# Creating “born accessible” publications: What can editors do to help?

## An introduction to editors and IPEd

IPEd is the professional association for Australian and New Zealand editors. It exists to advance the profession of editing and to support and promote editors, including by:

* organising a professional development program to help editors build their skills
* maintaining and promoting formal Standards for Editing Practice
* administering a professional accreditation scheme.

Both the Standards and the accreditation scheme identify what editors need to know. The issue is where they gain the knowledge and skills they need when it comes to accessibility.

It is time-consuming for publishers and those who work for them to find the relevant information. Many of these sources come from the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) and are designed to address web accessibility, but not necessarily the needs of braille users, readers of children’s books and educational texts, or the managerial aspects of publishing.

IPEd has formed an Accessibility Initiative Working Party to create a free, comprehensive guide on accessibility for publishing professionals, so everyone can find what they need quickly and easily while they work.

## Where editors fit into the publishing process

Despite common perception, editors don’t just correct writers’ spelling and grammar. Among other things, we may also influence the content of a publication, determine the style used and make suggestions to improve readability – and, of course, accessibility.

The tasks an editor performs can be grouped broadly into three types: substantive editing, copyediting and proofreading. Editors also work in managerial positions within publishing organisations, including writing briefs and planning workflows.

## The role of editors in creating accessible publications

While most publishers are interested in making their publications accessible, they don’t always know where to start. The more editors know about the issues faced by readers and transcribers, the better placed they are to instruct the rest of the publishing team.

For example, editors directly influence the style of publications. Copyeditors create a detailed style sheet for each text, to ensure consistency. But if they don’t have reliable primary sources to back up their choices, editors can’t justify changing established practices, especially if the decision creates extra costs for publishers.

## Research and consultation

Round Table members are invited to complete a questionnaire to inform writers, editors and publishers about issues that cause unnecessary work. If you tell IPEd what these issues are, and why they are a problem, we can cite that information as a primary source to argue for change.

We also have our own list of questions. For example:

* At what age can/should colour be introduced in descriptions for children?
* At what age/school level are children ready to start using alt text?
* What problems do you encounter with maths and science texts?
* Can you provide any guidelines for setting complex maths and symbols?
* Is there a way of setting science abbreviations so they are read correctly by screen readers?
* Should the alt text identify areas that are not labelled in an illustration?
* Should alt text be edited for style?
* Are merged cells in tables accessible for digital braille users if they are coded correctly?
* How should references be presented?

Complete the questionnaire at <https://bit.ly/AIWP22>

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