

Navigating Accessibility In Online Instruction

This guidance document serves two purposes. One is to inform you of the most common accessibility issues educators face in delivering digital instruction to all students, including students who are blind/visually impaired. The second purpose provides resources specifically designed to help educators and schools deliver equitable instruction for students who are blind or visually impaired.

Alternative Text (Alt Text) and Screen Reader

Alt Text is the most commonly used solution to providing access to diverse learners, but there are some related challenges that instructors should be mindful of and work to mitigate. Alt text is invisible text that is used to describe images and graphs and is read to people who are blind or visually impaired. A screen reader converts text and images to speech and is primarily used by people with visual impairments.



For example, look at this painting of George Washington crossing the Delaware. Without alt text the screen reader can not read the image. In order to provide the best information about an image, consider the purpose in using it in the first place. If the image is filler, there is no need for a long description. For instance, if this picture is only to tell the learner that the lesson will be discussing George Washington generally, the alt text "George Washington crossing the Delaware." is sufficient.

If the image is being used for more in-depth learning such as as an example about the effects of climate on human geography or historic events, then something more detailed such as "Washington and his men crossing the frozen Delaware while bundled to brace against the cold wind." is more appropriate but still within the capacity of screen readers.

If the lesson were on the artistic meaning of the picture, alt text would necessarily address the lighting in the artwork as well as highlight the colors and what they might mean. This would be difficult in the tight constraints of an alt text. In this case, best practice is to use "Image described in text below." Then, add a description to the body of the page.

Note: Many programs allow developers to add unlimited text to the alt text box; however, screen readers stop reading after about 140 characters. In order to provide the best information about an image, consider the purpose in using it in the first place.

Headings

Both users with sight and without use headings to skim pages. It's important to use headings to show the structure of the page or document. Headings follow a natural nesting order: H1 headings precede H2 headings. H3 headings follow H2 headings. H1 headings should only be used for the title of a document. H2 headings are for the main headings. Headings should only be used for headings.

See the nested headings on this college syllabus:

- **Heading 1: ENGL 1301 Course Syllabus**
 - **Heading 2: Instructor Information**
 - **Heading 2: Basic Course Information**
 - **Heading 3: Course Prerequisites**
 - **Heading 3: Course Description**
 - **Heading 3: Student Learning Outcomes**

Note: Do not use H1 or H2 to make text BIG or bold. Instead, use caps or the bold formatting option.

External Links

When providing external links, human-readable text is always better. Avoid "Click here" links. They do not tell users where they might be going.

For more guidance: The Accessible Digital Office Document (ADOD) Project is a good resource to learn about how to make accessible word processing documents, spreadsheets, presentations, and PDFs. For example, users with sight as well as screen reader users can easily read the text and link:

<https://adod.idrc.ocadu.ca/>

Download Links

If a link is to materials that the user will download, tell them! It might be a mild annoyance to download something that users were not expecting; however, for a user with a disability, it could be problematic.

In this example it is clear that the user will download a document and that the document will be a PDF:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1D8k3aGvBaD-Spg4PL06KRGKz8OzVFWkG/view?usp=sharing/pdf>

Audio Descriptions

Close your eyes and listen to the video below. Can you tell what's happening?

<https://youtu.be/-WdC4DaYleQ>

Now, close your eyes and listen to this video. Is it easier to follow the story?

https://youtu.be/O7j4_aP8dWA

Not all videos need audio descriptions. Have you watched LinkedIn Learning training? Usually, the narrator is doing a great job explaining what is happening and a second video with audio descriptions is unnecessary.

Watch the 3Play Media webinar Introduction to Audio Description for more information:

www.3playmedia.com/resources/recorded-webinars/intro-to-audio-description/

General Accessibility Resources

- Accessibility for Teams: <https://accessibility.digital.gov/>
- WebAIM: <https://webaim.org/>
- WCAG Guidelines: <https://www.w3.org/WAI/standards-guidelines/wcag/>
- Centre for Excellence in Universal Design: <http://universaldesign.ie/What-is-Universal-Design/>
- National Center for Accessible Media:
http://ncam.wgbh.org/invent_build/web_multimedia/accessible-digital-media-guide/guideline-h-multimedia
- TED Talk When We Design for Disability, We All Benefit:
<https://www.ted.com/talks/>
- 3Play Media has many recorded webinars available. They offer one free webinar each month on topics ranging from captioning to audio description to legal information. <https://www.3playmedia.com/resources/recorded-webinars/>
- Deque is another accessibility focused company with great articles and free webinars. <https://www.deque.com/news-resources/accessibility-webinars/>

PowerPoint Resources

- Quick reference guide: https://assets.knowbility.org/accessu/2019/presentations/Zapata-Michael-Accessible_PowerPoint_Presentations-Quick_Reference_Guide.pdf
- Presentation: https://knowbility.org/assets/accessu/2018/presentations/Zapata-Mike-Accessill_benefit

Resources for Adapting Educational Materials

- The Paths to Literacy project is a collaboration between Perkins School for the Blind and TSBVI. The first link provides information on adapting worksheets, and the second is on creating science accommodations for students with visual impairments.
 - <https://www.pathstoliteracy.org/blog/enabling-access-tips-adapting-worksheets-students-visual-impairments>
 - <https://www.pathstoliteracy.org/blog/tips-creating-accommodations-science-materials-students-visual-impairments>
- The Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI) can emboss and ship supplementary reading materials in braille from their library. Titles available in their library can be found at <https://tsbvi.booksys.net/opac/tsb/#menuHome>. Please contact Renee Toy, TSBVI's librarian, at toyre@tsbvi.edu to order materials or for more information.
- TSBVI Accessibility Coordinator, Jim Allan shows you how to add the essential structure to make a Word document accessible; one that can be read and searched with a screen reader, such as JAWS, converted into braille or a PDF, or posted to the web in html format. Watch this free [webinar](#) from the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired.

Resources for Braille

- Districts may need instructional materials in braille and may not have access to a transcriber or braille equipment. TEA has contracts with several braille producers for state-adopted instructional materials. Contact Lea Ann Lee at leaann.lee@tea.texas.gov to request materials in a braille format. In the email, please include the ISBN, title, publisher's name, and subject area for each of the items to be created in braille.
- Districts with students that have access to refreshable braille displays may request braille-ready-format (BRF) files from [Bookshare](#). For state-adopted BRF files, please contact Lea Ann Lee.