Section 508 Compliance
for Localization and Translation

It's important for every organization and business to make their content and information accessible to all audiences. But some federal organizations and federally-affiliated entities are required by law to make their content 508 compliant. This means ensuring your information and content are accessible to as many people as possible, particularly those with disabilities.

So, what is 508 compliance? How do you make your content accessible, and what does that look like in practice?

Here, we'll answer some common questions about 508 compliance and 508 remediation, so you can understand how to make your organization's materials optimally accessible.

What is Section 508?

Section 508 was a 1998 amendment to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, requiring federal agencies to make electronic and information technology (EIT) accessible to people with disabilities.

Section 508 mandates that agencies must give disabled employees and members of the public equitable and comparable access to information. Federal agencies are required to make information and communications technology, or ICT, available to those with disabilities.

This applies not only to federal employees but also those that use any documents, training materials, software, and more published by a federal agency. This means that all federal agencies must comply with Section 508's accessibility requirements.

Updated in 2018, Section 508 now addresses more recent foreign policies and technological innovations. The 2018 updates were created to align US guidelines with established accessibility standards, including those issued by the European Commission and the World Wide Web Consortium's (W3C) Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.0).

How do you make documents and websites more accessible?

The concept of accessible content can be boiled down to intentional clarity in the content's language and structure.

For example, clear language and structure allow visually impaired people who use screen reader technology to understand and navigate a document or website.

In making content accessible for those with disabilities, it's best to make your content clear, navigable, and understandable for all, regardless of language and ability.

What content needs to be compliant with 508 standards?

All ICT must meet accessibility standards, according to the ICT Accessibility Policy. ICT is any technology that facilitates access to information or data.

ICT includes, but is not limited to:

- Internet websites
- Software and operating systems
- Webinars
- Call centers and tech support
- Online training
- PDFs
- User guides

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Here are some steps you can take to make content more accessible.

Use proper headings
Use proper section headings — such as Headings 1, 2, and 3 — in documents and on websites, rather than resizing fonts manually. This helps people using alternative navigation methods, like screen readers, to gain a clear understanding of structure and broader context.

Use Alternative (Alt) Text
To make your content accessible to visually impaired and blind audiences, alt text is a necessity. Rather than just describing imagery, alt text describes imagery within the broader context of a document or website, explaining the meaning of images or visual cues.

For example, when describing the Facebook logo, alt text would read, "Visit our Facebook page," rather than, "Logo with a blue F."

Use clear language
Using clear, digestible language in your content is a low-impact, effective way to make your content accessible. To do this, avoid using jargon, acronyms, metaphors, and abbreviations to eliminate confusion.

Use legible fonts and font sizes
Legible fonts are crucial for making text easy to read and understand.

Use sans-serif fonts, like Verdana, Helvetica, and Arial for visual clarity. Avoid using overly thin, "lightweight" fonts and overly bold, "heavyweight" fonts, since both of these font styles are harder to read.

Font sizes are also important. It's recommended to use 12-point fonts or higher, since these are legible by most. But it's also helpful to have large-print versions of text — 16-point Arial or higher — available, too.

Use recommended contrast ratio
The color contrast between your text and website/document backgrounds should meet the recommended 4:5:1 ratio. Use high-contrast colors between text and backgrounds and avoid using light-colored texts over light backgrounds, or dark-colored text over dark backgrounds. If you're not sure the ratio of your colors, you can use this tool.

Work with a partner for 508 remediation services. 508 document remediation ensures that your documents, website, and other content meets accessibility standards.

This process is the most thorough and effective way to make your content accessible to as wide an audience as possible.

Start remediating your content with Dynamic Language.
At Dynamic Language, our team of experts understands what goes into making your organization fully 508 compliant, and we're equipped to successfully remediate your materials.

We at Dynamic Language are expressly committed to expanding your global reach, with scalable technologies, multilingual talent, and industry-leading customer service.

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