Using Accessible Digital Typography

In this module, you'll learn:

- What the characteristics of accessible digital typography are.
- Why accessible typography is important.
- How to ensure typography is accessible.
- Best practices for accessible typography.

What are the characteristics of accessible digital typography?

Accessible digital typography:

- Consists of a sufficient size to optimize readability.
- Includes a consistent thickness in letter strokes, which is a characteristic that can be found in most sans-serif fonts.
    - The font used in this training, Arial, is an example of a sans-serif font. The strokes in all the letters of this font are the same width. Sans-serif fonts are easier to read at a distance, whereas serif fonts include varying widths in the strokes and can be more difficult to see.

Definition: Sans-serif fonts are fonts that don't contain serifs, those little tails or curlicues at the end of fonts like Times New Roman and others.

Example: A comparison of accessible sans-serif fonts used at MURAL (left) and less accessible fonts.

- Proxima Nova (mural default font).
- Arial. bamboo

- Adelle
- Museo Slab

Why is accessible digital typography important?

Distinguishable font types, sizes, and spacing enhance the readability of content, making it more accessible. People with disabilities, such as those with dyslexia, low vision, eye injuries, declining vision, and others rely on accessible or customizable typography and text to engage with and comprehend content.

Resource: Watch the video to learn about the importance of Customizable Text.

How can I ensure digital typography is accessible?

As a designer, you play a crucial role in ensuring typography is accessible. Accessible typography meets, at a minimum, Web Content Accessibility Guidelines for Resizing Text and

the related guidelines in the resource box below. Use the following recommendations to create accessible typography in your designs:

- **Font size:**
    - Use no less than 12 point font (typically 16 px) for body copy unless the user can customize the font size up to 200% of its original size.
    - Large fonts are 14-point (typically 18.66px) or larger and bolded or 18-point (typically 24 px) or larger and unbolded.
- **Font type:**
    - Use Proxima Nova (the default font in a mural) and a 16 px minimum font in default-sized mural stickies.
    - Make sure the contrast ratio for regular-size text is at least 4.5:1.
    - Large text should have a contrast ratio of at least 3:1.
    - A contrast ratio of 3:1 for graphics, including text on images, and user interface components.
        - The size of the font in the graphic dictates what ratio the font should be.
        - To help ensure sufficient contrast, aim for a 4.5:1 ratio. Often images resize, which changes the size of the font and causes it to become smaller. If you know the size of the text and can be certain the image does not change size, you can follow the WCAG guidelines for 3:1 or 4.5:1 based on the text size.

Resource: For more information on color contrast ratios and standards, view the **"Using Color and Sufficient Color Contrast"** module.

- **Customization:**
    - Allow end-users to change text size and font at the user level.

Note: While murals allow facilitators to change font sizes and other elements, this is not the same as allowing individual users to make these changes at the user level. Changes at the facilitator level may make elements more accessible for some and less accessible for others.

    - Ensure individual users can resize text at the user level up to 200 percent without assistive technology and loss of content or functionality.
- **Text layout and appearance:**
    - Avoid fully justified text or center-aligned body text.
    - Avoid walls of text. Break it up by using headings, bullet points, images, tables, and different types of layouts.

Resource: Learn more about layouts in the **Creating Accessible Layouts** module.

    - Limit underlining to links.

- Avoid chunks of italic text.
- Use upper and lower case according to the spelling conventions of the text language.

Example: A comparison of a paragraph that lacks accessibility (left) and a more accessible paragraph.

A paragraph about how cool pandas are will probably include a list of their characteristics, such as how: they spend a big portion of their day eating food and sleeping, their cubs are cute, they have a sixth finger that they use like a human thumb, they like climbing trees and swimming. As you can see, pandas are awesome, but it's harder to tell how awesome they are when their characteristics are crammed into one long, center-aligned, continuous paragraph using text that is too small, has poor contrast, and is in an italicized serif font.	A more accessible paragraph about pandas would use bullet points to show off their cool characteristics. For example, pandas: ● Spend a big portion of their day eating food and sleeping. ● Have cute cubs. ● Have a sixth finger that they use like a human thumb. ● Enjoy climbing trees and swimming. This paragraph just demonstrated the gloriousness of the panda by using: ● Bullet points. ● Left-aligned text with sufficient contrast. ● A 12-point non-italicized sans serif font.

Resources:

- Understanding 1.4.12 Text Spacing.
- C28: Specifying the size of text containers using em units, WCAG 2.1 technique.
- C35: Allowing for text spacing without wrapping, WCAG 2.1 technique.
- C36: Allowing for text spacing override, WCAG 2.1 technique.
- F104: Failure of Success Criterion 1.4.12 due to clipped or overlapped content when text spacing is adjusted, WCAG 2.1 technique.

Best practices in a nutshell

Here's a summary of what you can do to create accessible typography:

- Use a sans-serif font that's at least 12 points or 16 pixels in size, left-aligned, and not in italics.
- Ensure your text and background meet color contrast requirements.
- Allow end-users to customize font type, size, contrast, and other elements to meet their needs.
- Avoid creating a wall of text by using bullets, images, tables, layouts, and more.
- Keep the spelling and capitalization conventions of the language of your text.

Test your knowledge

Choose one or more answers to the following questions.

1. Which of the following logos uses a sans serif font?
   A. 

   B. 

   C. 

2. What is the font type and size you should use in a mural to ensure the typography is accessible?
   A. Proxima Nova, 16 px.
   B. Arial, 12 px.
   C. Verdana, 14 px.

3. Large fonts are 12-point or larger and bolded or 16-point or larger and unbolded.
   A. True.
   B. False.