**How Screen Readers Read Content**

In general:

* Screen readers pause for:
  + periods
  + semi-colons
  + commas
  + question marks
  + exclamation points
  + paragraph endings
* Screen readers try to pronounce acronyms, if there are sufficient vowels/consonants to be pronounceable. Otherwise, they spell out the letters.
  + NASA is pronounced as a word.
  + SQL is pronounced “sequel” even though some humans say “S. Q. L.”
  + NSF is pronounced “N. S. F.”
  + URL is pronounced “U. R. L.”
* Users can pause screen readers and go back to repeat a word or passage. They can even have the screen reader read words letter by letter, with the screen reader shouting/emphasizing the uppercase letters.
* Screen readers read letters out loud as you type them, but say “star” or “asterisk” for password fields.
* Screen readers announce the page title (the <title> element in the HTML markup) when first loading a web page.
* Screen readers will read the [alternative text](http://webaim.org/techniques/alttext/) of images, if alt text is present. JAWS precedes the alternative text with the word “graphic.” If the image is a link, JAWS precedes the alternative text with “graphic link."
* Screen readers ignore images without alternative text and say nothing, but users can set their preferences to read the file name.
* If an image without alternative text is a link, screen readers will generally read the link destination (the href attribute in the HTML markup) or may read the image file name.
* Screen readers announce [headings and identify the heading level](http://webaim.org/techniques/semanticstructure/). NVDA and JAWS, for example, precede <h1> headings with “heading level 1.”
* Some screen readers announce the number of links on a page as soon as the page finishes loading in the browser.
* JAWS says “same page link” if the link destination is on the same page as the link itself and “visited link” for links that have been previously accessed.
* Screen readers in table navigation mode inform the user how many rows and columns are in a [data table](http://webaim.org/techniques/tables/data).
* Users can navigate in any direction from cell to cell in table navigation mode. If the table is marked up correctly, the screen reader will read the column and/or row heading as the user enters each new cell.
* Screen readers inform users when they have entered into a form. Users have the option to enter form navigation mode.
* Screen readers can be thrown off by homographs. For example, the word *read* can be pronounced “reed” or “red,” depending on the context: “I’m going to read the newspaper” vs. “I already read the newspaper.” A sentence such as “I read the newspaper every day” is ambiguous to all readers—humans and screen readers alike. The word *content* is another example: “I feel content” (meaning *satisfied*, with the emphasis on the second syllable [con-**TENT**]) vs. “WebAIM.org has some really awesome content” (meaning the *subject matter*, with the emphasis on the first syllable [**CON**-tent]).
* Screen readers may or may not read out punctuation, depending on the user’s verbosity setting. Ensure that your intended meaning will be conveyed in either case. To appreciate the value of punctuation, consider these sentences:
  + Let’s eat, grandpa!
  + I’d like to thank my parents, the pope, and Mother Teresa.
  + He finds inspiration in cooking, his children, and his cat.