

Accessibility Issue – Incorrect or missing HTML headings

Incorrect or missing headings in a website and digital documents can have several implications for users making use of assistive technologies. Understanding the importance of HTML headings and how to implement them correctly will allow developers and content administrators to create more accessible websites and content.

What you need to know

HTML Headings

Pages across a website make use of HTML headings to communicate the organisation of the content on the page. Correct use of headings will allow assistive technologies to interpret the headings and communicate this to the users. For example, a screen reader can recognise HTML headings code and announce the text as a heading with its level. Screen readers are also able to navigate headings which can be an effective way for screen reader users to more quickly find the content of interest.

- **Structural Headings** – These types of headings refer to content which does not change when navigating a website or belong to a specific page to organise or section content. When assigning a heading to a fixed area on a web page such as the top navigation menu it is very important to maintain uniformity across the entire website.
- **Content Headings** – Content heading and subheadings organise text content to guide readers. These headings will vary depending on the content within a page, for example a page containing different paragraphs of text with individual titles should make use of headings and/or subheadings to distinguish between them. Typically, a CMS (Content Management System) such as WordPress or Drupal will automatically tag any headings programmatically based on the content editor. If you are unsure how a content editor works on your website, it is best to discuss this with your developer.

Content headings are also to be applied to any other forms of content found within the website such as PDF or Word documents. This can be done using built in application features and settings.

HTML headings do not need to be lengthy. When headings are clear and descriptive, users making use of assistive technologies can find the information they seek more easily, and they can understand the relationships between different parts of the content.

Heading Ranks

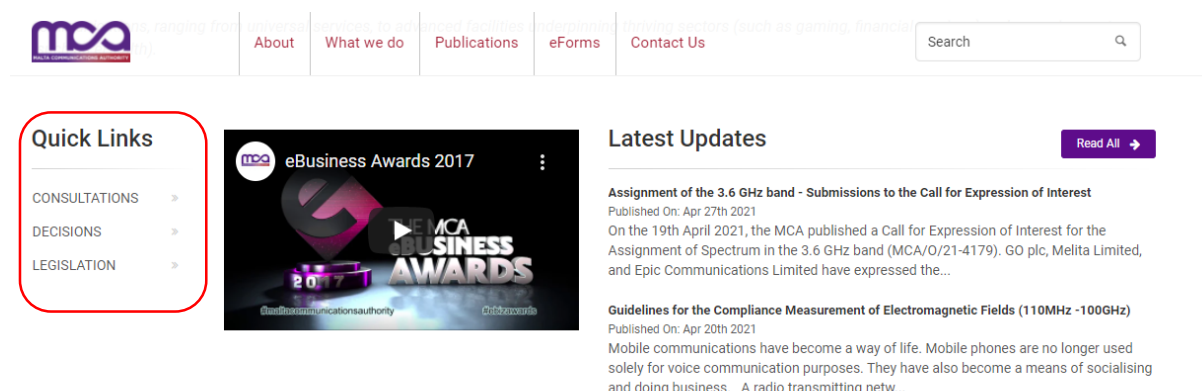
Headings make use of a maximum of 6 ranks with 1 `<h1>` being the most important and 6 `<h6>` being the least important. It is common practise for the top navigation area to be labelled as the first heading `<h1>`

Implementing headings

A web site is normally managed by a developer (or website development company) together with a user, or team, who are responsible for creating the content on the website. In this scenario it would be the developer's responsibility to configure correct structural headings and the content administrator's responsibility to make use of content headings.

Structural Headings

<h2 class="section-sub-title">Quick Links</h2>



The screenshot shows the MCA website header with navigation links: About, What we do, Publications, eForms, and Contact Us. A search bar is also present. The main content area features a 'Quick Links' sidebar on the left with links for CONSULTATIONS, DECISIONS, and LEGISLATION. The main content area displays a featured image for 'eBusiness Awards 2017' and a 'Latest Updates' section with two articles: 'Assignment of the 3.6 GHz band - Submissions to the Call for Expression of Interest' and 'Guidelines for the Compliance Measurement of Electromagnetic Fields (110MHz -100GHz)'.

Content Headings

<h2>Section Title</h2>

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Cras at egestas leo, at consequat lorem. Etiam at ligula et nisl maximus commodo.

<h3>Subsection Title</h3>

Aliquam elit arcu, iaculis vitae hendrerit sed, rutrum quis magna. Suspendisse iaculis sit amet enim quis interdum. Quisque fringilla et mauris at sollicitudin. Aenean dictum volutpat elit id varius. Fusce nec pellentesque arcu, ac dictum ex.

<h3>Subsection Title</h3>

Sed sagittis ipsum eu purus condimentum accumsan. Pellentesque volutpat porttitor est, sit amet tincidunt risus vehicula porttitor. Morbi condimentum dapibus fringilla.

Related WCAG criteria:

Success Criterion 1.3.1: Info and Relationships – Level A

<https://www.w3.org/WAI/WCAG21/Understanding/info-and-relationships.html>

Success Criterion 2.4.1: Bypass Blocks – Level A

<https://www.w3.org/WAI/WCAG21/Understanding/bypass-blocks.html>

Success Criterion 2.4.6: Headings and Labels – Level AA

<https://www.w3.org/TR/UNDERSTANDING-WCAG20/navigation-mechanisms-descriptive.html>

WCAG best practises and recommended techniques:

H42: Using h1-h6 to identify headings

<https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG20-TECHS/H42.html>

H69: Providing heading elements at the beginning of each section of content

<https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG20-TECHS/H69.html>

Providing descriptive headings

<https://www.w3.org/WAI/WCAG21/Techniques/general/G130>

Organizing a page using headings

<https://www.w3.org/WAI/WCAG21/Techniques/general/G141.html>

Providing headings by marking content with heading tags in PDF documents

<https://www.w3.org/WAI/WCAG21/Techniques/pdf/PDF9.html>