Accessibility guidelines for graphic design

(to ensure WCAG 2.0 compliance)

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Atalan

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Introduction

Context and objectives

This manual brings together all the accessibility specifications to consider during the graphic design and ergonomics stages of website or web application development (wireframes, prototypes, mock-ups, etc.) to ensure WCAG 2.0 compliance.

By taking these recommendations into account you can plan for the inclusion of a maximum number of accessibility criteria before the technical integration and development phases.

Several recommendations in this manual can also apply to the functional design of a website or web application (inclusion of a search engine, functionalities for a media player, etc.).

This manual is part of a set of four complementary manuals that can be downloaded from the http://www.accede-web.com/en/ website:

1. **Accessibility guidelines for graphic design (this manual).**
2. Accessibility guidelines for HTML and CSS.
3. Accessibility guidelines for rich interfaces and JavaScript.
4. Accessibility guidelines for editors (template).

Who should read this user guide, and how should you use it?

This document should be given to the stakeholders and/or service providers who create the functional specifications and graphic mock-ups. It should be used in addition to the project specifications, company graphic charter, and creative briefs. The recommendations may be supplemented with others, or left out, according to the circumstances—the project manager is often the most appropriate person for this task.

The recommendations should be taken into account during the graphic design phase, and for some of them, when creating storyboards and functional specifications.

This document can also be used by project managers to check that accessibility has been included in the wireframes, prototypes, or mock-ups supplied by the implementation teams.

There are some annotations that complete the document and should be read to understand each recommendation.

- **Note**: notes help complete the recommendations by providing additional details for specific or exceptional functional or graphic situations.
- **Warning**: warnings highlight specific points that require attention or traps to avoid in order to guarantee good accessibility.
- **Tip**: Tips are not directly linked to accessibility, but you can improve the general quality of the interfaces by implementing them, or facilitate the integration of accessibility in subsequent steps in the project. Note that the recommendations in this project, although aimed at accessibility, are often good practice for ensuring ease of use, and improved user experience, performance, and referencing.

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Contact

Please send any comments about this document to Atalan, the coordinator of the AcceDe Web project, at the following email address: accede@atalan.ca.

You can also find more information about the AcceDe Web project procedural manuals on the website http://www.accede-web.com/en/ or follow our twitter account @societe_atalan.

Credits

The icons used in the AcceDe Web guidelines are from a set of *24x24 Free Application Icons* (http://www.small-icons.com/packs/24x24-free-application-icons.htm).

The screen captures of content are taken from the following websites, on July 23 2012.

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- http://www.bnpparibas.com/en
- http://www.generali.com/generalicom/home.do
- http://www.lamutuellegenerale.fr
- http://www.edfenergy.com/
- http://www.sfr.com
- http://www.societegenerale.com/en?_force=1
- http://www.amazon.com/
- http://www.essec.edu/programme.html
- http://uk.voyages-sncf.com/en/
- http://uk.atos.net/en-uk/home.html
- http://www.sciencespo.fr/en
- http://www.isae.fr/en
- http://www.capgemini.com
- http://www.handirect.fr
- http://www.airliquide.com/en/home.html
- http://www.imaginetgv.com
- http://www.ratp.fr/en/ratp/c_21879/tourists/
- http://www.google.com/calendar
- http://www.bnpparibas.net
- http://www.areva.com
- http://www.lafarge.com/
- http://www.rff.fr/en/
- http://www.ter-sncf.com
- http://portail.free.fr/
- https://www.bankofamerica.com/

1. Navigation

1.1. General navigation

1.1.1. Provide a breadcrumb

A breadcrumb must be present on each page:

- It must show the current position of the user in the website's hierarchical structure in relation to the home page.
- It must allow the user to navigate up the hierarchy of parent pages to the home page.
- It must always be positioned in the same place on each page.

Note
Breadcrumbs are not mandatory on the home page.

Tip
It is considered good practice to visually distinguish the last item of the breadcrumb if this is the current position.

1.1.2. Provide at least two of the following navigation methods: main menu, site map, and search engine

At least two of the following three navigation methods must be available in the website:

- **A main menu**.
- **A site map** that shows the structure of the website, and at least allows the user to access all sections and functions of the website.
- **A comprehensive search engine** that provides a search on all the content (text, documents, videos, etc.).

These items should be available in the same place on each page throughout the website.

Note
You can, of course, choose to have all three navigation methods in the same website.

Figure 1 : examples of site maps.

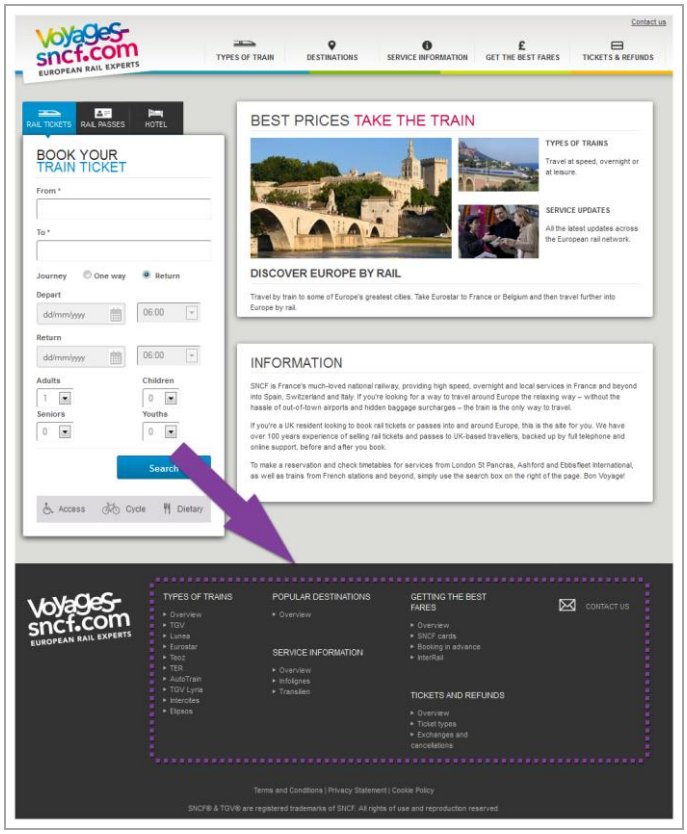


Figure 2 : example of a site map included at the bottom of the page.

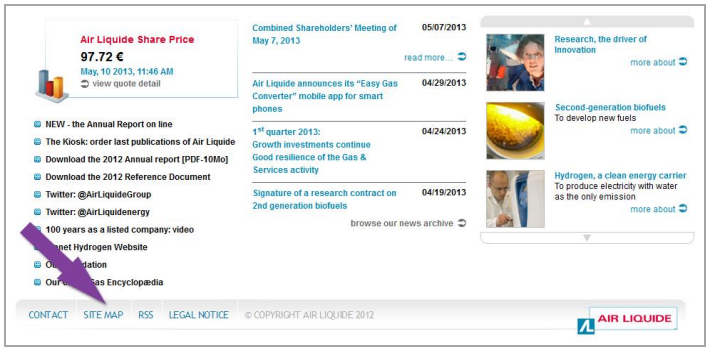


Figure 3 : example of a link to a site map in the page footer.

Figure 4 : If required, you can provide filters with the search engine to limit the scope of the search.

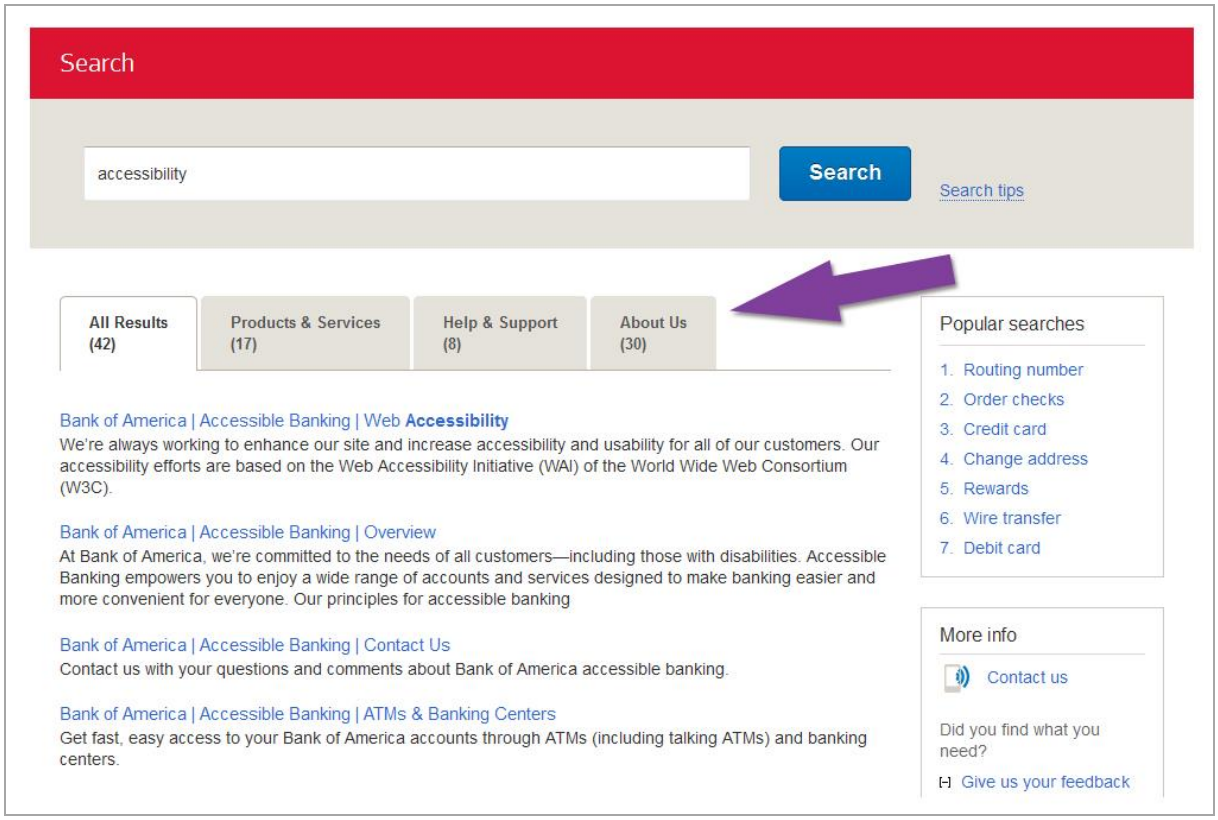


Figure 5 : example of a search results page grouped by relevance and themes

.

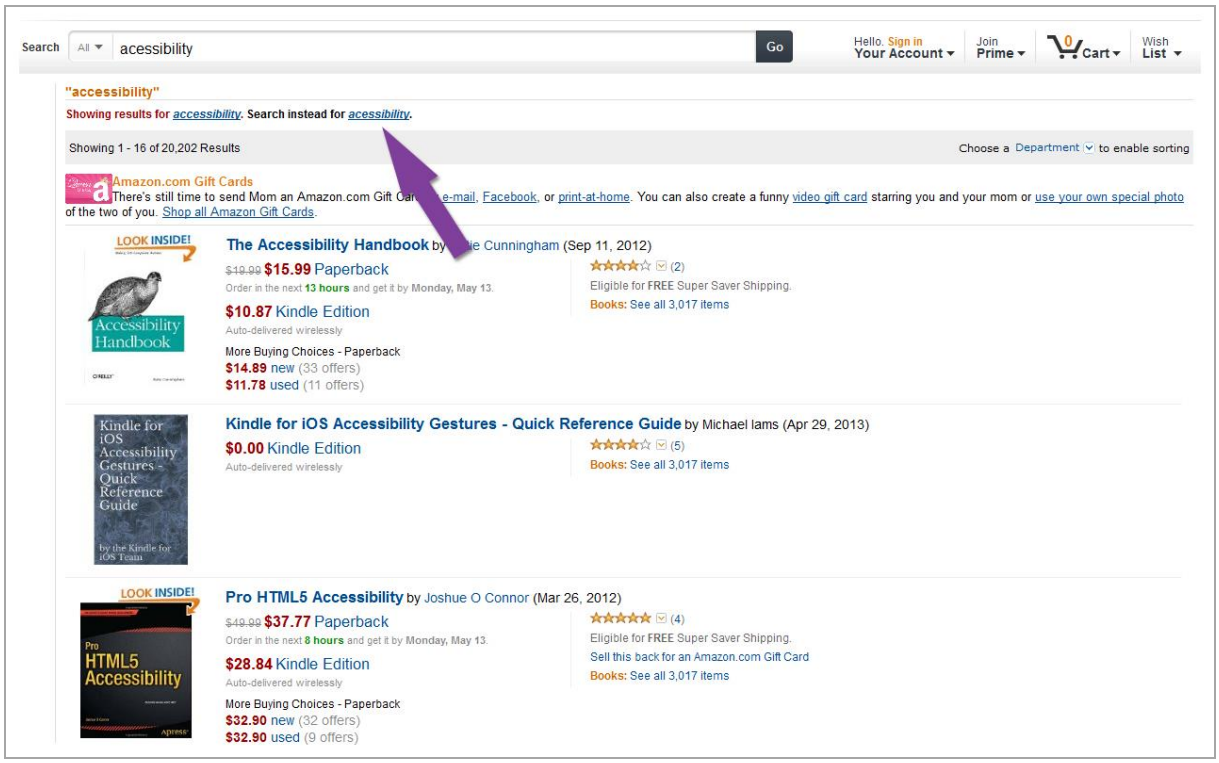


Figure 6 : Suggesting corrections is an accessibility good practice.

1.1.3. Make the current position visually different in the menus

In each menu, the current item must have a different appearance.

Tip

It is also highly recommended to have a different appearance for the mouse-over of menu items.

Figure 7 : In this example, an arrow pointed downwards indicates the menu item that is opened ("Members' area", while a colour background and an arrow pointing to the right indicate the current page ("Bonus points").

Figure 8 : example of a background colour indicating the currently selected menu tab.

1.1.4. Make sure that the navigation is visually consistent

Throughout the website, the appearance and position of items should be consistent (though not necessarily identical):

- Navigation menus.
- Search engine.
- And, generally, all the items that appear on every page (logos, useful links, etc.).

Note
The appearance of the home page may be different than the rest of the website.

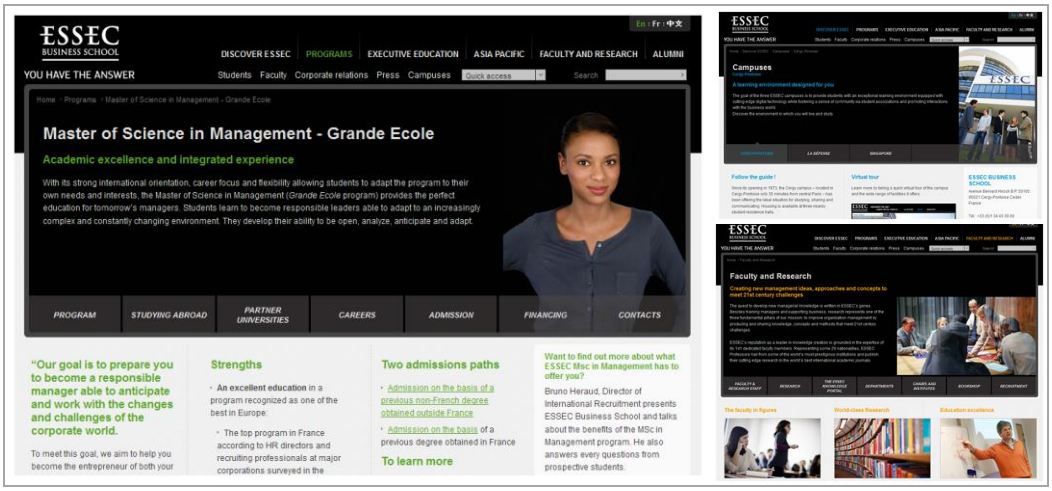


Figure 9: in this example, although the colours and information are different on the three pages, the position and general appearance of shared items is consistent.

1.2. Navigation aids

1.2.1. Provide a help page

You should plan to provide a help page:

- The help page must provide information that helps users to consult and use the website.
- A link to the help page must be available in the same place from all the pages in the website.

Note
A mock-up of a help page is available at http://wiki.accede-web.com/en/notices/graphique-ergonomique/modele-de-page-d-aide.

1.2.2. Provide skip links

A “Go to content” skip link must be displayed in the same place at the top of each page.

Tip

If the presence of images prevents the display of this link, the latter could be hidden later on, during the development phase, so that it is only displayed in specific circumstances (navigation with the keyboard, version for mobile phones, etc.).

Note

Links such as “Go to menu”, and “Go to search”, can also be added besides the “Go to content” link if these items are not near the top of the page.

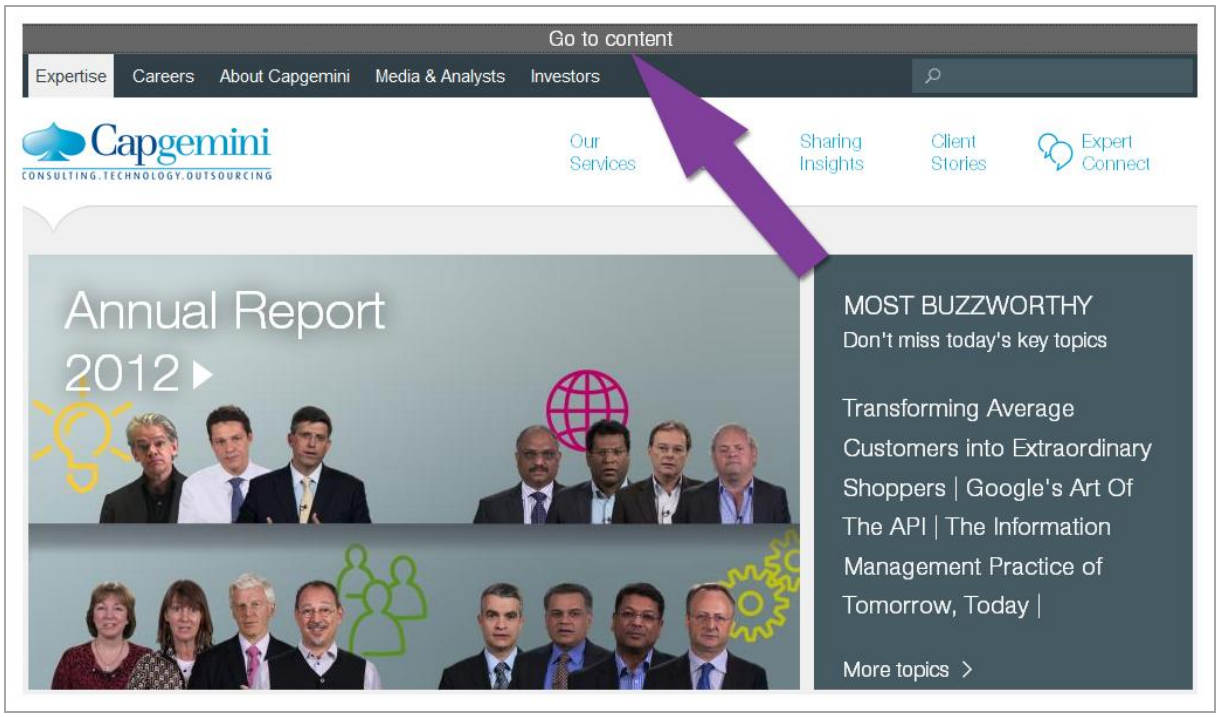


Figure 10: example of a “Go to content” skip link situated at the top of the page.

2. Text and symbols

2.1. Text

2.1.1. Keep accents on capital letters

Accents must be kept, even on capital letters.

Therefore you should write “Belle Époque” instead of “Belle Epoque”, “DÉTENTE” rather than “DETENTE” etc.

Note
You are strongly encouraged not to write long sections of text in capital letters, because they make reading tiresome.

2.1.2. Do not justify the text

Text must not be justified.

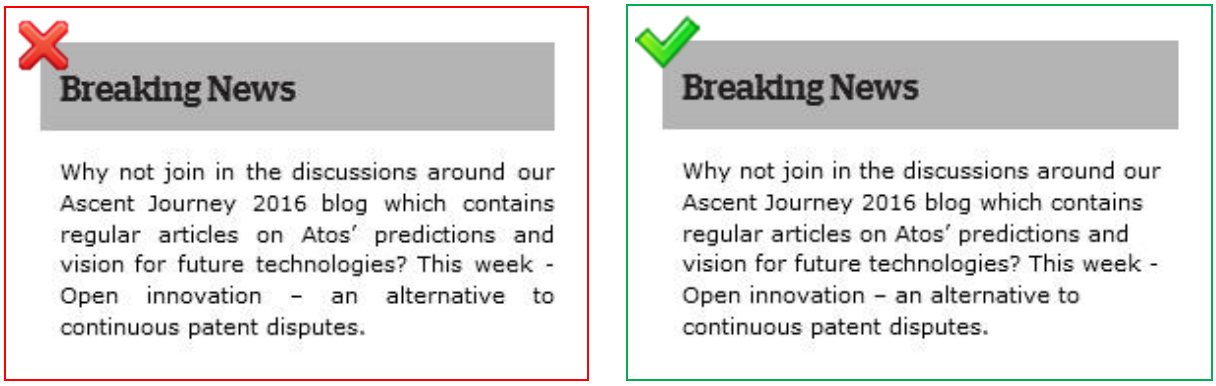


Figure 11 : in the first example, the justified text leads to irregular and large gaps between words, which may lead to difficulties in reading the text.

2.1.3. Make sure that the typefaces can be integrated in text format

The typefaces used must be displayed in text format rather than as images.

Warning
To validate this point, you should contact those responsible for the development. They will be able to confirm if the chosen typefaces can be correctly displayed in text format in the target browsers for the project.

If they cannot correctly be displayed, there are other solutions that can be applied in the development phase, but these will be less efficient and more restrictive than simply using a typeface.

Note
The technical aspect of this recommendation is described in the manual “Accessibility guidelines for HTML and CSS”

Figure 12 : Example of a typeface that can be included in text format (the method used is: @font-face CSS3).

2.2. Symbols

2.2.1. Associate text with each ambiguous symbol

If symbols whose meaning is not obvious are used, they must:

- Be accompanied by text that clarifies the meaning.
- Be located near the accompanying text.

Note
If it is not practical to associate a text with specific symbols whose meaning may not be clear (lack of space in the mock-up, for example), some solutions may be found later on in the development phase (by adding tooltips, for example). Nevertheless, these are compromise solutions that are less effective than optimising the symbol directly with associated text.

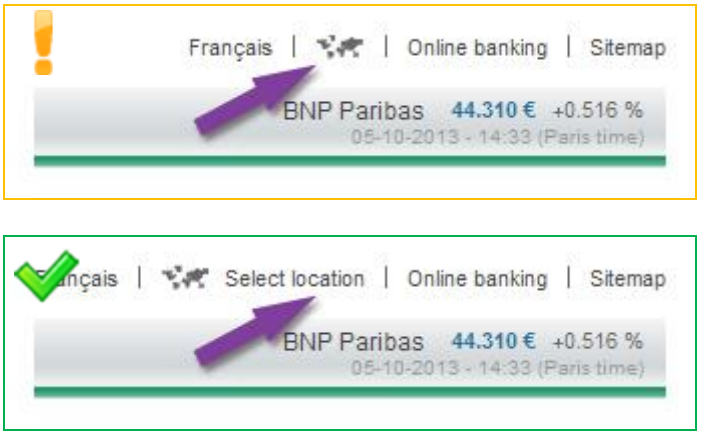


Figure 13 : In this example, the “World map” is completed with the text “Our offices” to be more explicit.

3. Colours

3.1. Contrast

3.1.1. Make sure that there is sufficient contrast between the content and the background or propose an alternative with contrast

The contrast between the colours and the background must be sufficient for all items present (text, images, videos, etc.).

To test the contrast, you could use, for example, the *Contrast Analyser* tool for Windows and Mac OS, which you can download free at http://wiki.accede-web.com/en/ressources/mode-d-emploi-du-logiciel-contrast-analyser.

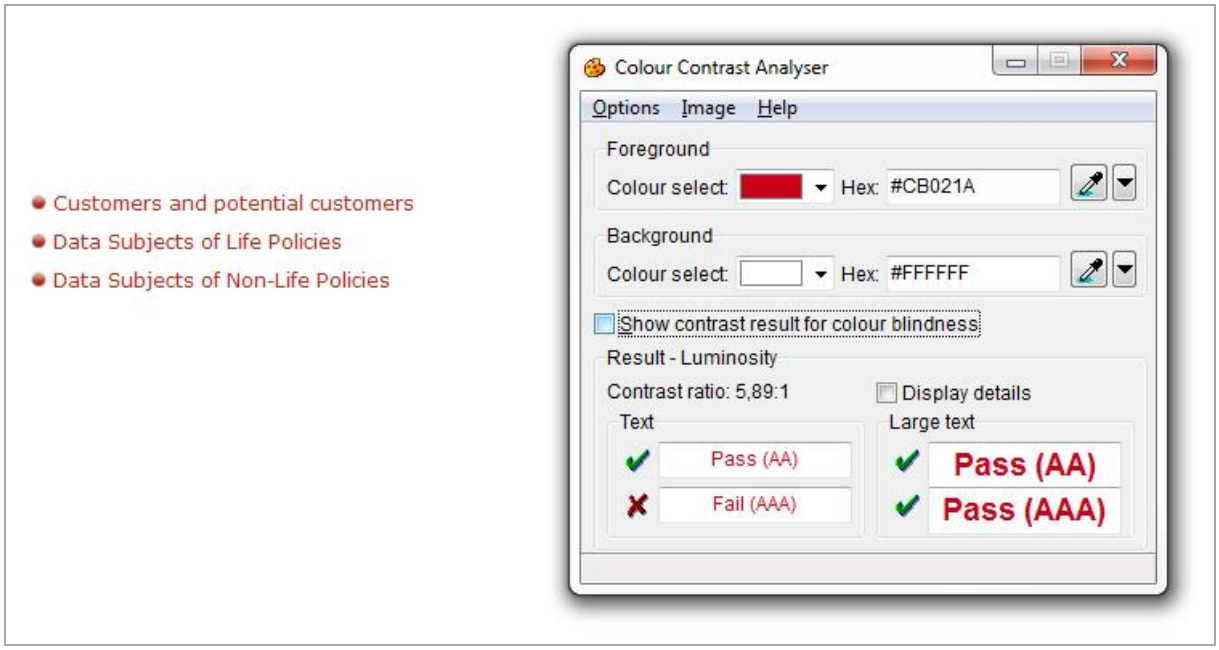


Figure 14 : According to this tool, the contrast ratio is considered as sufficient if it reaches the standard AA.

Warning
Be careful when using shading or patterns as background for content.

Note
If it is not practical to optimize the contrast, then you can create alternative style guidelines that offer sufficient contrast.

Alternative style guidelines do not necessarily push the contrast to the limits (for example, *black on white*, or *white on black*), but provide rules so that the association of colours is optimized satisfactorily.

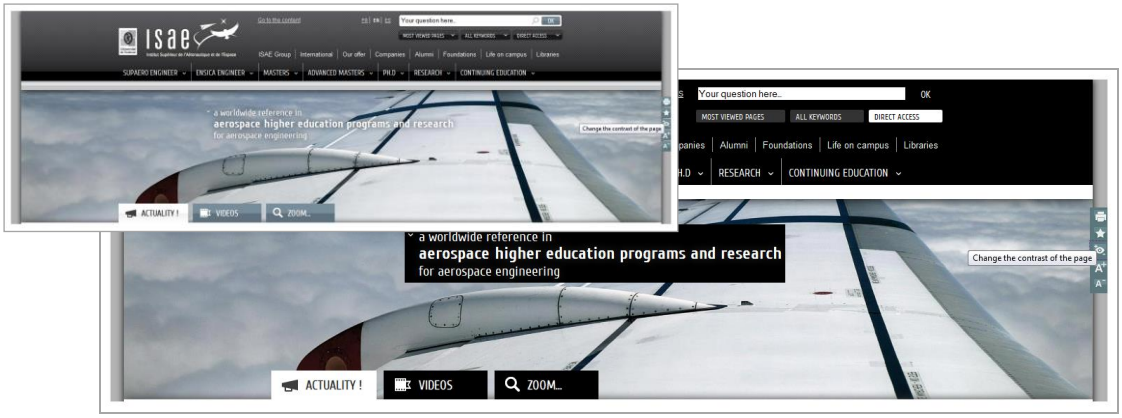


Figure 15 : in this example, alternative style guidelines that are sufficiently contrasted can be activated from the button "Change the page contrast".

3.2. Meaning conveyed by colour

3.2.1. Make sure that information is comprehensible, even if the colours are absent

Information must not be conveyed **solely** by colour.

Tip
To test this point, you can first convert the mock-up to black and white and check that all the information is still comprehensible.

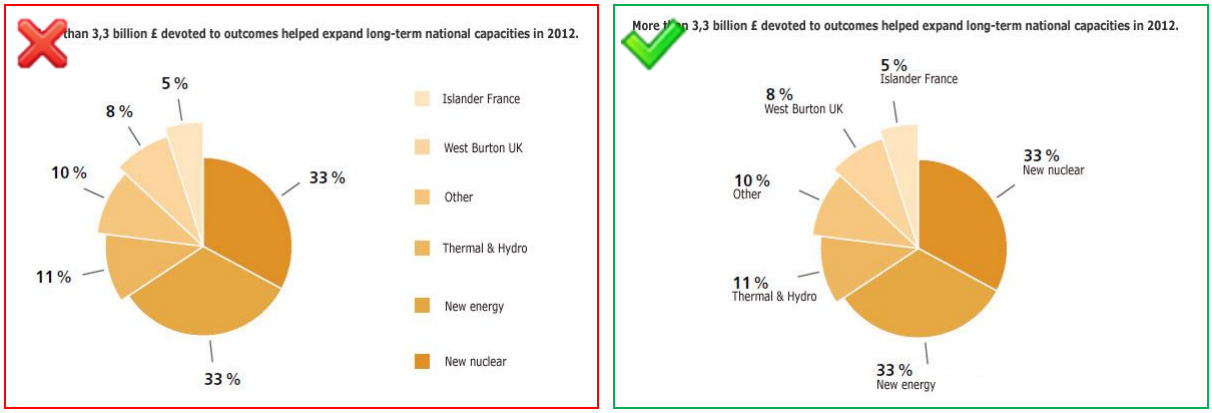


Figure 16 : In the first example, the information in the pie chart can only be understood by associating each segment with a colour; the second version is comprehensible even if the colours are absent.

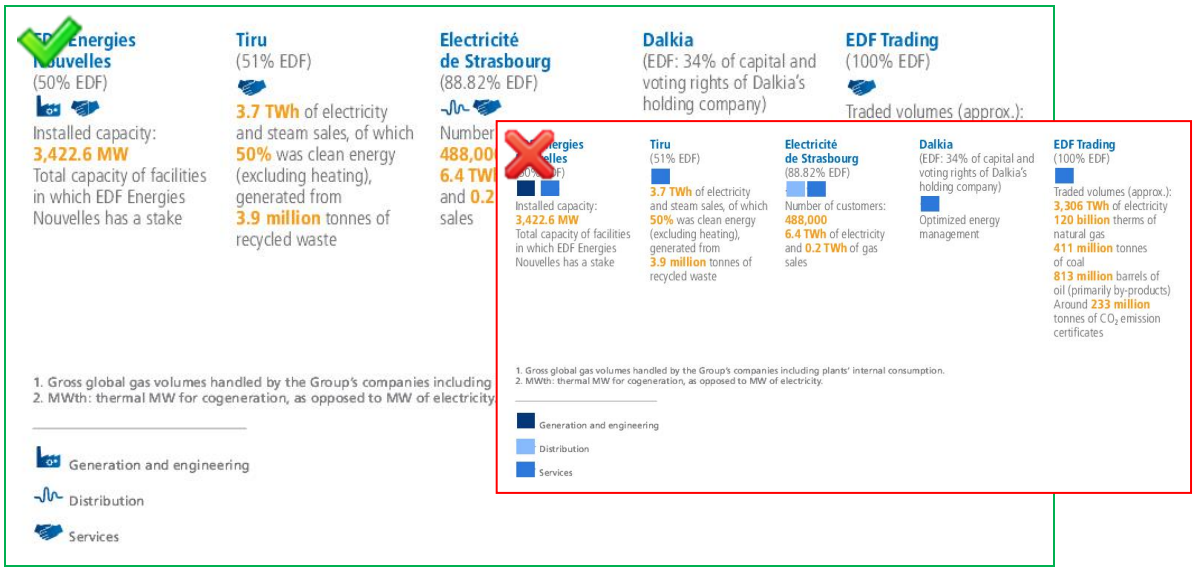


Figure 17 : In this example, pictograms are used instead of squares of different colours.

4. Links

4.1. Link texts

4.1.1. Provide a link text for each link

An explicit link text must be provided for each link. In other words, the function of the link must be perfectly comprehensible just by reading the text.

The following link texts are therefore to be avoided:

- “Read more”
- “More information”.
- “Click here”.
- Etc.

They should be replaced by such texts as:

- “Mr. Cameron’s statement (read more)”.
- “More information on the Wiltshire contract”.
- “Discover our welcome offer”.
- Etc.

Note
If it is not practical to make some link texts explicit (lack of space in the mock-up, for example), there are other solutions that can be used later in the development phase (adding tooltips, for example). Nevertheless, this is a compromise solution that is less effective than directly optimizing the link with an explicit link text.

Figure 18: In this example, the “Read on” links have been deleted, and the links placed directly on the heading of the news story.

4.1.1. Identify each link that triggers the opening of a new window

For each link that triggers the opening of a new window or a new tab, provide a pictogram or a statement in order to warn the internet user.

Warning
This pictogram or statement must be the same throughout the website.

Note
If it is not practical to add such a pictogram or statement (lack of space in the mock-up, for example), there are other solutions that can be used later in the development phase (adding tooltips, for example). Nevertheless, this is a compromise solution that is less effective than directly optimizing the link.

Figure 19: example of a pictogram indicating that a new window is opened.

4.2. Identifying links

4.2.1. Distinguish links from the surrounding text

When links are included in content, they must be distinguished from the text surrounding them. For example, the links could be underlined.

Note
This rule does not apply to links included in link groups (menu items, for example), because their function is obvious.

Warning
You are strongly advised not to:

- Only use colour to distinguish links from the surrounding text.
- Apply underlining to other elements than links.

Tip
In addition to this recommendation it is also a good idea to provide the mouse-over appearance of links in the mock-ups.

Figure 20: example of a satisfactory visual distinction between a link and its surrounding text.

5. Documents

5.1. Documents available for download

5.1.1. Indicate the size and format of each document that can be downloaded

For each link that points to a document that can be downloaded, the following information must be included in the link text:

1. Name of the document.
2. Format of the document.
3. Size of the document.

Note
If it is not practical to make certain link texts explicit (lack of space in the mock-up, for example), there are other solutions that can be used later in the development phase (adding tooltips, for example). Nevertheless, this is a compromise solution that is less effective than directly optimizing the link text.

Figure 21: example of indication of size and format of a PDF document.

5.1.1. Indicate the language of each document available for download written in a foreign language

Whenever a link points to a document available for download in a different language than the main language of the page, then the language of the document must be indicated in the link text.

Note
If it is not practical to add this information in the link texts (lack of space in the mock-up, for example), there are other solutions that can be used later in the development phase (adding tooltips, for example). Nevertheless, this is a compromise solution that is less effective than directly optimizing the link text.

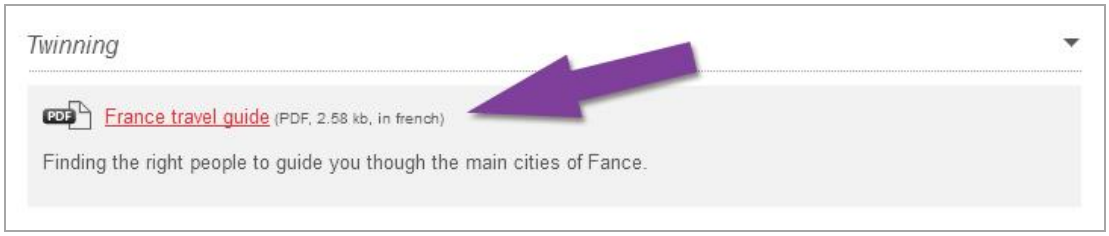


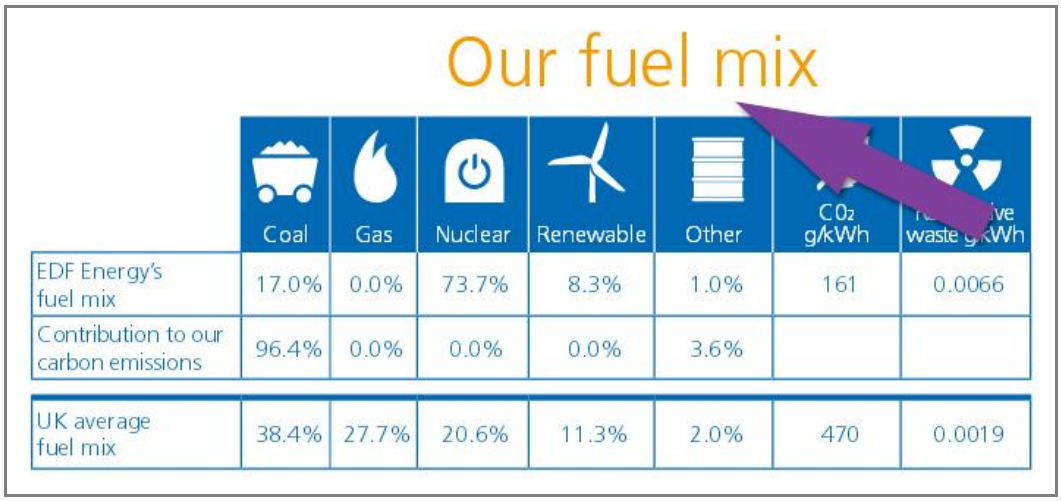
Figure 22: example of an indication of the language of a PDF document.

6. Tables

6.1. Table headings

6.1.1. Provide a heading for each data table

Whenever data tables are used, they must be **immediately** preceded by a heading that clearly and briefly describes the content.



Our fuel mix

	Coal	Gas	Nuclear	Renewable	Other	CO_2 g/kWh	waste g/kWh
EDF Energy's fuel mix	17.0%	0.0%	73.7%	8.3%	1.0%	161	0.0066
Contribution to our carbon emissions	96.4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	3.6%		
UK average fuel mix	38.4%	27.7%	20.6%	11.3%	2.0%	470	0.0019

Figure 23: example of a heading for a data table.

7. Forms

7.1. Labels and fields

7.1.1. Provide an explicit label for each form field

An explicit label must be provided for each form field.

Note
If it is not practical to add a label for each field (lack of space in the mock-up, for example), there are other solutions that can be used later in the development phase (adding tooltips, for example). Nevertheless, this is a compromise solution that is less effective than directly optimizing the form field label.

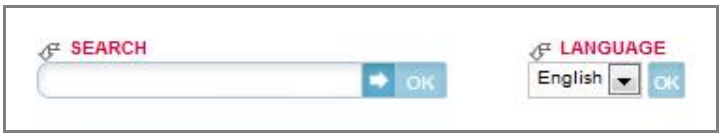


Figure 24: in this example, the "Search" and "Language" form fields both have explicit labels.

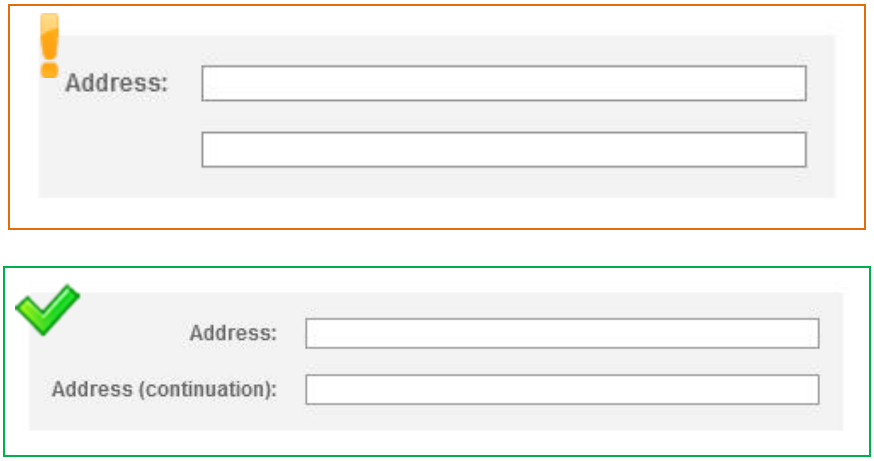


Figure 25: in this example, a label has been added to the field for the second line of the address.

7.1.2. Use identical labels for form fields that have the same purpose

Whenever you have two or more fields with exactly the same purpose on the same page, their label must also be identical.

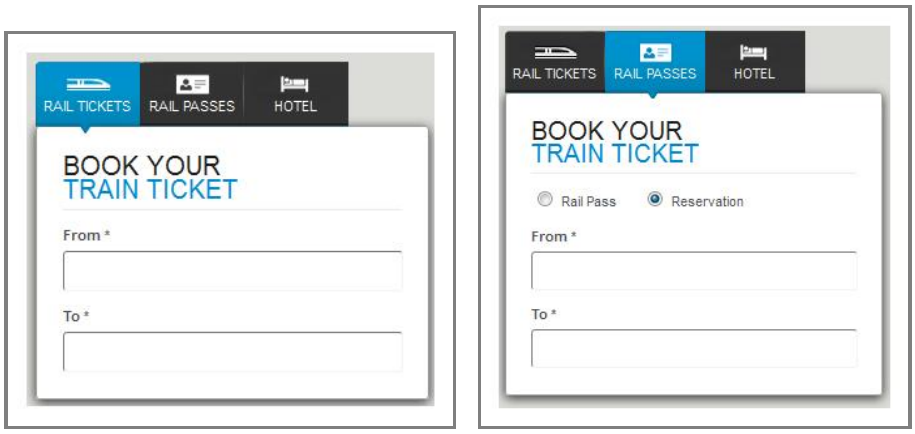


Figure 26: In this example, regardless of the tab, the labels "From" and "To" are identical. It would have been bad practice, for example, to put "To" on one tab and "Arriving in" on another.

7.1.3. Place each label next to the corresponding field

Each label must be placed close to the field to which it is attached. There should only be a few pixels that separate a label from its corresponding field.

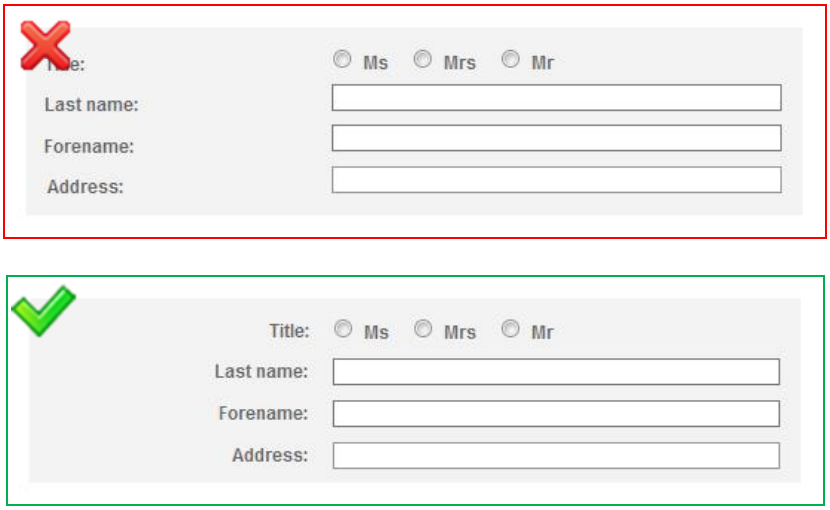


Figure 27: in this example, labels are right-aligned so that they are next to the corresponding fields.

7.1.4. In long forms group similar form fields together and give them a heading

Whenever fields of the same type are present in long forms (for example, address fields), these must be:

- Visually grouped together.
- Introduced with a clear and concise heading.

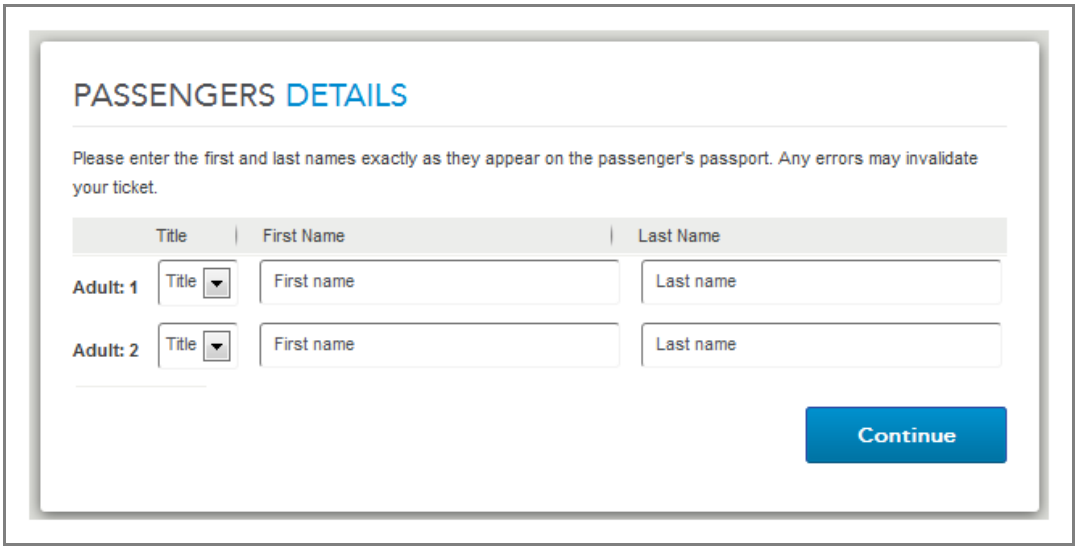


Figure 28: In this example, the fields are grouped in zone: "Passengers Details". Information for each passenger is grouped together, and titled "Adult 1" and "Adult 2".

7.2. Buttons

7.2.1. Provide a submit button at the end of each form

A submit button should be provided in each form, and placed at the end of the form.

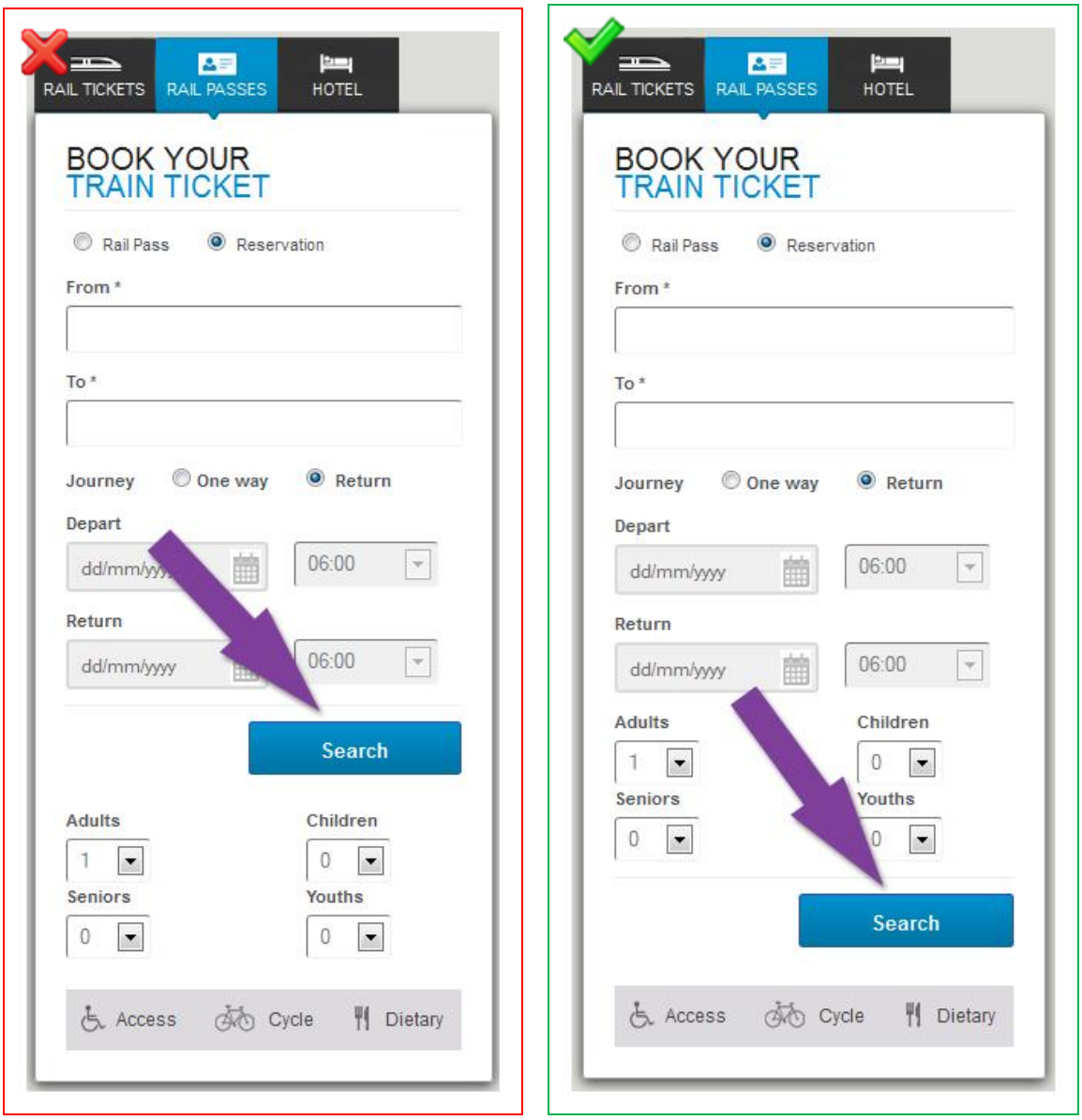
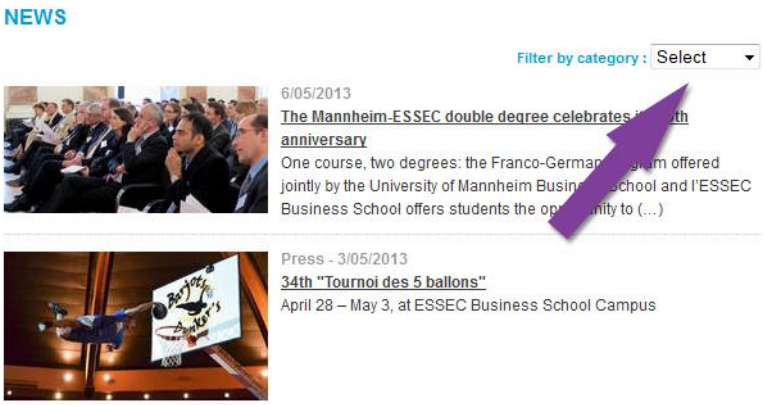


Figure 29: In the first example, the options "Who is travelling" and "How do you want to travel" are placed after the "Book" submit button. Some users may omit to enter this information. For this reason, it is important to position the submit button at the end of the form, as in the second example.

Note

In some circumstances, you do not need to provide a button. This is the case, for example, with a drop-down list for sorting a list of results dynamically, as the action is triggered dynamically when the user makes a choice.



7.2.2. Provide an explicit button text for each button

An explicit button text must be provided for each button. The purpose of the button must be easily understood just by reading the button text, even if it is read out of context.

Button texts with the following text should therefore be avoided:

- “OK”.
- “Validate”.
- “Confirm”.
- Etc.

They should be replaced by button texts such as:

- “Register”.
- “Go to step 2”.
- “Confirm payment”.
- Etc.

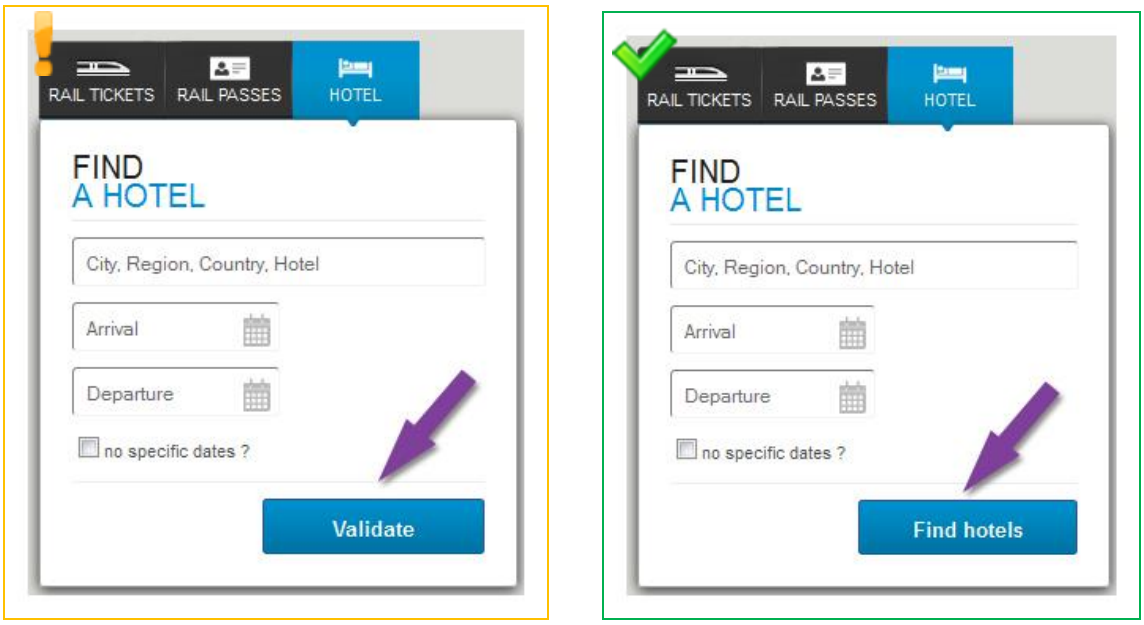


Figure 30: in this example, the "Validate" button has been replaced by a "Compare" button, which is more precise.

Note

If it is not practical to add a button text for some buttons (lack of space in the mock-up, for example), there are other solutions that can be used later in the development phase (adding tooltips, for example). Nevertheless, this is a compromise solution that is less effective than directly optimizing the button text.

Figure 31: in this example, the image button represents a magnifying glass.
It will be made accessible during the technical phase.

7.3. Information messages

7.3.1. Clearly indicate mandatory fields

On each form, mandatory fields should be clearly indicated:

- A distinctive sign (statement, symbol, pictogram, etc.) must be provided in the label of each mandatory field.
- A statement **at the beginning** of the form must indicate that the symbol or pictogram stands for a mandatory field.

Note

- If all the form fields are mandatory, then the statement “All fields are mandatory” may be sufficient.
- You can also indicate at the beginning of a form that all fields are mandatory, except where there is an indication that the field is optional in the field label.

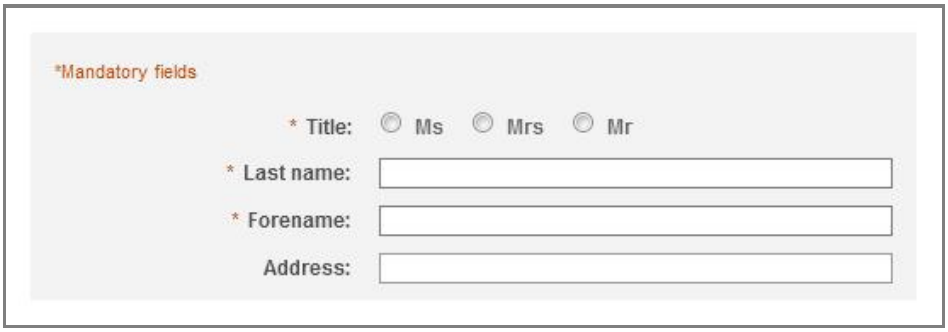


Figure 32: in this example, mandatory fields are indicated with an asterisk.

7.3.2. Provide help for entering data

Whenever the user is expected to enter values in a specific format in a form field, this should normally be indicated to the user.

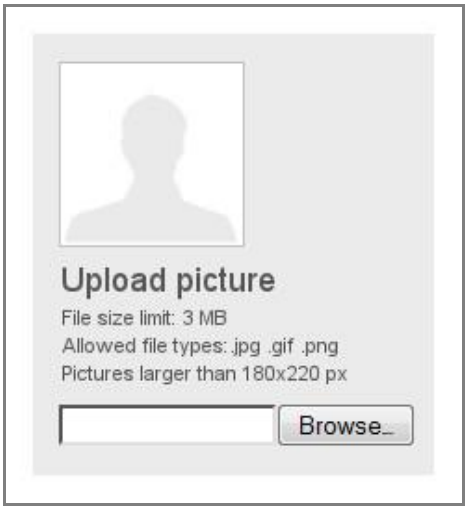


Figure 33: in this example, information concerning the format and size of the document is provided before the document is sent.

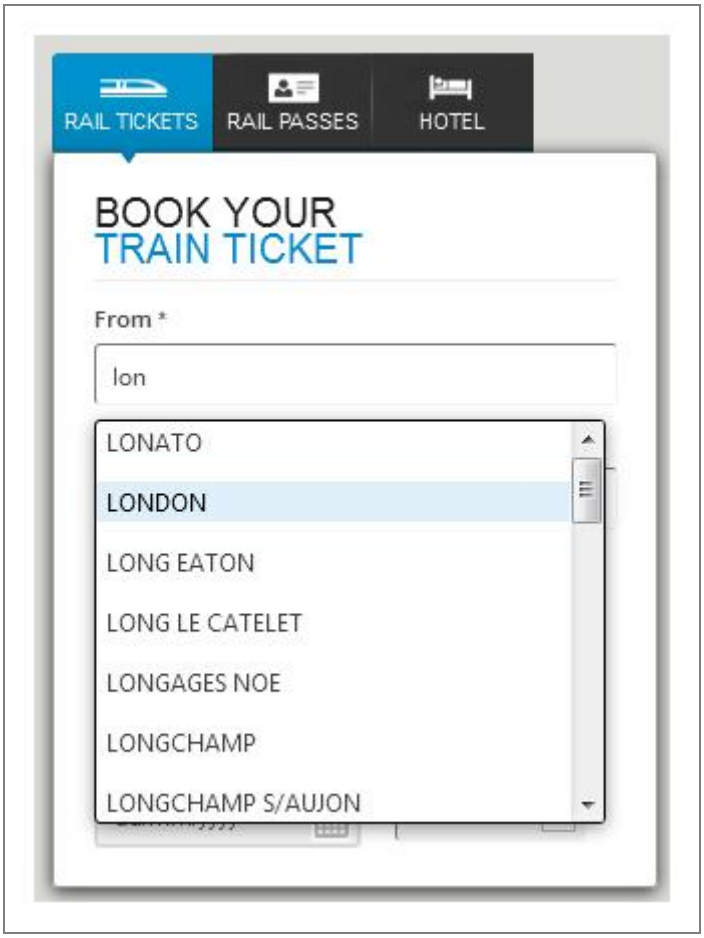


Figure 34: Auto-completion is another way of providing field-level help to the user.

7.3.3. Provide explicit error messages and suggestions for correcting errors

Whenever there is a possibility that a form returns errors, the following items must be provided:

1. Explicit error messages.
2. Suggestions for correcting errors.

These items must be positioned in one of the following places:

3. At the **beginning** of the form.
4. At the **level** of each form field.
5. In both places at the same time.

Error messages must be explicit. In other words, the user must understand the cause of the error and be able to identify the field, just by reading the error message.

Suggestions for correcting errors that are caused by entering data in an incorrect format must be provided.

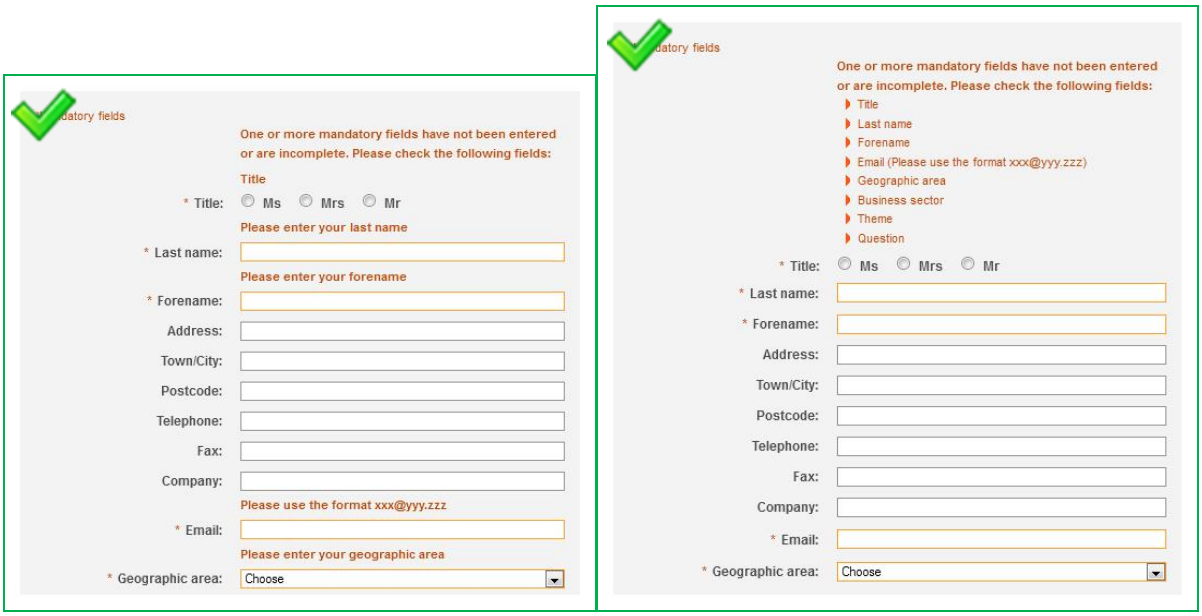


Figure 35: in the two examples above, the error messages are thorough and are accompanied by suggestions for correcting the errors (email format).

7.3.4. Provide a confirmation message

Whenever a form is validated with success, a confirmation message must be provided. This message must remind the user of the action that has been executed.

Note

In some circumstances, a confirmation message is not necessary, as the page displayed after submitting the form makes the result of the action obvious. For example:

1. A connection form that sends the user to a “User profile” page.
2. A “Go to next step” button that sends the user to the next step in a form with multiple steps.
3. A comment form that sends the user to the comment posted.
4. Etc.

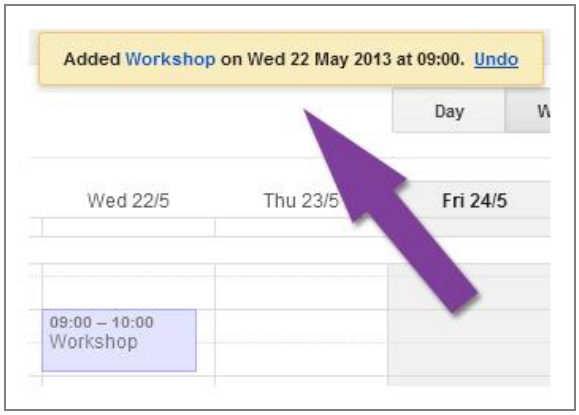


Figure 36: Following the addition of an event to an agenda, a confirmation message is clearly displayed on the screen.

7.4. Forms with multiple steps

7.4.1. Clearly indicate the total number of steps as well as the current step

For each form with multiple steps, the total number of steps as well as the current step must be clearly indicated.

Figure 37: the user is informed that this form includes three steps.

7.4.2. Provide a way of returning to the previous steps

For each step with multiple steps, a way of returning to the previous steps must be provided.

Figure 38: Users can click on the title of step 1 to go back from the subsequent steps.

7.4.3. Provide a summary of values entered before the form is finally submitted

For each form containing multiple steps, a summary of all the data entered must be proposed to the user before the final submission of the form.

From the summary, it must be possible either to directly edit all the values, or to return to the preceding steps to do so.

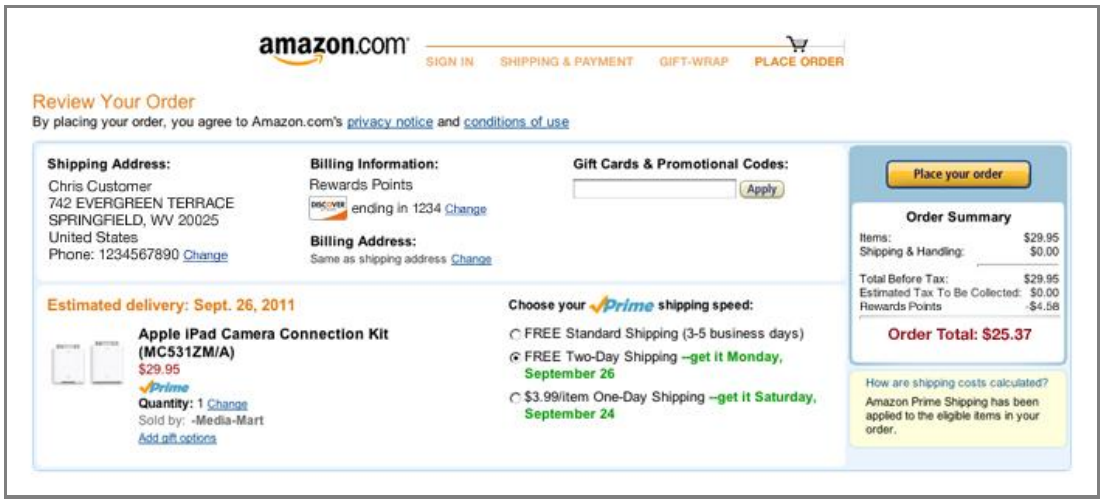


Figure 39: after having filled in the form, a summary is shown to the user, who can modify the values before certifying that the information is correct.

7.5. CAPTCHA (anti-spam systems)

7.5.1. Provide an alternative to each CAPTCHA that is either just sound or visual

For each CAPTCHA (anti-spam system) that is either just sound or visual, an alternative must be provided. For example:

1. A sound alternative for a visual CAPTCHA.
2. A visual alternative for a sound CAPTCHA.
3. A text alternative in the form of a simple question for a sound or visual CAPTCHA.
4. Etc.

Warning
CAPTCHA systems are designed to block spammers and use increasingly sophisticated methods to obstruct them. CAPTCHAs are therefore more and more difficult to decipher. By definition, a CAPTCHA will therefore never be completely accessible. With respect to accessibility, the best solution is to avoid them.

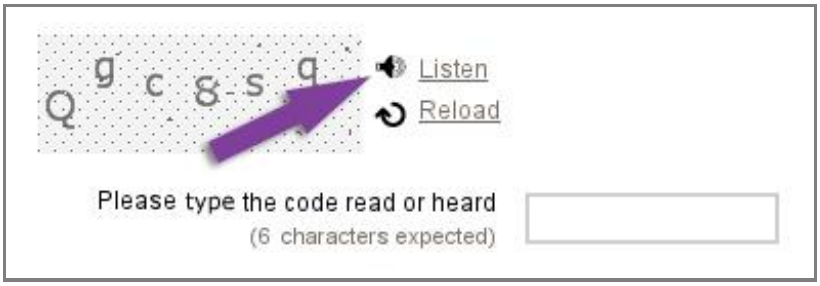


Figure 40: in this CAPTCHA, the link "Listen" provides the user with a sound version of the CAPTCHA.

7.5.2. Provide a refresh method for each CAPTCHA

For each CAPTCHA (anti-spam system), a way for refreshing the content must be provided, because the user is often unable to decipher the CAPTCHA at the first attempt.

Tip
A good practice is to propose, in addition to the refresh solution, a way of contacting the website administrator in the event that the CAPTCHA value cannot be entered (link to a "Contact" page, telephone number, etc.).

Figure 41: in this CAPTCHA, the link "Reload" provides the user with a new image if the current one is difficult to read.

8. Multimedia

8.1. Videos

8.1.1. Provide a heading or summary for each video

To highlight each video, a heading and/or summary must be provided.

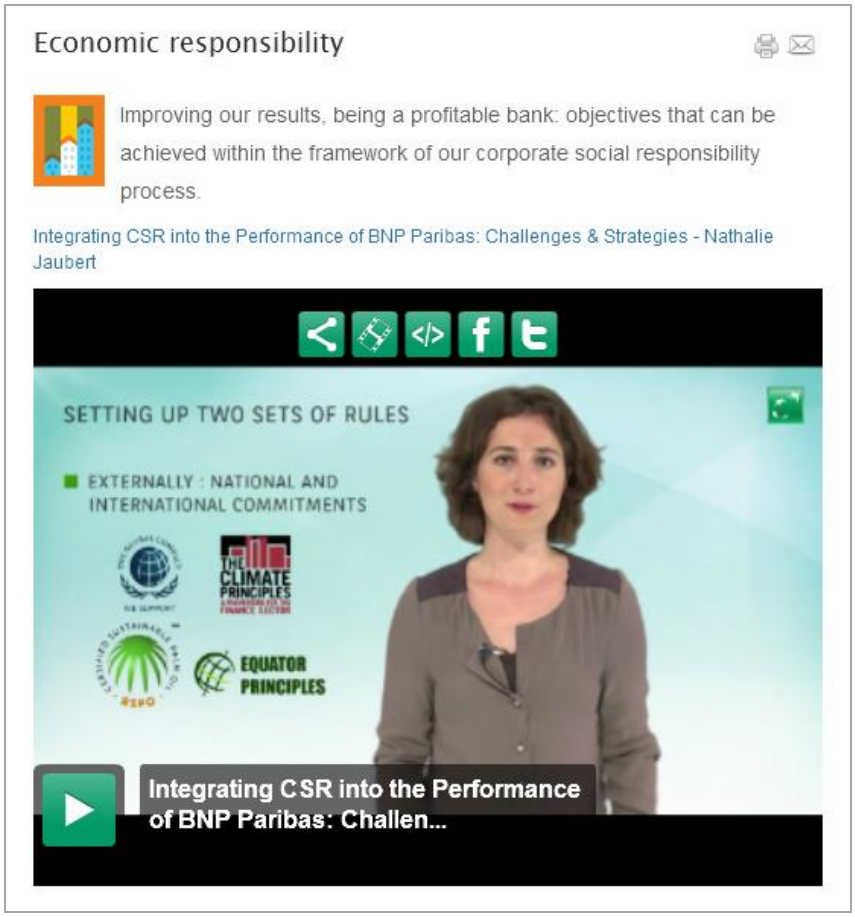


Figure 42: the video above is accompanied by a heading and a short introductory text.

8.1.2. Provide a way of accessing the text transcript of each video

The user must have a way of accessing the text transcript of each video.

This text transcript must be available:

1. Either directly on the same page near the video.
2. Or on another page, available from a link close to the video.

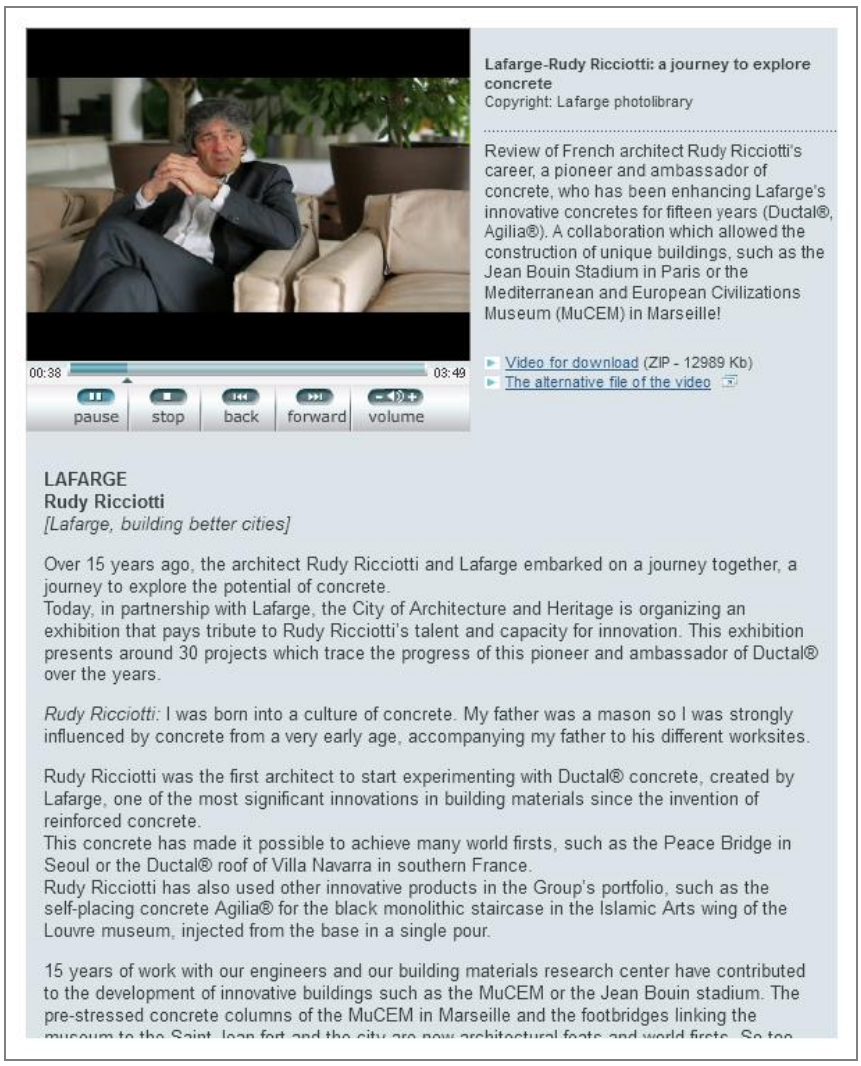


Figure 43: example of a text transcript directly under the video.

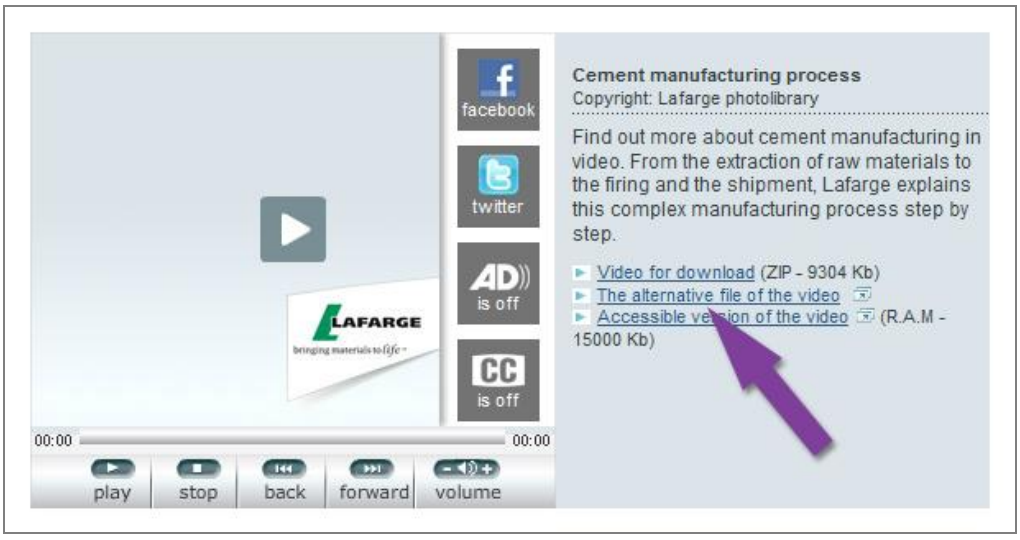


Figure 44: example of a link to the text transcript located near the video.

8.1.3. Provide a way of controlling the progress and volume of each video

The following controls must be included with each video:

1. Progress controls, play/pause button and stop button.
2. Sound controls: mute/unmute sound button and volume control button.

Tip
It is very useful to display information concerning the current position and total duration of the video, and a method of moving forwards or backwards in the video (progress bar, fast forward/fast backward buttons, etc.).

8.1.4. Provide a way of displaying the closed captions

You must provide a way of displaying and hiding the closed captions for each video.

Figure 45: the "CC" button is used for activating the closed captions.

8.1.5. Provide a format for closed captions that ensures they are readable

Whenever closed captions are displayed, the contrast between the text and the video in the background must be sufficient.

Tip
For example, add a black background for white closed captions, or a dark outline for clear text, in order to ensure readability in all circumstances.

Figure 46: white type with a black closed captions, for example, ensures that it is readable in all contexts.

Figure 47: a background that is opaque or semi-transparent also ensures that the text is easily read.

8.1.6. Provide a way of activating the audio description

A way of activating or deactivating the audio description must be provided with each video.

Note
The audio description is the equivalent of closed captions for blind or visually impaired people. It provides oral commentary and narration for information that is only conveyed by images.

Figure 48: the "AD" button (for Audio Description) is used to activate the audio description.

8.2. Audio content

8.2.1. Provide a heading or summary for each audio content

To highlight each audio content, a heading and/or summary must be provided.

8.2.2. Provide a way to access the text transcript of each audio content

A way of accessing the text transcript must be provided for each audio content.

This text transcription should be available:

1. Either directly on the same page near the audio content.
2. Or on another page, available from a link near the audio content.

8.2.3. Provide a way of controlling the progress and volume of each audio content

At a minimum the following controls must be provided for each audio content:

1. Progress controls: play/pause and stop buttons.
2. Sound controls: mute/unmute sound button and volume control button.

Tip
It is very useful to display information concerning the current position and total duration of the audio content, as well as a method of moving forwards or backwards in the audio (progress bar, fast forward/fast backward buttons, etc.).

8.3. Animations and sounds (banners, scrolling content, background music, etc.)

8.3.1. Provide a method for stopping each animated content

You should provide a way of pausing and restarting each animated content (content that scrolls, blinks, moves, or is automatically updated, etc.).

Note
You do not need to provide a progress bar or pause/play button for animations that last less than 5 seconds.

Figure 49: as this advertisement is animated, it has a system for pausing the movement.

8.3.2. Provide a way of stopping sounds that are triggered automatically

Whenever a sound that lasts longer than three seconds is launched automatically, you must provide a way to stop the sound at the top of the page.

Warning
You are strongly recommended not to include sounds that are triggered automatically. Some users will be disconcerted by a sound that is launched without any action on their part, and it may be difficult to find the source of the sound when several tabs are open. Other users will simply be blocked—users of voice synthesisers will no longer be able to continue navigating, for example.

Appendixes

Appendix 1: Additional Recommendations...

With the aim of being pragmatic and quickly operational, a few accessibility recommendations of the WCAG have not been kept in the core of this document. These criteria are rarely applicable in a web project or are of low priority. Nevertheless, they are listed below and will be described in the Accede Web project wiki[2].

...to comply with level A (WCAG 2.0)

3. Limit the use of flash.
4. Provide a heading or summary for each interactive content with information only perceptible through one of the five senses.

...to comply with level AA (WCAG 2.0)

5. Provide a method for controlling the size of text.
6. Provide a table of contents for pages with a large volume of content.
7. Provide links to sibling pages, if required.
8. Allow the control of personal, legal or financial data entered.

...to comply with level AAA (WCAG 2.0)

9. Provide a glossary to provide detail on complex content, if required.
10. Indicate the pronunciation of words when their meaning is ambiguous in the context.
11. Provide a method for reading the text content aloud.
12. Provide a display zone for translating complex content in sign language.
13. Limit the width of text to 80 characters.
14. Provide line spacing of at least 1.5 times the text size.
15. Provide paragraph spacing of at least 1.5 times the value of the line spacing.
16. Ensure optimal contrast between the content and the background, or propose an alternative with sufficient contrast.
17. Provide a method for customizing the display colours.
18. Provide an explicit link text for each link.
19. Allow the control of all data entered.
20. Provide an alternative or a transcription for each live media content.
21. Provide a thorough audio description for each multimedia content.
22. Provide an interpretation in sign language for each multimedia content.

[2] http://wiki.accede-web.com/en/notices/html-css/recommandations-additionnelles

Appendix 2: WCAG 2.0 correspondence table

The set of recommendations presented in this document is drawn from the WCAG 2.0.

In order that readers can read this document and compare the recommendations with the level of the standards (A, AA, AAA) a correspondence table between the AcceDe Web recommendations and the criteria of WCAG 2.0 is maintained in the project wiki at the following address: http://wiki.accede-web.com/en/notices/html-css/grille-de-correspondances-wcag-accessiweb-rgaa.