



OSU Minimum Web Accessibility Standards (rev. 06/30/2004)

<http://www.wac.ohio-state.edu/standards/>



Standard 19 -- Alternate Versions. An accessible mirror page (e.g. text-only or non-flash) with equivalent information or functionality, can be provided to make a web site comply with this policy, when compliance cannot be accomplished in any other way. The content of mirror pages must be updated whenever the primary page changes .

Examples:

- 19.1 -- A mirror page is acceptable when there is no other way to make the content accessible, or when it offers significant advantages for ease of navigation.
- 19.2 -- The content for primary and mirror pages should be updated simultaneously. For example, using a common database to generate content for multiple versions of the site.
- 19.3 -- Instead of static alternative pages, set up server-side scripts that generate accessible versions of a page on demand.
- 19.4 -- Mirror pages must be the functionality equivalent to primary pages (e.g. provides alternatives for applets, scripts, plug-ins and similar applications that are not directly accessible).
- 19.5 -- "Text-only" and "accessible" are not synonymous; designers must incorporate all of the above standards when designing mirror pages.

Alternate Versions -- Dos and Don'ts

Do	Don't
Offer alternate versions of particular pages that cannot otherwise be made accessible.	Assume that if one page can't be made accessible, the entire site must be offered as "text-only."

Why: Making as few pages as possible in duplicate formats (accessible and not accessible) increases the likelihood that all versions will remain up-to-date and helps insure all users have access to the same content.

How: When you have two versions (e.g. HTML and PDF) of a document, default to display the most accessible version first (HTML) and offer a link to the non-accessible version (PDF) from that page.

Do	Don't
Offer an alternate version of the entire site ONLY when the site cannot otherwise be made accessible.	Plan on ignoring accessibility issues in the "real" version of the site and create an alternate "text-only" version to take care of all those "pesky" accessibility issues.

Why: In reality, very few sites cannot be made accessible with careful planning and knowledgeable designers.

While certain aspects of the site may require alternate versions (e.g. text-based navigation or transcripts of animation or video content), the majority of a site can usually be made available to all users without redirecting a certain segment of users to what is often a sub-par version of the site.

How: Focus on making particular elements or segments of content accessible, rather than assuming you need to make an alternate version of the entire site.

Do	Don't
Use databases or other programming methods to insure the alternative, accessible pages are updated concurrently with primary pages.	Update primary pages first then update alternative, accessible pages "as time allows" or "as soon as we can."

Why: Unless content from the primary page is directly tied to content of the alternative version, it is highly likely that the alternative version will become quickly outdated.

How: Web authors who decide to use an alternative version for accessibility must establish a method for insuring both versions are updated simultaneously. This is usually done by tying content to a database, where it can be updated once and updated information appears on both versions of the site.

Do	Don't
Clearly identify the availability of an alternative version and make the alternate version easy to access.	Use scripting, Flash, or other non-accessible elements to identify and link to alternative versions of the site.

Why: Some well-intentioned web authors create an alternative version of the site, but then make the link to this "text-only" site using Flash or other methods that essentially make the alternate version inaccessible.

How: The alternate version should be clearly marked and easy to get to. Use a plain-text link and put it as close to the top of the page as possible.

Do	Don't
Avoid PDFs if possible or provide both PDF and other accessible format.	Require PDF capabilities to reach the majority of your site content.

Why: While generally simple to make in its non-accessible version, creating accessible PDFs requires a lot of forethought and careful planning. Most PDFs offer only limited access to the text in the file; often including inaccessible tables, graphs, and images. If your site is going to rely on PDF for information, you must use highly-skilled designers who create the original documents with accessibility in mind *BEFORE* converting to PDF.

How: If you want to use PDF to control formatting for printing, offer the document in an alternate accessible format and link to the PDF version. Be sure to warn users of any links that open a PDF document.

Get more help with alternate versions, read [WebAIM's article "Do Accessible Web Sites Have to be Boring?"](#)



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