

Accessible Social Media Guidelines

For the District of Saanich



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Introduction

Social media is a powerful tool for communication, engagement, and community building—but when content isn’t designed with accessibility in mind, it can exclude people with disabilities. This guide offers practical tips to help ensure your posts reach everyone in the District of Saanich’s community, including those who are blind, have low vision, are D/deaf or hard of hearing, have cognitive or learning disabilities, or use assistive technologies.

Why Social Media Accessibility Matters

Accessible social media benefits everyone. When content is perceivable, operable and understandable, it reaches a wider audience and demonstrates a commitment to inclusion. Many people rely on screen readers, captions, transcripts or other assistive technologies. Without accessible posts, they miss important information and opportunities to participate. Making content accessible is also a legal obligation under human rights legislation. By prioritizing accessibility, the District of Saanich fosters a culture of respect and ensures compliance with relevant guidelines.

General Best Practices

Inclusive and Clear Language

- **Write in plain language:** Use short sentences, everyday vocabulary, and avoid jargon or acronyms unless you spell them out on first use. Clear communication supports everyone - including people with cognitive disabilities and those using translation tools. Please see [“Plain](#)

[Language and Overall Access](#)” in the Resources section of this guide for additional tips on best practices on plain language use.

- **Use inclusive language that respects the diversity of your audience:** People-first (such as, “person with a disability”) or identity-first (such as, “disabled person”) language may be appropriate depending on individual preferences; avoid ableist or gendered terms. For example, avoid expressions like “blind to the issues” or “turn a deaf ear.”
- **Maintain a friendly but professional tone:** Use active voice and be mindful of readability.

Alt Text and Image Descriptions

- **Provide alternative (alt) text for all images, graphics and GIFs:** Alt text conveys the essential information conveyed visually.
- **Keep alt text concise but descriptive. Mention key details, context and identities relevant to the content:** Avoid phrases like “image of” because assistive technologies already announce the media type.
- **Be thoughtful about identity:** For images selected to represent community diversity—such as those chosen to help people see themselves and feel they belong—briefly note visible diversity (race, disability, gender expression, etc.) so people using screen readers can also perceive that inclusivity. When describing people in alt text, use preferred, neutral, and polite terms, and include details only when they are relevant to the image’s purpose or meaning. When possible, ask community members included in photos how they want to be referred to,

ensuring respectful, accurate descriptions to promote representation rather than perpetuating a “white by default” perspective. If preferred terms are unknown, or if using stock images, use language that is respectful and contextually relevant, avoiding assumptions about personal identity and focusing on objective physical characteristics (e.g. hair, clothing, skin tone).

- **For complex visuals, include a longer description in the post or link to a text description elsewhere:** Alt text should supplement—not replace—image descriptions when more detail is needed. Include information specific to Saanich: a neighbourhood, park, street, or other landmark, for context. For example:

- **Image:**



- **Alt text:** Infographic titled “Did you know that Saanich delivers services to the community using assets valued at more than \$5 billion?” showing the number and types of assets the District of Saanich manages, including roads, pipes, parks, vehicles, and recreation centers. See post for details.
- **Long description:** “Did you know the District of Saanich manages more than \$5 billion in community assets? [include a written list of the assets within the infographic]”

Captions, Transcripts and Audio Descriptions

Before diving into best practices, it’s helpful to understand the differences between the key tools used to make videos accessible.

Definitions

Captions

Captions are synchronized text that displays spoken dialogue and relevant sounds, like music or sound effects. They support people who are D/deaf, hard of hearing, or who prefer to watch videos without sound.

There are two types of captions:

1. **Closed captions** can be turned on or off by the user, offering flexibility, customization (e.g. font, size, etc.), and multiple language options but depend on video player support.
2. **Open captions** are always visible, ensuring accessibility on any platform but can’t be turned off, customized, or easily edited.

Transcripts

Transcripts are a full written version of a video's content, including spoken words and, where applicable, descriptions of important sounds or visuals. They can be read separately from the video and are useful for searchability and quick reference.

Audio Descriptions (AD)

Audio descriptions are additional narration tracks that describe key visual elements—like scene changes, facial expressions, or on-screen text—for people who are blind or have low vision. They're especially useful when visuals are essential to understanding the content.

Best Practices

- **Caption all videos:** Use closed captions when possible so users can turn them on or off. Edit auto-generated captions for accuracy.
- **Provide transcripts for audio and video content:** Transcripts help users who cannot view video or who prefer reading.
- **Ensure captions and subtitles have adequate contrast:** Especially with the background and are synchronized with the audio.

Hashtags and Emojis

- **Use CamelCase in multi-word hashtags:** (such as, #AccessibleSaanich) so screen readers can pronounce each word. Put hashtags at the end of your post and limit the number you use.
- **Avoid special characters, stylized fonts or unicode characters:** These cannot easily be interpreted by screen readers

- **Use emojis sparingly:** If you include emojis, place them at the end of the post and separate them by spaces so screen readers articulate each one. Do not use emojis to replace words.

Colour Contrast and Visual Design

- **Ensure sufficient colour contrast between text and background:**
The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) recommend a contrast ratio of at least 4.5:1 for normal text and 3:1 for large text.
- **Do not convey meaning by colour alone:** When presenting data, use patterns, labels or textures in addition to colour.
- **Avoid flashing or strobing content that may trigger seizures:** If you must include a flashing effect, provide a clear warning and limit the frequency to under three flashes per second.
- **Ensure that overlay text on images or videos remains legible:**
Particularly against the background by adding a semi-transparent colour block or drop shadow.

Links and Formatting

- **Use descriptive link text** instead of generic phrases like “click here.”
Describe where the link will take the user.
- **Avoid posting long URLs in the main text.** Consider using a short, descriptive link or link shortener that preserves context.
- **Avoid using all capital letters (ALL CAPS)** for extended text, as screen readers may interpret them as acronyms and reading comprehension is reduced.

Sensory Considerations

- **Provide content warnings** for sensitive material such as flashing lights, violence or traumatic events so users can choose whether to engage.
- **Avoid auto-playing audio or video.** Allow users to control playback.
- **Consider multiple modalities.** Whenever possible, offer information in more than one format (visual, auditory and written) so users can access content in the way that best suits them.

Platform-Specific Guidelines

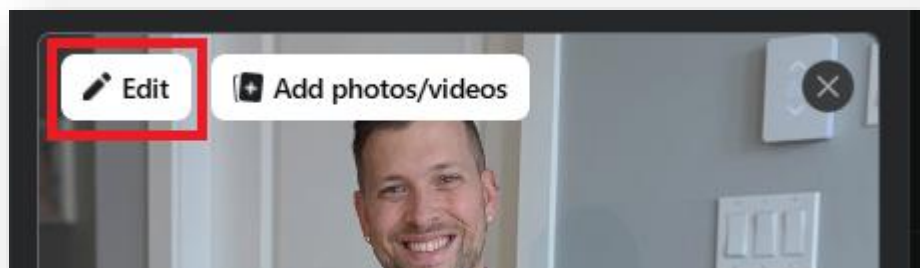
The following sections provide platform-specific recommendations for accessible social media content. While the general best practices apply to all platforms, certain features and processes differ across platforms. Use the guidelines below when creating content for each platform.

Note: Instructions for adding alt text may change as platforms and social media management tools evolve. For the latest guidance, please see these Help Center articles:

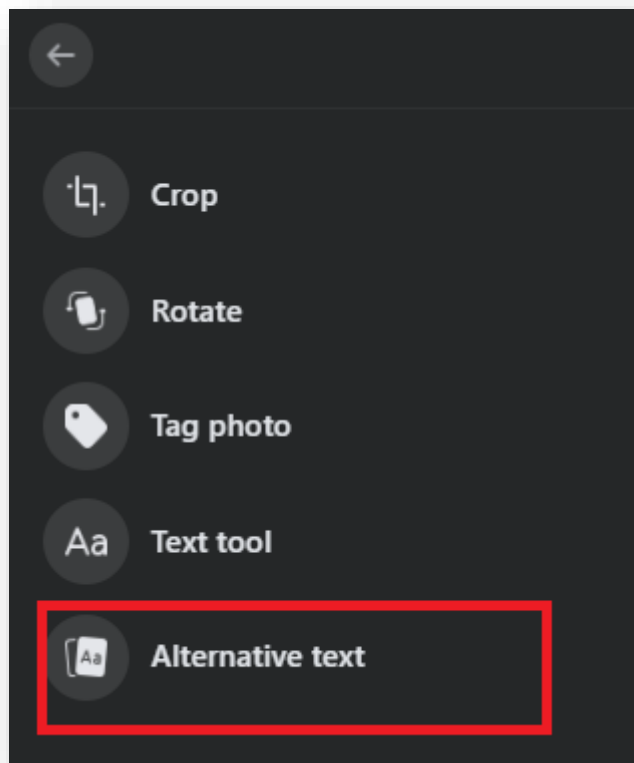
- [Facebook Help Center](#)
- [Instagram Help Center](#)
- [LinkedIn Help Center](#)
- [X Help Center](#)
- [Hootsuite Help Center](#)

Facebook

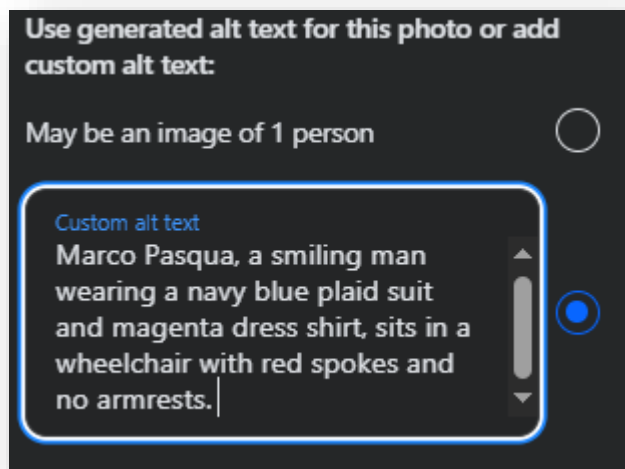
- **Use CamelCase for hashtags** and limit them to no more than a few per post. Place hashtags and @mentions at the end of the caption.
- **Avoid relying on reaction slides or memes without description.** If using screenshots of text, provide the text in the post body.
- **Add custom alternative text** to all photos by selecting "Edit Alt Text" when uploading images. Review Facebook's automatic alt text and override it if inaccurate, to do this:
 1. Go to **Create Post** and upload your photo.
 2. After the image loads, click the **Edit** button on the image preview.



3. In the pop-up window, select **Alternative text** in the left panel.



4. Click **Override generated alt text**, then enter your custom description.



5. Click **Save**, then finish your post.

- **Note:** Instructions vary if you're using one of these popular social media management tools:
 - **Meta Business Suite:** On the image, select the pencil icon > Alt Text > Enter description > Apply.
 - **Hootsuite:** Hover over the image > Alt > Enter description > Apply.
- **Caption all videos.** Upload a caption file (such as, .srt) for recorded videos and use live captioning tools or third-party services for Facebook Live. Ensure captions are accurate and synchronized.
- **Describe complex images or charts** in the post body or a separate image description. Provide context so screen-reader users receive the same information. For example, if describing the following chart:

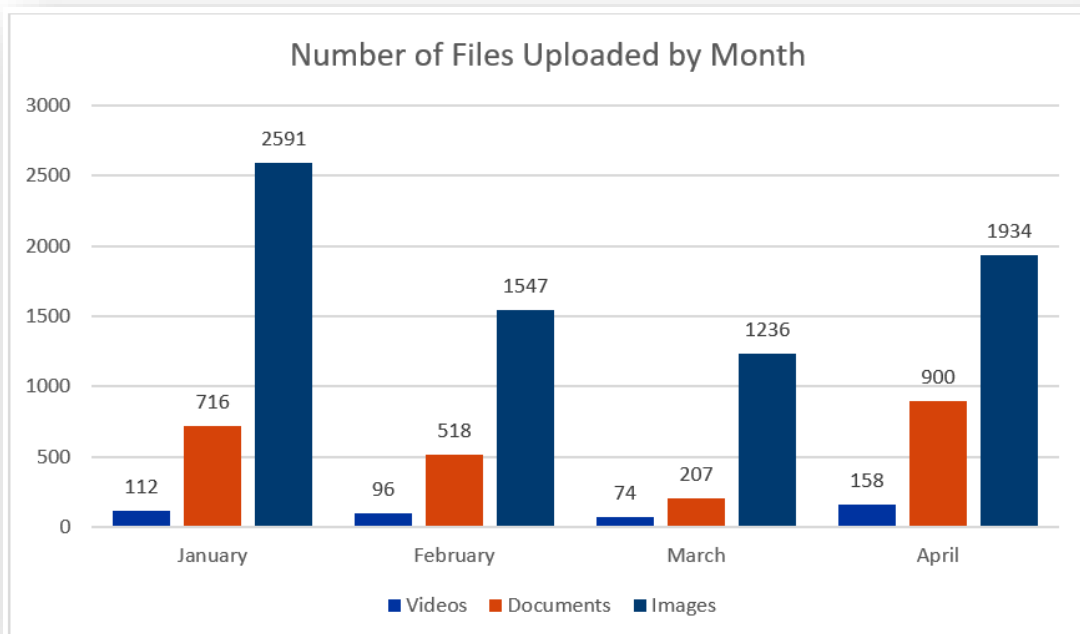


Image Description (Alt Text for Screen Readers)

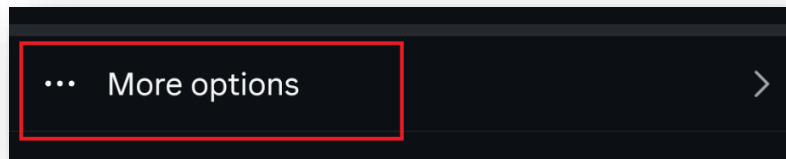
A vertical bar chart titled "*Number of Files Uploaded by Month.*" It shows the number of videos, documents, and images uploaded in January, February, March, and April.

- **January:** 112 videos, 716 documents, 2,591 images
- **February:** 96 videos, 518 documents, 1,547 images
- **March:** 74 videos, 207 documents, 1,236 images
- **April:** 158 videos, 900 documents, 1,934 images

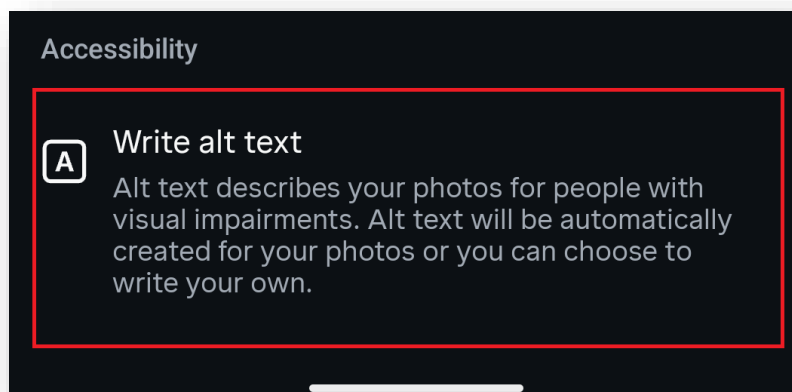
Images consistently had the highest uploads across all months, peaking in January. Documents followed, with a steady rise in April. Videos had the lowest upload counts in all months.

Instagram

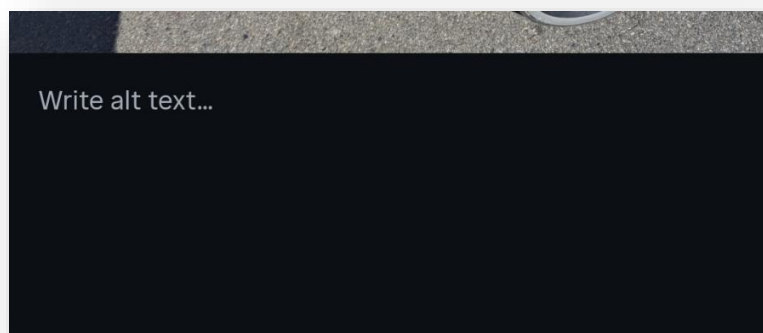
- **Add alt text to images** using the "Accessibility" or "Advanced Settings" field when creating or editing a post. Provide concise descriptions of what is important in the image. Steps to do this vary for new posts and existing posts.
 - **For new posts:**
 1. Tap the **+ icon** to create a new post and select your image.
 2. After applying filters and editing, tap **Next**.
 3. Tap **More Options** at the bottom of the screen.



4. Under *Accessibility*, tap **Write alt text**.



5. Enter your custom alt text and tap **Done**.

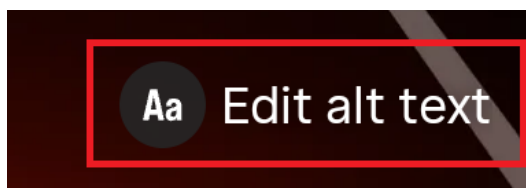
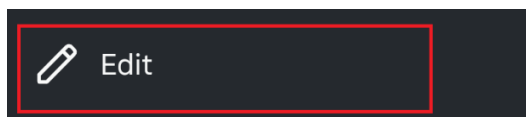


- **For existing posts:**

1. Go to the post and tap the **three dots (...)**.



2. Tap **Edit**, then tap **Edit Alt Text** in the bottom-right corner of the image.

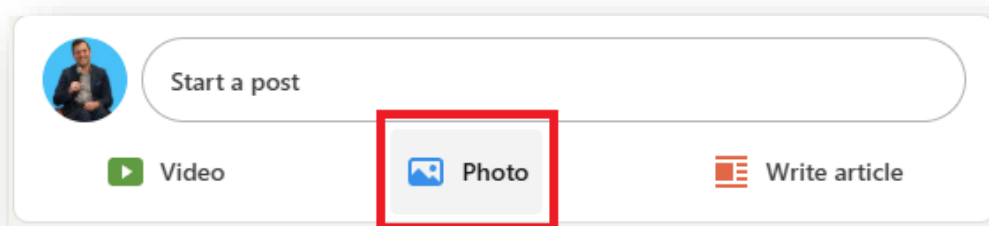


3. Add or revise the alt text, then tap **Done**.
 - **Note:** Instructions vary if you're using one of these popular social media management tools:
 - **Meta Business Suite:** On the image, select the pencil icon > Alt Text > Enter description > Apply.
 - **Hootsuite:** Hover over the image > Alt > Enter description > Apply.
 - **For Stories and Reels, add open captions or use caption stickers.** Edit Instagram's automatic captions to correct mistakes and ensure readability; position captions away from overlaying important visuals.

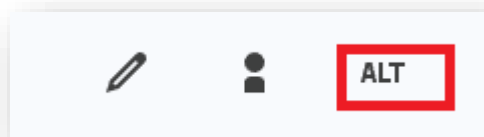
- **Ensure text overlays, stickers and polls have sufficient colour contrast with the background.** Avoid placing text over busy images; use solid backgrounds or high-contrast colours.
- **Use CamelCase hashtags and limit to a few relevant tags.** Place hashtags and @mentions after the main caption, separated by a line break.
- **Do not rely on images of text alone.** Include key information in the caption so that screen-reader users and translation tools can access it.

LinkedIn

- **Add alt text to images when sharing posts or articles.** LinkedIn allows you to enter a description when uploading an image; provide concise descriptions that convey key information. To do this:
 1. Start a new post and click the **image icon where it says "Photo"**.



2. Upload your image, then click the **alt button** on the image preview.



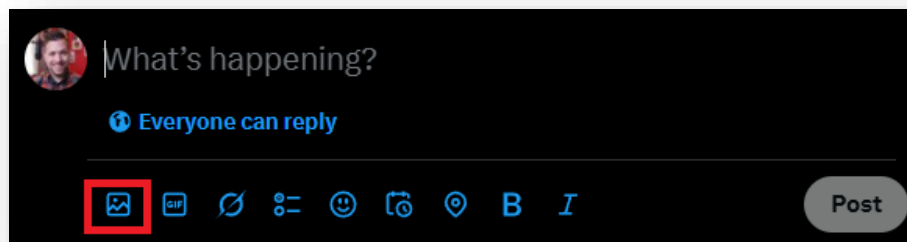
3. Enter your description (up to 300 characters), then click **Save**.

- **Note:** Instructions vary if you're using one of these popular social media management tools:
 - **Meta Business Suite:** On the image, select the pencil icon > Alt Text > Enter description > Apply.
 - **Hootsuite:** Hover over the image > Alt > Enter description > Apply.
- **Upload caption files (such as, .srt or .vtt) when posting videos.** Do not rely solely on auto-captions, and avoid uploading videos without captions. You could also choose to embed the captions right in the video when exporting it. This ensures it can't be toggled on or off.
- **Avoid stylized or special unicode fonts in your headlines, names or posts.** Screen readers often mispronounce these characters or skip them altogether.
- **Write clear and concise text.** Break longer posts into short paragraphs and use lists or headings for structure. Use descriptive link text rather than "click here."
- **Use CamelCase hashtags sparingly.** Place hashtags and mentions at the end of your update rather than interspersed within the sentence.

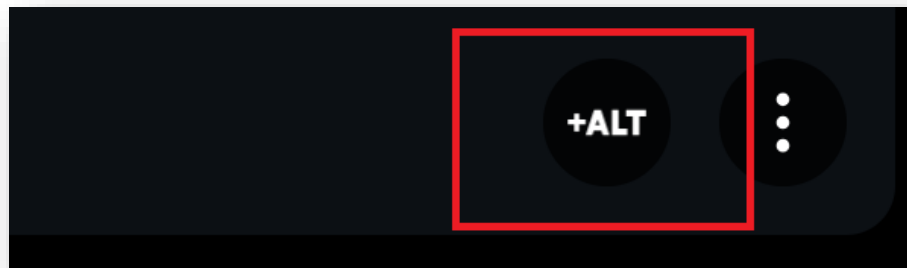
X (Twitter)

- **Add alt text to all images and GIFs when posting.** Twitter supports up to 1,000 characters of alt text—describe the visual content clearly and concisely. To do this on a mobile device:

1. Start a new post and **upload an image**.



2. Tap or click **+ALT** in the bottom right corner of the image.



3. Enter your alt text (up to 1000 characters), then tap **Save**.

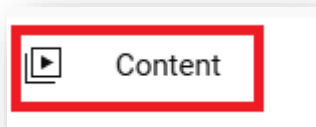
- **Note:** Instructions vary if you're using one of these popular social media management tools:
 - **Meta Business Suite:** On the image, select the pencil icon > Alt Text > Enter description > Apply.
 - **Hootsuite:** Hover over the image > Alt > Enter description > Apply.

- **Provide captions for videos by using Twitter's Media Studio to upload caption files or by burning captions into the video before uploading.** Do not share videos without captions.
- **Use CamelCase hashtags and limit yourself to two or three relevant tags.** Place hashtags and @mentions at the end of your tweet to improve readability.
- **Note on Hashtags:** While hashtags are still useful for reinforcing branding and organizing content (especially in live events or campaigns), their influence on discoverability has decreased across several platforms. X, for example, now limits hashtags in paid promotions to streamline content and reduce distractions. Consider using branded or thematic hashtags sparingly and always in CamelCase for screen reader clarity. Avoid over-relying on hashtags for reach, and focus on clarity and engagement in the core message itself.
- **Avoid using special fonts or unicode characters.** They are inaccessible to screen readers and may be misinterpreted by assistive technology.
- **Use plain language and keep tweets concise.** If sharing a thread, number each tweet and use the same alt text conventions.
- **Limit the use of emoji.** When used, place them at the end of the tweet and do not overuse consecutive emoji, which can cause repeated screen-reader announcements.

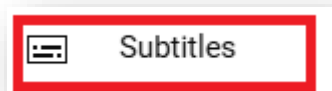
YouTube

- **Provide accurate, synchronized captions for all videos.** Upload a caption file (such as, .srt or .vtt) or edit YouTube's auto-generated captions. Ensure proper punctuation and speaker identification. To do this on a computer:

1. Go to [YouTube Studio](#).
2. Click **Content**, then **select the video**.



3. In the left menu, click **Subtitles**.



4. Choose your language and click **Add > Upload file > With timing** or **Without timing**, then select your caption file (.srt, .sbv, etc.).
 5. Alternatively, use the **Auto-sync** option by pasting your transcript and letting YouTube generate the timing.
- **Include a transcript of the video's spoken content in the description or a linked document.** Transcripts support users who prefer to read rather than watch or listen.

- **Write descriptive titles and descriptions that summarize the video content.** Include keywords and any content warnings (such as, flashing lights or sensitive topics).
- **Use high-contrast thumbnails with minimal text and strong visuals.** While YouTube does not support alt text for thumbnails, you can describe the thumbnail in the video description.
- **Provide audio descriptions for key visual information that is not conveyed through dialogue.** You can include audio description in the main video or create a separate described version.
- **Avoid auto playing videos on websites and embed players.** Provide clear controls for play/pause, volume and captions, and ensure they are keyboard accessible.

Tools and Accessibility Check

- **WebAIM Colour Contrast Checker** – [This tool](#) can test colour combinations for sufficient contrast. Use it when designing infographics or overlaying text on images.
- **Accessible hashtag generators** - These tools help convert hashtags to CamelCase automatically. This [generator by Hootsuite](#) is pretty nifty!
- **Captioning tools** – platforms like YouTube Studio, [Kapwing](#), [Descript](#), [Adobe Express](#), or [Rev](#) can generate and edit captions. Always review auto-generated captions for accuracy.
- **Screen reader testing** – use free screen readers such as NVDA (Windows) or VoiceOver (iOS/Mac) to experience your content as a blind user might.
- **Accessibility checkers built into social platforms** – use Facebook’s alt-text editor, Instagram’s accessibility settings and LinkedIn’s alt text field to add descriptions.
- **Plain language tools** – readability checkers like [Hemingway](#) or [Grammarly](#) help simplify language and avoid jargon.

Resources

Plain Language and Overall Access

- [Plain Language Checklist by the B.C. government](#)
- [Plain Language Guide by the US government](#)
- [Five Steps to Plain Language by the Center for Plain Language](#)

- [Social Media Accessibility Best Practices by Harvard University](#)
- [Accessible Social Media Best Practices by Disability:IN](#)
- [10 Guidelines to Make Social Media Posts More Accessible by Sprout Social](#)
- [Inclusive Language Guidelines by Sprout Social](#)
- [W3C Web Accessibility Initiative \(WAI\)](#)

Alt Text

- [The Case for Describing Race in Alternative Text Attributes by Tolu Adegbite](#)
- [Alternative Text: Race, Gender, and Physical Descriptions by Make Things Accessible](#)
- [Thoughts on Skin Tone and Text Descriptions by Léonie Watson](#)

Captions, Subtitles and Transcriptions

- [Making Audio and Video Media Accessible - W3C](#)
- [Transcripts - W3C](#)
- [Transcribing Audio to Text - W3C](#)
- [Resource on Captions/Subtitles - W3C](#)
- [Captions, Transcripts, and Audio Descriptions - WebAIM](#)
- [Described and Captioned Media Program - DCMP.org](#)
- [Subtitle Guidelines - BBC](#)