

# The Case for Accessibility: Why It's Important and What Case Writers Need to Know



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Imagine your case is being taught in a class where one of the students is dyslexic. The student is struggling to engage fully with the case and its accompanying materials. The text is too small, the font colour isn't distinctive enough against the background colour, and the use of jargon and complex phrasing is confusing. If this isn't addressed, the student is likely to fall behind, through no fault of their own.

The faculty member has approached the case distributor who published your case and asked for changes to be made to the case document to make it more accessible. The distributor has passed this request on to you.

What should you do?

In this article, we are going to be exploring what accessibility means, why it matters from an ethical standpoint, and what your responsibilities are as a case author. We will also be looking at the legal implications for anyone doing business or creating in our global economy, and what this means for business education.

## WHAT ACCESSIBILITY MEANS AND WHY IT MATTERS

The above scenario has been taken from a real-life example we experienced at The Case Centre. In this instance, we asked the case author to make changes to enhance the readability of the case document. Because, as the faculty member in the example pointed out, no student should be at a disadvantage when it comes to accessing course materials.

This is why accessibility is so important.

It means ensuring that everyone, regardless of any additional needs or impairments, can access the same resources, information, and opportunities as anyone without those needs. These additional needs could be related to auditory, visual, neurological, physical, or cognitive impairments.

Accessibility is crucial as it ensures that everyone can participate fully in our classes and in society. By making resources and opportunities accessible, we create a more inclusive world. Removing barriers to participation to ensure equality of opportunity promotes diversity and inclusion.

Essentially, equality does not mean treating everyone the same. It means making sure that everyone has access to the same opportunities, regardless of their abilities, gender, sexual orientation, identity, economic, geographic, or cultural background. Accessibility is one of the ways we, as case researchers and educators, can support this.

Accessibility is linked to the underlying principle of the UN member states'

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commitment to ‘leave no one behind’ and is inherent throughout the UN sustainability goals. These goals include delivering education that is inclusive and accessible for all; promoting inclusive work practices and economic growth; inclusive infrastructure; promoting inclusive technologies and inclusive design; reaching marginalised communities and reducing inequality.

## **WHAT DOES THAT LOOK LIKE?**

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As a case distributor, we have a responsibility to ensure that all our products and services can be accessed by everyone, which sometimes means adjusting how we structure and deliver services. For example, our cases are available in accessible digital formats compatible with screen readers and assistive technologies. Our website is designed to be responsive and user-friendly across various devices and accessibility tools, like keyboard navigation and voice commands. Teaching materials are available in low-vision and screen-reader-friendly formats, and our multimedia resources are supported by transcripts or text alternatives. We also provide cases in multiple languages (where possible) and offer tiered pricing and discounts for educators in developing countries.

Additionally, we offer personalised support to accommodate the specific accessibility requirements of attendees at our workshops and webinars.

We have recently introduced accessibility requirements to our [submission guidelines](#) for authors hoping to be published in our case collection. The aim is to give case authors clarity on expectations, so that they can design their products to meet our accessibility standards before submitting them for publication.

## **THE BENEFITS ARE WIDE-RANGING**

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Making resources accessible improves the user experience for everyone, including those without disabilities. For example, clear navigation on websites makes using technology more convenient and user-friendly for all.

Accessibility measures also help information, resources, and content to have a wider reach. Closed captions, for example, mean that anyone can access media in different languages.

But it’s not just a ‘nice-to-have.’ If you provide any kind of product or service, then you have ethical and legal responsibilities to demonstrate that you’re abiding by the accessibility laws in the countries where you do business.

Let’s dig into this in a little more detail.

## **WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT FOR BUSINESS EDUCATION?**

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Accessibility couldn’t be more relevant than in business education. The reasons for this are multifaceted.

First, ensuring that education environments are accessible goes back to the principle of leaving no one behind. By promoting accessibility, we are building a richer and more diverse business landscape, while fully utilising talent that might otherwise be overlooked.

The World Bank estimates that excluding people with disabilities from the labour market can cost countries between 3% and 7% of their GDP, due to lost productivity and increased social welfare expenditures.<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, a 2022 Canadian journal article evaluating the economic benefits of an accessible and inclusive society estimated that moving to a fully accessible and inclusive society would create an economic value in the range of \$252.8 to \$422.7 billion.<sup>2</sup>

Accessibility also supports businesses in terms of their market reach.

According to the World Health Organisation, over a billion people worldwide live with some form of disability, representing a substantial potential customer base. Ignoring accessibility means excluding these individuals, limiting market reach and revenue opportunities.<sup>3</sup>

For example, in the United Kingdom, the spending power of disabled individuals and their households is valued at £274 billion annually. Of that total figure, it's estimated that £24 billion per year is collectively lost by businesses who fail to include disabled people in their marketing.<sup>4</sup>

Research from Accenture, in partnership with the “Disability Inclusion Imperative” and the American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD), highlights that inclusive organisations report 28% higher revenue, 30% greater profit margins, and twice the net income compared to their less inclusive peers.<sup>5</sup> In 2023, Accenture expanded on these findings: they found that companies leading in disability inclusion saw 1.6 times more revenue, 2.6 times more net income, and 2 times more economic profit than their peers.<sup>6</sup>

In short, inclusivity is good for business.

## **PREPARING STUDENTS FOR A GLOBAL BUSINESS LANDSCAPE**

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In order for students to thrive in a global market, it is crucial that education programs are reflective of the natural diversity of the world we live in. This means that a diverse range of perspectives, voices, and lived experiences are represented in any student group, and by extension, the wider workforce.

Education programs are uniquely placed to foster a sense of understanding of different lived experiences, through exposure and inclusion. Preparing students to engage with multiple perspectives and thrive in global workplaces, while supporting students to develop empathy and a broader understanding of perspectives and lived experiences that are different from their own. Essentially, accessibility contributes to an environment of inclusion and respect, and it is hoped that this will go some way toward reducing prejudice and fostering respectful and collaborative workplaces and communities.

Exposure to diversity also challenges students to think more deeply and critically because they learn to recognise bias, question assumptions, and develop more nuanced understandings of complex issues.<sup>7</sup>

## **THIS IS WHERE WE GROW OUR FUTURE LEADERS**

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Business students are going to be the ones shaping the global market, employment practices, and communities. Their understanding of diversity, equity, and inclusion will directly impact the world we create for future generations. As employers and leaders, their influence and social impact will be significant.

Students will also need a sound understanding of the laws around accessibility in the countries in which businesses operate. It is vital that leaders are aware of their legal

requirements to avoid penalties and negative repercussions, as well as potential damage to their reputation.

We also know from research that consumers are becoming increasingly concerned with a company's ethics and societal impact.<sup>8</sup> A business's commitment to accessibility signals a company's ethical business practices.

And as we touched on earlier, accessibility drives innovation. This is because making products and services accessible can improve the user experience for everyone, not just people with disabilities. Features like voice control, captions, or simplified navigation, initially created to meet accessibility standards, often become popular mainstream features.<sup>9</sup>

Essentially, accessibility compliance not only mitigates legal risks but also enhances business growth, innovation, and corporate social responsibility. Delivering benefits in business and society on both micro and macro levels.

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## HOW WILL THIS AFFECT CASE AUTHORS?

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Once a case is ready for publication, authors and case distributors need to confirm that the case and all its accompanying materials are accessible.

The European Accessibility Act was passed into law in June 2022, with a directive for implementation by June 2025. This act is widely considered to be a robust digital accessibility law,<sup>10</sup> and will have a significant impact on how cases are written, published and distributed. As published cases can be used anywhere in the world, it is important to remember that it is not enough to consider the digital accessibility laws in the country where your case is produced. All cases and their accompanying materials also need to be compliant with accessibility laws in the countries where they are distributed. For example, a case written in the United States will need to comply with the European Accessibility Act if it could be distributed in Europe.

Making your cases accessible is crucial to helping them reach as many students as possible, enhancing learning and enriching the educational experience.

Distributors, like The Case Centre, Harvard Business Publishing, and Ivey Publishing, will need to ensure that cases and case materials in their collections are presented in formats that are accessible. Universities operating in Europe will also need to be compliant with the act, with a responsibility on faculty to guarantee that case materials used in their classes adhere to requirements.

The European Accessibility Act is also consistent with the [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines](#) (WCAG), which is written for a global audience.<sup>11</sup> The WCAG provides a detailed framework for designing websites, digital content, and digital applications that are accessible to users with a wide range of disabilities.

We've included a list of international accessibility laws (see **Appendix 1**) and links for further information.

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## HELP IS AT HAND

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Here at The Case Centre, we've produced a 'How To' guide to help case authors make sure that all their cases and materials are accessible. The guide can be accessed on our website, but we've also included it here (see **Appendix 2**). We hope this helps you when getting your cases and case materials ready for distribution. And if you do need any additional help, The Case Centre has a wide range of resources to support case writers, from the seed of an idea through to final publication.

Accessibility is crucial to making sure that all students can engage with learning materials, and all faculty members have access to the materials they need to deliver their programmes. By making cases accessible, we contribute to an inclusive environment where everyone can fully participate. We're also meeting legal requirements, demonstrating ethical responsibility, enhancing outcomes, and promoting equal opportunities. All in all, contributing to a foundation of inclusion in a society where everyone can thrive.

## Appendix 1: List of Accessibility Laws

European Union (2016) Directive (EU) 2016/2102 on the accessibility of the websites and mobile applications of public sector bodies. [online] EUR-Lex. Available at: <<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2016/2102/oj>> [Accessed 9 Jun. 2025].

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UK Government (2018) Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) Accessibility Regulations 2018. [online] legislation.gov.uk. Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2018/952/contents/made>.

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United Nations (2025) List of National Disability Laws and Acts. [online] UN Enable. Available at: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/resources/laws-and-acts.html>.

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W3C Web Accessibility Initiative (2025) Web Accessibility Laws and Policies. [online] W3.org. Available at: <https://www.w3.org/WAI/policies/>.

World Intellectual Property Organization (2013) Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works for Persons Who Are Blind, Visually Impaired or Otherwise Print Disabled. [online] WIPO. Available at: <https://www.wipo.int/treaties/en/ip/marrakesh/>.

World Wide Web Consortium (2018) Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1. [online] W3C. Available at: <https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG21/>.

## Appendix 2: Accessibility Guidance from The Case Centre

**The guidance below will help you format your text in Microsoft Word to ensure maximum accessibility.**

### *Use proper headings*

When you're writing cases and creating case materials, use the correct heading structure. This means using hierarchical headings, for example, Heading 1 for your initial heading, then Heading 2 for a subtitle. This makes navigation easier while making things clearer for screen readers.

### *Choose readable fonts and sizes*

Use sans-serif fonts like Arial and Calibri for clear readability. Set the font size to at least 10pt for body text, with larger text for headings, to make sure that text is legible across devices.

Avoid excessive use of italics or overly decorative fonts, which may be hard for some users to decipher.

### *Use clear, simple language*

Write in plain language, avoiding jargon or complex phrases. The aim is to make content easily comprehensible for all readers.

### *Add alt text for images and visuals*

Alt text, or alternative text, is text that describes what's happening in an image or other visual content. Alt text enables screen readers to convey the content of images to visually impaired users.

Provide descriptive alt text for all images, graphs, charts, and other non-text elements. You might have seen alt text in applications like PowerPoint, for example, where a description of an image is included in a text box underneath the image.

### *Consider accessible designs for visuals*

When using graphics, charts, or diagrams, they need to be simple and clear. This means keeping to one takeaway per chart, avoiding '3D' or decorative effects, using labels and titles, and avoiding colour-only distinctions. It's also important to use legible fonts and avoid cluttered layouts.

Because visual impairments exist on a broad spectrum, simple and clear designs make visuals easier to interpret. These adjustments also make visuals more user-friendly for everyone.

### *Ensure sufficient colour contrast*

Make sure there is a high contrast between the text and background colour to support readability for users with visual impairments.

### *Tables*

When using tables in your cases and case materials, make sure they are properly formatted with clear row and column headers. Avoid complex or nested tables that might confuse screen readers.

### *Links*

All links need to be descriptive and meaningful.

For example, you might want to use, "Download the [2023 Annual Report](#) to review the company's financial performance and strategic initiatives"; as opposed to, "[click here](#)".



For all Case Research Journal (CRJ) cases, all video links must be accompanied by a brief description of what occurs in the video.

#### *Document language settings*

Make sure your materials are set to the correct language, e.g. English or French, as this supports screen readers in choosing the appropriate voice.

#### *Accompanying materials*

When creating videos, use closed captions, audio descriptions or voiceovers. You can also use media alternative transcripts, which act like Alt text, telling the viewer what's happening visually on screen as well as the speech.

To make videos accessible to those with colour blindness, use a contrast checking tool to ensure that colours can be distinguished.

High-quality audio and minimal background music will make videos more accessible for those who are hearing impaired, as well as standard and extended audio descriptions.

If you are creating spreadsheets, there are things you can do to help screen readers. Use descriptive labels for sheets, rows and columns; ensure data is well structured; avoid using colour alone to convey information; and limit the use of merged cells.

#### *Checking accessibility*

There are a range of tools to help you check if your documents are accessible.

##### **Checking accessibility in Microsoft Word**

- Open your document in Microsoft Word.
- Go to the **Review** tab in the ribbon.
- Click **Check Accessibility** in the **Accessibility** group.
- A panel will open on the right side, listing any accessibility issues.
- Click on each issue for suggestions on how to fix it.
- Follow the recommendations to improve accessibility, such as adding alt text or using proper headings.

##### **Checking accessibility in Adobe Acrobat (PDFs)**

- Open your PDF in Adobe Acrobat.
- Click on **Tools** in the top menu.
- Select **Accessibility** from the list of tools.
- Click **Full Check** (or Accessibility Check) to start the scan.
- In the report that appears, review any issues and follow the suggestions for fixing them.

##### **Test your document with assistive technologies**

In addition to the tools in Word and Acrobat, you can use other tools to check the accessibility of your document:

- Screen readers: JAWS, NVDA, VoiceOver (Mac).
- Colour blindness simulators: Coblis, Colour Oracle.
- Contrast checkers: WebAIM's Contrast Checker, Contrast Ratio.

Further guidance, including recommendations for spreadsheets and videos, can be found on The Case Centre website at:

<https://www.thecasecentre.org/submission/guidelines/accessibility>.

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