

The Fifteen Minute Accessibility Test

Three manual tests, five minutes each, no training and no license required. They will tell you more about where you stand than six months of automated scans.

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Before you start

Two decisions, thirty seconds.

Pick your top task, not your homepage. The homepage is where nobody converts. Choose the one thing people actually come to your site to do: register for the class, pay the bill, book the appointment, download the agenda. Test that.

Write it down as you go. The list of what broke is the deliverable. A score is not evidence of anything; a dated record of what you tested and what you found is.

DATE
TESTED BY
PAGE URL
THE TASK I AM COMPLETING
BROWSER AND VERSION
OPERATING SYSTEM

Test 1. Keyboard only

FIVE MINUTES

Put the mouse behind the monitor. Unplug it if you have to. Load your page and complete the whole task using only **Tab**, **Shift + Tab**, **Enter**, **Space**, and the arrow keys.

Watch for three failures

- ☐ **Can you always see where focus is?** If the outline disappears, you are lost. Covers WCAG 2.4.7 Focus Visible.
- ☐ **Does focus ever get stuck?** Tab into a menu or modal and try to Tab back out. Try **Esc**. If the only way out is reloading the page, that is a keyboard trap, WCAG 2.1.2, Level A, the lowest bar there is.

- ☐ **Does focus ever jump somewhere senseless?** Opening a menu should not throw you to the top of the page. Closing a dialog should return you to the control that opened it. Covers WCAG 2.4.3 Focus Order.

Also worth noting

- ☐ Is there a skip link, and does it actually move focus to the main content?
- ☐ Can you reach every interactive thing, including anything that only appears on hover?
- ☐ Does **Enter** or **Space** activate custom buttons, or do they only respond to a click?
- ☐ Did you complete the task, or did you give up?

There is no partial credit on "I could not finish." If the task cannot be completed by keyboard, nothing else on this page matters yet. Fix that first.

Test 2. Two hundred percent zoom

FIVE MINUTES

In your browser press **Ctrl**+**+**, or **Cmd**+**+** on a Mac, until you reach 200%. Do not resize the window and do not switch to a phone. Browser zoom at desktop width is the test.

- ☐ Does any content overlap or collide?
- ☐ Is anything cut off with no way to scroll to it?
- ☐ Did the navigation vanish entirely instead of collapsing into something usable?
- ☐ Do you have to scroll horizontally to read a line of text?
- ☐ Can you still complete the task?

Covers WCAG 1.4.4 Resize Text and 1.4.10 Reflow. Text-heavy government, clinic, and university sites fail this constantly, usually because a fixed-width container or an absolutely positioned header was never tested past 100%.

Test 3. Screen reader, top task only

FIVE MINUTES

Use the one already on your machine. You are not auditing and you do not need to be good at it.

Turning on a screen reader. The same keystroke turns it off.

PLATFORM	TOOL	SHORTCUT
macOS	VoiceOver	Cmd + F5
Windows	Narrator	Ctrl + Win + Enter
Windows	NVDA, free, what most blind users actually run	Install from nvaccess.org

1. Turn it on and close your eyes for the first thirty seconds. Just listen to the page load.
2. Navigate by headings. In VoiceOver that is **Ctrl** + **Opt** + **Cmd** + **H**; in NVDA press **H**.
3. Try to complete the same task you completed in Test 1.

You are asking one question

Could I have done this without looking? That is the whole test. Not whether the markup is perfect.

- ☐ Do the headings tell you what is on the page, or are they decoration read aloud?
- ☐ Does every image either say something useful or stay silent? "Image" and a filename are both failures.

- ☐ Do form fields announce their own label, and do errors say how to fix the problem?
- ☐ Do links make sense out of context, or is everything "click here" and "read more"?
- ☐ When something changes on the page, are you told, or does it happen silently?

What broke

This table is the point of the exercise. Fill it in while you remember.

Record every failure. Note which test found it, so you know whether a scanner would ever have caught it.

WHAT BROKE	WHERE	TEST	BLOCKS THE TASK?

What to do with this sheet

Keep it. Date it. Do it again next quarter, or after the next redesign, or when a new editor joins.

Auditors and plaintiffs do not look at dashboards. They look at whether a person with a disability could complete a task, and at whether you have a documented process. Good faith is a real thing and it is made of records, not numbers. A folder of dated sheets like this one, with fix dates written next to the findings, is worth more than any score anyone can generate.

Anything in the "blocks the task" column is not a backlog item. It is someone who cannot use your site today. Fix those before you touch anything cosmetic, regardless of what your scan says the severity is.

Brent Passmore writes about accessibility, AI wayfinding, and the unglamorous work of governing a lot of websites at once. He also builds eiSEO, an automated scanner, which is why he would rather tell you its limits than have you find them in a deposition.

The current version of this sheet lives at brentpassmore.com/resources/fifteen-minute-accessibility-test/

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