

Head First Web Design: a Learner's Companion to Accessible, Usable, Engaging Websites by Ethan Watrall & Jeff Siarto

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I was interested in learning more about accessibility, so the title jumped out at me, in addition to wanting to update my web design skills. This book is written in a humorous manner, and definitely isn't a stuffy, boring manual. I'm definitely not a RTFM type person, and this one was a pleasure to read.

The Head First learning philosophy involves presenting the material in a visual style, keeping the reader's attention, and repeating the important points so they stick in the reader's head. They use pictures to get the ideas across, and use a conversational style for the text.

The book begins with the design process, stressing the importance of designing with pen and paper first before touching any code. Information architecture is discussed, the process of organizing the website's content in a hierarchical manner. There are specific examples, and the reader is encouraged to work through the exercises to get a hands-on experience. These examples encourage thinking through the problems of redesigning a website. Each chapter features "Your web design toolkit", which quickly sums up the skills learned, plus bullet points at the end, the important points of the chapter to refresh your memory.

Following chapters include pre-production design, and working with the client to get the design they want, using storyboards. The layout and design chapter encourages knowing your audience, using surveys and server stats to target your message to your audience. The chapter on Designing with color was particularly helpful to me, discussing color as a design element, and the emotional impact it can have on the audience. The chapter on navigation gets deeper into site organization and information architecture. The accessibility chapter covers the basics of web accessibility, and discusses screen readers, tab order, Web Content Accessibility Guidelines, color, and images. Other chapters include writing for the web, keeping your website fresh, and the business of web design.

Overall, I enjoyed reading the book and working through the exercises. The conversational style and pictures helped reinforce the ideas behind each chapter, and I feel I got more out of this book than I would have with a dry, boring manual.