

WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY

Accessibility for Blackboard and Distance Learning Course Content

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Introduction

At The Western Kentucky University, we are committed to making courses available to all and have prepared this checklist of best practices to help faculty members think through and improve accessibility for courses.

- The course incorporates ADA standards and reflects conformance with institutional policy regarding accessibility in online and hybrid courses.
- Course pages and course materials provide equivalent alternatives to auditory and visual content.
- Course pages have links that are self-describing and meaningful.
- The course ensures screen readability.

Online teaching allows students with disabilities to participate in a myriad of courses without limitations imposed by time and physical locations. However, new technologies have brought with them modes of communication and media that can outstrip the abilities of screen readers, computer screen adaptations, and special keyboards to make content accessible.

We hope you find the guidelines helpful and invite you to send additional resources and suggestions to us.

Quality Measure 1

The course incorporates ADA standards and reflects conformance with institutional policy regarding accessibility in online and hybrid courses

Before classes begin

- The earlier students receive information about a course the easier it is for them to anticipate and plan for special needs that may arise.
- List your course's media/technology tools requirements and include the URL for WKU's ADA policy and/or guidelines.
- Provide links to descriptions of accommodation features for any additional third party tools.

Syllabus

- Consider your syllabus a prime communication vehicle to your students about expectations for the course and where to find help during the course
- Ensure that you have the WKU-required statement in the course syllabus that tells students how to gain access to WKU's disability services.
- Include the URL for accommodation for the Learning Management System (LMS). At WKU, this will usually be Blackboard, which has resources posted.

Technology Support

- Navigation throughout the online components of the course is logical, consistent, and efficient.
- Students can readily access the technologies required in the course.
- The course technologies are current.
- The course instructions articulate or link to a clear description of the technical support offered and how to access it.
- Course instructions articulate or link to the institution's accessibility policies and services.
- Course instructions articulate or link to an explanation of how the institution's student support services can help students succeed and how students can access the services.
- The course employs accessible technologies and provides guidance on how to obtain accommodation.

Quality Measure 2

Course pages and course materials provide equivalent alternatives to auditory and visual content

Images

This includes charts, graphs, mathematical/scientific notation, photos (any element saved in a graphical format)

Use ALT (Alternative Text) tags on all visual elements, whether in MS Word, PowerPoint, on the LMS screen, within a test or email, or elsewhere. The purpose of ALT text is to explain the meaning of an image when someone cannot view the image directly.

Extended text descriptions may be needed for complex images. Visit the website <http://webdesign.about.com/> for more information on writing good ALT tags

Audio or video files

Provide captioning or a written transcript as an alternative to non-text components of online pages, whether in Blackboard or another web-based platform. Text transcripts can be attached as Word or PDF documents alongside the audio/video. Screen capture programs, like Camtasia, allow you to create captioning within visual segments.

Microsoft Word/Excel/PowerPoint Documents

Screen reader users have very limited page access. They will not be able to navigate a page to locate a desired section of content unless the content creator has authored pages following certain markup guidelines and best practices.

Use preset “Styles” for marking up headers and lists in your document. Styles give documents a structure of headings that can be read by a screen reader. Elements like ‘heading 1’ or ‘title’ when used consistently and read by a screen reader, orient students to where they are in a text-based piece.

If you want to use material from a Word file, then either upload the document as is, convert it to a PDF file (and see PDF files below), or recreate it as an HTML file. Avoid the “Save as Web” file option in Word, as it creates inaccessible files. When data is displayed in tables, provide column and row titles.

When creating lists, use ordered lists so that items are numbered, or include the item number within your text.

If you include links, provide a meaningful name for the hyperlink. Either use an Insert Hyperlink function to replace the URL with a textual name (e.g. Western Kentucky University in place of <http://www.wku.edu>) or provide both the title and the hyperlink.

If you use acronyms, in Word 2010 you can use the Acronym tool to create a list for screen readers. Refer to <http://www.webaim.org> or Microsoft help for more information on creating accessible Word files.

For files created in the 2010 version of Word, Excel, and PowerPoint, check your documents in the Accessibility Checker.

If using a file compression program, like iSpring, provide a written transcript.

PDF (portable document files)

Scanned documents that become PDFs are NOT accessible—they are treated like images. PDFs must be made accessible when they are created, through the use of tags. PDF tags provide a hidden, structured, and textual representation of the PDF content that is presented to screen readers. The tags exist for accessibility purposes only and have no visible effect on the PDF file

Use the option to add tags appropriate to your version of Word or Excel for labels and to identify images. Remember that the source document, usually from MS Word, must be accessible before being converted to PDF.

When in doubt about whether or not a PDF is needed, create a text-only or HTML version of the content.

Office 2000-2003 users must have Acrobat Professional installed, as well as the add-in Office 2007 users must have either Acrobat Professional or the Microsoft PDF add-in installed. Office 2010 users can create tagged PDF files natively or with the Adobe add-in. Visit the Adobe website for creating accessible PDF files from Microsoft Word.

Blackboard

Use “Style” settings for text in the Blackboard WYSIWYG editor.

When copying text from a program like MS Word, it is best to remove formatting by first copying and pasting the text through a rich text editor like Notepad.

Complete “Alt text” options for images and hyperlinks.

If you link to external websites, consider whether or not those sites are designed with accessibility in mind. Visit the Blackboard Accessibility website for any extra information.

Be aware of anyone in your course who may have trouble accessing the content, and provide appropriate visual and audio content in an alternative form

When using audio, encourage students to identify themselves whenever they speak by microphone.

Tests and Quizzes

Apply the same accessibility best practices used in other parts of your course.

Account for any visuals or video included within text questions.

Format text using preset Styles, as you do for other text elements in your course.

Tables

Include an ALT tag for the table through Table Properties.

Use true columns in Word/Excel document, not tables or columns created by hand with the Tab key.

Use the <th> element for table headers in HTML.

See other hints on this checklist for using color and images

Flash-based content

Very few tools will "out-of-the-box" produce Flash content that is fully accessible to both the keyboard alone and to a screen reader. One will find that the majority of Flash content on the web has not been produced with accessibility in mind—a situation that commonly confronts students with disabilities. So:

- Provide alternative forms of presenting the content, such as a written transcript.
- If you are creating Flash elements from scratch, consult the Adobe website.

Quality Measure 3

Course pages have links that are self-describing and meaningful

Navigational links in Blackboard courses and other websites

If your page has links, make sure there is text that gives a meaningful description of what students will find at the linked site.

Use the text rather than the buttons options for menu design in Blackboard.

If your page includes redirects or timed actions (such as clicking OK to continue being logged in), then be sure to provide adequate response time for users of screen readers or users with mobility impairments. In some cases, a redirect should be replaced with a static page containing a link.

Quality Measure 4

The course ensures screen readability.

Consistency in Web/Blackboard layout, course organization, and terminology are important in making course elements accessible and easy to find, for all students.

- For HTML table-based layouts, incorporate appropriate headers and data cell designations.
- If you use motion or animation, make sure that it's necessary.
- Avoid having text or visuals flicker, as flickering animations may trigger epileptic seizures.
- Use color combinations that provide sufficient contrast between foreground and background.
- Keep type styles, sizes, and orientations consistent throughout your online course pages. This is best accomplished by using preset Styles in Blackboard or alternate Webpage design tool.
- Basic HTML tips - Use appropriate <h> tags to structure your content into sections and be as concise as possible.
- Be aware that screen readers pronounce acronyms and abbreviations as single words.

Accessibility Checklist

Checkpoint	Yes/No/NA
In General (Priority 1)	
1.1 Provide a text equivalent for every non-text element (e.g., via "alt", "longdesc", or in element content). This includes: images, graphical representations of text (including symbols), image map regions, animations (e.g., animated GIFs), applets and programmatic objects, ascii art, frames, scripts, images used as list bullets, spacers, graphical buttons, sounds (played with or without user interaction), stand-alone audio files, audio tracks of video, and video.	
2.1 Ensure that all information conveyed with color is also available without color, for example from context or markup.	
4.1 Clearly identify changes in the natural language of a document's text and any text equivalents (e.g., captions).	
6.1 Organize documents so they may be read without style sheets. For example, when an HTML document is rendered without associated style sheets, it must still be possible to read the document.	
6.2 Ensure that equivalents for dynamic content are updated when the dynamic content changes.	
7.1 Until user agents allow users to control flickering, avoid causing the screen to flicker.	
14.1 Use the clearest and simplest language appropriate for a site's content.	
And if you use images and image maps (Priority 1)	
1.2 Provide redundant text links for each active region of a server-side image map.	
9.1 Provide client-side image maps instead of server-side image maps except where the regions cannot be defined with an available geometric shape.	
And if you use tables (Priority 1)	
5.1 For data tables, identify row and column headers.	
5.2 For data tables that have two or more logical levels of row or column headers, use markup to associate data cells and header cells.	
And if you use frames (Priority 1)	
12.1 Title each frame to facilitate frame identification and navigation.	
And if you use applets and scripts (Priority 1)	
6.3 Ensure that pages are usable when scripts, applets, or other programmatic objects are turned off or not supported. If this is not possible, provide equivalent information on an alternative accessible page.	
And if you use multimedia (Priority 1)	
1.3 Until user agents can automatically read aloud the text equivalent of a visual track, provide an auditory description of the important information of the visual track of a multimedia presentation.	
1.4 For any time-based multimedia presentation (e.g., a movie or animation), synchronize equivalent alternatives (e.g., captions or auditory descriptions of the visual track) with the presentation.	
And if all else fails (Priority 1)	
11.4 If, after best efforts, you cannot create an accessible page, provide a link to an alternative page that uses W3C technologies, is accessible, has equivalent information (or functionality), and is updated as often as the inaccessible (original) page.	