GYATA TABIRI

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Use ARIA to explain behavior, not replace it

By Gyata Tabiri · Revised November 2, 2026

A disclosure can look finished while telling two different stories: the panel is open on screen, but the control still reports that it is closed. I care about that disagreement more than how many accessibility attributes the markup contains.

A name creates an expectation

Consider a button labelled “Show details.” Its name, keyboard behavior, and expanded state all need to describe the same interaction. Adding a role is only one part of that agreement. A native button gives us a useful starting point; a styled container requires us to recreate behavior the browser already provides.

Follow the change all the way through

When the panel opens, what happens to its exposed state? Where does focus remain? Can the person close it again? I want those questions settled together. Updating the appearance while leaving the state behind creates an interface that depends on how someone happens to access it.

More information can become more noise

A status announcement can help after an action, but announcing every minor update can interrupt the task. I would choose the information someone needs at that moment and test the timing. A longer announcement is not automatically a more helpful one.

The markup needs a behavioral review

Inspecting attributes is useful, then the control needs to be operated: keyboard, pointer, and relevant assistive technology. If the pattern is becoming difficult to explain, I would reconsider the interaction before adding more instructions around it.

The question I return to is simple: does the control keep the promise its name makes? That gives the review a purpose beyond checking that an attribute exists.

Read alongside: The promise in a link or button · Following a form through its response.

Reference: ARIA Authoring Practices.