

# MOSS QUICK TIPS AND BEST PRACTICES

## SECTION 508 ACCESSIBILITY

Section 508 law requires that all electronic communication be accessible to people with disabilities. This encompasses a wide range of types and severities of disabilities, not only blindness as is often believed. SC.gov shoulders the responsibility for the 508 compliance of your site's templates and layouts. However, you, as the content editor, are responsible for the compliance of the content added to the site. Most of the requirements of this law that affect your site's content also follow best practice principles for good usability for all users.

The tips below are the most important things to remember for both accessibility and usability. For more details, please visit [accessibility.sc.gov](http://accessibility.sc.gov) or [www.section508.gov](http://www.section508.gov).

## ABOUT YOUR SITE

Web design standards use cascading style sheets (CSS) to control the majority of the look and feel of the design, including background colors, margins and spacing, navigation styling, font type and size, and link styling. This separation of content from presentation makes maintaining a consistent design much easier. You don't need to worry about controlling your fonts paragraph by paragraph or whether your CSS will be cross-browser compatible – we've taken care of that for you. This results in decreased page load time as well.

## CONTENT ORGANIZATION AND ARCHITECTURE

Before you start building your site or converting an existing site, you will need to think carefully about your site architecture. This refers to the organization of your content and your navigation system.

If your current site has numerous links of all kinds on the home page, or when you create a new page you aren't sure where to put it on the site, this may be a sign that you need to alter the site architecture. Site content should be organized into a logical hierarchy, grouped into categories and sub-categories. Be sure to focus on how your customers and site visitors think about the information rather than going solely by your internal organizational structure.

Try to limit your primary navigation menu to about eight (8) links at the top level. This may not always be possible, and you may have as many links as you wish, just be careful that you don't overwhelm the user with too many links unnecessarily. Not everything has to be linked directly from the home page. Also remember that even if pages are deeper down in your site hierarchy, you can still highlight them on the home in an area titled "Featured", "Highlights", etc.

When naming your main navigation links, use intuitive labels that will make sense to users. Avoid jargon and acronyms. Try to keep your navigation labels short and concise.

## LINKS

The text that displays on a page for a link should be descriptive of what the user will find on the page you are linking to.

**BAD** link examples:

- For more information about our upcoming events, [click here](#).
- Download a copy of the budget [here](#).
- <http://agency.sc.gov/Site/Pages/longURL.html>

**GOOD** link examples for the above bad examples:

- View more information about [our upcoming events](#).
- Download a [copy of the budget](#).
- [Department of This or That](#)

**Important Note:** On the Web, underlined text is expected to be a link. Unlike in print documents, it does not indicate a heading. Please refrain from underlining anything other than links. Also, it is highly preferable that images are not the sole content of a link. An image with text beneath it would be an acceptable link.

## IMAGES

You always want to size your images before you upload them.

- Use appropriate image formats for the web and the type of graphic you are posting. For example, JPG is usually a better format for photographs and graphics with subtle gradations of color. GIF is usually a better format for graphics with areas of solid color, such as line drawings and illustrations.
- Use a program such as MS Paint Office Picture Viewer to resize images at least within close proximity of the size they will display on the Web page. The entire width of the SC.gov templates is 960px; the main content area of a two-column design is generally only 640px. As a basic guideline, resize photos to be no wider than 700px.


## TABLES

In the early days of the Web, the only way to organize content in anything other than a straight column was to use tables. Print documents still sometimes require tables to organize content. However, tables used for anything other than actual data on the Web is far from ideal, and it can cause major accessibility problems. When possible, it is suggested that you attempt to consider an alternate way of organizing the content of a page if it would require the use of a table. There are times when the use of a table to align content in MOSS is unavoidable, though.

## COPYING CONTENT

When content is first entered in a program such as Word or even Outlook, it is automatically given styles native to that program. Copying content from one of these programs will also copy those styles. This creates a wide range of problems. To avoid this, if you must copy content, first copy it into Notepad, then from Notepad into the site.

## FORMATTING CONTENT

The standard style sheets include styles to format all standard page content, including fonts, text sizing, heading styles, link styles, and more. **Do not make changes to a font size or color.** Simply structure your content correctly (See below) using the headings located under the “Paragraph Format” option (  ), and bold and italicize as needed. All other styling will be done for you automatically so that your site content looks professional and consistent. If you find that you are often wanting a certain font size / color combination for emphasis or headings, please contact us so that we can add to your site’s CSS.

## HEADING STRUCTURE

Logical heading and content structure improves the usability and accessibility of your pages.

You should always include a main page heading at the top of your content area. This should be the name of your page, matching the name used in the page title and in the navigation menu and breadcrumb trail. Use subheadings to break up and organize your text. You may select a subheading by selecting a heading under ‘Markup Styles’ (ex. Heading 1, Heading 2, etc).

You do not need to use the bold tag on headings and should not change the font, color, or size. Do not center headings. The formatting of headings is provided by the standard style sheets.

## BODY TEXT

Body text uses a font that has been shown to be easy to read on-screen. Body text is usually black or dark type on a white background and all styling is controlled through the standard style sheets.

Guidelines:

- Do not add background colors or background images to your content area. You may use a light background color in a small “call-out” content box to highlight a quote, alert, caption, or other specific piece of content on the page.
- Do not edit text settings such as fonts, sizes or colors.
- You may use bolding or italics.
- Do not underline regular text – users will think it is a link. Only links should be underlined.
- Do not center body text.
- Do not use all capital letters when entering body text, even for section headings. This can cause problems with screen readers.