit, users must be able to turn off, adjust, or extend it (at least 10x the default). Session timeouts must warn before expiry. Auto-rotating carousels need pause controls.

Toast / Notification

UI PATTERNS

Transient messages must use `role="status"` or `aria-live="polite"` so screen readers announce them. Must not auto-dismiss too quickly (< 5s minimum). Must be dismissible. Must not steal focus from the user's task.

Tooltip

UI PATTERNS

Must be triggerable by focus (not just hover). Dismissible with Escape. Persistent while hovering over it. Use `aria-describedby` to associate with trigger. Avoid for critical information.

U

01 · TERM STARTING WITH "U"

Use of Color

PERCEIVABLE 1.4.1

Color must not be the only visual means of conveying information. Add icons, patterns, underlines, or text labels alongside color coding. Affects 300M people with color-vision deficiency.

+ ICON ✓ Saved ✗ Error

V

04 · TERMS STARTING WITH "V"

Video Player

UI PATTERNS

All controls keyboard-accessible. Captions toggle visible and labeled. Volume, play/pause, seek, fullscreen all need accessible names. Captions must be synchronized. Provide a transcript link nearby.

Voice Control

TESTING

Software like Dragon, plus the dictation built into every phone, lets people operate a device entirely by speaking. Users say a button's visible label to activate it — which is why a control's visible text must match its accessible name.

"SEARCH" Say the visible label → the button activates.

Von Restorff Effect

LAWS OF UX

The item that differs from the rest is most remembered (the isolation effect). Highlight CTAs, error states, and new features by making them visually distinct. But don't rely on color alone (WCAG 1.4.1).

VPAT / ACR

COMPLIANCE

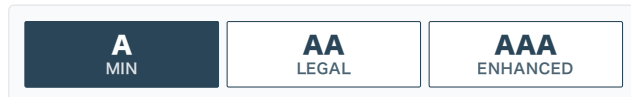
Voluntary Product Accessibility Template: standardized format for documenting a product's accessibility conformance. Produces an Accessibility Conformance Report (ACR). Required for US government procurement.



WCAG Level A

WCAG LEVELS

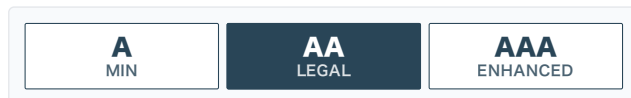
The minimum baseline — 32 success criteria addressing the most critical barriers. Includes alt text (1.1.1), keyboard access (2.1.1), page titles (2.4.2), and error identification (3.3.1). Level A alone is not sufficient for legal compliance.



WCAG Level AA

WCAG LEVELS

The legal standard worldwide — 24 additional criteria (56 total with A). Includes color contrast (1.4.3), reflow (1.4.10), focus visible (2.4.7), and all 6 new WCAG 2.2 AA criteria. Target this level. Referenced by ADA, EAA, Section 508, and EN 301 549.



WCAG Level AAA

WCAG LEVELS

Enhanced accessibility — 31 additional criteria (87 total). Includes sign language for video (1.2.6), 7:1 contrast (1.4.6), 44 × 44px targets (2.5.5), and reading level (3.1.5). Aspirational, not achievable for all content. Cherry-pick criteria that benefit your audience.



WCAG 2.2 Overview

COMPLIANCE

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines: 4 principles, 13 guidelines, 86 success criteria at Levels A / AA / AAA. Level AA is the legal standard worldwide. WCAG 2.2 adds 9 new criteria for mobile, cognitive, and focus.

WCAG 3.0 / Silver

COMPLIANCE

Next-generation accessibility guidelines, in early draft. Major restructuring: outcome-based testing, severity scoring, broader scope (apps, documents, XR). Years away from W3C Recommendation. Don't wait — implement WCAG 2.2 now.

Web Accessibility Directive

COMPLIANCE

EU Directive 2016/2102 (the WAD). Requires public-sector websites and apps to meet EN 301 549 (which embeds WCAG 2.1 AA). Distinct from the EAA, which targets private-sector products and services — some operators fall under both.

Working Memory

LAWS OF UX

The cognitive system that temporarily holds information needed to complete tasks. Limited to ~4 chunks. Reduce reliance on memory: show don't recall, persist state, keep related info visible together.

Z

02 · TERMS STARTING WITH “Z”

Zeigarnik Effect

LAWS OF UX

People remember incomplete tasks better than completed ones. Progress indicators, partially filled profiles, and onboarding checklists leverage this to drive completion. Use ethically — not as a dark pattern.

Zoom & Magnification Testing

TESTING

Test at 200% zoom (WCAG 1.4.4) and 400% zoom / 320px viewport (WCAG 1.4.10 Reflow). Check for: horizontal scrolling, overlapping text, clipped content, broken layouts, and unreadable text. Browser zoom ≠ OS magnification — test both.

COLOPHON

An accessible booklet about accessibility.

This edition was typeset in **Inter** at 9.5–11.5pt for body and 34–78pt for display, with **JetBrains Mono** reserved for WCAG success-criterion codes and audit statistics. Every text-on-background pair meets WCAG AAA (7:1 or higher). Color is never the only carrier of meaning — every category tag also carries a label.

SOURCE

joegullo.com/resources/accessibility-glossary

COMPILED BY

Joe Gullo
Digital Accessibility Expert

ALIGNED TO

WCAG 2.2 · EN 301 549 · EAA · ADA
· Section 508

AUDIT DATA

WebAIM Million, 2026 edition

EDITION

2026.1 · May 2026

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A printed glossary can't replace a real audit — it can't catch your focus order, your reading flow, or whether your modal traps focus the way the spec requires. But it can put the right vocabulary in front of every person in the room. That's where the work starts.

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