

The Section 508 Refresh: Some Key Things to Know



QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE



Section 508 of the United States Rehabilitation Act provides federal agencies and contractors with scoping guidance that determines what information and communication technology (ICT) should be accessible. Section 508 also provides standards to help agencies and contractors to define what accessible ICT looks and acts like.

Many states also use Section 508 as the starting point for state laws that provide guidance to state agencies and affiliates.

The United States Access Board oversees the Rules that specify scoping and standards within Section 508. The Access Board has worked for over 10 years to update Section 508 so that it is more effective in a modern technology environment.

The Refresh of Section 508 recently concluded. The Final Rule was issued in January, 2017.

There are several differences between the Section 508 Rules that have been in place since 2008 and the updated Final Rule issued in 2017. We highlight a few key differences below:

- Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0, Level AA as new ICT accessibility standards
 - » WCAG 2.0 Level AA is included by reference, not copied and pasted into the Rule
 - » WCAG 2.0 Level AA standards are more flexible when applied to things like mobile apps or document content like Microsoft Word or Adobe PDF
- PDF/UA-1 as specific PDF accessibility
 - » PDF/UA-1 is included by reference, not copied and pasted into the Rule
- Specific items that are not public-facing but should be accessible are categorized as Agency Official Communication. These include:
 - » An emergency notification;
 - » An initial or final decision adjudicating an administrative claim or proceeding;
 - » An internal or external program or policy announcement;
 - » A notice of benefits, program eligibility, employment opportunity, or personnel action;
 - » A formal acknowledgement of receipt;
 - » A survey questionnaire;
 - » A template or form;
 - » Educational or training materials; or
 - » Intranet content designed as a Web page.

- Non-web ICT is specifically included in the Scope of the new Rule
 - » This includes things like Microsoft Word, Acrobat PDF and other non-HTML formats
- Revised Functional Performance Criteria
 - » Broader set of Functional Performance Criteria
 - » Includes cognitive, language and learning disabilities
 - » Serves same purpose as in original Section 508
 - ▶ “Where the requirements...do not address one or more functions of telecommunications or customer premises equipment, the functions not addressed shall conform to the Functional Performance Criteria specified...”

Effective Date

The Section 508 Rules went into effect on March 21, 2017. However, federal agencies have until January 18, 2018 to conform to the new Rules.

Relation to Section 255 of Telecommunication Act

At the same time that the Access Board refreshed Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act, the Access Board also updated Section 255 of the Telecommunication Act. Section 255 provides guidance and standards for accessible telecommunication equipment covered by the Telecommunication Act of 1996.

The Access Board combined their updates of Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act and Section 255 of the Telecommunication Act since both combine to address the web, web applications, mobile apps and things like smartphones.

Much More Information

The Access Board has published the [final Rules in full](http://bit.ly/2jfTG9k) (http://bit.ly/2jfTG9k). In addition, the Access Board provides its own [overview of the Final Rule](http://bit.ly/2mDTgaM) (http://bit.ly/2mDTgaM).



Accessibility Quick Reference is provided courtesy of:
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