

5-MINUTE SELF-CHECK · NO TOOLS REQUIRED

# Is Your Website Section 508 Compliant?

Twelve visible red flags that any team member can spot in five minutes, no automated scanner required. Each red flag explains the regulation it violates and the audit exposure it creates.

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**TIME TO COMPLETE**

5 minutes

**TOOLS NEEDED**

A web browser

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## Why this checklist exists

Most accessibility problems are visible to anyone who knows what to look for. You do not need a scanner. You need a list.

Automated accessibility scanners catch about 30 to 40 percent of accessibility issues. The rest require manual testing and human judgment. This checklist gives you the manual checks any team member can perform on the homepage of your website in five minutes, with no software and no training.

It will not give you a complete picture. It will give you twelve specific things that, if you find them, mean you have a real problem you cannot ignore. Twelve things that an auditor, a complainant, or a federal procurement reviewer will find within their first five minutes too.

### HOW TO USE THIS CHECKLIST

Open your homepage in a browser. Walk through each red flag below. For each one, mark FOUND if the issue is present, NOT FOUND if it is clearly absent, or UNSURE if you cannot tell. UNSURE counts the same as FOUND in your scoring, because if you cannot tell, an auditor or a screen reader user cannot tell either.

FOUND  NOT FOUND

**1.1 Low color contrast.** Look at the body text on your homepage. Is the text visibly dim against its background? Light gray on white, light gray on light gray, dark gray on a colored panel? If you have to squint, contrast is failing.

**WHY IT MATTERS:** *WCAG 2.0 1.4.3 requires a minimum 4.5:1 contrast ratio for normal body text. Failing contrast is the single most common WCAG failure on professionally designed websites and is one of the easiest things for an auditor or complainant to verify.*

FOUND  NOT FOUND

**1.2 Color used as the only signal.** Are there places on your page where information is communicated only by color, with no text label or icon? "Required fields are in red," "Active items are highlighted blue," "Status indicators use red and green." If color is the only cue, the cue does not exist for color-blind users.

**WHY IT MATTERS:** *WCAG 2.0 1.4.1 prohibits using color as the sole means of conveying information. This is one of the most common failures on dashboards and form-heavy pages.*

FOUND  NOT FOUND

**1.3 Headings used for visual weight, not structure.** Right-click your page, choose "Inspect," and look at the heading tags. If you see h1, h3, h5 with no h2 in between, or if you see h2 used multiple times to make text bigger, your heading hierarchy is broken.

**WHY IT MATTERS:** *Screen reader users navigate by heading. A broken hierarchy makes the page un navigable. WCAG 2.0 1.3.1 requires programmatic structure that matches visual structure.*

FOUND  NOT FOUND

**1.4 No skip-to-content link.** Press the Tab key once on your homepage. The first focusable element should be a "Skip to main content" link or similar. If the first Tab takes you into the navigation menu and you have to tab through 30 nav items to reach the content, the skip link is missing.

**WHY IT MATTERS:** *WCAG 2.0 2.4.1 requires a mechanism to bypass repeated content. Keyboard users and screen reader users cannot use the page efficiently without it.*

FOUND  NOT FOUND

**2.1 Focus indicator is missing or invisible.** Use the Tab key to move through links and buttons on your homepage. Can you see clearly where the focus is at every step? If the focus indicator disappears on certain elements, or if it is so subtle you have to look hard, it is failing.

**WHY IT MATTERS:** *WCAG 2.0 2.4.7 requires a visible focus indicator for any keyboard-operable user interface. Without it, keyboard users cannot navigate the page.*

FOUND  NOT FOUND

**2.2 Keyboard trap.** Tab into your homepage and try to tab back out of every interactive element (modal, dropdown, custom widget). If Tab gets stuck inside something and you have to use the mouse to escape, you have a keyboard trap.

**WHY IT MATTERS:** *WCAG 2.0 2.1.2 prohibits keyboard traps. They make the page completely unusable for keyboard-only users.*

FOUND  NOT FOUND

**2.3 Custom controls that look like buttons but are not.** Look at the interactive elements on your page. Anything styled like a button should respond to Enter and Space when focused. If clicking with a mouse works but pressing Enter does nothing, the control was built as a div with a click handler, not a real button.

**WHY IT MATTERS:** *Custom controls that lack proper semantics (button, link, input) are invisible or unusable to screen readers. This violates WCAG 2.0 4.1.2 and is a common consequence of using design systems that prioritize visual over semantic markup.*

FOUND  NOT FOUND

**2.4 Tab order does not match visual order.** Tab through your page and watch where the focus goes. Does it follow the visual reading order (top to bottom, left to right) or does it jump around unexpectedly? Unexpected tab order is usually caused by CSS positioning that moves visible content without updating the underlying source order.

**WHY IT MATTERS:** *WCAG 2.0 2.4.3 requires a meaningful focus order. Pages with broken tab order are deeply confusing for keyboard and screen reader users.*

FOUND  NOT FOUND

**3.1 Images without alt text.** Right-click an image, choose "Inspect," and look at the img tag. If there is no alt attribute, or if the alt is empty for an image that conveys information, you have an alt text problem. Decorative images should have alt="" (empty), and meaningful images should have descriptive alt.

**WHY IT MATTERS:** WCAG 2.0 1.1.1 requires text alternatives for non-text content. Missing or wrong alt text is the most cited accessibility failure in 508 audits.

FOUND  NOT FOUND

**3.2 Video without captions.** Find any video embedded on your homepage or in your most recent news/blog post. Does it have synchronized captions available? "We will add them later" does not count.

**WHY IT MATTERS:** WCAG 2.0 1.2.2 requires captions for prerecorded video content. The absence of captions is a guaranteed audit finding and a guaranteed complaint trigger from deaf and hard-of-hearing users.

FOUND  NOT FOUND

**3.3 Inaccessible PDFs linked from your homepage.** Click the most prominent PDF link on your homepage. Open it in Acrobat. Check Properties for tags. If the PDF is untagged, has no document language, or has no logical reading order, it is not accessible.

**WHY IT MATTERS:** Document accessibility is the single most common 508 failure category. Federal contractors and agencies are required to make publicly posted documents accessible. Untagged PDFs are visible from a mile away and are routinely cited in complaints.

FOUND  NOT FOUND

**3.4 Forms with placeholder text instead of labels.** Find a form on your site (search, contact, sign-up). Look at each input. Does each input have a visible label, or does it rely on placeholder text inside the field? Placeholder text disappears when the user starts typing and is invisible to screen readers as a label.

**WHY IT MATTERS:** WCAG 2.0 1.3.1 and 3.3.2 require labels for all form fields. Placeholder-only forms are an accessibility failure even if they look clean to sighted users.

## SCORING

### What Did You Find?

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#### RED FLAG TALLY

Visual and Structural (out of 4) \_\_\_\_\_

Keyboard and Focus (out of 4) \_\_\_\_\_

Content and Media (out of 4) \_\_\_\_\_

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**TOTAL FOUND (out of 12)** \_\_\_\_\_

**0–2**

#### LOOKS HEALTHY

Your homepage passes the surface-level manual checks. The next step is a deeper review by a qualified tester to catch the issues this checklist does not surface.

**3–5**

#### REAL GAPS

You have visible accessibility issues that an auditor or complainant would flag in their first five minutes on your site. Each red flag corresponds to a specific WCAG criterion, and most of them are fixable in a single sprint.

**6+**

#### SIGNIFICANT EXPOSURE

Your site has multiple critical accessibility failures. This is a posture that will not survive a procurement review or a complaint investigation. Address before the next contract opportunity, not after.

### Important caveat

Twelve red flags is not a complete audit. It is a screen. A site that passes all twelve still has accessibility issues; the screen just gives you a cheap way to spot the worst of them. A real audit covers the rest of the WCAG 2.0 criteria, the Revised 508 standards beyond WCAG, and the parts of your site that are not the homepage.

## Get the Full Picture

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The red flags above are the visible problems. Most accessibility programs have a longer list of less visible problems that only show up under manual testing by someone trained to catch them. The fastest way to find out what is actually on your site is to put it in front of one of those people.

### Schedule a Free Accessibility Scan

We will manually scan your homepage for the issues this checklist surfaces and the ones it does not. You will get back a short report with the real findings, prioritized by severity. No slides, no vendor pitch, just the scan.

· [hello@simkinselgazar.com](mailto:hello@simkinselgazar.com)

**SCHEDULE YOUR FREE SCAN →**