



# MINNESOTA STATE GUIDELINES

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## State of Minnesota Guidelines Accessibility Guidelines

These guidelines are for the 2011-04-29 edition of the standard, and are informative and not normative.

### Timeline

September 1, 2010: new or substantially upgraded information systems, tools and content must be accessible; existing systems, tools, and content may remain unchanged.

April 29, 2011: new version of the standard issued.

### Scope of the Standard

The standard, applies to all information technology acquired or developed for the State of Minnesota executive branch including:

- Web site, including electronic documents, video and multi-media
- Content created in an electronic format, including emails, text documents, spreadsheets and presentations
- Software applications, including internal and public-facing applications
- IT products that accessibility standards apply to, including telecommunication, multi-media and individual desktop computers and laptop

Many of these standards are being addressed through standards based purchasing and procurement processes. Individuals and agencies need to focus on content, web sites and applications they create. In general, if it is recorded, it needs to be accessible for the simple reason that you don't know who is going to be referring to it later.

The goal is to change our processes and tools so that accessibility is built into everything we do. However, this may not always be possible or necessary. A reasonable "rule of thumb:" is that something does not have to be accessible if

- It is transient (*i.e.*, not recorded), and
- The group of people that the content is distributed to is small enough that you know for sure that no member needs the accessibility.

Some examples that might meet this rule include:

- Notes for your use
- Audio, video, or web conference among several people

In this case, "several people" might be ten or less. With a larger group it is unlikely that you can be certain none

of them needs accessibility features. The exact cutoff point will vary from situation to situation. Of course, if you have any information that at least one of the people involved needs the accessibility – even if it only involves two people – you must provide the accessibility or accommodation needed.

Note that an in-person meeting of any number of people does not involve information technology and is therefore not covered by the standard.<sup>1</sup>

## Notes on the Standard Statement

The paragraph starting “Where a State information system, tool or information content...” is not strictly necessary because it repeats existing Federal law. However, it assists in focusing the scope.

The standard uses the word “procured”, as well as the word “acquired”, the intention being to include all acquisitions – including those for which no payment is required. Also, in the case where a system has been purchased but not installed by the effective date, serious thought should be considered to making that system as accessible as possible as the whole point is to stop installing new, non-accessible systems.

Content refreshing is on a page basis. Thus, if a page is updated, all elements on that page must be brought into compliance, but other pages need not be affected.

In the case where the State contracts with an outside party for custom content (for example, a page provided for State employee access), that custom content falls under this standard and this applicability should be referenced in any new or revised contracts. The external link case is only intended to apply to when there is no contractual or editorial relationship between the State and the external entity.

There’s a gray area here. Consider the case where the State has a contract with a distributor who simply puts a “State of Minnesota” logo or label on an existing web site that serves to deliver another product or service (*e.g.*, for ordering parts). There’s a contract, but it’s for the product or service behind the web site and the web site is really a means to an end. Yet, we don’t want to force the provider to redo their whole web site (as it would be a new site for us). On the other hand, if the web site is for a product or service needed by all state employees, it would be important to have that site accessible to all employees. The best way to handle cases like these is through the exception process.

## The Link Mark

We are recommending that the external link mark be the open-square-with-arrow-pointing-up-and-right symbol that is commonly used for this function. An example (from Wikipedia) is:



The exact style and color is not specified as part of these guidelines.

## Preferred Web Page Document Types

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<sup>1</sup> It is still covered under other law and you may have to provide accommodation.

How does accessibility affect web page design? Not as much as you might think: just about all of the elements that make for best practices in web page design contribute to making the page more accessible. These practices include:

- Separating content from markup
- Use of styles and style sheets to structure the page layout
- Use of descriptive labels on links<sup>2</sup>

One of the key practices is to integrate content into the flow of the page. This means that clicking on a link to a page brings up the desired content and not a page that is an elaborate placeholder for a link to a non-web document such as a PDF.

There certainly are times when it is appropriate to include other documents on a page. One good use of such is to provide additional assets. For example, a page might discuss combining several images into a final composite. In such a case, it may make sense to include higher-resolution separate source images in an archive and link to that archive for those who want to work the example. Since (in this example) the user will already be leaving the web environment to follow the example, having the assets outside of the web flow does not create a problem.

When you do need to include outside assets, you should try to use:

- open standards, then
- industry standards (when there are no applicable industry standards), and only then
- vendor proprietary standards (when there are no applicable open or industry standards).

Open standards include:

- Plain text files
- Comma-separated files (CSV) for spreadsheet-type data
- Portable document format (PDF) for layouts
- PNG, JPEG, and GIF for images
- MP3 and AAC for audio
- H.323 for video
- ZIP for archives

This is by no means a complete list of all open standards, it is just to help you get oriented.

You should only include vendor proprietary formats on internal sites where you know the viewers will have access to the appropriate tools. It is almost never a good idea to include them on public sites.

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<sup>2</sup> *I.e.*, using “...the <a...>User Manual</a> ...” (preferred) instead of “...click <a...>here</a> for the User Manual...” (bad)