



Map Design

Accessibility Quick Card

Follow these best practices to create maps that are well designed and accessible.

Use only necessary data and appropriate layout

Too much information can bury the map's story. Make sure a map is the best way to show the information. Choose the appropriate scale and page size for the map.

Keep fonts simple and appropriately sized

Use two to three font typefaces at most. In general, use sans serif fonts, such as Aptos or Arial. Use font size and emphasis (for example, different colors or bold text) to reflect the importance of features. More important features have larger font sizes. Descriptive text has a minimum font size of 12pt. Labels have a minimum font size of 6pt.

Use high-contrast colors

Design maps with color contrast in mind. Normal text to background ratio is 4.5:1 (for DHS, this standard is 7:1). For simple maps with a few colors, non-text elements ratios are 3:1. For maps that need several colors to convey essential information, use a combination of color values and styles. Validate colors with a color blindness simulator or test the design by printing it in grayscale.

Use consistent and uniform labels

Make labels consistent throughout and uniform in orientation and placement. Never overlap labels and do not exceed a 90° angle (not upside down). Use leader lines when necessary. Use appropriately sized halos to emphasize text on a busy background.

Limit patterns

Patterns can be visually distracting. Limit the use of patterns to one or two maximum. Avoid overlapping patterns. Never use dashed lines on top of an opaque pattern.

Keep line styles to a minimum

Too many line styles on one map can be confusing. Limit to no more than six or consider making multiple maps. When using the same color, vary line weights by at least 1pt. Use lighter shades of the same color to distinguish features on less important elements.

Utilize recognizable and consistent symbols

Imitate the real world whenever possible. Choose colors and symbols that people associate with the represented features. Be consistent across maps.

Include a legend

If the map contains any more than a few clearly labeled objects, include a legend to make sure viewers do not miss vital context.

Provide data in an alternative format

Some viewers may benefit from having visual elements explained in text. Add a title and description of the map's content for viewers who may not be able to interpret the information in a visual format.

Soften background images

Visually soften background and basemap images, such as aerial photos, with transparency or muted colors, to minimize visual clutter and confusion and make the map objects stand out.



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