

My Top Questions for Improving Access

By Emily Tso





Intro

Going beyond compliance to achieve truly accessible products, services and environments requires more than just another checklist. It takes cultivating a mindset (and culture) that values how creating access can improve people's everyday lives.

But by challenging ourselves to honestly ask difficult, but essential, questions, and being willing to set aside our own biases and assumptions, we can find commonality that inspires the creation of more universally usable designs.

Here are two exercises to help you and your team begin to cultivate an "access mindset" that leads to more inclusive, human-centred design.

Happy creating!

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5 Questions to Cultivate An Access Mindset

A Reflection for Teams

1. In what ways have you been "disabled"? For five minutes? For five days? Etc.

Put another way, in what ways have you experienced exclusion? Maybe it was the first time you tried to push a stroller through a heavy door, or the summer you spent on crutches. By reflecting on our own moments of exclusion, we can build the foundation of empathy on which the access mindset is built.

2. What do the words "accessibility," "access," "inclusion," and "disability" mean to us?

How we understand and use certain words can reveal points where our mindset about access is actually limiting how we think about inclusive design. How might we as a team need to expand or rethink our definitions?

3. Where are we at today when it comes to creating access?

By being honest about where we are today, we can identify where we need to get to.



4. What do we imagine future accessibility guidelines might include (think WCAG 10.0), and how can we start designing for some of those standards today?

The most valuable resource we have is imagination. We know guidelines will continue to evolve. If we can anticipate what some of that growth might be in the future, we can start creating more access and inclusion for people today.

5. How do we need to change to promote more access and inclusion in the products, environments, or services we provide?

Accessibility is a team effort. Perhaps commit to asking one access-related question at your weekly check-ins or building in “access” check points into projects. Even small mindset adjustments can impact how accessible the things we create end up being for those who need them.





5 Questions to Cultivate an Access Mindset for a Specific Project

For Individuals

What beliefs and assumptions based on my own experiences and abilities am I bringing to this project?

By committing to acknowledging and unlearning our own biases, we can get closer to more creative and appropriate solutions for creating access.

Who might I be excluding with my design?

By shifting our focus to who we might be excluding, as opposed to who we are including, we can start to acknowledge the spectrum of those who might depend on or benefit from what we create. Consider aspects like culture, age, gender, and socioeconomic status, in addition to disability.





Have I recruited diverse product testers?

The best way to know whether or not something is inaccessible is to ask. Seek testers who will help you understand the realities and context of the people who will be impacted by your design directly and indirectly.

How might someone from a culture different from my own experience what I'm creating?

Consider how many cultures you're inviting into your idea, and if any different cultures might be misrepresented. You can use this as a starting point to build your intercultural and intergenerational fluency.

Have I built the capacity for ongoing feedback and commitment to future growth and product improvements?

Keep in mind that your design or product doesn't have to be perfect the first time. "Access" in itself is an evolving term and target, since people's contexts change on a regular basis. But if we don't have a mechanism to regularly review and upgrade what we've created, we won't be able to adjust it when points of inaccessibility arise.

Want to go deeper? Reach out to us at hello@domain7.com for everything from coaching to a robust partnership in understanding where your organization can grow beyond due diligence to true digital accessibility and inclusivity. Or visit us at Domain7.com for more on designing in ways that support human thriving.