

Accessible Course Design Tips

What You Can Do

As a course instructor you hold a pivotal role in ensuring that your online learning environment is accessible to all users, regardless of their learning needs. It is your content that students must access, assess, and respond to. Because Accessibility is such an important aspect of online teaching and learning, there are many resources available online about Accessible teaching and UDL (Universal Design for Learning, which can be found through simple web-searches.

Meeting Web Accessibility Standards

To get you started, the list below outlines some Accessibility best practices you can use to ensure you meet the learning needs of all your students. Most of the tips provided are web content standards set by the World Wide Web Consortium in the [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines](#).

- **Use a simple layout that does not organize content in tables or columns.** Simply organized material is easier for students to read and understand, is easier for assistive technology to interpret and present, and is easier for mobile and handheld devices to resize.
- **Use headings to communicate the relationships between sections.** Use Heading 1 for the title, Heading 2 for major sections, Heading 3 for subsections, etc. If headings are used correctly, screen reader users can quickly search a page by heading and participants with cognitive disabilities can understand how sections and content relate easier.
- **Make sure each heading is unique.** Do not use the same text for a Heading 3 (subsection) that you used for your Heading 1 at the start of the document. The same principle applies to file/item names. Make sure each file or item you create has a unique name.
- **Include a table of contents that links to each section and "Back to top" links** at the end of each section for longer documents.
- **Include alternative text descriptions (alt text) for all graphics.** Use double quotes (null) "" as the alt text if the object is a decorative element that does not add meaning. If the graphic is a link, begin the alt text "Link to." The HTML Editor in FOL automatically prompts you to include alt text when you insert an image.
- **Include detailed captions below tables and graphs.** These captions should explain what the objects convey, including important trends and statistics. This will help all students interpret the objects. For tables, include a summary element in the table tag that explains how the table is organized and make sure tables make sense when read from left to right. Screen readers have difficulty conveying information that reads from top to bottom.

KEY TAKEAWAY

WHY HTML?

It's recommend that you create HTML topics for your course content when possible. HTML code is easier for assistive technologies to interpret than application based files such as MS Word. It also allows you to link content topics together and link content to different tools in Learning Environment. See the *Using FOL Templates QRG* for more details.

- **Use the same text on-screen and in the alt text for links.** Make sure the text describes the action that will occur. Never use text such as “Click Here” as the link. Screen reader users often use a list of links to quickly navigate actions on a page, this is not possible if links are not descriptive.
- **Include text alternatives of multimedia content, such as audio or video files.** If you do not have the time to create a complete text alternative, include a descriptive label that summarizes the content.
- **Do not use blinking or flashing multimedia** as it can cause seizures in individuals with photosensitivity. Use animation when it helps convey a concept and not to draw attention to an unchanging object. Use a combination of size, color, and prominence to draw attention to objects.
- **Never use only color to convey meaning.** If you want to show how concepts and objects relate to each other use a combination of size, color, and text labels.
- **Ensure there is a strong contrast between the text and background colors** used in your course materials.
- **Use relative font sizes and make sure the text and page layout adjusts when font sizes are changed.** Users should not have to scroll horizontally.
- **If you use scanned PDF files, make sure they were scanned with optical character recognition (OCR)** so the text can be read by screen readers. Scan pages with multiple columns one column at a time so that OCR works correctly. Add bookmarks for major sections to make the content easier to navigate.

Additional Resources

- [Creating Accessible Documents in Microsoft Word](#),
- [Creating Accessible PDFs from Microsoft Word](#), and
- [Fixing Inaccessible PDFs Using Adobe Acrobat Pro](#) from U of Washington
- [PowerPoint Accessibility](#) from WebAIM
- [Creating Accessible Excel Documents](#) from Michigan State University
- [Seven Steps to Creating an Accessible Excel Spreadsheet](#) from dor.ca.gov



UDL and Student Supports

- [Universal Design for Learning](#) (UDL) from CAST.org
- [UDL resources](#) from Durham College's Centre for Academic and Faculty Enrichment (C.A.F.E.)
- [Supporting Your Students](#) - resources from Ryerson University