Is Your Pre-Employment Testing Accessible? Tips and Tricks

Tips and Tricks for Employers and Their Tech Teams

TalentWorks Tip Sheet

Pre-employment testing. According to the Washington Post, it's a trend that's on the rise in today's job market. More and more employers leverage web-based tools to screen applicants, test knowledge, evaluate personality traits, and more. Such online tests represent an efficient way to vet potential employees before an interview and narrow the field of applicants, easily and cost effectively.

If you think pre-employment testing is about simple online questionnaires, think again. Today's recruiters are testing the real-time know-how of their job applicants through virtual games, customer service simulations, and other types of scenario-based online experiences.

If you're one of the cutting-edge employers using pre-employment tests to screen potential hires, have you stopped to consider whether those tests are accessible to all applicants? It's an important question that speaks to both equal employment opportunity, and your capacity to cast the widest net possible when fishing for talent. Your dream hire could be someone who's perfect for the job—but who's unable to complete your pre-employment test due to inaccessible technology.

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Below is a checklist of common accessibility issues to consider when using pre-employment testing, compliments of Daniel Ferro, a senior interaction designer at Forum One. While they're presented in the context of pre-employment testing, most of the tips below are exemplary accessibility practices that apply to all eRecruiting tools.

Pre-Employment Testing: Accessibility Problems and Solutions

Timeout Challenges

Users with and without disabilities often complain that pre-employment tests "timeout" before they have time to complete a set task or even finish reading through the sometimes-complex instructions. Employers often use default time settings that might not be long enough for the task at hand.

Solutions:

- Provide the option for extra time before the system automatically times out.
- Provide a way for users to save their answers before the system times out.

Visual Design Pitfalls

Many people with visual impairments have trouble reading web content due to poor color contrast and other design issues.

Solutions:

• Ensure your color contrast is high. You can test this using WebAIM's online color contrast checker.
• Ensure that color is not the only method of conveying important information to job candidates.

Navigation Issues

Some job applicants with disabilities will use built-in screen readers, voice recognition software, and keyboard-alternative input devices to successfully navigate pre-employment tests. So if your interfaces aren't accessible to alternate navigation methods, you may be missing out on qualified applicants.

Solutions:

• Forms. Ensure your forms have labels programmatically associated with their inputs. One easy way to test this is to click on the label of a form, such as "First Name," and see if the input box where you type in your name now becomes active.
• Data. Code your tabular data in an accessible manner. This is difficult to test for without knowing a fair amount of HTML; however, you generally want your data tables to have no more than one heading row for the best result.
• CAPTCHAs. Avoid using CAPTCHAs—those annoying challenge-response tests that determine whether or not a user is human. A more accessible and effective alternative is the "honeypot" method.
• Images. Make sure important images have alternative (ALT) text.
    ◊ Images need to have text associated with them in the code so that the images are described to job applicants using a screen reader.
    ◊ Complex infographics or other diagrams that require long explanations should have a link to a text-only version that contains the same information.
• Headings. Use coded headings in your website and documents. This means headings should be tagged as a heading in the code and at the proper level, such as Heading Level 1 and Heading Level 2, instead of just untagged, larger, bolder text.
• Keyboard control. Make sure that users can do absolutely everything necessary in the system without a mouse. This means the ability to access all form fields, links, and controls by simply pressing the "Tab" key on a keyboard and other keys on the keyboard.
• Links. Avoid ambiguous links. That means none of your hyperlinks should need context. Instead of saying, "click here" or "read more," create descriptive links that tell you exactly where you're going to go (e.g., "submit your response," or "learn how to request an alternative format").

Inaccessible Videos

Videos are frequently incorporated into pre-employment testing applications, and these are not always accessible to people with hearing or visual impairments.

Solutions:

• Add synchronized captions, or subtitles, to the videos that you post. These don't have to be turned on by default, but there needs to be an accessible way to enable them.
• Add audio descriptions to your videos, or provide a link to a video transcript.
• Learn more about making multi-media accessible in this TalentWorks fact sheet.

Overwhelming and Irrelevant Test Questions

Users with and without disabilities often complain about the number of test questions in a pre-employment screening, some of which are not even related to the job posting. Other times, questions are complicated and ambiguous, which can pose challenges to people with cognitive disabilities.

Solutions:

• When possible, decrease the number of questions in your pre-employment tests and be respectful of applicants' time.
• Don't ask questions that are not related to the job posting, and make your questions clear and to the point.

Lack of User Support

Pre-employment test interfaces often lack contact information for customer/user support. This means that users may simply drop out of the candidate pool because they don't understand a set of instructions or there is a technical issue with the test.

Solution:

• Provide email and/or telephone contact information for user support on every page of the test and job application.
• Review the information gathered for these interactions to learn ways to improve or streamline the test based on user feedback.

Lack of Reasonable Accommodations

Some job applicants with disabilities may need to request an accommodation to support their completion of the test. For example, certain users may request additional time to complete the test, or an alternative format. However, many tests do not provide a way to request these accommodations.

Solutions:

• Provide email and/or telephone contact information within your online testing applications and an accessible way for users to request an accommodation. This information should appear in an obvious place on every page of the test and job application.
• Make sure the person handling requests is trained on the subject of accommodations and aware of the rich resources of the Job Accommodation Network.