

Blind & Visually Impaired Accessibility Checklist

This checklist of accessibility features will greatly improve access to coursework and course material for students who are blind or visually impaired.

Use Accessible Software Headings Styles

Quality heading structures facilitate navigation for screen reader users. With keyboard strokes, a screen reader user can navigate to specific headings (and skip other content) when desired. Heading Styles should be listed hierarchically (Heading 1, Heading 2 to Heading 3 and so forth). Headings Styles are easily inserted into Word, Blackboard, Softchalk and other accessible software. Screen readers cannot navigate visual page elements (font, size, bold, etc.), unless coded within a Heading Style.

Use Descriptive Hyperlinks

Do not hyperlink to the direct URL of a website page, which a screen reader will attempt to read as a word. Use descriptive hyperlink text that makes sense and informs all users about link content.

Do Not Link to the Words "Click Here"

Do not write "click here" or any other non-specific phrases when linking to websites or downloadable files. A screen reader user can navigate with keystrokes between links, so repeatedly navigating to the words, "click here" disrupts understanding and is not accessible content for a screen reader user.

Improve Descriptive Hyperlinks with File Formats

Use descriptive text for links and indicate the file type in parenthesis. For example, at end of link to a PDF file include (PDF) in parenthesis. Some screen reader products state the word, "link" to a user, while others do not. Adding (PDF) to the description enables all users to understand that the link is downloadable and not to another webpage.

Use Readable PDFs

Make sure all PDFs are readable by a screen reader. An easy way to determine "readability" is to search for a word in the document. Scanned pages are saved as images and are not searchable or screen readable. A scanned article, book chapter, form, etc. will not be accessible to a screen reader user unless it is scanned with an OCR (optical character recognition software). Using an OCR is the only way to scan printed text and save as digital text.

Use Alternative Text for Images

Alternative text (alt text) is descriptive text that provides meaning and information about the content in the image to a screen reader user. This text is accessible only by a screen reader (will not be seen by others) and is especially important if the content is not described in the body of the page.

Decision Making about Alt Text (Aesthetic Image or Not)

Instructors and technologists need to consider if alternative text improves content understanding or is only a visual design feature. Aesthetic or decorative images should write alt=" " as the Alt text so the screen reader knows to ignore it. If the Alt text for the image is left blank, a screen reader will likely read the file name which is usually meaningless and confusing (i.e. IMG 34549). For best practices and information about whether an image is aesthetic or not, review specific examples created by web accessibility in mind (WebAIM).

Universal Design re: Images

Universal design* of online coursework is greatly encouraged, because multiple means of representation (i.e. images, video) in addition to text based content provides alternative access and understanding for different types of learners. Therefore, we strongly encourage using purposeful images and video in online coursework. Effective use and decision making around alternative (alt text) for images and video is critical for screen reader users. [*Universal Design for Learning in Higher Education, CAST]

Fonts and Colors

Choose simple, easy to read font (Arial, Times, Tahoma, Veranda, etc.)

Don't use appearance of font (color, shape, placement) as the only way to convey meaning.

Use sufficient color contrast between text and background colors.

Be aware that red and green often appear gray for people who are colorblind.