Social Media: Emojis

What is it for?

Emojis add personality and tone to messages, but for a screen reader user, they are read aloud as literal text descriptions. For example, a simple smiley face is read out as 'Smiling face with open mouth'.

When emojis are used excessively or incorrectly, this feature can become overwhelming. If you string ten 'Clapping hands' emojis together, the user has to listen to the phrase 'Clapping hands' repeated ten times in a row. Similarly, if you use an emoji as a bullet point, the user hears the emoji name before every single item on the list, which distracts from the actual content.

How to support it

To keep your content fun but readable, follow these best practices:

- Use them sparingly. One or two emojis are usually enough to convey a mood.
- Put them at the end. Place emojis at the end of a sentence or paragraph so they do not interrupt the flow of reading.
- Never replace a word with an emoji (e.g. writing 'I want [pizza emoji]' instead of 'I want pizza'). This ensures the sentence still makes sense if the emoji description is different from what you expect.
- Check the emoji description. Use a site like Emojipedia to check exactly how your chosen emoji will be described to a blind user.

Useful links

- Emojipedia
- Accessible Social - Emoji
- The Good, The Bad, And The Ugly: Emojis and Accessibility