

# History of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG)



May 6, 2019

This month, the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) turned 20 years old. WCAG version 1.0 was published on May 5, 1999 and was a total game-changer for web accessibility. Today, WCAG version 2.1 is cemented as the gold standard in accessibility. So, how did we get here?

## Quick history lesson: the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG)

### What is WCAG?

WCAG is a set of specific standards designed to make the web more accessible to people with disabilities. It is on its third version, updated over the years to account for changes in web-based digital technology, assistive technology, design and development trends, and the growth of the mobile web. It is published by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) in collaboration with individuals and organizations within the global accessibility community according to the [W3C Process](#).

### Why is WCAG so universally accepted?

WCAG offers an actionable framework for creating or remediating websites and apps to be accessible. It is not abstract, but specific and technical, and is supported by documentation that identifies methods and techniques that would be considered to pass or fail the minimum accessibility expectations of each checkpoint. WCAG is broken into four guiding principles, which state that web content must be perceivable, operable, understandable, and robust.

Developed for content creators, content authoring tool developers, accessibility testers and test tool developers, and anyone who wants to understand how to make digital experiences accessible, WCAG is used all over the world.

"Rarely does a single document have such a direct impact on people's lives, but the guidance that WCAG provides allows developers and content creators to include people who have historically been excluded from digital experiences," said Mark Shapiro, President of the Bureau of Internet Accessibility.

### WCAG timeline

- May 5, 1999: WCAG 1.0 is born. It included 14 guidelines, ranging from the need to provide text equivalents to considering clarity and simplicity on the web. Each

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keep up. WCAG 2.0 was an incredible follow-up to its predecessor and was intended to be applied to almost all things digital (including documents and apps). WCAG 2.0 also introduced the four guiding principles of accessibility, stating content must be perceivable, operable, understandable, and robust, supported by success criteria for meeting those principles. WCAG 2.0 reigned as the gold standard for a long time.

- June 5, 2018: [WCAG 2.1](#) builds on but does not replace WCAG 2.0. The latest version of WCAG is backwards-compatible with the previous, which means if you comply with WCAG 2.1, you automatically comply with WCAG 2.0 – great news for website and app creators. WCAG 2.1 came as a highly-welcomed update, after the decade-old WCAG 2.0 could no longer completely account for advancements in technology and web use. The new WCAG 2.1 standards include several success criteria for improving web accessibility on mobile devices, as well as for people with low vision and cognitive disabilities.

## Testing according to WCAG

We believe our comprehensive testing strategy provides the best path to achieving, maintaining, and proving digital compliance. Our four-point hybrid testing combines the best of human and artificial intelligence. Learn about our [four-point hybrid testing](#).

For information on how we apply WCAG to identify the actual accessibility barriers people may face, check out the following five-part series:

- [Accessibility testing for people with visual disabilities](#)
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- [Accessibility testing for people with cognitive, learning, and neurological disabilities](#)
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