Accessibility Quick Reference for Social Media

The following are key best practices you can implement to keep your posts accessible.

Hashtags

Make sure to use hashtags carefully so that all users who use a screen reader on their computer or mobile phone can understand them.

- Use hashtags in moderation.
- Capitalize each word in the hashtag (*#ZamiNobla* rather than *#zaminobla*).
- Place hashtags at the end of posts or tweets whenever possible.
- Place hashtag clouds in the first comment of Instagram posts instead of the caption.

Emojis

Remember to use emojis in moderation throughout your posts as the way these read out to a screen reader user may not line up with what you intended.

- Do not use emojis as points.
- Avoid putting emojis in the middle of written content.
- Stick to default yellow emojis unless a custom skin tone is necessary for context.
- Double-check the descriptions of emojis on emojipedia.org before using them, as this will read out loud for a screen reader user.

Images

Alternative ('alt') text describes an image's content or purpose for users who are unable to view images in posts. These can be read out by a screen reader or appear visually in place of an image when internet connectivity is poor.

- Add alt text to all images, including GIFs.
- Add alt text for all copy on images that include flattened text.
- If an image has excessive flattened copy on it (i.e. an official statement or organizational update), link out from the post to a webpage where the full statement is available as readable text and add alt text to the image.

Videos

Any video included in social media posts needs to be able to be accessible for people who have poor to severe impaired vision, hearing, or cognitive difficulties. This means including additional information such as closed captioning, transcript or audio descriptions.

- Add closed captioning to all videos that contain dialogue and/or audio.
- Provide a written or audio description of a video if it does not contain audio.
- Add open captioning to videos where closed captioning is not possible (i.e. auto-caption sticker for Instagram Stories).
- Avoid using flashing lights or strobe effects in videos.

- Make live captioning and/or an on-camera interpreter available for live videos.

Characters & Symbols

Using special characters in social media posts may cause readability issues if characters and symbols do not appear clear, and affect the readout for screen reader users, making the message inaccessible.

- Do not use special Unicode characters from external websites to make type appear in different styles or fonts.
- Do not use ASCII Art in posts or tweets.

Social Media Glossary

Alternative text
Alternative text – more commonly known as 'alt' text – is the meta description of an image that a screen reader uses to accurately describe it aloud to blind and visually impaired users. The platforms Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn allow users to write custom alt text for in-feed images.

Audio description
Verbalized description of a video that allows blind and visually impaired users to understand its content. On streaming services like Netflix and Disney+, an audio description is available as a track separate from the closed captions track. The platforms YouTube and Vimeo do not allow for separate audio description tracks, unfortunately.

Closed captions
Closed captioning (CC) and subtitling are both processes of displaying text on a video to provide interpretive info about the dialogue or other audio in the video. Subtitles are intended for viewers who can't understand the language being spoken in the video. Closed captions can be toggled on and off.

Emojis
Colorful icons popular on social media. Every individual icon – including ones with custom skin tones – has its own unique description assigned to it that is read aloud when a screen reader comes across an emoji in content. The appearances and descriptions of emojis can vary based on the device or platform they are being viewed on. Use the site emojipedia.org to double-check emoji descriptions.

Flattened text
Text on digital assets such as images and/or PDF files that has been turned into an object and is no longer recognized by a screen reader as readable characters. Flattened text is easily identified (video) by dragging your mouse over the copy in question and seeing if you can highlight the individual words.

Open captions
Captions or subtitles that are burned into a video during post-production and always visible. They cannot be turned off by viewers.

Screen reader

[Assistive software program](#) that allows blind and visually impaired users to consume the text that is displayed on a screen with a speech synthesizer or braille display. Most smart phones have screen readers built into them. On iPhone, the program is called [VoiceOver](#). On Android devices, it's called [TalkBack](#).

Special Unicode

Characters copied and pasted from external websites like [IGFonts.io](#) and [CoolFont.org](#) that are visually different from the social media platform's native type. This trend became popular on Instagram and has spread to the other platforms. However, not all screen readers can decipher these special Unicode characters, making them inaccessible.