Accessibility Evaluation Protocol

Audit accessibility early to avoid costly fixes later. Evaluate against WCAG, user needs, and assistive tech. Finding problems in design is cheaper than fixing them in production.

2 hours
Design
Intermediate

H HOW TO RUN

1 Automated Testing — 20 min

(20 minutes). Run accessibility checkers (axe, WAVE, Lighthouse). These find missing alt text, poor contrast, invalid HTML, and missing labels. They catch about 30% of issues, so document everything.

2 Manual Testing — 40 min

(40 minutes). Test with keyboard only. Can you reach everything? Is focus visible? Is the tab order logical? Test with a screen reader (NVDA, JAWS, VoiceOver). Are labels meaningful? Do interactions make sense? Test color blindness modes. Document all barriers.

3 Test with Users — 40 min

(40 minutes). Watch disabled users attempt key tasks. Where do they struggle? What's confusing? Even one session reveals major problems.

4 Prioritize and Plan — 20 min

(20 minutes). Categorize issues as Blocker, Major, or Minor. Create a fix plan, starting with quick wins, then major barriers, and finally minor polish. Assign owners and deadlines.

KEY TIP

Automated tools are a starting point. They miss confusing interactions, illogical flow, missing context, and poor labeling.

O OBJECTIVES

- Find accessibility barriers in an interface
- Test with assistive technology and users
- Prioritize issues by severity
- Create a remediation plan

M MATERIALS

- ☐ Product or prototype
- ☐ Accessibility testing tools
- ☐ Assistive technologies (screen readers, etc.)
- ☐ WCAG 2.1 AA checklist
- ☐ Variety of devices for testing

P PARTICIPANTS

2 to 4 people

F FACILITATOR NOTES

REMEMBER

- Manual and user testing are essential. If you haven't used a screen reader, prepare to be surprised.
- What's obvious to sighted users can be opaque to screen reader users.
- Test early, test often, and test with real users. Keyboard-only navigation exposes poor information architecture and unclear focus states.
- A bad keyboard experience means a worse screen reader experience.
- Accessibility issues found during design cost hours to fix. Issues found in production cost days.
- Issues found after a lawsuit cost millions. Evaluate early and continuously.