



ACCESSIBILITY GUIDE FOR SURVEYS

A complete guide to creating inclusive unmoderated tasks for quantitative user research.



ABOUT PEOPLE FOR RESEARCH

At People for Research we specialise in providing participant recruitment for user research and usability testing. We work in partnership with clients including global technology companies and government departments.

The driving force behind our service is a commitment to help the UX sector deliver valuable insights by providing reliable and high-quality recruitment of people for research. Our process enables clients to focus on what they do best while we identify, screen, and book reliable and relevant participants.

Over the last three decades, we refined our user recruitment techniques and turned them into part of our tried and tested process to find the best participants to take part in your projects, assuring the quality and validity of our data. Thanks to years of experience, we have developed a consultative approach and robust screening and booking process that translates into one of the industry's lowest drop-out rates.

[Find out more about our services here](#)
or get in touch by emailing
info@peopleforresearch.co.uk.

OUR SERVICES

- **Consumer recruitment:** connecting you with a diverse range of everyday consumers.
- **B2B recruitment:** sourcing senior professionals and business owners.
- **International recruitment:** accessing participants from around the globe.
- **Unmoderated recruitment:** providing participants for unmoderated surveys and tasks.
- **Panel management:** building and managing bespoke panels of participants.
- **Low digital recruitment:** engaging participants with limited digital access.
- **Accessibility recruitment:** recruiting individuals with disabilities to ensure accessible and inclusive research.
- **Accessibility Collective:** a dedicated panel of participants with access needs at a fixed price per head.
- **Customer data recruitment:** utilising your customer data to recruit participants for targeted research.
- **Incentive management:** managing your participants' incentives on your behalf.
- **Recruitment & studio:** providing a full suite of recruitment and studio services.

RESEARCH & ACCESSIBILITY

The idea behind accessibility in surveys is a simple one: the easier your survey is to perceive, understand, navigate and interact with, the more likely the user is to contribute to it. However, accessibility and survey design don't always work in tandem, with question design options like 'sliders' and 'drag-and-drop' features translating into style over substance.

Accessibility and UX design should work closely together, with UX and UI designers ensuring all users have consistent digital experiences that meet their needs. The fundamentals laid out in the WCAG (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines) have helped make the digital sphere into a more inclusive place, but there is still work to be done. This post is about how those guidelines relate to unmoderated online surveys and tasks and how to apply best practice recommendations.

Let's start by considering accessibility in the digital world and making the distinction between permanent disabilities versus temporary limitations.

Categories of permanent disability:

- Auditory
- Cognitive
- Neurological
- Physical
- Speech
- Visual
- Hidden

Examples of temporary limitations:

- Temporary "disabilities" (lost glasses, broken arm, etc.)
- Limited access to devices
- Digital ability of the user (includes older users and their changing abilities)
- Situational limitations (e.g. noisy background)
- Slow internet connection

There are ways of tailoring surveys around each of these factors to make them more inclusive. We can break down elements and improvements to surveys into three simple categories, following the advice and recommendations of the W3C Web Accessibility Initiative: design, content and development.



WHAT NOT TO DO...

Back in 2021, the UK Disability Survey was released and almost 100 disability organisations and allies called for the government to scrap the rushed initiative.

The government was forced to extend the deadline to complete the survey, but the damage was done: the critics accused ministers of not really wanting to listen to disabled people or related organisations. The survey itself had access issues, it had over 110 questions (that's a lot for any questionnaire) and the version of the Microsoft Word document that can be sent out to make it more accessible couldn't be filled out on a screen.

So, what was wrong with this survey? Here are some examples.

The intro text 🗣️ The intro alone was 638 words long, had two videos over 13 minutes long, and nine links. For a typical reader, it would take about one hour to get through this section. Using a screen reader on this would be incredibly time-consuming.

Question wording 🗣️ Multiple examples on the survey were quite hard to interpret. A significant amount of people reported they had to read some the questions multiple times.

Question types 📄 Drop-down lists are problematic for people with certain motor issues and users of specific assistive technology. Yet, they were frequently used in the survey.

No conditional logic 🧠 This created unnecessary hurdles. For example, users with cognitive impairments or learning difficulties may have a hard time processing questions that are not relevant to them.

Poorly built for people with visual impairments 🗣️ The survey was so difficult for visually impaired people to complete, this was even highlighted by the BBC at the time.

Error messages 🚫 The error messages were so general, the survey couldn't highlight where you had made an error, what kind of error or how to fix it.

[You can read more about these examples and see screenshots on this article we wrote back in 2021.](#)

MAKING YOUR SURVEY ACCESSIBLE: DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

Ensure there is enough contrast between background and font

The recommendation for text-to-background colour contrast is 4.5:1 (to test this, use a tool like Contrast Ratio). Also, some platforms may have the option to run on a different background to improve readability for individuals with dyslexia.

Add information that doesn't rely only on colour

Don't rely solely on colour to make required questions or error messages obvious. By adding extra elements to colours, like symbols, you give the content more context. This makes it accessible for people with colourblindness and other visual impairments.

Make links and next steps obvious

Make sure the link text for all external links shows in a different colour with an underline. If you have interactive content like videos or audio files in your surveys, you will need to consider the ease of use of these elements. Finally, display elements like 'next' and 'submit' buttons at the bottom of the page in an alternate colour with a progress bar, if possible.

Make each survey page consistent

Each page of your survey should feel familiar to your participant: this includes a consistent colour scheme, page layout, headings, semantics and image placement on the survey.

Design for as many devices as possible

The minimum requirement is to make sure your survey is responsive on different laptops, tablets and smartphones, but sometimes it's the most essential requirements that are forgotten.

Give users control over auto-playing multimedia files

If your survey includes videos or sound files, make sure these elements are not set to start playing automatically. W3C recommends adding controls for this type of content to allow users to view or listen to these elements when they're fully prepared to do so.

MAKING YOUR SURVEY ACCESSIBLE: CONTENT DESIGN



Make the purpose of separate sections clear

Label the progress an individual makes through a survey and add subheadings for sections to break up questions and make the survey easier to follow.

Link the text that contains relevant information

Write the link text so that it describes the content of the participant's next step. You can also add more context in the link – i.e. (this will open a new tab) or (PDF, 5MB).

Add relevant ALT text to images

ALT text is not a new thing and everyone knows how important it is nowadays as a minimum requirement for accessibility. Users of screen readers need this type of context, especially with instructional images. Rather than talking about what the image is, move towards talking about what information you're looking to communicate with an image.

Add captions to multimedia elements

When displaying video or audio, ensure the captions used to communicate voices, actions and relevant background sounds work properly. You may want to layer different colours if multiple people are communicating and add emotional context and other cues if this is relevant to the survey.

Make questions and instructions short and clear

And don't forget to avoid jargon or technical expressions and complex sentence structures.

Use lists and iconography to strengthen the message

People take in lists and bullet points quicker than paragraphs of text, and icons give your words more context while serving as a visual aid to break down text. Work with both to transform the way your surveys communicate the overall message to the participants.

MAKING YOUR SURVEY ACCESSIBLE: THE DEVELOPMENT STAGE

Use labels and input tags

Use <label> elements and link them to the ID attribute in forms as it will give readers context around the form.

Error messages and guidance text

The lack of proper guidance and error messages is another infuriating element of form design that has made its way over to surveys. To avoid this, code these explainers at the end of error messages to ensure the participant knows exactly what is required. Take your time to get the placement, language and clarity right.

Code for multiple devices

There is a reason responsive design is mentioned twice in this guide: because it's so essential. The first step refers to designing the survey to work across multiple devices and the second serves to remind you to build your online task with this goal in mind.

Avoid CAPTCHA if possible

This may seem a little rogue, but CAPTCHAs cause problems with accessibility in surveys. Depending on the platform you are using to run your task, research other options for pre-qualification criteria that aren't related to identifying traffic lights or buses. This is especially relevant if you've invited accessibility participants to fill out a survey or if this is the audience you are looking to target.

Avoid question types that don't meet compliance

User researchers lean towards some tools from a design perspective, but this doesn't mean they're easy to use for disabled participants, both the ones who use assistive technology and the ones who don't need it. Sliders, ranking questions and matrix drag-and-drop tables don't meet the standards set by the WAI and although they are designed and built superbly, not all users will be able to use them.

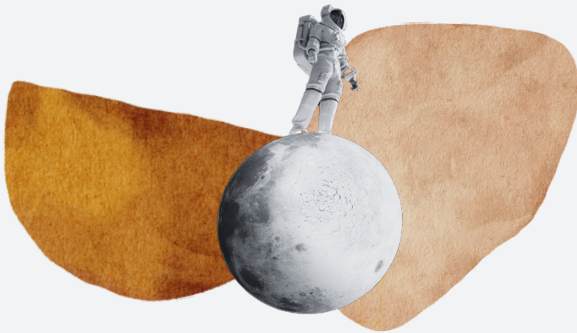


SURVEY ACCESSIBILITY CHECKLIST

- Ensure there is enough contrast between background and font.
- Add information that doesn't rely only on colour.
- Make links and next steps obvious.
- Make each survey page consistent.
- Design for as many devices as possible.
- Give users control over auto-playing multimedia files.
- Make the purpose of separate sections clear.
- Link the text that contains relevant information.
- Add relevant ALT text to images.
- Add captions to multimedia elements.
- Make questions and instructions short and clear.
- Use lists and iconography to strengthen the message.
- Use labels and input tags.
- Error messages and guidance text.
- Code for multiple devices.
- Avoid CAPTCHA if possible.
- Avoid question types that don't meet compliance.



TESTING YOUR SURVEY



Testing your survey involves more than a simple proof read.

Surveys and remote unmoderated research usually require higher a volume of people to complete them than in-person research, which in turn means it's important to get it right the first time. Without testing it, you may not realise you have missed something until after the participants have completed the survey or self-moderated test.

A few testing ideas:

- The best way to ensure your survey has been built in an accessible way is to run a small test with real users. Testing with at least three users that match the general profile of your audience is a great start.
- WAVE Web Accessibility Evaluation Tool: WAVE helps authors make their content more accessible to individuals with disabilities.
- W3C Markup Validation Service: the W3C tool checks for more code elements on your survey to ensure the content is accessible.

ESSENTIAL LINKS AND RESOURCES

- Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) | <https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG20/>
- Making the Web Accessible | <https://www.w3.org/WAI/>
- Contrast Ratio tool | <https://webaim.org/resources/contrastchecker/>
- 6 Form Error Message Mistakes Almost Everyone Makes
<https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/error-message>
- WAVE web accessibility evaluation tool | <https://wave.webaim.org/>
- W3C Markup Validation Service | <https://validator.w3.org/>

RECRUITMENT FOR UNMODERATED TASKS

We have a dedicated unmoderated team who are experienced in successfully finding high-quality, qualified participants to take part in studies worldwide. We have a flexible and tailored approach, using a variety of tools to find suitable participants for criteria ranging from simple to very niche/complex. Our priority is ensuring we generate valid responses and provide representative and credible data, which can be used to inform key business decisions.

Why you should choose PFR to be the recruitment partner for your surveys and other unmoderated research:

Recruiting for all unmoderated research types, including surveys and tasks.

Guidance on lead time and appropriate incentives.

Guaranteed quality of respondents and validity of data.

Highly targeted approach thanks to tried and tested methods.

Tailored service and constant close communication with our clients.

Fully GDPR-compliant process.

Quick turnaround for straightforward suitability requirements.

Support at the initial stages of profiling.

Get in touch!

Contact us today to find out which recruitment option is best for you and to assess how we can fully support your unmoderated study.

✉ info@peopleforresearch.co.uk

☎ +44 117 921 0008

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**Empower your research insights.
Contact us today.**

