Accessible Content Core Skill 4: Links

The proper use of links and hyperlinks can make it easier for people to access content. Links are important for web accessibility because they are how people navigate through content. Links should be brief, clear and make sense on their own.

Brief and clear link text

Link text, also known as anchor text, should be a word or short phrase that describes where the hyperlinks leads. There is no rule for the length of link text, but hyperlinking full sentences or multiple lines of text is often distracting. The best practice is to keep link text as short as possible without losing meaning.

Best practice example of brief and clear link text:

"The [Accessibility Resource Hub](#) is a centralized web space on the YRDSB website for all things accessibility."

Bad practice examples of brief but unclear link text:

"The [Accessibility](#) Resource Hub is a centralized web space on the YRDSB website for all things accessibility."

"The Accessibility Resource Hub ([click here](#)) is a centralized web space on the YRDSB website for all things accessibility.

People using screen readers can scan from link to link, skipping the text in between. This is why nondescript phrases such as "click here" or "learn more" should be avoided as link text. Remember that accessible link text needs to be clear, meaningful and make sense on its own.

Avoid full web addresses

Including full web addresses or URLs in web content are known as "naked links", and should also be avoided. URLs can be lengthy and may include a mix of letters, numbers and other characters.

Bad practice example of including a full web address as a hyperlink:

"Access the Accessibility Resource Hub at YRDSB here: https://www2.yrdsb.ca/about-us/human-rights-commissioners-office/accessibility/accessibility-resource-hub-0"

The entire URL will be read out by a some screen reader, for example:

"h-t-t-p-s-colon-forward slash-forward slash-w-w-w-two-dot-y-r-d-s-b-dot-c-a-forward slash-about-forward slash-human-dash-rights-dash-commissioners-dash-office-dash-accessibility-forward slash-accessibility-dash-resource-dash-hub-dash-zero"

Take a moment to reflect on this... If you are accessing a web page or document visually and see a URL on the page, do you read out the full URL in your mind? Or do you click/tap the URL only if it leads to information you want to access?

People accessing a web page using a screen reader should also be able to access hyperlinks in a convenient way, and without having to hear the full URL. (Also, full URLs on page just look messy!)

Avoid URL shorteners

URL shorteners (such as bit.ly links) are also not considered accessible. A URL shortener or full web address should only be used in printed content or social media posts. It should be noted that social media apps and websites are not fully accessible at this time.

Do…

- Use brief and clear words or short phrases as link text.

- Include meaningful link text that makes sense on its own.

- Ensure hyperlink colour and underline has strong contrast (e.g., default blue hyperlinks)

- Check regularly to ensure there are no broken links and that all hyperlinks lead to the intended location.

Do Not…

- **Don't** hyperlink full sentences.

- **Don't** use nondescript link text, like "click here" or "learn more".

- **Don't** include full URLs (naked links) or URL shorteners (bit.ly links) in web content.

- **Don't** hyperlink the same link text more than once on a page if the links lead to different URLs.