

A WCET Closer Look at Creating Accessible Content

The goal of this closer look is to foster a deeper understanding of how to provide accessible content to ensure that all students, faculty, and staff, including those with disabilities, can access information.

Overview of Topic

Accessible content is prepared so individuals with disabilities can readily access the information. Unlike accommodations, which are provided reactively to meet the needs of specific individuals, accessibility is addressed proactively by designing, producing, and disseminating content with attention to how users with various disabilities will interact with it and barriers they may encounter. This proactive approach ensures that people with disabilities can access information in an equitable and independent manner.

Content to make accessible includes documents, presentation files, videos, web pages, emails, images, learning management system (LMS) content, and live presentations. Techniques include providing closed captions for videos, providing alternative text for images, and formatting text for assistive technology.

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Definitions

Accessibility

The degree to which materials, products, services, facilities, and environments are usable by as many people as possible. Visit [WebAIM's Introduction to Web Accessibility](#) to learn more about people with disabilities.

Accommodations

Reasonable accommodations are required by law to be provided for individuals with disabilities. Higher education institutions provide such accommodations for students, employees, and job applicants. Examples of accommodations include interpreters, Braille materials, and extended time for tests.

WCAG

[Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\)](#) detail how to make web content accessible. They articulate multiple levels of accessibility conformance and provide technical guidance for ensuring that web content is perceivable, operable, understandable, and robust. Visit the "[WCAG 2 Overview](#)" for more information.

Remediation

The process of making inaccessible content accessible according to WCAG guidelines. For example, PDF files often must be remediated so individuals with visual impairments can readily access the information.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

An approach to designing learning experiences with a wide variety of learners in mind, including those with disabilities. While [CAST UDL Guidelines](#) encompass more than accessible content, providing accessible content is consistent with UDL.

Main Takeaways

- 1. Use Accessible Technologies.** Use accessibility tools that evaluate content and suggest how to make it more accessible. Buy and use accessible technologies by reviewing VPATs. Identify efficient technology workflows to produce accessible content, such as creating and sharing videos with closed captions. Stay current with AI advancements that support accessibility. Don't just rely on tools, include people with disabilities during the development and remediation process.
- 2. Collaborate with Colleagues.** Collaborate with other units, such as the Center for Teaching and Learning, Online Learning, Student Disability Services, Human Resources, Information Technology, and Communications and Marketing to promote accessible content, share knowledge, and maximize impact. Form an institution-level group to develop a cohesive accessibility strategy or ask how to support its efforts. Collaborate with faculty to create user-friendly accessible templates for syllabi, assignments, and LMS content that meet their instructional needs.
- 3. Use Scalable Approaches.** While comprehensive accessibility training can engage committed colleagues, it may not scale. Engage more faculty and staff with short online tutorials and templates that help make creating accessible content a normal practice. Regularly incorporate accessibility tips in workshops and consultations on various teaching and learning topics. Foster colleagues' awareness by noting how anyone can be or become disabled at any time. Many people will benefit from or need accessible content during their lifetimes.
- 4. Proactively plan for a diverse student population.** UDL provides a framework you can use to optimize teaching and learning for everyone, in any discipline. Providing multiple means of engagement, representation, and action and expression means you can reach a broader audience of people with disabilities, assistive technology users, and people with different learning preferences.

Suggested Resources:

- [Voluntary Product Accessibility Template \(VPAT®\)](#)
- [Microsoft's accessibility checker](#)
- [Microsoft Accessibility Assistant](#)
- [Canvas's accessibility checker](#)
- [WAVE's web accessibility evaluation tool](#), available through [WAVE browser extensions](#), quickly evaluates web pages and LMS pages.
- [How To Revolutionize Web Accessibility With Artificial Intelligence](#)

DEI and Policy Considerations

Considerations for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Related to Accessibility

Proactively developing and curating accessible content for students, faculty, and staff fosters an inclusive environment because accessible content helps people with a variety of disabilities and other people. For example, techniques used to create accessible content can also help native speakers of other languages understand the information.

Several elements common across higher education courses are included in the table on the next page. This list is not exhaustive, but addressing these elements will assist people across the disability spectrum because [disability impacts all of us](#).

Considerations for Policy, Regulations, or Accreditation

In addition to fostering an inclusive environment, providing accessible content supports an institution's efforts to meet legal and policy requirements. While some requirements vary based on the type of institution, providing accessible content generally supports efforts to create non-discriminatory practices consistent with federal laws that prohibit disability-based discrimination. These federal laws govern how institutions of higher education treat students, employees, prospective employees, and members of the public. Additional state laws and policies may also apply.

ADA and ADAAA

The [Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\)](#) and [Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act \(ADAAA\)](#) are civil rights laws that prohibit discrimination based on disability. They ensure equal opportunity for individuals with disabilities in employment, government services, and other settings.

The Rehabilitation Act Of 1973

This law prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in programs receiving federal financial assistance, which may include private institutions in addition to public colleges and universities. References to Section 503, Section 504, and Section 508 refer to this law.

Higher education institutions, which have been subject to numerous accessibility lawsuits (see [Higher Ed Accessibility Lawsuits, Complaints, and Settlements](#)), must remain alert to changes in law and policy. Recently, the U.S. Department of Justice and U.S. Department of Education have signaled intentions to amend web accessibility rules under Title II of the ADA and amend regulations implementing Section 504 to strengthen rights for students with disabilities.

Do's and Don'ts in Accessible Design

Media/ Element	Do's	Don'ts
Video	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Provide closed captions. ✓ Provide scrolling, time-stamped transcripts. ✓ Good quality video, minimize distractions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Use visual distractions like flashing or strobing.
Audio Recordings (including podcasts)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Provide transcripts. ✓ Provide good quality audio. ✓ Minimize distractions. 	
Images	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Provide concise alternative text (alt text) that describes the information communicated by the image. ✓ Mark it as a decorative image if does not convey information. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Put text inside images
Hyperlinks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Place hyperlinks on words or phrases that describe the linked content (not "here" or "click here"). ✓ Ensure links open in a new tab within the learning management system. 	
Tables	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Avoid merged, split, or empty cells. ✓ Designate a header row and/or column. ✓ Set the header row to reappear on subsequent pages. ✓ Include a table description. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Nest one table inside another table.
Color	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Ensure sufficient contrast between text color and background color. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Use color-coding as the only way to indicate emphasis or meaning.
Text	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Use heading styles in documents, web pages, and LMS content to reflect the content's hierarchical structure. ✓ Use unique slide titles in presentations. ✓ Make PDF text searchable. ✓ Use plain language. ✓ Use sans serif fonts and black or dark gray as default color for text. 	
Interactive Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Use features that can be selected and navigated with the keyboard. 	

Real World Examples

Color Contrast

It is important to ensure that the colors used for design meet requirements for color and contrast. This means that your users will be able to perceive your content. Check out the WebAIM contrast checker to make sure you use the best combinations of colors. The examples below show one text box that does not have good color contrast, and one that does.

"The one argument for accessibility that doesn't get made nearly often enough is how extraordinarily better it makes some people's lives. How many opportunities do we have to dramatically improve people's lives just by doing our job a little better?" - Steve Krug

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Heading Format

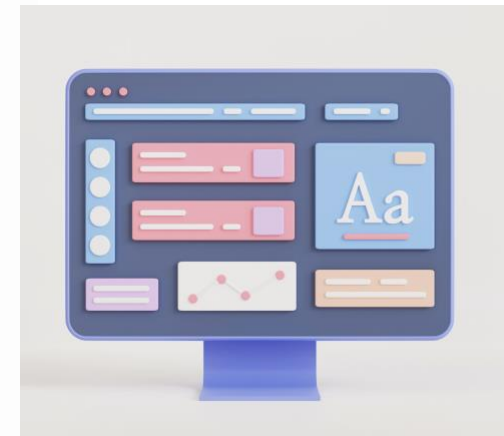
The hierarchical structure of sections and subsections of content in a web page, document, or LMS page must be designated through the consecutive use of heading styles so users of screen readers can quickly locate needed content.

Heading 1
Heading 2
Heading 3
Heading 3
Heading 2
Heading 2
Heading 3
Heading 4
Heading 4

Alternative Text

To ensure that everyone can use images on your site, you should include an alternative text (alt text) for each image. [W3C has an excellent tutorial on providing alternative text for images.](#)

For example, for the image below, the alternative text could be something like "an illustration of a computer monitor with text and media edit options."



Authors Information

**This resource was created by: WCET - the WICHE Cooperative for Educational Technologies
in partnership with: Teach Access and iDesign**

About Teach Access and iDesign

[Teach Access](#) and [iDesign](#) work on a national level to help higher education institutions provide accessible content by curating technical guidance and offering capacity-building resources.

Complementing its [Teach Access Faculty Grants](#) for infusing fundamentals of accessibility into course content, Teach Access supports higher education professionals developing curriculum to teach students about accessibility. For example, the resource [Teaching Accessibility Fundamental Concepts & Skills](#), is a document guiding faculty and students in how to address the accessibility skills gap and curate resources on creating accessible content. The [Teach Access Tutorial](#) provides developers and designers basic training on making accessible mobile apps and websites. Teach Access helps the higher education industry and institutions build capacity for creating accessible content with its [Accessibility Skills Hiring Toolkit](#).

Teach Access and iDesign created a [Curriculum Repository](#), with accessible templates and tips for creating accessible content to help faculty incorporate accessibility into their curriculum and increase students' understanding of digital accessibility.

iDesign has worked with over 100 institutions to create [high-quality online courses](#) and programs with attention to accessibility evaluation. Learning architects and quality reviewers provide faculty and administrators feedback throughout the course development process about increasing instructional materials accessibility and building accessible LMS content to support diverse student populations. Visit our "[Latest News](#)" for more information about our work.



About WCET

WCET is the leader in the practice, policy, & advocacy of digital learning in higher education. We are a member-driven organization that brings together colleges, universities, higher education organizations, and companies to collectively improve the quality and reach of digital learning programs.

For More Information



Visit the WCET Website

wcet.wiche.edu



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Join us in wctetMIX (our online community)

Learn more at wcet.wiche.edu/for-members/member-only-community-overview