Team WCAG Quick-Start Guide

Seven accessibility wins your whole team can make this week

> Welcome to Team WCAG. I'm Matt Rohnkohl — a DHS Trusted Tester who makes websites and documents work for everyone. Accessibility can feel huge, so here's the opposite: the seven fixes that remove the most barriers for the least effort. You don't need to be a developer. Start at the top and work down.

The seven that matter most

1. Use real headings

Screen-reader users navigate by headings the way sighted users skim with their eyes. Big bold text that only looks like a heading gives them nothing to jump to.

Do this: Use the built-in Heading styles (Heading 1, 2, 3) in order — in your site, your Word docs, and your slides — instead of just enlarging or bolding text.

WCAG: 1.3.1 Info and Relationships (Level A)

2. Add alt text to meaningful images

An image with no text alternative is invisible to anyone who can't see it — including search engines.

Do this: Write a short description of what the image conveys. If it's purely decorative, mark it decorative (or alt="") so it's skipped.

WCAG: 1.1.1 Non-text Content (Level A)

3. Write descriptive link text

"Click here" and "read more" tell a screen-reader user nothing when they pull up a list of every link on the page.

Do this: Make the link text say where it goes: "Download the spring newsletter," not "click here."

WCAG: 2.4.4 Link Purpose (Level A)

4. Check your color contrast

Low-contrast text is hard to read for anyone, and impossible for many — light gray on white is the most common failure on the web.

Do this: Make sure normal text has at least 4.5:1 contrast against its background (3:1 for large text). A free contrast checker tells you in seconds.

WCAG: 1.4.3 Contrast (Minimum) (Level AA)

5. Never rely on color alone

"Items in red are required" fails anyone who can't distinguish the color — the meaning simply disappears.

Do this: Pair color with a word, label, or icon so the meaning survives without it: "Required" in text, an asterisk, or an icon.

WCAG: 1.4.1 Use of Color (Level A)

6. Make everything work with a keyboard

Many people navigate entirely by keyboard. If they can't reach or operate something — or can't see where they are — they're stuck.

Do this: Tab through your page: can you reach and use every button, link, and field, and can you always see which one is focused? Never remove the focus outline without replacing it.

WCAG: 2.1.1 Keyboard (A) and 2.4.7 Focus Visible (AA)

7. Caption and transcribe your media

Video without captions and audio without a transcript shut out anyone who is deaf or hard of hearing — and help everyone watching with the sound off.

Do this: Add synchronized captions to video and provide a transcript for audio. Auto-captions are a start, but always proofread them.

WCAG: 1.2.2 Captions (A) and 1.2.1 Audio-only (A)

Your first-pass checklist

Run through this on your next page or document. If you can tick every box, you've cleared the most common barriers.

- ☐ Headings use real heading styles, in order.
- ☐ Every meaningful image has alt text; decorative ones are marked decorative.
- ☐ Links describe where they go — no "click here."
- ☐ Text has enough contrast against its background.
- ☐ Nothing relies on color alone to carry meaning.
- ☐ You can reach and operate everything with the keyboard, with a visible focus indicator.
- ☐ Video has captions; audio has a transcript.
- ☐ Documents have a title set and a language set, and export to a tagged/accessible PDF.

> **The golden rule:** build it right in the source — real structure first — then export. Fixing accessibility at the source is far easier than repairing it afterward.

Ready to go further?

This guide covers the fixes that matter most. When you're ready to go further, here's how I can help — as a DHS Trusted Tester working advisory-only, so there's no server or code access and your team stays in control.

- Start with a free sample audit — a no-cost review of a couple of your pages, with real findings and fixes, against WCAG 2.1 AA and Section 508.
- Full audits, guided remediation, and role-based team training — developers, content, design, and QA.
- Prefer to produce your own VPAT / Section 508 conformance report? The ready-to-use toolkit is in the store.

WCAG Compliance Services
teamwcag.com • wcagcs.com • matt@wcagcomplianceservices.com • 586-343-5416