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leadership elections

accessible elections

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Accessible Elections

Why is it important?

If you don't make your candidate statement accessible many people might miss out on what you are hoping to achieve as an officer!

Blind and low vision people, and also some people with dyslexia, use assistive technology when on the internet, and even people who don't use those technologies might benefit from having an easily accessible text to read. Ensuring your candidacy is accessible is crucial for democracy and it will be your responsibility to ensure that this is done. Here are some tips to make it easier for you!

What should my candidate statement look like?

It's always better to create an accessible document from the start than having to go back and fix it after you've put in the work! That way you make sure that everyone is included from the start and no one feels they have been an afterthought!

Text/HTML

The easiest way to ensure your candidate statement is accessible is to use HTML for your manifesto text. You can use the default format to avoid extra work being put into it (it will still look good!), but you can also have more control over your design if you have some knowledge of HTML and CSS. Many online candidate statement editors won't allow you to include.

Images

You can also use an image to create your candidate statement in a more visual way, which you can embed in the page. This allows you to create more complex designs but it does pose a threat to accessibility. To fix that, you will need to include the plain text at the bottom of the page, formatted with the controls of the editor, like you would with a Text/HTML candidate manifesto.

For general image accessibility, always ensure that you avoid small text, low contrast or background colours that are too vivid. This might put people off from reading your candidate statement, which would hurt your campaign.

What is plain text?

Simply put, in this context, plain text is text that is not part of an image. If you can't highlight it or copy and paste it somewhere else, it's not plain text!

That doesn't mean that your candidate statement can't have formatting, though. It is important that you use semantic formatting (using headings for your headings and lists for your lists - like in a Word document). If you don't use this, your candidate statement could be a block of text with no structure for some people, regardless of the visual structure you use. Giving the content the correct formatting ensures that it is put in context, enables the use of assistive technologies to navigate your candidate statement and ensures everyone can access the candidate statement equally.

How to make your plain text accessible

Use semantic formatting

Format your text to match the visual structure of your document. Format Headings as Headings and Lists as Lists.

Use the right heading levels

This is both visually important and allows navigation within the document for screen readers. Heading 1 is your page title, Heading 2 is your section title, and other headings can be used to mark subsections and break down the content further.

Keep the contrast high

Ensure that you use sufficient contrast for text and background colours. That will ensure that more people can see it easily and use the content.



You can check the contrast between colours at WebAIM Contrast Checker. The least you should pass is WCAG AA - ideally, reach for AAA standard.

Don't overuse emphasis

Using bold and italics to emphasise parts of your candidate statement is useful, but it should be used sparingly. If you need to emphasise more than a few words at a time, consider rewording your text - it might mean you are not conveying the message clearly enough.

Add alternative/alt text to informational images If you include images in your candidate statement, consider what the purpose of them is in order to determine if they need alt text.

- Purely decorative images don't need alt text.
- Images that convey content not available in the text should have alt text that provides that information.
- If you have an image-based manifesto with the plain text separate, it does not need alt text. The content of the image is already in the text! You can add alt text when you upload your image, or afterwards, by right-clicking on the image in the editor and selecting image properties.

Accessible social media

Social media is a great way of engaging with potential voters, as well as giving out information about what you're up to - so it's crucial that your content doesn't exclude anyone! This guidance is always good practice to make your posts better and help convey your message more broadly

Images

Whilst we do know that image posts perform better than text-only posts, it's important to ensure that the information is provided also outside of the image as some people might not have access to the image in the same way. People who use screen reading technologies need the content to be plain text, and images can be a problem when using screen magnification as the text will blur when zoomed in.

Always ensure that any text in the image is also in the text below in the post. The best way to do this is to build it organically into the text of the post. Sometimes if the content is a list (such as events) it might not look the best in a caption - what you can do is separate the caption in post text and plain text of the image using a line with three hyphens (—) to separate them.

Referenced images

If you post an image of something you want to talk about, there are two ways to ensure accessibility.

- Make the post descriptive enough to allow people to understand the full context only from the text
- Add a short image description: It's best to add them at the beginning of the caption so that everyone gets the context needed to understand the post, use [Image description:...]

Decorative images

Some images are purely decorative, you will not need to describe them in the text of your post but it is best practice to add an image description if the social media platform allows

Video

If you post a video, always add subtitles! Apart from enabling engagement from deaf or hard of hearing people it has the benefit of allowing the video to be watched with the volume sound off, which many people do while scrolling through social media.

Semantic Formatting

Formatting texts visually enables us to understand the structure of the text easily, we understand that the bolder and bigger text is a heading and that the smaller blocks of text are content relating to it. When you format a text in software (such as using Headings in Word), this allows screen readers to also understand that structure and navigate it. It's not always possible to do in social media but when you can it helps the content look neater, helps convey the message and make it easier for everyone to read.

All-caps

Text written in all caps is harder to read for everyone, especially people with dyslexia, and it can also cause issues for screen readers as the software can interpret the words as initialisms and will read every letter individually. Sometimes using all caps can help with emphasis, but try to keep it short (1-2 words) and be careful to not overuse it

Hashtags

A lot of screen reading software will interpret hashtags as a string of characters, so they will read them out letter by letter. This makes it hard for people who use screen readers, and it can get very frustrating!

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