

Accessible Name and Description Computation 1.1

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Abstract

This document describes how *user agents* determine the *names* and *descriptions* of *accessible objects* from web content languages. This information is in turn exposed through *accessibility APIs* so that *assistive technologies* can identify these objects and present their names or descriptions to users.

Documenting the algorithm through which names and descriptions are to be determined promotes interoperable exposure of these properties among different accessibility APIs and helps to ensure that this information appears in a manner consistent with author intent.

The accessible name and description computation specification defines support that applies across multiple content technologies. This includes accessible name and description provided by general-purpose [WAI-ARIA](#) [WAI-ARIA] [roles](#), [states](#), and [properties](#) as well as features specific to individual content languages.

This document supersedes the accessible name and description guidance in the [WAI-ARIA 1.0 User Agent Implementation Guide](#) [WAI-ARIA-IMPLEMENTATION] [W3C](#) Recommendation. It is part of the [WAI-ARIA](#) suite described in the [WAI-ARIA Overview](#).

Status of This Document

This section describes the status of this document at the time of its publication. Other documents may supersede this document. A list of current [W3C](#) publications and the latest revision of this technical report can be found in the [W3C technical reports index](#) at <https://www.w3.org/TR/>.

This is the Accessible Name and Description Computation (Accname) 1.1 [W3C Recommendation](#) by the [Accessible Rich Internet Applications Working Group](#). The Working Group created a [Accname 1.1 Implementation Report](#) to demonstrate that the specification is implementable. A [history of changes to Accname 1.1](#) is available in the appendix.

To comment on this document, [file an issue in the \[W3C accname GitHub repository\]\(#\)](#). If this is not feasible, send email to public-aria@w3.org ([comment archive](#)). Comments received on the Accname 1.1 Recommendation cannot result in changes to this version of the specification, but may be addressed in errata or future versions of Accname. The Working Group may not make formal responses to comments but future work undertaken by the Working Group may address comments received on this document. In-progress updates to the technology may be viewed in the [publicly visible editors' draft](#).

This document was published by the [Accessible Rich Internet Applications Working Group](#) as a Recommendation.

Please see the Working Group's [implementation report](#).

This document has been reviewed by [W3C](#) Members, by software developers, and by other [W3C](#) groups and interested parties, and is endorsed by the Director as a [W3C](#) Recommendation. It is a stable document and may be used as reference material or cited from another document. [W3C](#)'s role in making the Recommendation is to draw attention to the specification and to promote its widespread deployment. This enhances the functionality and interoperability of the Web.

This document was produced by a group operating under the [W3C Patent Policy](#). [W3C](#) maintains a [public list of any patent disclosures](#) made in connection with the deliverables of the group; that page also includes instructions for disclosing a patent. An individual who has actual knowledge of a patent which the individual believes contains [Essential Claim\(s\)](#) must disclose the information in accordance with [section 6 of the \[W3C Patent Policy\]\(#\)](#).

This document is governed by the [1 February 2018 W3C Process Document](#).

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1. Introduction §

This section is non-normative.

User agents acquire information from the DOM [DOM] and create a parallel structure called the accessibility tree, made up of accessible objects. An accessible object provides information about its role, states, and properties. An example is an accessible object whose role is `menuItem`, is currently in an `enabled` state, with a `haspopup` property, indicating that it leads to a sub-menu.

The two properties of accessible objects described in this document are its accessible name and accessible description. The name is a short label that provides information about the purpose of the object. An example of an accessible name for a menu item is `New`, signifying that the menu item provides for the creation of new documents, windows, and so on.

The description is a short explanation that further clarifies the nature of the accessible object. It is not always necessary to provide a description if the name is sufficient, but it can help a user better understand the use of the object.

Accessibility APIs currently support flat, unstructured strings for accessible names and descriptions. The result of the name/description computation is thus a flat string.

The terms "accessible name" and "accessible description" are used to emphasize that they are properties of accessible objects as exposed by Accessibility APIs. However, they are frequently referred to hereafter as simply "name" and "description".

2. Conformance §

As well as sections marked as non-normative, all authoring guidelines, diagrams, examples, and notes in this specification are non-normative. Everything else in this specification is normative.

The key word **MUST** is to be interpreted as described in [RFC2119].

2.1 RFC-2119 Keywords §

RFC-2119 keywords are formatted in uppercase and contained in a `strong` element with `class="rfc2119"`. When the keywords shown above are used, but do not share this format, they do not convey formal information in the RFC 2119 sense, and are merely explanatory, i.e., informative. As much as possible, such usages are avoided in this specification.

2.2 Normative and Informative Sections §

The indication whether a section is normative or non-normative (informative) applies to the entire section including sub-sections.

Informative sections provide information useful to understanding the specification. Such sections may contain examples of recommended practice, but it is not required to follow such recommendations in order to conform to this specification.

3. Important Terms §

While some terms are defined in place, the following definitions are used throughout this document.

Accessibility API

Operating systems and other platforms provide a set of interfaces that expose information about [objects](#) and [events](#) to [assistive technologies](#). Assistive technologies use these interfaces to get information about and interact with those [widgets](#). Examples of accessibility APIs are [Microsoft Active Accessibility](#) [MSAA], [Microsoft User Interface Automation](#) [UI-AUTOMATION], MSAA with [UIA Express](#) [UIA-EXPRESS], the [Mac OS X Accessibility Protocol](#) [AXAPI], the [Linux/Unix Accessibility Toolkit](#) [ATK] and [Assistive Technology Service Provider Interface](#) [AT-SPI], and [IAccessible2](#) [IAccessible2].

Accessibility Tree

Tree of [accessible objects](#) that represents the structure of the user interface (UI). Each node in the accessibility tree represents an element in the UI as exposed through the [accessibility API](#); for example, a push button, a check box, or container.

Accessible Description

An accessible description provides additional information, related to an interface element, that complements the [accessible name](#). The accessible description might or might not be visually perceivable.

Accessible Name

The accessible name is the name of a user interface element. Each platform [accessibility API](#) provides the accessible name property. The value of the accessible name may be derived from a visible (e.g., the visible text on a button) or invisible (e.g., the text alternative that describes an icon) property of the user interface element. See related [accessible description](#).

A simple use for the accessible name property may be illustrated by an "OK" button. The text "OK" is the accessible name. When the button receives focus, assistive technologies may concatenate the platform's role description with the accessible name. For example, a screen reader may speak "push-button OK" or "OK button". The order of concatenation and specifics of the role description (e.g., "button", "push-button", "clickable button") are determined by platform [accessibility APIs](#) or [assistive technologies](#).

Accessible object

A [node](#) in the [accessibility tree](#) of a platform [accessibility API](#). Accessible objects expose various [states](#), [properties](#), and [events](#) for use by [assistive technologies](#). In the context of markup languages (e.g., HTML and SVG) in general, and of WAI-ARIA in particular, markup [elements](#) and their [attributes](#) are represented as accessible objects.

Assistive Technologies

Hardware and/or software that:

- relies on services provided by a [user agent](#) to retrieve and render Web content
- works with a user agent or web content itself through the use of APIs, and
- provides services beyond those offered by the user agent to facilitate user interaction with web content by people with disabilities

This definition may differ from that used in other documents.

Examples of assistive technologies that are important in the context of this document include the following:

- screen magnifiers, which are used to enlarge and improve the visual readability of rendered text and images;
- screen readers, which are most-often used to convey information through synthesized speech or a refreshable Braille display;
- text-to-speech software, which is used to convert text into synthetic speech;
- speech recognition software, which is used to allow spoken control and dictation;
- alternate input technologies (including head pointers, on-screen keyboards, single switches, and sip/puff devices), which are used to simulate the keyboard;
- alternate pointing devices, which are used to simulate mouse pointing and clicking.

Attribute

In this specification, attribute is used as it is in markup languages. Attributes are structural features added to *elements* to provide information about the *states* and *properties* of the *object* represented by the element.

Class

A set of instance *objects* that share similar characteristics.

Element

In this specification, element is used as it is in markup languages. Elements are the structural elements in markup language that contains the data profile for [objects](#).

Event

A programmatic message used to communicate discrete changes in the [state](#) of an [object](#) to other objects in a computational system. User input to a web page is commonly mediated through abstract events that describe the interaction and can provide notice of changes to the state of a document object. In some programming languages, events are more commonly known as notifications.

Hidden

Indicates that the [element](#) is not visible, [perceivable](#), or interactive to *any* user. An element is considered *hidden* if it or any one of its ancestor elements is not rendered or is explicitly hidden.

Informative

Content provided for information purposes and not required for conformance. Content required for conformance is referred to as [normative](#).

Node

Basic type of [object](#) in the DOM tree or [accessibility tree](#). DOM nodes are further specified as [Element](#) or [Text nodes](#), among other types. The nodes of an [accessibility tree](#) are [accessible objects](#).

Normative

Required for conformance. By contrast, content identified as [informative](#) or "non-normative" is not required for conformance.

Object

In the context of user interfaces, an item in the perceptual user experience, represented in markup languages by one or more [elements](#), and rendered by [user agents](#).

In the context of programming, the instantiation of one or more [classes](#) and interfaces which define the general characteristics of similar objects. An object in an [accessibility API](#) may represent one or more DOM objects. [Accessibility APIs](#) have defined interfaces that are distinct from DOM interfaces.

Perceivable

Presentable to users in ways they can sense. References in this document relate to [WCAG 2.1 Principle 1: Content must be perceivable](#) [WCAG21].

Property

[Attributes](#) that are essential to the nature of a given [object](#), or that represent a data value associated with the object. A change of a property may significantly impact the meaning or presentation of an object. Certain properties (for example, [aria-multiline](#)) are less likely to change than [states](#), but note that the frequency of change difference is not a rule. A few properties, such as [aria-activedescendant](#), [aria-valuenow](#), and [aria-valuetext](#) are expected to change often. See [clarification of states versus properties](#).

Role

Main indicator of type. This [semantic](#) association allows tools to present and support interaction with the object in a manner that is consistent with user expectations about other objects of that type.

Semantics

The meaning of something as understood by a human, defined in a way that computers can process a representation of an [object](#), such as [elements](#) and [attributes](#), and reliably represent the object in a way that various humans will achieve a mutually consistent understanding of the object.

State

A state is a dynamic [property](#) expressing characteristics of an [object](#) that may change in response to user action or automated processes. States do not affect the essential nature of the object, but represent data associated with the object or user interaction possibilities. See [clarification of states versus properties](#).

Text node

Type of DOM [node](#) that represents the textual content of an [attribute](#) or an [element](#). A Text node has no child nodes.

Tooltip attribute

Any host language attribute that would result in a user agent generating a tooltip such as in response to a mouse hover in desktop user agents.

User Agent

Any software that retrieves, renders and facilitates end user interaction with Web content. This definition may differ from that used in other documents.

Widget

Discrete user interface *object* with which the user can interact. Widgets range from simple objects that have one value or operation (e.g., check boxes and menu items), to complex objects that contain many managed sub-objects (e.g., trees and grids).

4. Name and Description §

The starting point of the name and description computation is a DOM *element*. The output is a flat, unstructured string that can be as simple as a single word, or a string of space-separated tokens. Examples include **Save** and **Reload from disk**.

An important factor is the *element*'s *role*, that determines which content contributes to the name string. Roles have a **nameFrom** RDF property, with two possible values:

author

name is generated from values provided by the author in explicit markup features such as the **aria-label** and **aria-labelledby** *attribute*, or a host language labeling mechanism, such as the **alt** or **title** *attribute* in HTML, or the **desc** *element* in SVG.

contents

name is generated from the *Text nodes* associated with the *element*. Although this may be allowed in addition to "author" in some *roles*, "content" is used only if higher priority "author" features are not provided. Priority is defined by the [accessible name and description computation](#) algorithm.

The [Accessible Rich Internet Applications \(WAI-ARIA\) 1.1](#) [WAI-ARIA] specification provides lists of roles that support [name from author](#) and [name from content](#).

4.1 Name Computation §

User agents **MUST** compute an *accessible name* using the rules outlined below in the section titled [Accessible Name and Description Computation](#).

4.2 Description Computation §

If **aria-describedby** is present, *user agents* **MUST** compute the accessible description by concatenating the text alternatives for elements referenced by an **aria-describedby** attribute on the current element. The text alternatives for the referenced elements are computed using a number of methods, outlined below in the section titled [Accessible Name and Description Computation](#).

4.3 Accessible Name and Description Computation §

The accessible name and description computation is used to generate both the *accessible name* and *accessible description*. There are different rules provided for several different types of *elements*, *nodes*, and combinations of markup. Text alternatives are built up, when appropriate, from all the relevant content contained within an *element*. This is accomplished via steps 2B and 2F, which are recursive, using the full set of rules to retrieve text from its own children or nodes it references.

The purpose of the computation is to create a *perceivable* label or description for alternative presentations, in the form of a flat string of space separated textual tokens.

4.3.1 Terminology §

Root node

The **DOM** *node* or *element* for which the text alternative is sought.

Current node

The **DOM** *node* currently traversed to compute the **root node**'s text equivalent. Initially, the **current node** is the **root node**, but at later stages is either some descendant of the **root node**, or another referenced node.

Flat string

A string of characters where all carriage returns, newlines, tabs, and form-feeds are replaced with a single space, and multiple spaces are reduced to a single space. The string contains only character data; it does not contain any markup.

Total accumulated text

The text equivalent computed up to, but not including the **current node**.

Accumulated text

Text accumulated at a step or sequence of steps described below. It is temporary storage for those steps.

Result

The text equivalent computed at one of the steps described below.

Append the result, without a space, to X

- If X is empty, copy the **result** to X.
- If X is non-empty, copy the **result** to the end of X.

Append the result, with a space, to X

- If X is empty, copy the **result** to X.
- If X is non-empty, add a space to the end of X and then copy the **result** to X after the space.

Prepend result, without a space, to X

- If X is empty, copy the **result** to X.
- If X is non-empty, copy the **result** to the start of X.

Prepend the result, with a space, to X

- If X is empty, copy the **result** to X.
- If X is non-empty, copy the **result** to the start of X, and add a space after the copy.

The text alternative for a given element is computed as follows:

1. Initialize: Set the **root node** to the given element, the **current node** to the **root node**, and the **total accumulated text** to the empty string ("").
2. Compute the text alternative for the **current node**:
 - A. If the **current node** is hidden and is not directly referenced by **aria-labelledby** or **aria-describedby**, nor directly referenced by a native host language text alternative element (e.g. **label** in HTML) or attribute, return the empty string.

► **Comment:**
 - B. Otherwise:
 - if computing a name, and the **current node** has an **aria-labelledby** attribute that contains at least one valid IDREF, and the **current node** is not already part of an **aria-labelledby** traversal, process its IDREFs in the order they occur:
 - or, if computing a description, and the **current node** has an **aria-describedby** attribute that contains at least one valid IDREF, and the **current node** is not already part of an **aria-describedby** traversal, process its IDREFs in the order they occur:
 - i. Set the **accumulated text** to the empty string.
 - ii. For each IDREF:
 - a. Set the **current node** to the node referenced by the IDREF.
 - b. Compute the text alternative of the **current node** beginning with step 2. Set the **result** to that text alternative.
 - c. Append the **result**, with a space, to the **accumulated text**.
 - iii. Return the **accumulated text**.
 - C. Otherwise, if computing a name, and if the **current node** has an **aria-label** attribute whose value is not the empty string, nor, when trimmed of white space, is not the empty string:
 - If traversal of the **current node** is due to recursion and the **current node** is an embedded control as defined in step 2E, ignore **aria-label** and skip to rule 2E.

- Otherwise, return the value of `aria-label`.

► **Example:**

D. Otherwise, if the `current node`'s native markup provides an `attribute` (e.g. `title`) or `element` (e.g. `HTML label`) that defines a text alternative, return that alternative in the form of a `flat string` as defined by the host language, unless the element is marked as presentational (`role="presentation"` or `role="none"`).

► **Comment:**

E. Otherwise, if the `current node` is a control embedded within the label (e.g. the `label` element in `HTML`, or any element directly referenced by `aria-labelledby`) for another `widget`, where the user can adjust the embedded control's value, then include the embedded control as part of the text alternative in the following manner:

- If the embedded control has role `textbox`, return its value.
- If the embedded control has role `button`, return the text alternative of the button.
- If the embedded control has role `combobox` or `listbox`, return the text alternative of the chosen `option`.
- If the embedded control has role `range` (e.g., a `spinbutton` or `slider`):
 - If the `aria-valuetext` property is present, return its value,
 - Otherwise, if the `aria-valuenow` property is present, return its value,
 - Otherwise, use the value as specified by a host language attribute.

► **Example:**

F. Otherwise, if the `current node`'s `role` allows `name from content`, or if the `current node` is referenced by `aria-labelledby`, `aria-describedby`, or is a native host language text alternative `element` (e.g. `label` in `HTML`), or is a descendant of a native host language text alternative `element`:

- Set the `accumulated text` to the empty string.
- Check for `CSS` generated textual content associated with the `current node` and include it in the `accumulated text`. The `CSS :before and :after` pseudo elements [CSS2] can provide textual content for `elements` that have a content model.
 - For `:before` pseudo elements, *User agents MUST* prepend `CSS` textual content, without a space, to the textual content of the `current node`.
 - For `:after` pseudo elements, *User agents MUST* append `CSS` textual content, without a space, to the textual content of the `current node`.
- For each child node of the `current node`:
 - Set the `current node` to the child node.
 - Compute the text alternative of the `current node` beginning with step 2. Set the `result` to that text alternative.
 - Append the `result` to the `accumulated text`.
- Return the `accumulated text`.

Important: Each [node](#) in the subtree is consulted only once. If text has been collected from a descendant, but is referenced by another IDREF in some descendant node, then that second, or subsequent, reference is not followed. This is done to avoid infinite loops.

► **Comment:**

G. Otherwise, if the **current node** is a [Text node](#), return its textual contents.

H. Otherwise, if the **current node** is a descendant of an element whose [Accessible Name](#) or [Accessible Description](#) is being computed, and contains descendants, proceed to 2F.i.

I. Otherwise, if the **current node** has a [Tooltip attribute](#), return its value.

► **Comment:**

Append the **result** of each step above, with a space, to the **total accumulated text**.

After all steps are completed, the **total accumulated text** is used as the [accessible name](#) or [accessible description](#) of the [element](#) that initiated the computation.

5. Accessible Name and Description Mapping §

Information concerning name and description accessibility API mappings, including relationships, such as labelled-by/label-for and described-by/description-for, is documented in the [Core Accessibility API Mappings](#) specification [CORE-AAM-1.1]. See the mapping table entries for [aria-label](#), [aria-labelledby](#), and [aria-describedby](#).

6. Appendices §

6.1 Change Log §

6.1.1 Substantive changes since the [last public working draft](#) §

- 10-April-2018: Treat listbox in the same fashion as combobox in step 2E, i.e. returning the text alternative of the chosen option.
- 5-March-2018: Remove mapping table content as it is redundant to what is in Core AAM.
- 9-August-2017: Added interim step to be able to process recursions of elements who are descendants of an element whose name/description is being computed
- 27-July-2017: Modify step 2F to handle elements that are descendants of text alternative elements in host languages.
- 08-June-2017: Remove list style information from the accessible name computation.

6.1.2 Other substantive changes since the [WAI-ARIA 1.0 User Agent Implementation Guide Recommendation](#) §

- 04-Apr-2016: Added new `UJA` `FullDescription` property for accessible description mapping.
- 05-Nov-2015: Removed all `MSAA+UJA` Express mappings.
- 10-Jun-2015: Moved special case of unlabeled `<img>` to `HTML-AAM`.
- 05-Jan-2015: Glossary entry for "value" removed; removed links to that entry.

6.2 Acknowledgments §

This section is non-normative.

The following people contributed to the development of this document.

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