

Style Guide for Corporate Websites for Ministries

Version 1.1, September 2007

Preface

Uniformity, accessibility and coherence in communicating with citizens were the starting points for the Information Council to develop a Style Guide for corporate websites. The Style Guide study group of the Information Council's New Media Committee started working on it in 2005. The results were good. On 4 May 2006, version 1.0 of the Style Guide for Corporate Websites for Ministries was presented. The Style Guide contributes to the objectives of the current cabinet policy: a recognisable and accessible government. The Information Council has set down its interest and ambitions in this field in the Annual Programme Joint Communication 2007.

The Style Guide has already been applied to many ministry websites. The changes in this 1.1 version are the result of the knowledge and experience gained during the past period. A year ago, the Ministry of Finance's website was the only website to have been set up according to the Style Guide; by now, thirteen ministry websites are 'Style Guide-proof'. The same applies by now to a number of theme sites. By applying the Style Guide, these websites also comply with the Web Guidelines. The Web Guidelines are a part of the Style Guide and have been drawn up to increase the accessibility, sustainability, compatibility and findability of government information on the internet. In the Decree Regarding The Quality Of Dutch Government Websites it is set out that all new government websites should be built according to these guidelines.

Co-governments and implementing organisations have shown an interest in the Style Guide as well. They are eager to join the Style Guide and its further development. There is still work to be done though. Even with the introduction of a single government logo, for example, the Style Guide still has its role.

There is plenty of movement in the national government's internet strategy. This requires the necessary changes and effort from all ministries. With the new Style Guide, the Information Council wants to contribute to a solid foundation for the near future.

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Chairman of the Information Council

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Style Guide objectives

Information from the national government is of interest to many people. As a result, the websites of the various ministries are visited frequently. It is important that visitors are able to find the desired information easily and fast. In the Style Guide, ministries collectively agree on the structure, navigation, content and design of their websites. The objective is to create more uniformity for the visitor. The Style Guide 1.1 has been developed for the ministries' corporate websites.

The Style Guide contributes to:

- reliable content: up-to-date, correct and complete;
- user orientation: guidelines on how to set up the structure so the information can be found more easily;
- accessibility: guidelines on the requirements a website has to meet by applying existing guidelines such as Web Guidelines and Web Meta Data;
- recognisability: uniformity in style, structure, design and content as a prerequisite to present the site as a recognisable (national) government product.

Developing the Style Guide is a dynamic process. The Style Guide is constantly developed further based on user input, experience with the application and new insights. To support the introduction and application of the Style Guide, the Style Guide website has been created. This website is aimed at those who are involved in the introduction of the Style Guide in their everyday job. These are, for example, heads of new/digital media, web consultants, web developers, web editors, communication consultants and corporate identity experts.

The interdepartmental Style Guide study group is investigating whether the principles of the Style Guide can be applied to other types of web communication, such as theme site and campaign sites. The study group stimulates and supports the interest of co-governments and implementing organisations in the Style Guide. This is important for the further development of the Style Guide as a whole.

1. Standards and agreements

1.1 Introduction

With the Style Guide, the national government guarantees the accessibility and sustainability of ministerial websites. This is achieved by relying on (inter)national agreements and standards for using the internet as a means of information transfer, communication and transaction. The Style Guide provides an important contribution to the increase in quality of ministerial and related websites by aiming at uniformity in structure and design. This will improve the user experience and user-friendliness. The standards and agreements described in this chapter provide the basis for the Style Guide.

1.2 Web Guidelines

Clients, suppliers, designers, web developers and other external or internal staff members involved in building a (ministry) website for a ministry should always make sure the website and accompanying web applications comply with the manual 'Web Guidelines.overheid.nl', which can be found at <http://webrichtlijnen.overheid.nl/english>.

The Web Guidelines are based for an important part on the activities of the W3C, the World Wide Web Consortium (<http://www.w3c.org>). The W3C was founded in October 1994 by Web 'inventor' Tim Berners-Lee. The aim of the W3C is to develop the World Wide Web to its full potential. The W3C is an international industrial consortium with more than 500 member organisations and sixty staff members worldwide. They contribute to the development of web standards, specifications and software. The W3C creates recommendations. HTML and XML, for example, have been developed by the W3C as recommendations.

In April 2006, the Dutch Lower House of Parliament expressed its concern about the level of accessibility of the Dutch government's websites. This led to the 'Decree Regarding The Quality Of Dutch Government Websites' on 30 June 2006 in the Dutch Council of Ministers. As a result of this decree, new government websites must fully comply with the web guidelines. Existing government websites must comply with the web guidelines by 31 December 2010 at the latest. See <http://webrichtlijnen.overheid.nl/english> for more information.

1.3 Web meta data and taxonomy

The collective ministries and the Postbus51.nl, Overheid.nl and Regering.nl websites are working on improved findability of government information on the internet by using joint web meta data.

Standards have been agreed upon for information published by the national government:

- collective, required meta data;
- government-wide taxonomy (list of themes) required on the first and second levels.

The agreed meta data can be found at

http://stijlgids.overheid.nl/downloads/Handleiding_Activiteitenindex_versie_2.2.pdf

The set of meta data is based on the international standard Dublin Core (DC).

More information:

<http://www.advies.overheid.nl/metadata/> and <http://www.dublincore.org/>.

1.4 Appendices

There are three appendices to the Style Guide:

- navigatiemodel (navigation model), dated 22 November 2005 (status: required);
- FO Paginatypen Rijk (Functional Design Government Page Types), dated 21 December 2005 (status: recommendation);
- basisvormgeving 1.0 (basic design 1.0), dated 4 May 2006 (status: recommendation).

More information:

<http://stijlgids.overheid.nl/ondersteuning/documentatie/>.

2. Structure and navigation

2.1 Introduction

How do you make sure a visitor of a random ministerial website will end up on the right page fast and easily? By offering a good structure in the form of clear and uniform navigation on all ministry websites. This chapter focuses on the website's structure, the main and sub navigation and navigation via links. All of these have the same objective: to offer information fast and efficiently without the visitor getting lost or having to click on many unnecessary links.

2.2 Structure

Required

- Create an optimal separation between structure, content (both implemented in (X)HTML) and design (from style sheets) of information, in accordance with the Web Guidelines.
- Make sure the structure is consistent.
- In the design of the information architecture, the target group's information need prevails, instead of the ministry's organisational structure.

2.2.1 Layering

Required

Move from general to specific: the first level is intended for orientation and serves as a first introduction. Detailed information can be found on underlying levels.

Recommendations

Stick to the following principle: users click or scroll no more than five times to find the information they are looking for.

2.3 Navigation

Required

- Make sure navigation is consistent throughout the site. Navigation should be the same on each page via main and sub navigation.
- Navigation from 'Key topics' to 'Information files' should take no more than three steps ('T1-T3').
- Navigation within 'Information files' consists of a maximum of four steps ('D1-D4').
- During navigation in subsections, always provide the visitor with an overview of where he is in relation to higher levels.
- Always use text links, no images, in the (sub) navigation menus.
- When using expanding menus (for example HTML selection boxes), this functionality should not depend on 'client-side scripts' (scripts which are run on the user's computer).
- Clearly distinguish between main and sub navigation.

- Main navigation is available on every page. Sub navigation offers support for each subsection on the website.

Recommendations

- If a page is of considerable size and consists of multiple sections, use a table of contents with as many internal references (anchors) as possible, including a 'back to top' function.
- Avoid the use of illogical section names or English terms in Dutch texts.
- Where relevant, connect related subjects by using links.
- Only vertical scrolling is allowed; horizontal scrolling is never allowed.
- Do not include too many items on an overview page, preferably a maximum of twenty. Use a browse function to show the remaining pages.
- Offer visitors the option to create their own selection on overview pages using selection boxes (selection by month, year, subject or otherwise). Selection boxes are the filter options which are shown on overview pages. The select boxes allow you to make a selection from the full overview.

2.3.1 Links

See sections 4.10 and 4.11.

2.3.2 New windows

Required

- Do not open a new window when linking to pages on the own website.
- Do not open external websites in a new window.

Reasons:

- to open a new window in the browser or not is the user's choice, not the site owner's;
- when using small windows (800x600), the desktop will be filled with various windows, which will confuse the user;
- the functionality of the 'back button' in the browser is interrupted, which will confuse the user;
- users using auxiliary equipment (for example refreshable Braille displays) will get lost when a new window is opened: the old window will maintain the focus.
- The exception is when a link refers to additional information during an important process which should not be interrupted. In this case, inform the user beforehand.
- Do not bypass browser 'pop-up blockers'.

Recommendations

Do not use pop-up windows. The exception could be, for example, a web survey.

2.4 Domain names

Required

- At this moment, the ministries use the domain name <http://www.minministryabbreviation.nl/>, in accordance with an interdepartmental agreement from 1996, for example <http://www.minvws.nl/>.
- All ministry domain names should be accessible without www. as well.
- All ministry information files are accessible via [www.minministryabbreviation.nl/\[filename\]/](http://www.minministryabbreviation.nl/[filename]/). This applies not only to the names of the information files, but also to the topics which are chosen as an entry point by a ministry.

Recommendations

- In addition to the agreement listed above, some ministries also use the domain name www.ministryname.nl or www.ministryabbreviation.nl, for example <http://www.justitie.nl/>.
- Choose one domain name as the primary domain name and use it in all communications.
- Make sure all variants of the domain name link to the primary domain name of the ministry website or to a relevant information file on the site. Internet users often try to find information by entering 'www.subject.nl' on the off chance of finding it. In addition, in the past various domain names have been communicated with are still relevant. It is advisable to (continue to) claim old domain names and domain names for topics related to the ministry.
- To protect the own domain name, it can be advisable to have other 'top-level domains' (such as .com, .eu and .info) refer to the primary domain name as well.

2.5 Downloads / file formats

Required

- When linking to a download, provide the file type and the size (in kB and/or MB).
- The link text to the download consists of the file name, for example: read more in the [GGZ Transfer report](#).
- After HTML, PDF is always the preferred file format for documents. On the help page, include information about where the reader software can be downloaded. For example by providing a direct link to the Acrobat website (www.adobe.nl).
- Avoid the use of scanned texts in PDF documents. Always try to convert scans to text.
- Word files are only allowed as an extra alternative in addition to PDF, and saved in RTF format.
- Excel is only allowed if this is functional, for example in the case of a template. If the Excel file is informative only, convert it to an HTML page or a PDF document.
- Powerpoint is not allowed as a file format: create an HTML page or a PDF document.
- When linking to file formats such as .pdf, .rtf, .doc and .xls or to applications, use a 'Content disposition header': 'Content-disposition: attachment'. This way, downloadable files are not opened in a browser window, but in the appropriate application. This will happen after the user has indicated whether the document should be opened or saved to the hard disk.

Recommendations

- Provide more information about the contents of a file: include a summary or introduction of the file which is displayed with the link. This way, users will know what to expect when they click on a link.
- In the case of a document (.pdf, .rtf), include the number of pages of the download.
- Make documents larger than 3 MB available in multiple parts.

2.6 Naming of sections and pages

Required

Names of sections and pages should be logical and unambiguous to the user ('Index', for example, is not logical or unambiguous).

Recommendations

- Do not use capitals, spaces and/or special characters in file and directory names. This can interfere with the working of systems.
- Use logical and simple URLs.
- Use unique URLs which remain unchanged.

2.7 Sections and subsections

The sections displayed in **bold** below are required, including the name and order. These sections are important for a uniform navigation and content on all ministry sites. The content of these required sections is discussed in Chapter 3. The subsections of the main navigation displayed in regular font are not required, but should preferably be used.

Sections and subsections

- **[Ministry logo]**
- **[Main navigation]**
- **Home**
- **News**
 - News items
 - Press releases
 - Parliamentary papers
 - Speeches
 - **WOB requests**
 - Legislative calendar
 - All publications
- **Key topics**
 - Information files
- **Organisation**
 - Organisation chart
 - Minister
 - State secretary
 - **Working for** [ministry name]
 - **Jobs**
 - **Committees**
- **[Search box consisting of]:**
 - Search box (entry field) with a **'Search'** button
 - Link to the **'Site map'**
 - Link to **'Advanced search'**
 - Text size
- **[Service elements]**

These elements are required in the site's top bar

 - **Contact**
 - **Do you have a question?** / Contact form (= question form for PB51)
 - Route description
 - **Subscribe**
 - **English/Deutsch/Français/Nederlands...** (depending on the language)
 - See [3.7.3 Sections of the website in other languages](#)
 - **Help**
 - **Privacy statement**

2.8 Fixed terms (labels)

The terminology listed below is fixed. (* = required section, [see 2.7](#))

News*	Name of the item which displays an overview of, among other things, news items and press releases.
Contact*	Name of the item which displays at least the organisation's email address, phone number and address and provides an entry point to the 'Do you have a question?' page. Recommendation: when a section in an information file leads to a specific contact form, name it 'comment' or 'sign up'.
Jump to	Title of a section on the home page. This section consists of a collection of links to sections of the same website or to separate websites from the same organisation.
Home*	Name of the home page, the site's front page. Home is short for home page.
Parliamentary papers	All ministry papers addressed to the parliament, including attachments, but excluding documents which should be categorised under one of the other information types, such as policy documents and reports.
More information	A heading above a number of links below a text on a content page. The links are need-to-know links, such as relevant legislation and rules, press releases, speeches and parliamentary papers.
Most visited	Heading for a collection of links leading to sections of the website which have attracted the most visitors during a specific period of time.
Key topics*	Name of an item which displays, or serves as a heading for, an overview of policy areas, in units which fit the target group's information need.
Organisation*	Name of the item which leads to the main entry point 'Organisation' which includes, among other things, the organisation chart, with links to advisory bodies and independent administrative bodies, et cetera. Also includes information about the minister(s) and state secretary/secretaries of the ministry concerned.
Site map*	Name of the item which displays a clickable overview of the site structure (table of contents).
Text size	Name of the function which allows the user to set the text size on the site.
In the spotlight	Name which serves as a heading for information which is put in the spotlight.
Jobs*	Name of the item under 'Working for' which displays an overview of all jobs

with the ministry concerned, as included on Werkenbijhetrijk.nl.

Questions and answers	Name which serves as a heading for x number of questions and answers relating to the page's topic.
See also	Name which serves as a heading for a collection of links to (sections of) sites which are 'nice to know'.
Search*	Name of the item which starts the search engine.

Note: 'Downloads' should not be used as the title of a navigation item.

2.9 English part of the website

Required

Use British English spelling.

3 Content

3.1 Introduction

Visitors expect to see at least similar topics and content on every (home) page of a ministry website. A uniform structure on ministry websites offers visitors something to hold on to in their click behaviour. The type of information on the website should be more or less similar as well. This chapter describes gearing the content of the websites to one another. The sections in this chapter are based on the terminology used for the structure and navigation as listed in Chapter 2.

3.2 Home

Required

- News and current events occupy an important place on the home page.
- The home page makes clear whose website it is, for whom it is intended and what the visitor can expect with regards to information and functionality. The presentation of the home page can be different from that of the underlying pages. It is mainly a reference page.
- The ministry's logo on the site is clickable and displays the site's home page.

Recommendations

- Make sure the home page contains the most recent information from and about the ministry. Some characteristics:
 - Provide a policy clarification and explanation.
 - Correct media coverage or provide extra information.
 - Show a different perspective (for example because of biased media coverage).
 - Make sure news coverage is factual and businesslike.
 - Make sure information published by the ministry itself, such as press releases, is always published on the website first, before being published by, for example, the ANP. Publication on the website coincides with the spokesperson's (active) activities.
 - Respond to media attention or signals from society. Be proactive, for example in the build-up to a parliamentary debate or an external appearance.
 - Illustrate news items with visual material if this adds value.
 - The visitor's attention can be drawn to news by using a quotation (from the ministry's own media, a speech, a quotation from a member of government) or by special attention for a current information file in 'In the spotlight'.

3.3 News

The 'News' section provides access to the following content types:

3.3.1 News items

News items describe current events with regards to a ministry's policy areas. This is information about, for example, activities surrounding the members of government, appearances in the parliament, decision-making in the parliament or the policy areas. Examples of sources for news items are: press releases, speeches, parliamentary papers and working visits.

3.3.2 Press releases

Press releases are announcements primarily intended for the press about news moments related to agreements, pledges, working visits and correspondence with the parliament.

Required

- All press releases are published on the website in their entirety.
- The 'News' section gives the visitor access to the full overview of press releases.

3.3.3 Parliamentary papers

Required

All papers from the ministry addressed to both Chambers of Parliament are published on the website. Any attachments are included.

Recommendations

All attachments to parliamentary papers which should be categorised under one of the other information types, such as policy documents and reports, are also available via 'All publications' (3.3.7).

3.3.4 Speeches

Speeches contain the text delivered by a member of government or possibly a high-ranking official. All available speeches are accessible under 'News'.

3.3.5 WOB requests

Required

- The page containing the overview of WOB requests (requests related to the Wet Openbaarheid van Bestuur, the Openness of Government Act) contains a default text, approved by the Information Council, which should be used by every ministry. The page also contains a short explanation of the WOB and a chronological overview of accepted, and therefore available, WOB requests of the ministry concerned, sorted by title and date.
- Each WOB request can be considered as a small information file. It contains a short introduction, followed by a list of links to the related documents.
- If the information is not available yet in digital format, the introductory text on the WOB page will include the announcement that a request has been granted. Briefly indicate the topic. In addition, indicate whether and when the information will be available online.
- If the information is not available in digital format, the WOB page will contain a short introduction, followed by information on whether and when and where the information can be viewed on request.
- All WOB documents will remain visible in this way for at least one year.
- Observe the privacy of those involved.

Recommendations

On every WOB request page, include links to related information. For example, information files or news items which are available elsewhere on the site.

3.3.6 Legislative calendar

Not all ministry websites contain a legislative calendar. If a legislative calendar is included on the site, the following rules apply.

Required

The legislative calendar offers an overview of bills originating from the ministry. Three types of bills are distinguished:

- bills being considered by the States General;
- bills which have been passed, and which have been published in the Bulletin of Acts, Orders and Decrees;
- bills which have been withdrawn.

General information about how legislation is developed should be provided as well.

Recommendations

Preferably, the legislative calendar is (partly) presented graphically by phase of the legislation process.

3.3.7 All publications

This is an entry point for all available information types from the web meta data set (except web pages, information file pages and frequently asked questions) which are published via the website. See section 1.3.

3.4 Key topics

This includes the policy subjects and priorities. These topics are related to the government policy in general and/or a ministry's policy area in particular. A 'Topic' consists of one or more 'Information files'.

3.4.1 Information files

Required

- Information files are 'living' files. Information files provide insight into the current state of affairs of a specific topic and into its background.
- Always set up information files in the same way, from general to specific. More detailed information is provided on underlying pages.
- Information files are question-oriented: use possible questions from the visitor as a starting point for setting up an information file, instead of the structure within the organisation.

Recommendations

Possible elements or items within an information file are: a brief introduction of the subject, latest news, state of affairs, most recent changes or additions, background information (unless the introductory text is comprehensive enough), publications (reports, memorandums, leaflets, et cetera) and internal and external links.

3.5 Organisation

This is where the visitor can find all the information about the ministry's organisation.

3.5.1 Organisation chart

Required

The organisation chart should at least provide visual insight into the level of the Directorate-General and all lower levels.

Recommendations

List the names of the political and official senior executives up to and including board level.

3.5.2 Minister (name)

Required

- Information about and from the members of government is an integral part of the corporate website.
- This section is explicitly not intended for use by the member of government to present his or her party political views. The member of government's political convictions can be mentioned once in his or her biography.
- If desired, the information about members of government can be accessed via a web address of their own. This address always consists of a combination of function and last name. A ministry's domain contains no personal names and addresses.
- During the formation of a new cabinet, the information about members of government is available as long as the member of government is in office. During election time, exercise restraint in presenting the person concerned.

Recommendations

- In case of multiple members of government: for each member of government, information is included which is similar in structure and presentation. Members of government can distinguish themselves from each other in:
 - tone of voice and style (for example using the first person)
 - use of photos and videos
 - use of discussions or forming of opinion
 - personal documents such as a journal, column or diary

3.5.3 State secretary (name)

[See 3.5.2.](#)

3.5.4 Working for (ministry name)

Here the visitor can find the jobs available at the ministry and information on working for the ministry.

Required

3.5.4.1 Jobs

The jobs are a subset of werkenbijhetrijk.nl.

3.5.5 Committees

This section contains information about all committees, for example an overview of all the ministry's (advisory) committees and advisory bodies.

3.6 Search box

See section 6.2 for a description of the search box functionality.

Required

3.6.1 Search box (entry field) with a 'Search' button

This search option is visible on every page.

3.6.2 Site map

Provides an overview of the website's structure and content, hierarchical, alphabetical, graphical, textual or otherwise, containing just the first levels or very detailed.

3.6.3 'Advanced search'

This search option is visible on every page.

Recommendations

3.6.4 Search results

Preferably, provide a short summary of the items on the search result page.

3.7 Service elements

These elements are required in the site's 'top bar'.

3.7.1 Contact

This section contains location details, a route description and options to ask the ministry questions.

3.7.1.1 Do you have a question?

This is the form for questions for public information or Postbus 51.

3.7.1.2 Route description

Page containing a description of the route to the ministry.

3.7.2 Subscribe

Email subscriptions, RSS, podcasts, et cetera. See also sections 6.5 and 6.6.

3.7.3 Sections of the website in other languages

Not all functionalities of the Dutch part of the site need to be available on the section in another language.

Required

- The section of the website in another language contains at least:
 - a description of the organisation
 - a description of the policy's main points
 - a description of the members of government
 - contact details as described in section 3.7.1
- Use the full word as a link to the corresponding language.

3.7.4 Help

Required

Explanation of how to use the website: at least how to handle downloads, where the PDF reader software can be downloaded, information about accessibility, et cetera.

3.7.4.1 Privacy statement

Required

- Privacy statement: every ministry website should provide a statement on how the ministry handles personal details it has obtained and how these are protected. The text drawn up for this has been jointly agreed upon.
- Each page on which visitors leave (personal) details (such as web forms), contains a link to this text.

More information:

- http://www.communicatieplein.nl/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=113&Itemid=122

4. Style

4.1 Introduction

This chapter is intended for everyone who writes texts for government sites, both professional and nonprofessional writers. The quality of the website texts (content) for a large part determines the quality of a site.

A government site can be expected to contain texts which are well written. To this end, rules should be taken into account for:

- Text writing
- Government texts
- Writing for the web

Several reference books are available for text writing in general and for text writing for the government in particular:

- 'Het Groene Boekje', Taalunie, Sdu Uitgevers
- 'Schrijfwijzer', J. Renkema, Sdu Uitgevers
- 'Taalwijzer voor de overheid', E. Tiggeler, Sdu Uitgevers

Note: The guidelines in this chapter apply to the Dutch language version of corporate websites.

4.2 Concise writing

Required

- Make sure texts are concise and to the point.
- Use active language: do not use 'zullen', 'zouden', et cetera.
- Use a direct style, in other words, avoid past participles and descriptions. Example: 'ten behoeve van' = 'voor'.
- Avoid long sentences; vary sentence length.

Recommendations

- A web text should be a lot shorter than a text on paper.
- Preferably, sentences contain no more than eleven words.
- Paragraphs contain a maximum of eight lines.
- Use a maximum of two commas per sentence.
- Do not use more adjectives than necessary.

4.3 Language

Required

- Avoid official language and jargon, including an abundance of abbreviations.
- Choose one simple language level with which you can serve the majority of your visitors. Even those with higher education and specialists benefit from simple language.
- Tailor your text to the website's target group.

- Do not use a salutation to address the user, such as 'beste bezoeker' or 'hartelijk welkom'. A possible exception to this is the page for the members of government or the weblog.
- Make sure your message is complete and clear and with correct linguistic usage.
- Use a businesslike, objective and active style, but avoid being too distant.

4.4 Spelling and abbreviations

Required

- Use the official rules for numbers and amounts. Example: Spell out the numbers one up to and including twenty, tens, hundreds and thousands.
- Limit the use of terms in other languages.
- Do not write words or texts in capitals only, unless they are official names or abbreviations.
- Do not underline texts, to avoid confusion with hyperlinks.
- Always check texts for spelling mistakes and typing errors; texts containing spelling mistakes are taken less seriously.
- Use the word 'internet' without an article and without an initial capital, and use 'e-mail' (instead of 'email').
- When using abbreviations, always include the full term once on the page.
- Do not use abbreviations of words such as 'o.a.', 'bijv.' and 'etc.'.
- For phone and fax numbers, use the following default format:
 (070) 333 44 44
 (0180) 11 11 11
 06-11 11 11 11
 0900-11 11 11 (euro 0,03/min.)
 0800-11 11 11 (gratis)
 +31 234 56 78 90
 +31 20 623 45 67
 +31 6 53 45 67 89
- Do not use the € sign in texts, use the word 'euro' instead. For example: 'duizend euro' or '15,86 euro'. In tables, the use of the € sign is allowed.
- Do not use the % sign in texts, use the word 'procent' instead. For example: 'vijftien procent' or '19.86 procent'. In tables, the use of the % sign is allowed.

4.5 Content

Required

- In your text, always answer de five 'W' questions: what, where, who, when and why.
- Be as up-to-date as possible and include specific dates and years. Include the date including the year, if possible including the day of the week; do not use indications of time such as yesterday, soon or this autumn. Example: 'Op maandag 2 april 2007...'

Recommendations

- In addition to the five 'W' questions, you can also consider answering other questions in your text, such as how, which, as a result of what.
- Make the content more tangible by including numbers, facts and examples.
- Where possible, include relevant links with each text to information on the own website or on external sites.

4.6 Structure

Required

- Divide the text in short paragraphs with extra space in between.
- For long texts, add a table of contents at the top of the page. Create anchors from the words in this table of contents to the appropriate headings in the text.
- Use bulleted or numbered lists for lists.

4.7 (Sub)headings

Required

- For every page, use a title which covers the content ('Index' does not really mean anything).
- Use subheadings to prevent the paragraphs from getting too long. Make sure headings are short; use initial capitals in headings.
- Do not use headings in all capitals.
- Use the present tense in subheadings.
- Make sure the subheadings clearly reflect the subject.

Recommendations

- A subheading can also be used to tempt the visitor. After all, you want people to read your text. Use, for example, part of a quotation. Make sure, however, the subheadings are consistent throughout the site.
- Avoid long (sub)headings.

4.8 Tables

Required

Only use tables for actually displaying data; do not use tables for page layout.

Recommendations

- Make sure tables are well organised; avoid complex tables. Where necessary, divide the table into multiple tables.
- Make sure a figure or table is placed as close as possible to the accompanying text.

4.9 Privacy

Required

Only include names, addresses, (mobile) phone numbers and/or email addresses if the persons concerned have granted permission for publication. Details can also be published if they are public, for example in the case of a ministry's general mail address.

4.10 Links

Required

- A link description must convey meaning. Make sure users know, before they click, where the link will take them as well as what they can expect there. 'Click here' does not convey any meaning.
- Always include the email address in the link text. A correct example: 'send an email to: info@regering.nl'. A good alternative for a link to an email address is a contact form.
- Check regularly whether the links are still working.

Recommendations

- The great thing about the internet is that you can link everywhere, but this can also be a disadvantage. Use links sparingly; only add links which add something to your own content.
- Make clear what you are linking to; a website, a file, et cetera.
- A link description containing the URL or site name makes sure the link is also useful when the page is printed.

4.11 External links

Required

- With external links, it should be clear that they link to content located elsewhere. Several options are available to achieve this:
 - use a description (for example: 'refer to the information file on Legionnaire's disease at the VROM ministry').
 - write the link in full (for example: www.tweedekamer.nl).
 - use an icon for external links.

- Be careful when linking to external websites in which the ministry is not directly involved. Keep in mind that visitors will consider links on the ministry website to other websites to be reliable references.
- The websites which are linked should be closely connected with the ministry's policy areas. When including links, keep the ministry's task and nature in mind. Not all websites about policy areas are relevant.
- It should be clear who is responsible for the external website.

Recommendations

- Only link to external websites which are reliable, up-to-date and consistent.
- Links to underlying sections of a site (deep links) offer information which is more specific. However, there is a bigger risk that these links will change. Keep this in mind when using deep links and regularly check whether the links still work.
- Linking to the following parties is usually no problem:
 - Other government departments
 - Organisations associated with the government
 - Authorities issuing marks of quality
 - Non-governmental organisations
 - Interest groups
 - Professional/umbrella organisations
- Exercise restraint in linking to websites of commercial organisations to avoid the appearance of preferential treatment. In this case, more than in any other case, a link should be presented in context. Keep the following criteria in mind:
 - The organisation is collaborating with the ministry, for example on a project. In this case, the link is temporary and should be removed once the project is finished.
 - The organisation provides additional information about one of the ministry's policy areas.

4.12 Alt texts for images

Required

- In the alt text, describe the contents of the image.
Example: "State Secretary Bussemaker accepted the report about the Health Insurance from Mr Jansen." as an alternative for a photograph of the State Secretary accepting a report from Mr Jansen.
- Alt texts for functional images such as buttons should describe the button's function instead of the image.
Example: 'submit this form' instead of 'red arrow'.
- For images which contain no additional information, an empty alt attribute (alt="") is used. This prevents the file name from being displayed or read out.

5. Design

5.1 Introduction

Design contributes to the site functioning properly and supports de users' needs. Consider for example a website's readability: this depends on the choices with regards to colour, font type and font size. In addition, the position of the various elements (the layout) is very important in creating a well-organised site. A good design provides a balance between visualisation and functional structure.

5.2 Use of colour

Required

- Be consistent in use of colour when using it to convey meaning.
- Make sure the communicative elements do not convey their meaning solely by the use of colour. People who are colour-blind should not be limited in using the site.
- With a view to colour-blindness, avoid the following colour combinations (see webrichtlijnen.overheid.nl/english for more information):
 - red on black or black on red, or adjacent to one another;
 - green on red or red on green, or adjacent to one another;
 - combining beige, yellow or orange with red and/or green.
- Do not use different colours in body text; different colours are only allowed for links.

5.3 Typography

Required

- Do not use underlined text; use underlining for links only.
- Do not write words or texts in all capitals.

Recommendations

- Do not use italics in texts.
- Make sure the layout is well organised:
 - Present text in paragraphs of no more than eight lines.
 - Use subheadings.
- Do not create lists listing items in one sentence; list the items as separate sentences using bullet points and be consistent in using them.
 - Text blocks containing body text should always be aligned to the left.
 - Be consistent in aligning text and images.
 - Table columns are aligned according to the type of data (dates and numbers, for example, are aligned to the right).
- Use double quotations marks for quotations and single quotation marks for emphasis.

5.4 Visual material

Required

- All images, including icons, should include an alt text which conveys meaning, or an empty alt text. See also [section 4.12](#).
- The resolution for visual material is 72 dpi (= standard screen resolution), unless the visual material is offered as a download.
- When compressing visual material, a comparative assessment should always be made between size and quality. This is why photographs are saved as JPG files; visual material such as graphs and logos can be saved as PNG or GIF files.

Recommendations

With a view to readability, do not use images as background for text.

5.5 Icons

Required

- Icons should include an alt text which conveys meaning, or an empty alt text.
- The use of the following icons is required. Preferably use the icons agreed upon for:
 - File formats (PDF, Word, Excel, RSS)
 - External links
- Do not use icons for:
 - Main and sub navigation
 - Search box
 - Service elements

Recommendations

- The use of the following icons is optional. Preferably use the icons agreed upon for:
 - Print
 - Back
 - Forward
 - Back to top (if the text is longer than one screen)
- Use a favicon for recognisability in, for example, a bookmark list. A favicon is the symbol which is displayed before the site's URL or domain name in the bookmark list or in the address bar.

5.6 Error messages

Required

- Make sure server error messages have a clear design (400, 401, 403, 404 and 500).
- Error messages should look the same throughout the site, to make them immediately recognisable. This also applies to validation error messages in forms. Indicate the error next to the problem area on the page. Display the error messages itself in bold and red.

5.7 Banners

Recommendations

- Exercise restraint in the use of animated banners; they distract too much from the content.
- Preferably, do not place more than three banners on one page.
- Use the formats common for banners.

6. Functionalities

6.1 Introduction

Functionalities are the technical options offered by a site, such as a search function or an option to change the text size. Each site has its standard functionalities. In addition and optionally, specific functionalities can be built in. When these are used, some basic guidelines and recommendations apply.

For some functionalities, it may be necessary to request or save visitors' details.

Required

Do not ask more information than needed and indicate:

- why the information is needed;
- which information is saved;
- what happens to the information.

Openness about what happens to visitors' personal details is required based on the Personal Data Protection Act (see also [section 3.7.4](#) Privacy statement).

6.2 Search functionality

Required

- A search box with a search button on every page; the search button contains the text 'Search'.
- A results page, which includes at least the title, date, information type and file format (if not HTML) for each item found.
- An advanced search screen, in which visitors can refine their search request and can search in separate subsections, for example by date.

6.3 Web forms

Digital forms can be placed on every page on the site, for example to ask questions, order information material or sign up for meetings. It is possible to add an option to include documents as attachments.

Required

- Before submitting the form, let the user check and correct the details entered.
- After submitting a form, show the visitor a 'reaction' page.
- Indicate what happens to the information entered in the form.
- Mark required fields in the form with an asterisk.
- Validate the data entered.
- If only a limited number of characters can be entered, this should be clear to the user.
- Make sure forms work fully without the use of 'client-side scripts' (scripts which are run on the user's PC), such as javascript.

6.4 User preferences

Recommendations

Most user preferences can be set in the browser. Not everyone knows where to find these user preferences. This is why it can be useful to offer specific functionalities on the website itself as well.

Examples of user preferences are:

- Text size

This functionality is executed using a + and - sign. It is a 'style sheet switcher' in five steps (extra small; small; normal; large; extra large).

- Page style

Via a menu, alternatives can be selected for the standard style sheet. Available options are, for example:

- the standard style sheet;
 - a combination of high contrast and large text size, displayed in a one-column layout;
 - no style sheet.
- Opening external links in a new browser window.

Via a check box (a check option) the user can indicate whether links to information outside the own website should be opened in a new browser window. In addition, a similar option can be offered to open documents or applications in a new browser window. In time, the user preferences may become outdated as a result of advancing insight and use. An example of this is the 'print button', since by now visitors know how to print a page.

6.5 Subscriptions

Visitors can choose to be notified of information on the website, for example by email or RSS.

Required

- The visitor has to confirm his subscription to the notification.

The visitor can unsubscribe or change his details via a link in each message.

Recommendations

- After a new item has been published, for example in the 'News' section, the subscriber receives a notification containing a summary of the document and a link to the complete document on the website.
- Visitors can indicate for which topics and/or information types they want to receive notifications.
- A notification email contains a direct link to the item on the site. This is not a link to the primary address of the site, but to the exact page.

6.6 Newsletter

A newsletter is an extra service for interested visitors. Unlike the 'Notification', an email newsletter is not generated automatically; it is created by the editorial staff. In addition to text, the newsletter can also contain images and links.

Recommendations

- Interested visitors can subscribe to the newsletter on a special page, preferably accessible via the 'Subscribe' button.
- Preferably, the newsletter is distributed by email.
- Send the newsletter in both HTML and plain text.
- Let subscribers choose beforehand whether they want to receive the newsletter in plain text or in HTML format.
- Offer subscribers the option to unsubscribe or to change their details via a link in the newsletter.

6.7 Discussion forum

The forum functionality offers visitors the opportunity to immediately give their opinion on specific topics.

Recommendations

- Carefully consider how to moderate the forum and inform visitors of the rules.
- Offer visitors the option to create a profile.
- A visitor profile should at least contain a name and an email address.
- Visitors should have the option to delete their profile.

6.8 Guest book

In a guest book (or other response functionalities), visitors can post comments or contributions. The comments are listed below each other in a list on the website.

Recommendations

- Carefully consider how to moderate the guest book and inform visitors of the rules.
- Each message contains at least a name, the subject and the message itself.
- Published messages cannot be edited by the visitor.
- After a visitor has posted a message, a 'thank you' page is shown.

6.9 Poll

A poll is a functionality for voting or proposition. In a poll, visitors can give their opinion via a simple multiple-choice questionnaire (for example, yes/no/I don't know) and a voting button.

Recommendations

- Provide feedback about the poll results.
- Archive the poll results.

6.10 Survey

In a survey, visitors are asked their opinion about various topics. A survey can consist of a multiple-choice questionnaire, questions with multiple options, open questions or combinations of these options.

Recommendations

- Clearly indicate the survey's objective.
- Indicate beforehand how much time it will take to participate in the survey.
- Show the progress/status while the survey is being filled in.
- Display a 'thank you' page when the survey has been completed.

6.11 Weblog

A weblog, also called blog, is regularly updated. The information offered is displayed in anti-chronological order. The author actually provides a log of information which he or she wants to share with the public. Weblogs usually offer readers the option to post comments under the messages, anonymously if so desired.

Recommendations

- Carefully consider how to moderate comments.
- The texts are archived.
- Links and/or images can be added to the texts.

6.12 Video

In addition to text, the use of video on websites is becoming increasingly important. The use of video can have an obvious added value in addition to web texts.

Required

- Always offer video in layers, in accordance with the Web Guidelines.
- Use Flash video as the main format.
- For each video, provide both captions and a full text (transcription).
- Provide a downloadable version of the video as well.

Recommendations

- Use the 'Government video player' developed by the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport to display video on the website (see www.minvws.nl/en/video). This will present the video in layers, with Flash Video as the main format.
- The video should contain a concise, powerful message.
- Avoid videos which only contain 'talking heads'.