

Accessible Search FAQ

What is Google Accessible Search?

Accessible Search is an early Google Labs product designed to identify and prioritize search results that are more easily usable by blind and visually impaired users. Regular Google search helps you find a set of documents that is most relevant to your tasks. Accessible Search goes one step further by helping you find the most accessible pages in that result set.

How does Accessible Search work?

In its current version, Google Accessible Search looks at a number of signals by examining the HTML markup found on a web page. It tends to favor pages that degrade gracefully --- pages with few visual distractions and pages that are likely to render well with images turned off. Google Accessible Search is built on Google Co-op's technology, which improves search results based on specialized interests.

Why is Google offering this?

Accessible Search is a natural and important extension of Google's overall mission to better organize the world's information and make it universally accessible. Google Accessible Search is designed to help the visually impaired find the most relevant, useful and comprehensive information, as quickly as possible.

In the past, visually impaired Google users have often waded through a lot of inaccessible websites and pages to find the required information. Our goal is to provide a more useful and accessible web search experience for the blind and visually impaired.

How do you decide which sites are "accessible" and which are not?

Broadly, Google defines accessible websites and pages as content that the blind and visually impaired can use and consume using standard online technology, and we've worked with a number of organizations to determine which websites and pages meet those criteria. Our methods for identifying accessible pages and content are always evolving; Currently we take into account several factors, including a given page's simplicity, how much visual imagery it carries and whether or not its primary purpose is immediately viable with keyboard navigation.

How can sites make their content more accessible to the blind?

Some of the basic recommendations on how to make a website more usable and accessible include keeping Web pages easy to read, avoiding visual clutter -- especially extraneous content -- and ensuring that the primary purpose of the Web page is immediately accessible with full keyboard navigation. There are many organizations and online resources that offer Website owners and authors guidance on how to make websites and pages more accessible for the blind and visually impaired. The W3C publishes numerous guidelines including [Web Content Access Guidelines](#) that are helpful for Website owners and authors. Broad adherence to these guidelines is one way of ensuring that sites are universally accessible.

Does Accessible Search Filter Out Inaccessible Content?

No. First of all accessible is a very subjective measure --- what's more, queries can vary widely with respect to how accessible the results are. As an example, if you are looking for information such as weather forecasts or reference material such as the definition of an unfamiliar term, the result set often consists of both accessible and inaccessible content. In these cases, Google Accessible Search promotes those results that have been measured to be more accessible. On the other hand, if the particular query is about video games, the chances are fairly high that a majority of the best results for that query will be visually busy pages. So in the final analysis, we never filter content in Google Accessible Search; we pick the best results exactly as we do with regular Google search, and then re-order the top results by their level of accessibility.

The Result Set Looks Identical To Regular Search?

The operational word in the above question is looks. Google Accessible Search does not in any way change the look and feel of Google search results. What it does (see earlier question) is to re-order results based on how accessible they are.

Navigating Search Results

After Google Accessible Search was launched, many of our users sent us feedback about the results page (both Google Accessible and regular search) being difficult to navigate with screenreaders. In response, we have updated the results page in both cases to have section headers that can be used in

conjunction with screenreader hotkeys to quickly skim through the page. Thus, once Google has responded to your search query, use your access technology's "move by section" keys to move between the section that displays sponsored ads and the individual results.

How Can I Perform More Complex Searches?

Notice that <http://labs.google.com/accessible> has a link to Advanced Search in addition to the simple text box. Use this link to access Google Advanced Search - -- this provides you the ability to focus your search on documents in a specific language. The resulting search will continue to use Google Accessible Search for ordering the results.

How Can I Compare Regular Search With Google Accessible?

Google Accessible Search is an experiment, and to be an effective experiment, end-users need to be able to easily compare the results obtained by using regular Google search vs Google Accessible. Notice that the top of the results page contains a pair of radio buttons labeled Web Search and Accessible Search you can easily repeat your search by pressing the appropriate radio button and clicking on the submit button.

How Can I Make My Site Rank Higher?

And finally, for the ever popular question that everyone likes to ask. As with regular search, the best thing you can do with respect to making your site rank highly is to create good content. In fact you can think of GoogleBot as the world's most influential blind user --- the content that matters most to our indexing technology --- good quality text --- is what blind users hear when using spoken output. I highly recommend [Google's Guidelines](#) for Webmasters as a starting point. Once you've ensured you've fully addressed these, I'd suggest reviewing your content to see how well it degrades gracefully with respect to end-user abilities. As a simple example, try the following additional checks (in addition to viewing the page in text-only mode as suggested by the Google Webmaster Guidelines):

- Try browsing your site on a monochrome display
- Try using your site without a mouse

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