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# Form Accessibility Guidelines

Creating accessible and usable forms for all users

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**Standards:** WCAG 2.2 AA, Section 508

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# Form Accessibility Guidelines

Forms are one of the most critical components for accessibility. Poorly designed forms create barriers for users with disabilities and can lead to legal exposure. This guide provides comprehensive best practices for creating accessible forms.

## Core Principles

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1. **Every input must have a label**
2. **Errors must be identified and described**
3. **Forms must be keyboard accessible**
4. **Instructions must be clear and concise**
5. **Success must be communicated**

## Labeling Inputs

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**Required: Associate Labels with Inputs**

**Method 1: Explicit Label (Recommended)**

```
<label for="email">Email address</label>
<input type="email" id="email" name="email">
```

**Method 2: Implicit Label (Also Valid)**

```
<label>
  Email address
  <input type="email" name="email">
</label>
```

**Method 3: ARIA Label (Use Sparingly)**

```
<input type="email" name="email" aria-label="Email address">
```

## ✗ Common Mistakes

```
<!-- DON'T: Placeholder as label -->
<input type="email" placeholder="Email address">

<!-- DON'T: Visual label without association -->
<span>Email address</span>
<input type="email" name="email">

<!-- DON'T: Hidden label -->
<label for="email" class="sr-only">Email</label>
<input type="email" id="email" name="email">
```

## ✓ Best Practices

```
<!-- DO: Visible label with clear association -->
<label for="email">Email address</label>
<input type="email" id="email" name="email" required>

<!-- DO: Label with additional context -->
<label for="email">
  Email address
  <span class="help-text">We'll never share your email</span>
</label>
<input type="email" id="email" name="email" aria-describedby="
<span id="email-help" class="help-text">We'll never share your
```

## Required Fields

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## Indicating Required Fields

### Method 1: Visual and Programmatic (Recommended)

```
<label for="email">
  Email address
  <span aria-label="required">*</span>
</label>
<input type="email" id="email" name="email" required aria-requ
```

### Method 2: Using Abbr Element

```
<label for="email">
  Email address
  <abbr title="required" aria-label="required">*</abbr>
</label>
<input type="email" id="email" name="email" required aria-requ
```

### Method 3: Required Text

```
<label for="email">Email address (required)</label>
<input type="email" id="email" name="email" required aria-requ
```

## Error Handling

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### Identifying Errors

**WCAG 3.3.1 Error Identification** requires that errors are identified and described to the user.

```
<div class="form-group">
  <label for="email">Email address</label>
```

```

<input
  type="email"
  id="email"
  name="email"
  aria-invalid="true"
  aria-describedby="email-error"
>
<span id="email-error" class="error-message" role="alert">
  Please enter a valid email address
</span>
</div>

```

## Error Suggestions

**WCAG 3.3.3 Error Suggestion** requires providing suggestions for fixing errors.

```

<div class="form-group">
  <label for="password">Password</label>
  <input
    type="password"
    id="password"
    name="password"
    aria-invalid="true"
    aria-describedby="password-error password-requirements"
  >
  <span id="password-error" class="error-message" role="alert">
    Password must be at least 8 characters
  </span>
  <span id="password-requirements" class="help-text">
    Must include uppercase, lowercase, number, and special cha
  </span>
</div>

```

## Error Prevention

**WCAG 3.3.4 Error Prevention (Legal, Financial, Data)** requires reversible submissions, confirmation, or data checking for legal commitments or financial transactions.

```
<!-- Confirmation checkbox for financial transactions -->
<div class="form-group">
  <label>
    <input type="checkbox" required>
    I confirm that the amount of $1,000.00 will be charged to
  </label>
</div>
```

## Fieldset and Legend

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Use `<fieldset>` and `<legend>` to group related form controls.

```
<fieldset>
  <legend>Shipping Address</legend>

  <div class="form-group">
    <label for="street">Street address</label>
    <input type="text" id="street" name="street">
  </div>

  <div class="form-group">
    <label for="city">City</label>
    <input type="text" id="city" name="city">
  </div>

  <div class="form-group">
    <label for="state">State</label>
    <select id="state" name="state">
      <option value="">Select a state</option>
      <option value="CA">California</option>
      <option value="NY">New York</option>
    </select>
  </div>
</fieldset>
```

```
        </select>
    </div>
</fieldset>
```

## Input Types and Attributes

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### Autocomplete

Use the autocomplete attribute to help users fill out forms faster and more accurately.

```
<label for="email">Email</label>
<input type="email" id="email" name="email" autocomplete="email">

<label for="tel">Phone</label>
<input type="tel" id="tel" name="tel" autocomplete="tel">

<label for="cc-number">Credit card number</label>
<input type="text" id="cc-number" name="cc-number" autocomplete="cc-number">

<label for="address-line1">Address</label>
<input type="text" id="address-line1" name="address-line1" autocomplete="address-line1">
```

### Input Constraints

```
<!-- Number input with min/max -->
<label for="age">Age</label>
<input type="number" id="age" name="age" min="18" max="120">

<!-- Text input with pattern -->
<label for="zip">ZIP code</label>
<input type="text" id="zip" name="zip" pattern="[0-9]{5}">

<!-- Date input -->
```

```
<label for="birthdate">Birth date</label>
<input type="date" id="birthdate" name="birthdate">
```

## Radio Buttons and Checkboxes

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### Radio Buttons

```
<fieldset>
  <legend>Preferred contact method</legend>

  <div class="radio-group">
    <input type="radio" id="contact-email" name="contact" value="email">
    <label for="contact-email">Email</label>
  </div>

  <div class="radio-group">
    <input type="radio" id="contact-phone" name="contact" value="phone">
    <label for="contact-phone">Phone</label>
  </div>

  <div class="radio-group">
    <input type="radio" id="contact-sms" name="contact" value="sms">
    <label for="contact-sms">SMS</label>
  </div>
</fieldset>
```

### Checkboxes

```
<fieldset>
  <legend>Interests</legend>

  <div class="checkbox-group">
    <input type="checkbox" id="interest-tech" name="interests" value="tech">
```

```
<label for="interest-tech">Technology</label>
</div>

<div class="checkbox-group">
  <input type="checkbox" id="interest-design" name="interest">
  <label for="interest-design">Design</label>
</div>

<div class="checkbox-group">
  <input type="checkbox" id="interest-marketing" name="interest">
  <label for="interest-marketing">Marketing</label>
</div>
</fieldset>
```

## Select Elements

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### Basic Select

```
<label for="country">Country</label>
<select id="country" name="country">
  <option value="">Select a country</option>
  <option value="US">United States</option>
  <option value="CA">Canada</option>
  <option value="UK">United Kingdom</option>
</select>
```

### Multiple Select

```
<label for="languages">Languages</label>
<select id="languages" name="languages" multiple size="4">
  <option value="en">English</option>
  <option value="es">Spanish</option>
  <option value="fr">French</option>
```

```
<option value="de">German</option>
</select>
<span class="help-text">Hold Ctrl (Windows) or Cmd (Mac) to se
```

## Textareas

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```
<label for="message">Message</label>
<textarea
  id="message"
  name="message"
  rows="4"
  cols="50"
  aria-describedby="message-help"
></textarea>
<span id="message-help" class="help-text">Maximum 500 character
```

## Form Validation

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### HTML5 Validation

```
<form novalidate>
  <div class="form-group">
    <label for="email">Email</label>
    <input
      type="email"
      id="email"
      name="email"
      required
      aria-describedby="email-error"
    >
    <span id="email-error" class="error-message" role="alert">
  </div>
```

```

    <button type="submit">Submit</button>
  </form>

  <script>
    document.querySelector('form').addEventListener('submit', function(e) {
      const email = document.getElementById('email');
      const error = document.getElementById('email-error');

      if (!email.validity.valid) {
        e.preventDefault();
        email.setAttribute('aria-invalid', 'true');
        error.textContent = 'Please enter a valid email address';
      } else {
        email.setAttribute('aria-invalid', 'false');
        error.textContent = '';
      }
    });
  </script>

```

## Success Messages

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```

<!-- After successful form submission -->
<div role="alert" aria-live="polite" class="success-message">
  <h2>Thank you!</h2>
  <p>Your message has been sent successfully. We'll respond with an email shortly.</p>
</div>

```

## Keyboard Navigation

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### Tab Order

- Ensure logical tab order
- Use `tabindex="0"` for custom interactive elements
- Use `tabindex="-1"` to remove elements from tab order

- Never use positive tabindex values

## Keyboard Shortcuts

```
<!-- Submit form with Enter -->
<form>
  <label for="search">Search</label>
  <input type="text" id="search" name="search">
  <button type="submit">Search</button>
</form>

<!-- Reset form with Escape -->
<form>
  <label for="username">Username</label>
  <input type="text" id="username" name="username">
  <button type="reset">Clear</button>
</form>
```

## Testing Checklist

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### Automated Testing

- ☐ All inputs have associated labels
- ☐ Required fields use required attribute
- ☐ Error messages are associated with inputs
- ☐ Form is keyboard accessible
- ☐ No accessibility violations in axe/WAVE

### Manual Testing

- ☐ Test with keyboard only (Tab, Shift+Tab, Enter, Space)
- ☐ Test with screen reader (NVDA, JAWS, VoiceOver)
- ☐ Test error messages are announced
- ☐ Test success messages are announced
- ☐ Test at 200% zoom
- ☐ Test on mobile device

## Common Mistakes

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### Don't

- Use placeholder text as labels
- Hide labels with CSS
- Rely solely on color for errors
- Create keyboard traps
- Use positive tabindex values
- Submit forms without validation

### Do

- Always associate labels with inputs
- Make labels visible
- Provide text and visual error indicators
- Ensure keyboard accessibility
- Use logical tab order
- Validate before submission

## Resources

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- **WCAG 3.3 Input Assistance:** <https://www.w3.org/WAI/WCAG22/Understanding/input-assistance>
- **MDN Form Accessibility:** [https://developer.mozilla.org/en-US/docs/Learn/Forms/Form\\_validation](https://developer.mozilla.org/en-US/docs/Learn/Forms/Form_validation)
- **WebAIM Forms:** <https://webaim.org/techniques/forms/>
- **ARIA Authoring Practices - Forms:** <https://www.w3.org/WAI/ARIA/apg/patterns/forms/>