

Summary and Checklist: Form Labels, Instructions, and Validation

Summary

In order for users to know how to fill out a form, the form has to be accessible. For the most part this is easy to do. Key concepts include:

- Labels for form inputs
- Labels for groups of inputs
- Instructions and hints, where necessary
- Error prevention
- Form validation

With all of these, information must be visible on the screen, accurate and meaningful, programmatically discernible, and programmatically associated with the appropriate form element or group.

The more interactive a form element or process is, the more attention needs to be given to accessibility with respect to:

- Focus management
- Setting and updating ARIA names, roles, and values, where necessary
- ARIA live announcements, where necessary

Checklist

Labels

Semantic Labels

- Labels MUST be programmatically associated with their corresponding elements.
- Labels MUST be programmatically-discernible.

Meaningful Label Text

- Labels MUST be meaningful.
- Labels MUST NOT rely solely on references to sensory characteristics.

Icons as Labels

- Icons MAY be used as visual labels (without visual text) if the meaning of the icon is visually self-evident AND if there is a programmatically-associated semantic label available to assistive technologies.

Placeholder Text as Labels

- Placeholder text MUST NOT be used as the only method of providing a label for a text input.

Visibility of Labels

- Labels MUST be visible.

Proximity of Labels to Controls

- A label SHOULD be visually adjacent to its corresponding element.
- A label SHOULD be adjacent in the DOM to its corresponding element.

Multiple Labels for One Field

- When multiple labels are used for one element, each label MUST be programmatically associated with the corresponding element.

One Label for Multiple Fields

- When one label is used for multiple elements, the label MUST be programmatically associated with each of the corresponding elements.

Group Labels

Semantic Group Labels

- Group labels MUST be programmatically-associated with the group if the individual labels for each element in the group are insufficient on their own.
- Group labels MUST be programmatically-discernible.

Meaningful Group Labels

- Group labels MUST be meaningful.
- Group labels MUST NOT rely solely on references to sensory characteristics.

Proximity of Group Labels

- Group labels SHOULD be visually adjacent to the grouped elements.
- Group labels SHOULD be adjacent in the DOM to the grouped elements.

Visibility of Group Labels

- Group labels MUST be visible.

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Instructions & Other Helpful Info

Instructions for Forms, Groups, and Sections

- Instructions for groups or sections **SHOULD** be programmatically-associated with the group.
- Instructions for groups or sections **MUST** be programmatically-discernible.
- Instructions for groups or sections **MUST** be meaningful.
- Instructions for groups or sections **MUST** be visible.
- Instructions for groups or sections **SHOULD** be visually adjacent to the grouped elements.
- Instructions for groups or sections **SHOULD** be adjacent in the DOM to the grouped elements.
- If the instructions for groups or sections are not critical, the instructions **MAY** be hidden until the user requests them.
- Instructions for groups or sections **MUST NOT** rely solely on references to sensory characteristics.

Instructions for Inputs

- Instructions for an element **MUST** be programmatically-associated with the element.
- Instructions for an element **MUST** be available as programmatically-discernible text.
- Instructions for an element **MUST** be meaningful.
- Instructions for an element **MUST** be visible.
- Instructions for an element **SHOULD** be visually adjacent to the element.
- Instructions for an element **SHOULD** be adjacent in the DOM to the element.
- If the instructions for an element are not critical, the instructions **MAY** be hidden until the user requests them.
- Instructions for an element **MUST NOT** rely solely on references to sensory characteristics.

Required Fields

- Required fields **SHOULD** be programmatically designated as such.
- Required fields **SHOULD** have a visual indicator that the field is required.
- The form validation process **MUST** include an error message explaining that a field is required if the field isn't identified as required both visually and programmatically in the form's initial state.

Dynamic Forms & Custom Widgets

Changes in Context

- Focusing on an element **MUST NOT** automatically trigger a change of context, unless the user has been adequately advised ahead of time.
- Changing an element's value **MUST NOT** automatically trigger a change of context, unless the user is adequately advised ahead of time.
- Hovering over an element with the mouse **MUST NOT** automatically trigger a change of context, unless the user has been adequately advised ahead of time.

Custom Form Inputs

- Native HTML form elements **SHOULD** be used whenever possible.
- Custom form elements **SHOULD** act like native HTML form elements, to the extent possible.
- Custom form elements **SHOULD** have appropriate names, roles, and values.
- Updates and state changes that cannot be communicated through HTML or ARIA methods **SHOULD** be communicated via ARIA live messages.

Form Validation

Error Identification Considerations

- Error feedback **SHOULD** be made available immediately after form submission (or after an equivalent event if there is no form submission event).
- Error feedback **MUST** be programmatically-associated with the appropriate element.
- Error feedback **MUST** be programmatically-discernible.
- Error feedback **MUST** be meaningful.
- Error feedback **MUST** be visible.

Success Confirmation Considerations

- Success confirmation feedback **SHOULD** be programmatically-discernible.
- Success confirmation feedback **SHOULD** be meaningful.
- Success confirmation feedback **MUST** be visible.