

FAO Web Quality Assurance Checklist

WAICENT Criteria for Evaluating and Monitoring Web Quality

Version 1.3

Introduction

This Checklist contains the quality criteria for obtaining clearance from the Director, OEK, for the publication of new Web sites and systems. It is aimed at site owners, content providers, designers, information architects, systems developers (internal and contractors) and technical officers responsible for managing sites. This Checklist supplements the WAICENT [Web Guide](#).

All of FAO's sites contribute to a single online "FAO" presence. Therefore, each site should apply quality criteria to enforce the perception of the Organization as a high quality publisher of expert, neutral, global, technical information. Raising the quality of Web sites can have immediate measurable impacts, such as increasing the number of returning visitors that interact with, and stay longer on, your site.

There are various aspects of Web quality; some of the related criteria are easy to measure while others are subjective. Most criteria are the result of research and studies in Web usability and accessibility.

The criteria have been grouped into four sections: (1) Content quality; (2) Accessibility, usability and search engine optimization; (3) Interface and technical quality; and (4) Regular monitoring and review.

How to use this Checklist

1. Each section contains a table that lists the related quality criteria. Criteria are labelled **M** for mandatory and **R** for highly recommended.
2. For simplicity, each criterion appears under only one heading, even though some criteria can be classified under several headings.
3. This Checklist applies all Web sites on the FAO server, the only exception being the FAO corporate look and feel (see [5.3a Corporate visual identity](#)).

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1. Content quality

Content can be considered the most critical element of a site. Content includes text, images, figures, audio, video, databases and other elements. Content is the best tool for building trust with users and many studies indicate that content is more important than navigation, visual design, functionality or interactivity.

Content on FAO Web pages must be accurate, up-to-date and technically reliable. It should be consistent with data being published by FAO through other channels, such as databases and publications.

Table 1: Measurable criteria for content quality

Table 1: Measurable criteria for content quality		
1.1	Readability	
1.1.1	R	Text is specifically written for the Web; it is concise and scannable with bolded keywords, meaningful subheadings, bulleted lists, one-idea paragraphs and a conclusion-first writing style.
1.1.2	R	Text is well written, free of grammatical errors and conforms to the FAO Style Guide and FAO TERM . Translations are of high quality.
1.1.3	R	Blocks of text are no more than 80 characters wide, not fully justified (aligned to both the left and the right margins) and does not require horizontal scrolling when the text size is doubled.
1.1.4	R	Words that may be ambiguous, unknown, or used in a very specific way are defined using adjacent text. Expansions for abbreviations are provided.
1.1.5	M	Acronyms in menus and title bars are avoided.
1.1.6	M	Text is free of formatting errors.
1.2	Information integrity	
1.2.1	M	Content from other FAO sites is not copied and pasted. Use programming to reuse content and attribute the source.
1.2.2	M	Links to source content (e.g. Newsroom and FPMIS) are provided.
1.2.3	R	When content summaries or highlights are used, it is acknowledged and there is a link to the source content.
1.2.4	M	FAO repositories are used to store certain content types (e.g. Corporate Document Repository and FPMIS).
1.2.5	M	No “under construction”, “coming soon” or empty pages.
1.2.6	M	When used, country names, UNDP/ISO country codes, and regions are consistent with the Names of Countries database in all languages.
1.2.7	M	When national flags are used, they are consistent with the FAO Member Countries and Flags page.
1.2.8	R	Links to related information and reference materials are provided.
1.2.9	R	Pertinent images, figures, audio, video, etc. are used to enhance and complement content (no clip art or stock images).
1.2.10	M	Non-FAO material is used only with appropriate permission.
1.3	Referencing	
1.3.1	R	A “last updated” date is included.
1.3.2	R	The site owner is indicated.
1.3.3	R	Archived pages include a disclaimer.
1.3.4	R	Authors of a site’s content are indicated.
1.3.5	R	Contact details are provided on each page. Web forms are the preferred method of contacting site owners. If included, generic email addresses, such as spfs@fao.org, are preferable to personal email addresses.
1.3.6	R	A link to Ask FAO is provided.

2. Accessibility, usability and search engine optimization (SEO)

Accessibility ensures that Web sites are usable by people with disabilities, who use a range of assistive technologies. Web accessibility also benefits people without disabilities as it enables sites to technically meet different user needs, preferences and situation, because it:

- gives users a greater level of control over their browsing experience
- optimizes the display of the site on different type of devices
- makes the site easier to access on low-bandwidth Internet connections
- optimizes indexing of the site by search engines, which contributes to increased visibility in search results
- easier to maintain with redesigns and quicker to implement different language versions

For more detailed information on this subject, please refer to the [FAO Web Accessibility Guidelines](#) and [Tips on Improving Web Accessibility](#).

Table 2: Measurable criteria for accessibility, usability and SEO	
2.1	Page titles
2.1.1	M Unique page titles that accurately describe the content. Brief but descriptive titles are used.
2.2	'Description' metatag
2.2.1	M A description of the Web site is included in the page source in the language of the page.
2.2.1	R There is a unique description for each page in a Web site.
2.3	URLs
2.3.1	R The URL is meaningful and real words are used to create simple directory structures and file names. Where CMS allow, aliases are used to improve URL structure.
2.4	Navigation
2.4.1	R Navigation is logical, clear, consistent and intuitive.
2.4.2	M Primary navigation is available on all pages and consistent.
2.4.3	M The active menu item is obvious at all times.
2.4.4	M Navigation links that are repeated on Web pages do not change order when navigating through the site.
2.4.5	M Common page elements (such as a search box) look the same and appear in the same place across all pages.
2.4.6	M A HTML index page is provided for sites where content is in a database.
2.4.7	R The user's location indicated through breadcrumbs or by specifying the current step in a sequence (e.g., "Step 2 of 5").
2.4.8	R A site map is provided, preferably XML.
2.4.9	R Text is used to label navigation items. Images are not to be used.
2.4.10	R A 404 page is provided that contains information that assists users in finding the information that they seek.
2.5	Search engines
2.5.1	R Pages that are not to be indexed by search engines are included in the 'robots.txt' file (contact OEKM) or contain the 'noindex' element in the meta tag for that page.
2.5.2	R The 'nofollow' attribute is used on pages with un-edited content (e.g., forums or comments) or on specific links to untrusted content.
2.6	Anchor text
2.6.1	R Anchor text, which is the clickable text users see as a result of a link, is concise and descriptive, for example ' IPCC Fourth Assessment Report '. Text such as 'click here' is avoided.
2.6.2	M If only icons are used for a link to a download, e.g. for a PDF file, then 'PDF' is written in the alt text. These images are not included as background CSS images.

2.6.3	R	A minimum of links open in a new browser window.
2.6.4	R	Titles on links are avoided, except for expanding acronyms.
2.7		Heading tags
2.7.1	R	<h1> is used only once on each page for the page title. It is not used for the Web site title.
2.7.2	R	Headings are used sparingly on a page, and are consistent in font and size.
2.7.3	M	The heading tags <h2> and <h3> are used to create a hierarchical structure for the main content on a pages.
2.8		Optimize images
2.8.1	M	All images have a descriptive file name and concise alternative or "alt" text (including hotspots and form images: submit, reset, search. etc.).
2.8.2	M	Copyright is included on all images in the alt text in the language of the page, e.g. "Alt text - © FAO / photographer's name".
2.8.3	R	Images that are purely decorative and do not convey any content have null alt text (alt=""). They are included in the CSS as a background image.
2.8.4	R	Images are stored in their own folder labelled 'images'.
2.8.5	R	Where CAPTCHA images are used on Web pages for form validation then text or audio alternatives are provided.
2.8.6	R	Images do not contain titles in the HTML coding.
2.9		Non-text content (images, figures, video, audio, etc.)
2.9.1	R	Images, figures, video, audio, etc, have captions. Video and audio captions include duration.
2.9.2	R	A transcript is provided for audio and video.
2.10		Control all formatting and layout by CSS
2.10.1	R	The HTML does not contain any formatting or layout information, this is all contained in the CSS referenced in the document <head> (presentation is separated from content).
2.10.2	R	HTML tables are only used for tabular data and not for controlling the layout of Web pages. Table structure is kept simple without extra rows or columns and empty cells or span cells are avoided.
2.10.3	R	The <th> tag is used for table headers, adding an 'id' to the <th> code improves the experience.
2.10.4	M	Relative units are used for font sizes and line heights in the CSS (em rather than px) to enable flexible re-sizing. Font size and style are consistent throughout the site. Fixed font sizes are avoided for all containers including tables.
2.10.5	R	The page is readable and functions correctly when the text size is doubled.
2.10.6	R	Navigation bars are coded as a list: Menu item 1 Menu item 2 etc.
2.10.7	R	The CSS contains no hidden links as these will be detected by screen readers (disabling styles in the browser reveals any hidden links).
2.10.8	R	The colours of the background and foreground are specified in the CSS and have a minimum contrast ratio.
2.10.9	R	Colour and underlining are used consistently to identify links. Visual cues are used when links are hovered over and/or selected. Visited links consistently appear different to unvisited links.
2.10.10	R	No white text occurs on background images.

3. Interface and technical quality

Providing a consistent visual identity improves the usability of the Web site as well as reinforcing a more coherent online presence.

Applying the following technical quality criteria will ensure that FAO's target audiences can access and effectively interact with the Organization.

Table 3: Measurable criteria for interface and technical quality

3.1	Corporate visual identity
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3.1.1	M	FAO sites comply with the corporate visual identity policy, outlined in section 5.3b Corporate visual identity of the Web Guide.
3.1.2	R	The page design is optimised for 1024x768 pixels.
3.1.3	R	The pages load quickly, as indicated by the Web Page Speed Analysis tool (a 25kB file takes 10 seconds to load over 20kbps).
3.1.4	M	Frames are not used.
3.1.5	M	Pages are printable on portrait A4 pages.
3.1.6	R	An RSS feed is offered.
3.2		Language
3.2.1	M	Page content and navigation are in at least three FAO languages.
3.2.2	M	If more than one language is available for the site, those language links are displayed on every page and in the following text and order: العربية, 中文, English, Français, Русский, Español.
3.2.3	M	Country flags are not used as language links.
3.2.4	M	Alerts, feedback and instructions to users are in the language of the Web page where they appear.
3.2.5	M	The language links on a page point to the translated current page.
3.2.6	M	Links to other languages are present only when those languages are available.
3.2.7	M	Words or phrases of another language appearing in the content are tagged accordingly in the HTML. Sentences or sections of pages in another language are avoided.
3.3		Search facility
3.3.1	M	A 'free text' search facility is provided, Google Custom Search Engine is highly recommended. Opens source search solutions are also available for more complex queries.
3.3.2	M	The username and password of the site's Google Custom Search Engine has been registered with OEKM.
3.4		Images and figures' size and format
3.4.1	M	HTML is not used to resize images. Each image has the correct width and height attributes, so the correct layout is displayed while the page loads and if users have turned images off.
3.4.2	R	Images are in the correct file format.
3.4.3	R	JPEG images are used at the lowest acceptable level of quality, to reduce file size.
3.4.4	R	GIF and PNG images are used with the minimum number of colours without compromising image quality, to reduce file size.
3.4.5	R	For large images, thumbnails are provided, along with an indication of the larger image's file size.
3.4.6	M	Animation is not used, unless there is a special need.
3.4.7	R	Images are not used as text.
3.5		Compatibility
3.5.1	M	Site is compatible with the current and penultimate versions of Microsoft Internet Explorer, Mozilla Firefox, Google Chrome, Apple Safari and Adobe Reader (for PDF files).
3.5.2	R	Site is readable on mobile devices (such as an iPhone).
3.6		Plugins
3.6.1	M	Plugins are not used for navigation or design effects, only for specialized elements and only when essential.
3.7		URLs, files and folders
3.7.1	M	The site is compatible with the WAICENT File naming convention and file organization guidelines .
3.7.2	M	The site is compatible with the Internet Domain Name Selection, Registration and Organization .
3.7.3	M	The site contains no unnecessary or orphan files.
3.7.4	R	Each URL points to a single resource/page.
3.7.5	R	File and folder names are expressed in lowercase.
3.7.6	M	Absolute links are used (relative links are only used if they occur within a logical group of folders).
3.7.7	M	The page/site contains no broken links.
3.7.8	M	Redirects are used if a new URL is introduced. (The correct redirect is used for moved and deleted pages.)
3.8		Page encoding
3.8.1	M	The language encoding is in the <head> section.

3.8.2	R	UTF8 (universal transformation format: 8-bit bytes) is used.
3.9	Downloads	
3.9.1	R	Downloads do not exceed 2MB (compress or divide large files if necessary).
3.9.2	R	The size and file format of each download is indicated.
3.9.3	R	Use of Microsoft Office files (Word, Excel, etc) or TIFF files is discouraged.
3.10	FAO emblem and logos	
3.10.1	M	The official version of the FAO emblem is used and follows the usage guidelines (see Information for designers and illustrators). The emblem may be resized, but must not be otherwise modified, obscured or used as a watermark or decorative element
3.10.2	M	Other FAO logos appear in their correct proportions and colours (e.g. TeleFood).
3.10.3	M	Any non-FAO logo appears smaller than the FAO emblem, unless it is the logo of an organization that is a full partner with FAO (in the programme or activity described by the site/page). In this case, the non-FAO logo appears at the same size as the FAO emblem.
3.10.4	M	The FAO emblem links to the FAO home page in the corresponding language.
3.10.5	M	The official FAO URL icon is used (contact OEKM for the favicon file).
3.11	Copyright	
3.11.1	M	A link to FAO Copyright is included on all pages (the copyright page must be in the same language as the originating page).
3.11.2	M	Pages refer to the current year (i.e. © FAO, 2010).
3.11.3	M	FAO is identified as the content owner and copyright holder for content in external Web services (e.g. Delicious and YouTube).
3.11.4	M	Credit and copyright information is provided for images, audio and video. Copyright is included on all images in the alt text in the language of the page, e.g. "Alt text - © FAO / photographer's name"
3.12	Web use analysis	
3.12.1	R	Web sites having non-FAO domains maintain logs for web use analysis and tracking clicks on links that lead to file downloads. This should preferably be Apache combined logging format or another form of usage gathering statistics such as Google Analytics.

4. Regular monitoring and review

Once a site is published, it requires routine effort to monitor and maintain its relevance and quality. The following criteria are for site managers and editors, to help ensure that new sites are functioning correctly, and offer ways of improving existing sites.

Table 4: Measurable criteria for regular monitoring and review		
4.1	Monthly monitoring	
4.1.1	M	Recommended criteria in this Checklist that were not met at the time of the site's launch are complied with as soon as possible.
4.1.2	R	The site is updated/refreshed, especially news, what's new, highlights, calendars, event lists or newsletters.
4.1.3	R	New content is translated.
4.1.4	R	Web traffic is analyzed to profile the site's visitors (demographics), how they arrived, and how they interact with the site. Traffic analysis also identifies page errors and broken links.
4.2	Yearly review	
4.2.1	M	Outdated information (news, etc.) is archived or updated.
4.2.2	R	A focused usability study is conducted.
4.2.3	M	Services that are no longer active, such as fora, are closed.
4.2.4	M	References to services that are no longer maintained (such as latest news, what's new, highlights, calendars, event lists or newsletters) are removed.
4.2.5	M	References to mailboxes that are no longer maintained are removed and the mailboxes closed.
4.2.6	M	The Checklist is reapplied.

Appendices

Example report card

Table 5: Example Web Quality Assurance Checklist report card					
Number	Compliance				Comment
	N/A	Not	Partially	Fully	
4.1	Language				
4.1.1		X			Please translate the site into two other FAO languages
4.1.2			X		Text correct, but order incorrect
4.1.3				X	-
4.1.4	X				-

Table 6: Summary of Web Quality Assurance Checklist report card					
Type	Compliance				Comment
	N/A	Not	Partially	Fully	
Mandatory	3	1	5	45	Pass.
Highly Recommended	11	16	8	25	
Total = 114	14	17	13	70	

Document history

Date	Version	Change
14/11/20011	1.3	Minor updates added.
29/04/2010	1.2	Incorporates accessibility, usability and SEO requirements plus the corporate look and feel
09/09/2009	1.1	Incorporates Web accessibility guidelines
16/09/2008	1.0	Approved by WAG
11/03/2008	0.4.5	Incorporates changes after comments received from WAG members
23/01/2008	0.4.4	Incorporates changes after test of 3 Web sites
12/12/2007	0.4.0	Incorporates changes requested at the 12/12/2007 Web Guide editorial board exercise
26/11/2007	0.3.0	Draft; incorporates changes requested at the 15/11/07 Web Guide editorial board meeting
11/10/2007	0.2.0	Draft; combines the WAICENT Checklist with Web quality
27/06/2007	0.1.0	Draft