



BIC Digital Audiobook Best Practice

Accessibility Checklist

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This document is one of a set that Book Industry Communication has produced. Together, these provide a detailed standards and best practice overview of the digital audiobook supply chain.

BIC strongly recommends that you download and read the full set of documents. These currently comprise:

1. Supply Chain Diagram
2. Glossary, including
 - a. Terminology
 - b. Organisations
 - c. Roles and Responsibilities
3. Metadata Requirements
4. Good File Management
5. FAQs
6. EDItX Business Case
7. Sustainability Checklist
8. Accessibility Checklist

A single document including all of the above is also available.

We think of digital audiobooks as being accessible. They offer an alternative format for those who might have difficulty reading printed or ebooks.

What does accessible mean?

Accessibility refers to “ease of use”. That’s a generic definition. But if we look at accessibility from the perspective of those for whom digital audiobooks are essential rather than a ‘nice to have’, then accessibility has far greater impact.

The UK Association for Accessible Formats (UKAAF) defines a print disability as:

“a print impaired person means a person who has a physical or mental impairment which prevents the person from enjoying a copyright work to the same degree as a person who does not have that impairment... A person is not to be regarded as impaired by reason only of an impairment of visual function which can be improved, by the use of corrective lenses, to a level that is normally acceptable for reading without a special level or kind of light.

Source: Statutory Instrument No. 1384. The Copyright and Rights in Performances (Disability) Regulations 2014.”

So, while over 2,000,000 people in the UK live with sight loss (from visual impairment and partial sight to blindness) according to the RNIB, audiobooks are just as relevant to those with dyslexia or motor-difficulties too. The British Dyslexia Association estimates that 6 million people in the UK have dyslexia, although they may not have received a diagnosis.

For a global perspective, the World Bank states that “one billion people, or 15% of the world’s population, experience some form of disability...” and... “Barriers to full social and economic inclusion of persons with disabilities include... the unavailability of assistive devices and technologies...”.

Are all audiobooks accessible?

Not all audiobooks are created equal. Producing audiobooks that are truly accessible to those with a print impairment requires specialist skills and means reconsidering the whole lifecycle of the audiobook:

- a) How the original text should be interpreted during the audio recording. Different subject categories of book, different text layouts and illustrated titles all require specific approaches:
 - i. Fiction as well as non-fiction titles can have diagrams, footnotes, prefaces and forewords.
 - ii. The role of the narrator is particularly important in fiction, where reading is for pleasure and the right voice or voices matter.
 - iii. It may not be possible to transcribe the book directly into audio if the format won’t make sense. Think of graphic novels where the text relies heavily on referring to illustrations.
 - iv. Another factor to consider is how quickly a transcribed book will date. For example, in study guides the content is updated regularly and incorporates exercises and sample questions.
- b) The recording environment needs to ensure that extraneous sound is minimised.
- c) During the actual recording, the reader or voice actor will need to know how best to interpret text, footnotes, illustrations and quotes, to name but a few points.
- d) Does the technology involved in recording and producing the audio master files lend itself to accessibility?
- e) Is the technology used also compatible with devices and platforms?

- f) Does the product record for the digital audiobook include those metadata elements considered important for accessibility purposes?
- g) Think about how the consumer will navigate their way around the audiobook. How easy is navigation?
- h) Audiobook supplementary materials (in pdf format) should have a structure and navigation features that lend themselves to accessibility. Is text to speech functionality available?
- i) As the accessible audio market grows, consider whether demand, cost of production, rights holders and rights expiring are factors reducing the availability of the audiobook. Does the accessible audiobook have a shorter lifespan than the print or other versions?

Why does accessibility matter?

Publishers, other content creators, data aggregators, digital distributors, vendors, wholesalers, platforms, libraries, resellers, retailers and academic institutions all need to reflect on their role in the accessible digital audiobook market:

- a) It's a growing market.
- b) It should be inclusive and reflect the needs of all end consumers.
- c) It can enhance business reputation.
- d) It levels the playing field for those involved in the digital audiobook supply chain.
- e) It supports the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals that reference persons with disabilities.

Moreover, governments continue to legislate in terms of disability rights, equality and discrimination.

The upcoming European Accessibility Act will see the EU single market specifically legislate for products and services to be accessible to those with disabilities. Products covered by the act include e-readers, smartphones and other communications devices. Services covered include e-commerce, websites, mobile services and ebooks.

Although the UK has left the single market, those UK based organisations with a business presence in the EU will need to comply with the requirements of the act. From 28 June 2025, newly marketed products and services will be covered by the legislation.

BIC's mission is to make the UK and Ireland book supply chain more efficient and sustainable by developing standards and defining best practice. Our strategic focus is driven by our membership. Look out for further news on supply chain accessibility on our website and in our newsletters.

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