



HCQIS Human-Centered Design Community of Practice



*Office of Information Technology
Section 508 Discussion*

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Section 508

In 1998, Congress amended the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 to require Federal agencies to make their electronic and information technology (EIT) accessible to people with disabilities. The law ([29 U.S.C § 794 \(d\)](#)) applies to all Federal agencies when they develop, procure, maintain, or use electronic and information technology. Under Section 508, agencies must give disabled employees and members of the public access to information comparable to the access available to others.

Section 508 Refresh

In March 2017, Section 508 was revised to include Section 255 of the Telecommunications Act of 1934 as amended.

Section 508 guidance now provided by chapters to align with other regulations developed by the U.S. Access Board Section 508 standards rely on Web Council Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) version 2.0 or higher.

The Refresh was designed to better align with new technologies and how the information is consumed by users.

Refer to <https://www.access-board.gov/guidelines-and-standards/communications-and-it/about-the-ict-refresh/final-rule/text-of-the-standards-and-guidelines#C101-general>

WCAG Standards

WCAG 2.0 Standards are based on four (4) principles:

1. Perceivable
2. Operable
3. Understandable
4. Robust

The four (4) principles contain twelve (12) guidelines that developers should use as goals to progress toward greater accessibility.

The twelve (12) guidelines contain success criteria that developers can use for testing purposes.

For more information on each principle refer to: <http://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG20/>

Accessibility vs. Usability

A document is considered accessible if its contents can be accessed by anyone whether or not they are using assistive technologies. Products can be made accessible to people with disabilities, but if the content is poorly presented, the material may not make logical sense, e.g., awkward reading order, limited description of content items, too broad an outline of information, or unnecessary items.

- **Accessibility:** There are certain requirements outlined in the Section 508 standards for a document to be accessible. Stringently following these guidelines can potentially create a document that meets the definition of compliance but is incomprehensible or unusable by an individual with disabilities.
 - Accessibility refers to developing to a given standard (Section 508 or WCAG)
 - Should help to assure application can work with most assistive technologies
 - Should aid in working across most platforms
- **Usability:** Simply stated, what will work for the average user. The expectations of assistive technology users tend to explicitly revolve around Usability, not Accessibility.
 - Usability refers to a user's experience with engaging with the application or system
 - Most users who state that an application is not accessible often have issues that fall under usability issues.
 - In many cases, it is either lack of user knowledge about the assistive technology or application

Accessibility vs. Usability Continued

Samples of accessible web pages:

U.S Access Board home page: <https://www.access-board.gov/>

Section 508 web page: <http://www.section508.gov>

Commercial sites:

Costco Warehouse: <http://www.costco.com>

Samples of pages that can pose challenges:

Commercial sites:

Netflix: <http://www.netflix.com>

JC Pennies: <http://www.jcp.com>

Amazon.com: <http://www.amazon.com>

CMS Section 508 Contact Information

- Should you have questions regarding Section 508 please send an email to the CMS Section 508 Team: Section_508@cms.hhs.gov
- You can also contact your Component's Section 508 Clearance Officer for assistance. A list of the Clearance Officers can be found at: <http://www.cms.gov/Research-Statistics-Data-and-Systems/CMS-Information-Technology/Section508/Downloads/Clearance-Officers-List.pdf>