



# Content Lab: Top 10 accessibility tips

October 23, 2025

# What is Content Lab?

- Focuses on **Content Strategy**: Managing your content to reach target audiences and using data and feedback to improve content and user experience
- Community of practice
  - Values ongoing learning and continuous improvement
  - Flexible format
  - Thrives on active participation

*Content Lab is aligned to the Digital Roadmap, supporting the goal of high-quality, accessible, user-centric content on state websites*



# Our purpose: Learning + better content

## Community of practice

- We want to continually grow and improve
- We use real content examples – yours and ours
- The **methods** and practices are the point

## Mass.gov content

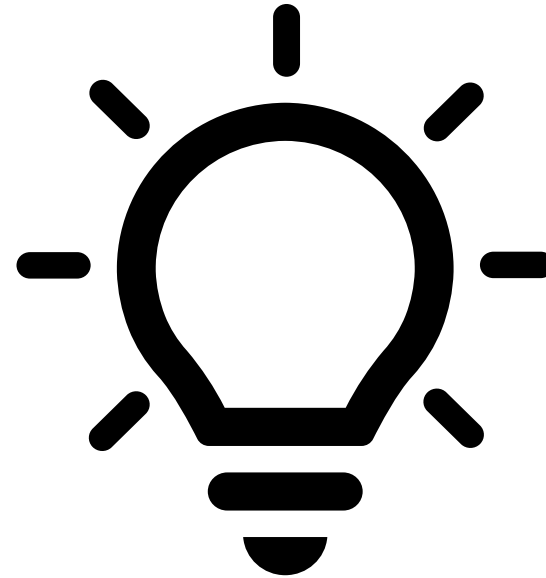
- Clear before clever
- Current
- Constituent-friendly

# Got an idea for Content Lab?

- Propose an idea for a session
- Offer to share something
- Tell us about your \_\_\_\_\_

Email [Kelly.knopf-goldner@mass.gov](mailto:Kelly.knopf-goldner@mass.gov)

Share it in the Content Lab Teams channel





## Agenda

- Intro
- About screen readers
- Correct heading order
- Descriptive link text
- Accessing content on mobile
- Avoiding long sentences and paragraphs
- Writing good alt text
- Simple tables
- Color contrast
- Directional and sensory language
- Resources

Accessible experiences: "essential for some, useful for all"

## Accessible content is better for everyone

- Understand the needs of your audience

## Compliance

- It is the law! [Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\) Title II](#)
- Deadline: April 24, 2026

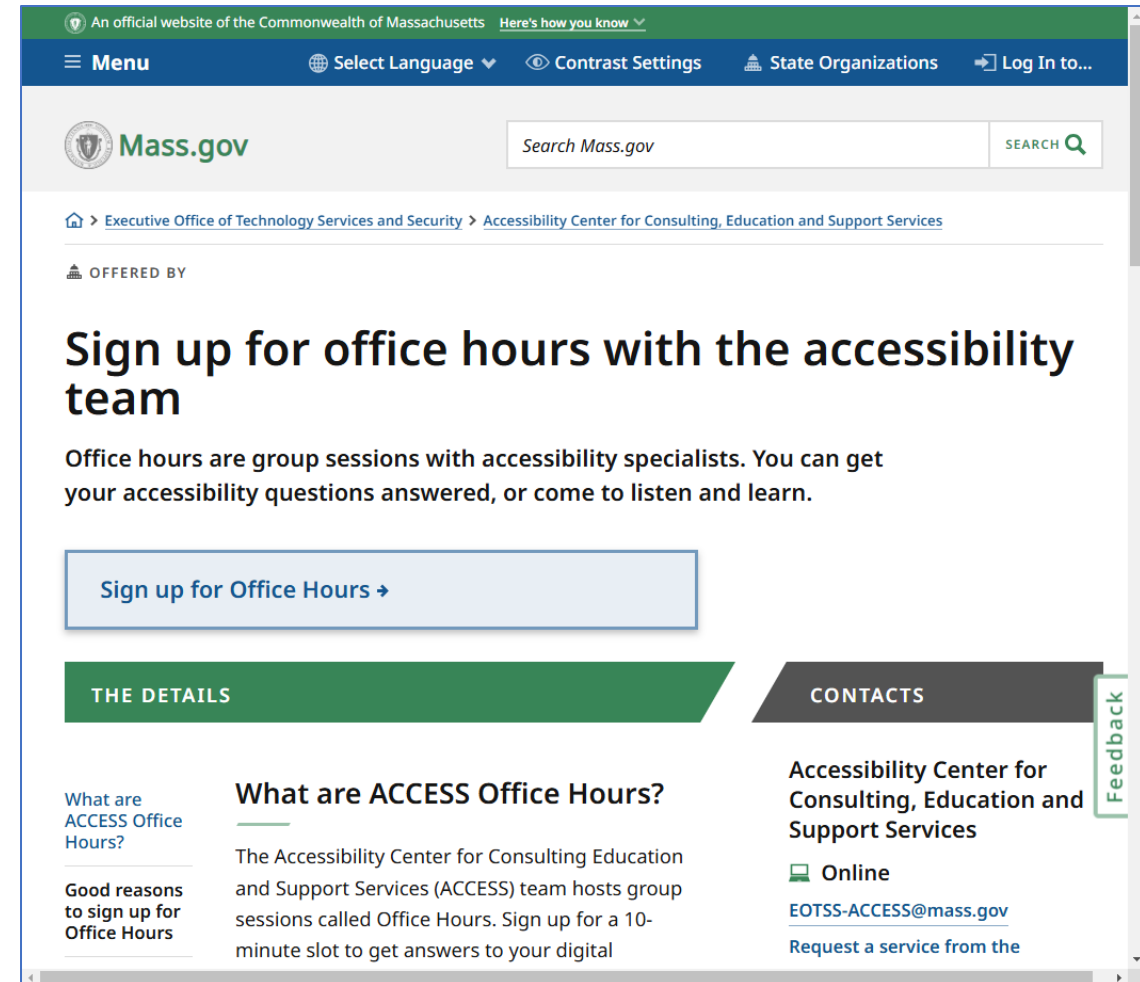
## Meaningful access

- Adopt "accessibility first" mindset
- Proactively design for greater access



# Today's practices are just the start

- Share today's practices with your org
- Attend ACCESS [trainings and group office hours](#)
- Check out our [new video course](#) on accessibility practices
- Stay connected with [Content Lab](#)



The screenshot shows the Mass.gov website with a green header bar containing the text "An official website of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts" and a link "Here's how you know". Below the header is a blue navigation bar with a "Menu" button, "Select Language" dropdown, "Contrast Settings" link, "State Organizations" link, and "Log In to..." link. The main content area has a search bar and a breadcrumb trail: "Home > Executive Office of Technology Services and Security > Accessibility Center for Consulting, Education and Support Services". The page title is "OFFERED BY". The main heading is "Sign up for office hours with the accessibility team". Below the heading is a paragraph: "Office hours are group sessions with accessibility specialists. You can get your accessibility questions answered, or come to listen and learn." A large blue button with white text says "Sign up for Office Hours →". Below this are two columns: "THE DETAILS" and "CONTACTS". The "THE DETAILS" column has two sub-sections: "What are ACCESS Office Hours?" and "Good reasons to sign up for Office Hours". The "CONTACTS" column has a sub-section: "Accessibility Center for Consulting, Education and Support Services" with links for "Online" and "Request a service from the". A vertical "Feedback" button is on the right side of the page.

An official website of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts [Here's how you know](#)

Menu Select Language Contrast Settings State Organizations Log In to...

Mass.gov Search Mass.gov

Home > Executive Office of Technology Services and Security > Accessibility Center for Consulting, Education and Support Services

OFFERED BY

## Sign up for office hours with the accessibility team

Office hours are group sessions with accessibility specialists. You can get your accessibility questions answered, or come to listen and learn.

[Sign up for Office Hours →](#)

### THE DETAILS

#### What are ACCESS Office Hours?

Good reasons to sign up for Office Hours

#### What are ACCESS Office Hours?

The Accessibility Center for Consulting Education and Support Services (ACCESS) team hosts group sessions called Office Hours. Sign up for a 10-minute slot to get answers to your digital

### CONTACTS

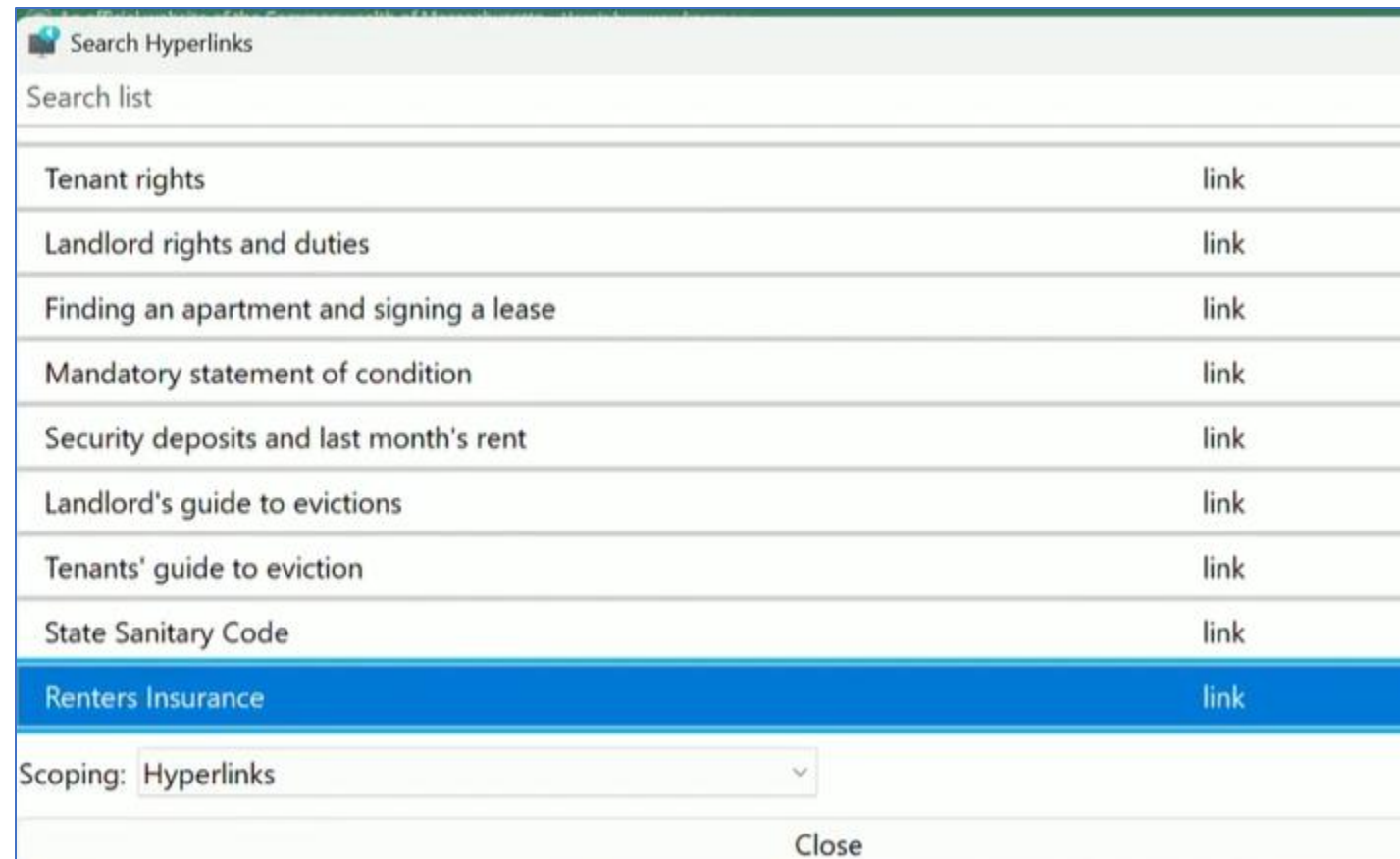
#### Accessibility Center for Consulting, Education and Support Services

[Online](#)  
[EOTSS-ACCESS@mass.gov](mailto:EOTSS-ACCESS@mass.gov)  
[Request a service from the](#)

Feedback

# About screen readers

- Attend an ACCESS demo about screen readers
- Assistive technology for people with visual, physical, cognitive disabilities
- Understand how people use screen readers
  - Navigate by keyboard
  - Pull up link lists





# Want to know how screen readers work?

Enable built-in screen reader for 5 min

- Narrator (PC)
  - To quit: Windows + Ctrl + Enter
- Voiceover (Mac)
  - To quit: Command + F5



## Tip #1: Heading order

Headings help ALL people scan a webpage and understand its structure.

- Think of heading levels as the index of a book:
  - H1: The title
  - H2: The chapters
  - H3 and below: Contents within the chapters

You probably scan headings to find out what a page is about. People use screen readers to do the same thing.

### What will I need to begin my application?

#### Notify your employer

Begin by speaking with your employer about when you need to take leave. Try to provide at least **30 days notice** before your official start date, if possible.

Then, you can [create an account on paidleave.mass.gov](https://paidleave.mass.gov) and apply online.

If you're applying for [military-related leave](#), or [unemployed](#), please call the Department's Contact Center at [\(833\) 344-7365](tel:833-344-7365) to get started.

#### Collect information about your leave

While filling out your application, you'll be asked for:

- The reason you're taking leave
- The date you notified your employer that you need to take leave
- The date when you are planning to take leave, or when your leave started

#### Gather documents and personal information

- Proof of ID, such as a driver's license or state ID. You can provide a copy of this document online or through the mail.
- Your bank account information, including your bank's routing number
- A phone number that can receive text messages (SMS) or phone calls or an authenticator

## Tip #1: Heading order: Screen readers

- Screen readers can jump from heading to heading
- Screen readers can also call a list of headings
  - Users can scroll through that list to choose the content they want to read

**71%**

Of screen reader users use headings to find information

**89%**

Of screen reader users find heading levels very or somewhat useful

[Source: 2024 WebAIM Screen Reader User Survey](#)

## Tip #1: Heading order: Semantic order

- Use headings in semantic order – H1, followed by an H2, followed by an H3 etc.
  - Only one H1 per page (page title)
  - Never skip heading levels
  - Never use headings out of order
- Heading text should be short, descriptive, and understandable on its own
  - "Overview" doesn't tell the reader anything about the content that follows

### Safe driving tips

Here are a few tips that will help you as you first get behind the wheel that ring true every time that you are behind the wheel. This is by no means a complete list. Please read the [Driver's Manual](#) for a more detailed review of safe driving practices that apply to both regular and special driving situations.

#### When you get into the car and turn it on, before taking the car out of park you should:

- Always make sure that the mirrors are adjusted appropriately.
- Fasten your seat belt.
- Be aware of where all the operating controls are (windshield wipers, lights, high beams, etc.).
- Check that your seat is positioned correctly.

#### Immediately after taking your car out of park, be sure to:

- Use appropriate turn signals.



## Tip #2: Descriptive link text

- Link text must make sense **out of context** because screen readers often navigate from link to link and skip surrounding text
- Text should clearly indicate the **purpose** or **destination** of the link
- Hyperlinks must be **visually distinct** from regular text. Typically, links are underlined and in a different color
- Keep most important keywords at the **beginning** of the text, since some screen readers order page links alphabetically



## Tip #2: Descriptive link text: Link keywords

- When adding link text to a webpage, always **link the keywords**
- Link **at least 1 full word**, 2 is better. A link that is only a letter or symbol will be difficult to locate and select and is useless to a screen reader.
- Links with the same keywords should be **made distinct**. If "Staff Listing" appears multiple times on the page, make it "Digital Services Staff Listing" and "RMV Staff Listing"

**Download the  
Annual Report**



**Read the  
full article**



**Sign up for the  
newsletter**



**Access the  
video tutorial**

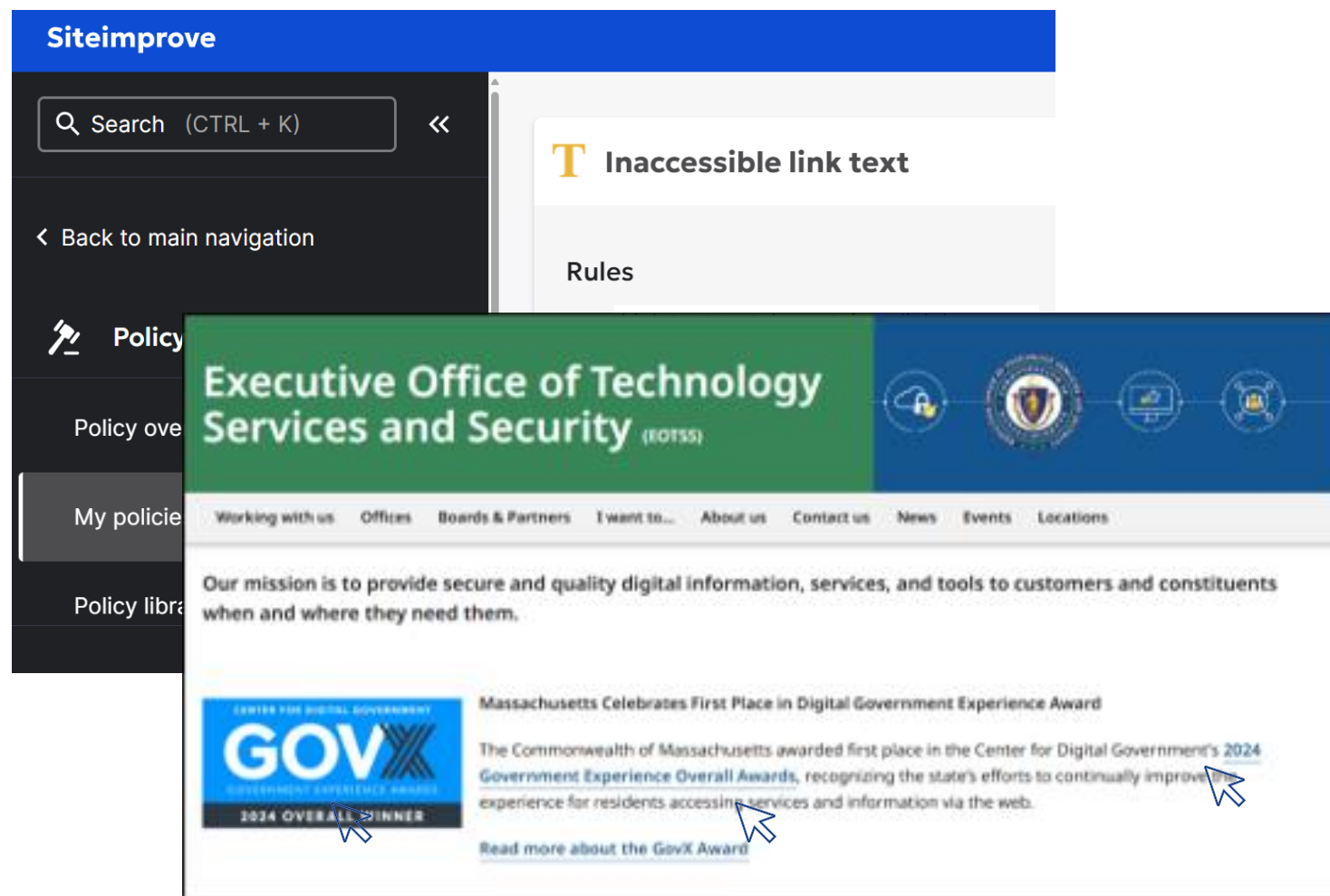


**Submit your  
feedback**



## Tip #2: Descriptive link text: Check your links

- Always **check your links**
- Make sure they're taking you where they say they're taking you
- Run a SiteImprove search for broken links, pages with "Click Here" "Read More" and other no-nos
- Ask yourself, "If this link was the only thing I had access to, would I know where it's taking me?"

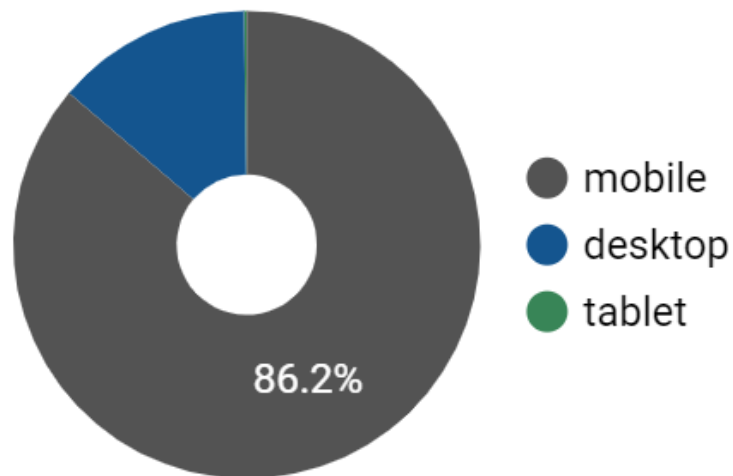


[Use this pre-made policy to review your link text](#)

## Tip #3: Accessing content on mobile

- Right click, inspect
- Check how various device types display

Page views by device type



Health & Social Services > ... > Food Assistance

OFFERED BY  
Women, Infants, & Children Nutrition Program  
Show 2 more ▾

### Find WIC approved stores

The vendor spreadsheet b  
organized by city in alphab

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### Vendor listing by ci

vendor-listing-by-city (A - L)

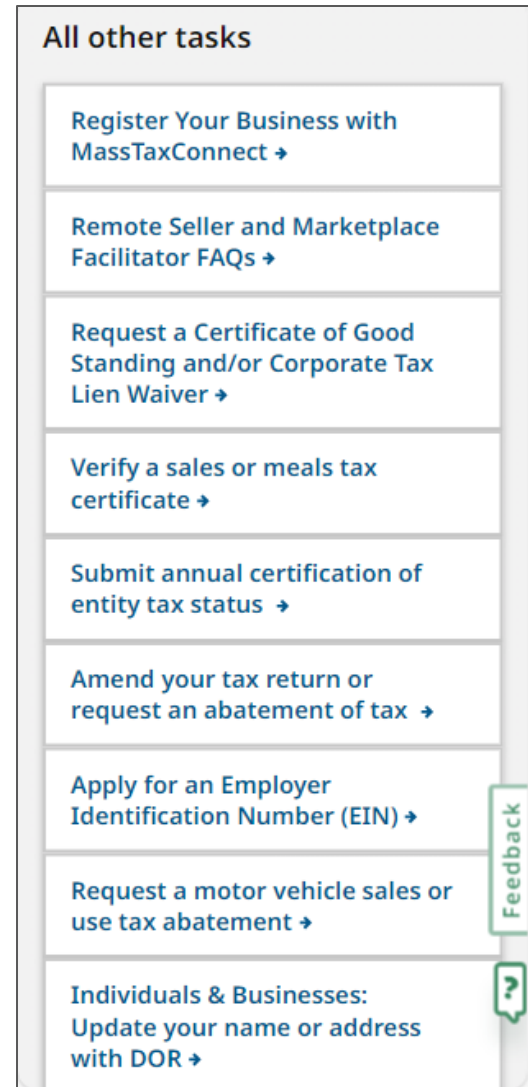
City	Store Name
Abington	Super Stop & Shop Trucchi's Supermarket
Acton	Walmart Store (F&P) #2227 CVS Pharmacy #706 Roche Bros. Supermarkets #11 Stop & Shop #460

Responsive  
iPhone SE  
✓ iPhone XR  
iPhone 12 Pro  
iPhone 14 Pro Max  
Pixel 7  
Samsung Galaxy S8+  
Samsung Galaxy S20 Ultra  
iPad Mini  
iPad Air  
iPad Pro

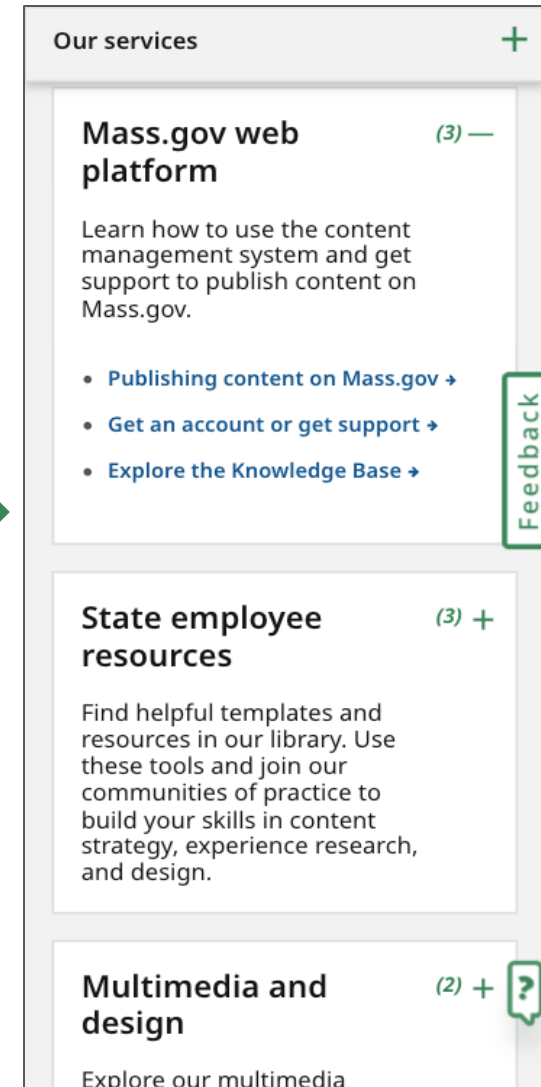


## Tip #3: Know how webpage components display on mobile vs. desktop

- Tables
- Related links
- **Buttons**
- **Accordions**
- Tables of contents
- Phone numbers




Consider



## Tip #3: Know how webpage components display on mobile vs. desktop

- Tables
- Related links
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- Accordions
- **Tables of contents**
- Phone numbers

 OFFERED BY  
Massachusetts Digital Service

### How to audit your Mass.gov content


This guide describes how Massachusetts state agencies can audit their Mass.gov content to find outdated content, identify poorly-performing content, and find accessibility and plain language issues.

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### Purpose of a content audit

Content audits help make sure that information you publish on Mass.gov is up to date and still doing the job you intended it to do. The most common reason to run a content audit is that you haven't been able to actively manage your content. You might also run one in preparation for a major organization change, such as a name change or a new law or policy.

Feedback

 OFFERED BY  
Massachusetts Digital Service

### How to audit your Mass.gov content

This guide describes how Massachusetts state agencies can audit their Mass.gov content to find outdated content, identify poorly-performing content, and find accessibility and plain language issues.

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[Purpose of a content audit](#)

[Step 1: Identify the goals and scope of your audit](#)

[Step 2: Assemble a team](#)

[Step 3: Run the audit](#)

[Next steps](#)

[Contact](#)

### Purpose of a content

Feedback


 TOP

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### A content audit is not a redesign

A content redesign is a project where you revise your content to improve the experience of the constituents who use it. Redesigns are most successful when they can target a small, specific set of pages (or even just 1 page). For example, you might redesign all the pages related to a single service. You might also redesign your organization page to better reflect what people are looking for. Redesigns are for when you recognize that a specific audience's needs aren't being met by your current content design.

If your organization has not been spending regular time on its content each week, you should run an audit, not a redesign.

### Step 1: Identify the goals and scope of your audit

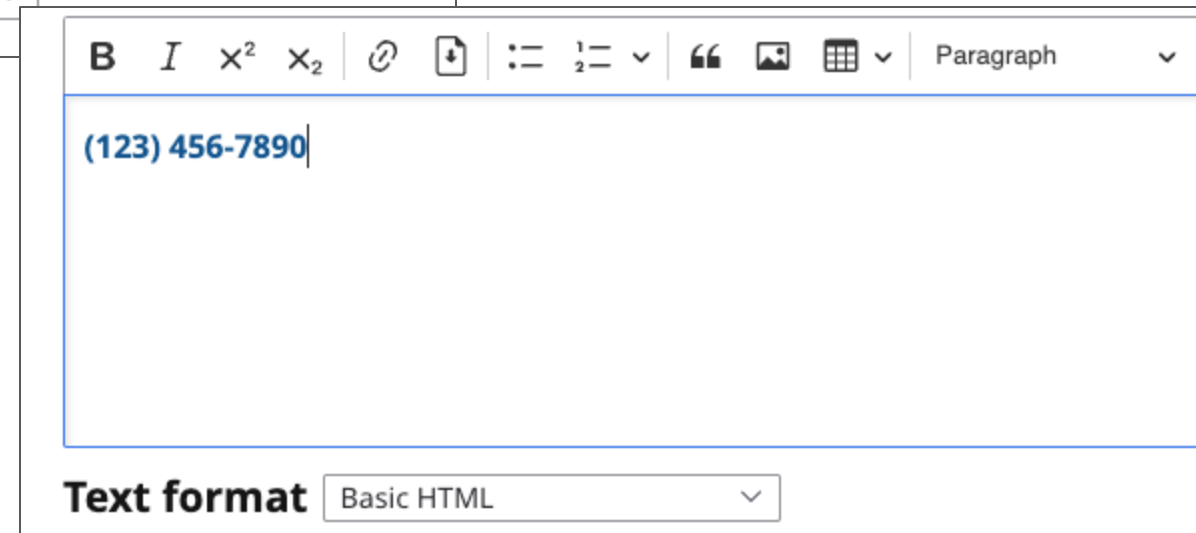
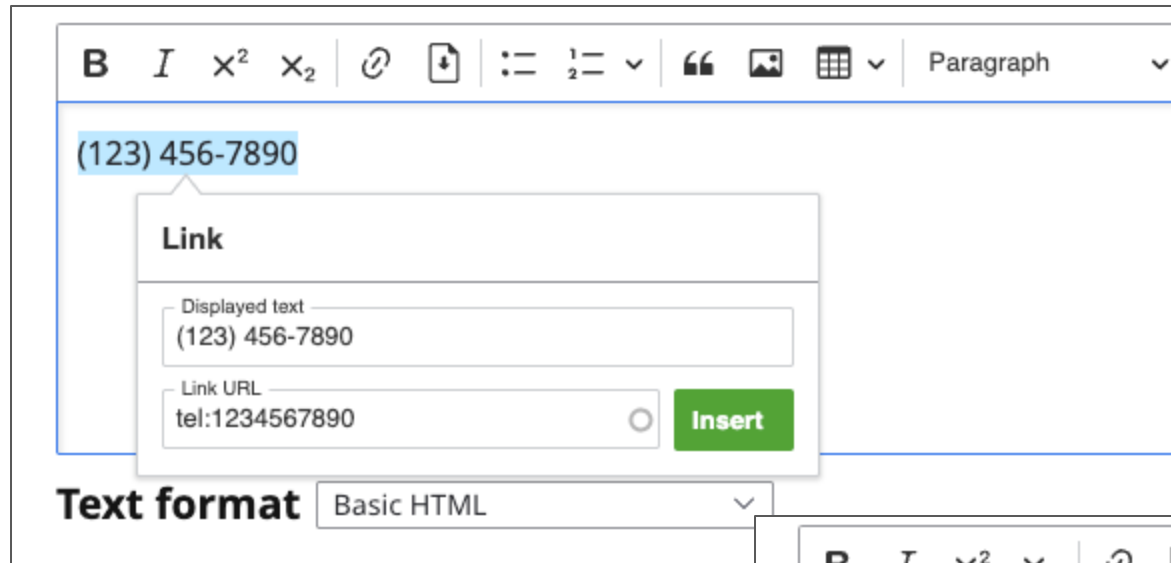
A well-scoped project is quicker, more affordable, and more efficient. Here's a list of common things to look for in an audit:

- Redundant, obsolete, and trivial (ROT)

Feedback

## Tip #3: Know how webpage components display on mobile vs. desktop

- Tables
- Related links
- Buttons
- Accordions
- Tables of contents
- **Phone numbers**



## Tip #4: Avoid long sentences and paragraphs

- Clear and concise text = greater access for everyone
- Write for people to scan
  - Chunk text + add more headings
  - Most important information first
  - Bullets and lists
  - Short, declarative sentences
  - Active voice
  - Plain language

### Services available by appointment

Get help with your claim, connect with job search services, and update your unemployment services account.

### Get help with your claim

- Apply or reopen an unemployment claim
- Drop off or print documents needed for your claim
- Complete your fact-finding questionnaire
- Get help with overpayments

### Get help with your job search

- [Create a MassHire JobQuest profile](#)
- [Sign up for workshops](#)
- Register for a job fair

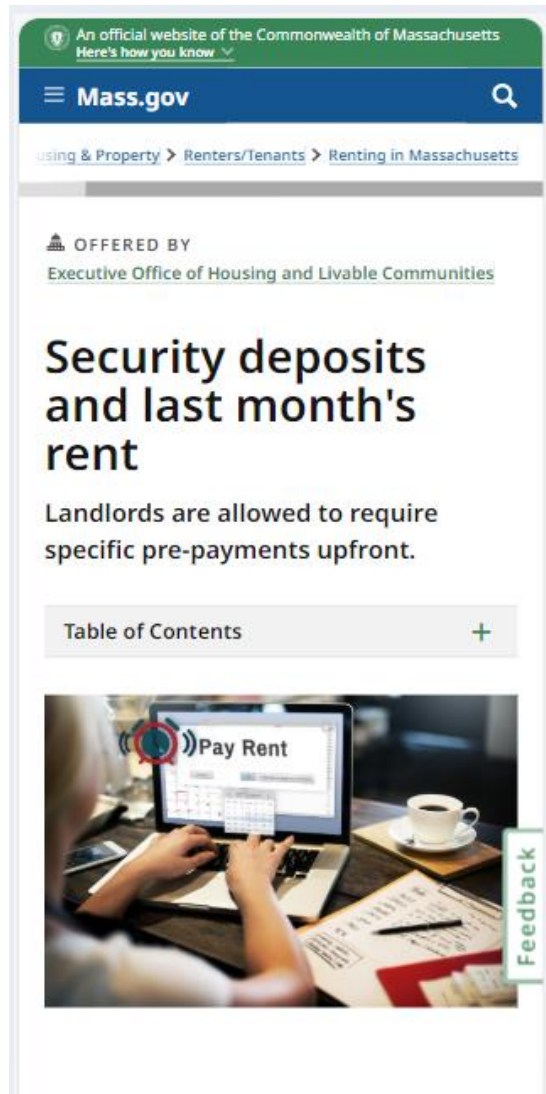
### Get help with your unemployment account

- Reset your Password
- Reset your PIN
- Update your personal information, include your bank account, family details, email, and mailing address

Feedback



## Tip #4 Long sentences interfere with comprehension



"A security deposit is a deposit of money to the landlord to indemnify him/her against losses due to the tenant's failure to pay rent or to pay for repairs if the tenant damages the premises."



## Tip #4: Short sentences and bullets help people scan

### **Overview**

Landlords are allowed to collect the first and last month's rent, a security deposit equal to one month's rent and money for the purchase and installation costs for a lock and key.

### **Pre-payments landlords can require**

Landlords can collect:

- First and last month's rent
- A security deposit equal to one month's rent
- Money to cover buying a lock and keys

## Tip #5: Why good alt text matters

### More than a description of an image

- Alt text lets people using screen readers fully experience your site, especially when an image is important to the content and context of the page.
- Alt text provides more information to search engines and can help boost your page's performance in search results
- If your images won't load for any reason, alt text will be displayed in their place instead of just a broken image icon, making sure all visitors to your page will still get the important context.

### 4 questions to ask when writing alt text

- Does my image tell a story related to my content?
- Is my image necessary to understand my content?
- Is my image functional?
- Does my image have any meaning at all?

## Tip #5: 4 questions to ask yourself when writing alt text

### Does my image tell a story related to my content?

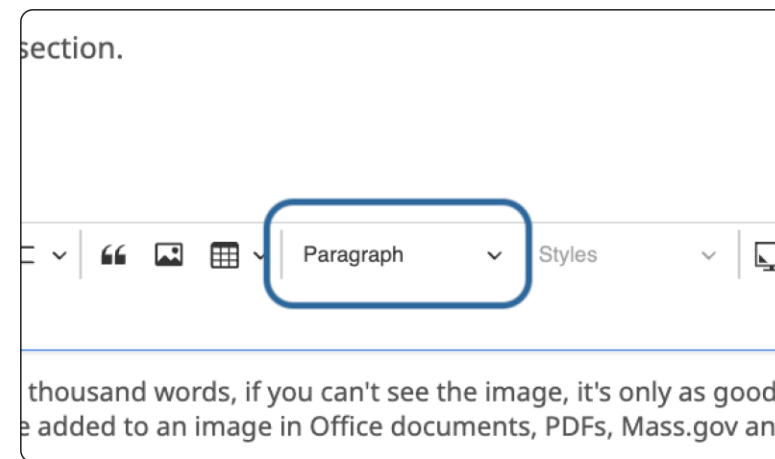
- If your image tells a story, you should describe the image concept instead of the specific contents.



Alt text: A concerned middle-aged man looks down at a desk full of bills and financial documents.

### Is my image literal and necessary to understand my content?

- If your image is a screenshot in a tutorial, the alt text should be more literal and exact.



Alt text: The Mass.gov CMS text editor with the Paragraph styles dropdown in the toolbar highlighted.



## Tip #5: 4 questions to ask yourself when writing alt text

### Is my image functional?

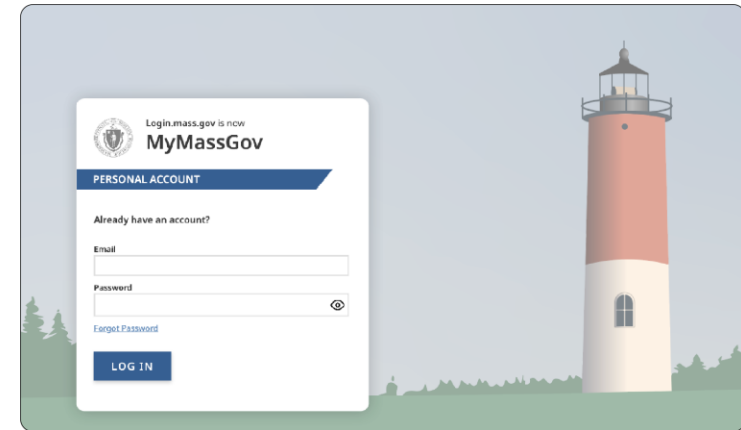
- If your image is functional, then it's better to describe its function rather than how it looks.



Alt text: Social media icons should have alt text announcing the social media site, not describing the look of the logo.

### Does my image have any meaning at all?

- If your image is simply decorative, it should be marked that way.

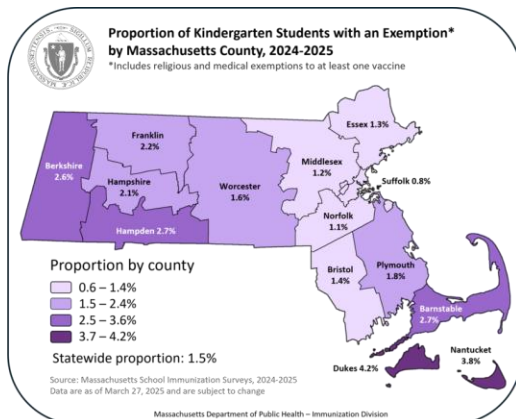


Alt text: This background image of a lighthouse should be marked as decorative or "null."

## Tip #5: Alt text best practices

### Charts, graphs, and images with text

- We strongly recommend avoiding using images with text on them, but sometimes this is unavoidable, such as with charts and graphs
- The information is important, but too long and complicated to put in the alt text
- In these cases, make sure the information is included elsewhere on the page, in the text or an accessible table format.



### Best practices

- Keep it short (1-2 sentences)
- Consider key elements instead of describing every detail
- Don't use "image of" or "picture of"
- Do say if it's a logo, illustration, painting, or cartoon (if that's important)
- Use proper grammar and punctuation
- Only provide relevant information
- Avoid text on images
- Avoid duplicating text elsewhere on the page or document (unless it's data)

## Tip #6: Make accessible tables: Simple structures

- Only 1 header row (and/or 1 header column)
- Each row has the same number of columns below it
- Each column has the same number of rows
- Be consistent with data types across cells in a column
- Do not copy and paste the table in the rich text field.
- If it's a file download, it should be a CSV file only (not an XLS!)

header	header	header
data	data	data
data	data	data
data	data	data

## Tip #6: Make accessible tables: Screen readers can navigate by rows and column headers

- Screen readers can navigate by row and column headers
- Screen readers speak one cell at a time and reference the associated header cells
  - Cells must make sense when read next to headers
- Note: guidelines about link text still apply when tables contain links!

Stocked Date	Waterbody	Town	Species
10/16/2024	Littleville Lake	Chester	Brown Trout
10/16/2024	Stockbridge Bowl	Stockbridge	Brown Trout
10/16/2024	Ashland Reservoir	Ashland	Rainbow Trout
10/16/2024	Fivemile Pond	Springfield	Rainbow Trout
10/16/2024	Forest Lake	Palmer	Rainbow Trout
10/15/2024	Goose Pond	Tyringham	Brown Trout
10/15/2024	Lake Buel	Monterey	Brown Trout
10/15/2024	Lake Cochituate	Framingham	Rainbow Trout
10/11/2024	North Pond	Florida	Rainbow Trout

Tip #6: Make accessible tables: Avoid extra header rows and empty header cells

## Other Wood Prices (Chips & Cord)

Fall 2021		
Type of Wood	Price Unit	Spring 2021
Dried Wood Chips	\$130/ton	\$123/ton
Cord Wood	\$293/cord	\$266/cord

Example: a table with an extra header row and empty header cells

## Tip #6: Make accessible tables: Avoid missing headers

### Phone Listings

A

No headers

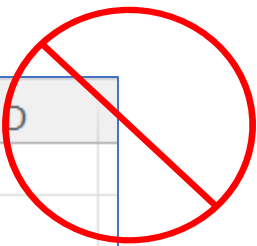
<a href="#">Academy</a>	(508) 867-1000
Accident Reconstruction	<i>See Collision Analysis</i>
AFIS	(508) 358-3170
Air Wing Section - North (Lawrence)	(978) 686-9464
Air Wing Section - East (Plymouth)	(508) 465-9200
Air Wing Section - West (Westover)	(413) 378-1200
Armorer	(508) 867-1537
Asset Forfeiture	(617) 557-2235
<a href="#">Attorney General's Office</a>	(617) 727-2200 or (413) 784-1240

B

- Table has no headers (like "Department" and "Phone number")
- Note: "See Collision Analysis" is confusing if you're expecting a phone number. This column has phone numbers. This is an example of mixing data types.
  - "See Collision Analysis *Department*" would only be acceptable if the columns had headers.




## Tip #6: Make accessible tables: Avoid “stacked” headers



	A	B	C	D
1	2022		2023	
2	Band	Concerts	Band	Concerts
3	The Sham Rollback	12	The Canoe Voucher	37
4	Raw Bumblebee	3	Acetylene Cork	20
5	Garden Bumper	21	Planet Foundation	8
6				

Avoid table designs where headers also have “sub header” rows.



Band	Concerts	Year
The Sham Rollback	12	2022
Raw Bumblebee	3	2022
Garden Bumper	21	2022
The Canoe Voucher	37	2023
Acetylene Cork	20	2023
Planet Foundation	8	2023

Instead, “transform” the data so that you have 1 row of headers.

## Tip #7: Color contrast

Color contrast is the difference in brightness between foreground and background colors. It helps people with low vision see and interact with content.

- Body text has a 4.5:1 contrast ratio with its background
- Large text (18pts+ and bold) has a 3:1 contrast ratio with its background
- Buttons and other interactive elements have a 3:1 contrast ratio



**Text Example**

Good: 7.7:1 contrast ratio



**Text Example**

Fail: 2.4:1 contrast ratio

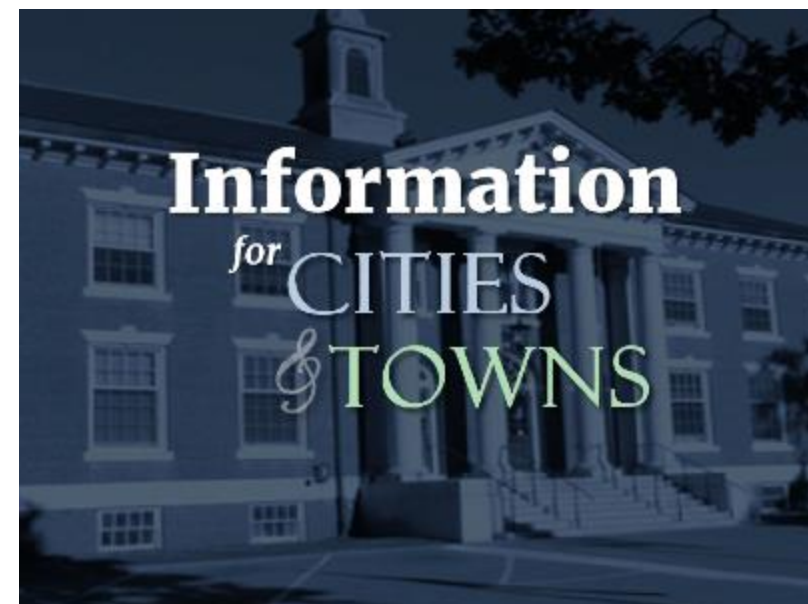
## Tip #7: Color contrast: Avoid using color only

Avoid using color alone to convey meaning

- Color should be supplemental to the content
- Use labels, for example, in addition to the color

Avoid putting text on photos or gradient backgrounds

- It can be difficult to read
- Choose solid backgrounds with good color contrast instead



<input checked="" type="radio"/> Color only
Required fields are in red
Name <input type="text"/>
Email <input type="text"/>

<input checked="" type="radio"/> Color and symbol
Required fields are in red and marked with an *
Name <input type="text"/>
Email * <input type="text"/>

## Tip #8: Sensory and directional language

Some people visiting your content won't be able to see, hear, or click. Avoid sensory characteristics such as shape, size, location, or sound.

- "To the left of the picture"
- "Click the small image"
- "At the bottom of the column"
- "Listen to the podcast"

Use other words or additional instructions.

- "Review," "find," or "explore" instead of "see," or "listen"
- "Select" instead of "click"



**2020 Form 1 Instructions** (English, PDF 1.76 MB)

For more information about the update to unemployment compens COVID-19, visit the link under Related on the right-hand side.



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### RELATED

[Current Tax Filing Season Overview →](#)

[Massachusetts DOR Tax Forms and Instructions →](#)

Help Us Improve Mass.gov

Did you find what you were looking for on this webpage?

☐ Yes ☐ No

## Tip #9: Resources

- ACCESS: EOTSS's accessibility team has the expertise, tools, mission to improve the state's digital accessibility
- Sign-up for [ACCESS office hours](#): Wednesdays and Fridays from 10am to 11:30am via Microsoft Teams
  - [ACCESS Team accessibility testing guidance](#)
  - [ACCESS team accessibility training resource center](#)
- Other online tools
  - [Color contrast checker](#)
  - [ANDI bookmarklet](#)
  - [WAVE extension](#) (similar to Editorially)
  - [Easy Checks](#) (Web Accessibility Initiative/World Wide Web Consortium)

# Wrap up

- We post everything in the Content Lab Teams Channel
- Next [session about Editorially](#): Oct. 30
- [Interactive workshop](#): Nov. 4
- [Sign up for a Content Lab Consult](#) if you're looking for help with a content strategy issue

