7 Steps to Accessibility

By law, instructors at the university level must provide content accessible to all. All universities must work to meet the guidelines set forth by the ADA, meaning that creating accessible content is required in online courses. This set of steps helps creators maintain WCAG 2.1 Level AA accessibility guidelines.

As educators, we should take a learner-centered approach to creating our educational content. Inclusive design welcomes all learners in terms of creating understanding, freeing assumptions, and showing empathy. Courses are designed best when all learners have the tools they need to be successful. **There are seven easy steps to follow to ensure your online classroom is accessible to all.**

1

Headings

When creating content on the Canvas course page it is important to use headings provided by the rich content editor (RCE). Headings create organization of content within a page and allow for screen-readers and sighted individuals to scan the page content seamlessly.

- Always use a heading when starting a new section.
- Never use a standalone heading with no paragraph text below it.
- Avoid using headings simply based on looks. Follow the rank of headings for formatting.
- Be consistent with heading usage and formatting.

2

Alt Tags

Alt Text or Alt Tag is a written (short and concise) description of non-text content on web pages. Alt Tags are essential for accessibility as the screen reader will read the description in place of an image and display the description if the image is not loading in the browser.

- Exclude the phrase "an image of" or "a picture of" as the screen reader will indicate it's an image.
- Remove the file type extension from the alt text (.jpg, .png, etc.).
- Consider personal identifiers and positional information (a glimpse of, a partial view, etc.).
- Keep Alt Text less than 20 words or 120 characters.
- Ensure information in the Alt Tag is not redundant for the user.

3

Descriptive Links

A screen-reader will read each individual letter, number, and symbol as it appears on screen. Often URL links are a jumble of these characters that make little sense to the viewer. Links can also be rather long, so listening to an entire link of jumbled letters is not a pleasant experience to users. To avoid confusion and disengagement, stray away from posting raw URL links and use descriptive links instead.

- Create a descriptive link by providing a descriptive phrase of what the link is tied to.
- Keep descriptive links short, but informative.
- Avoid linking ambiguous phrases such as "click here" or "read this" as these do not convey where the hyperlink will take the user.

4 Color

Text and color background (foreground) need to have sufficient color contrast. Learners who are legally blind, visually impaired, or have color vision deficiency may not be able to identify text in color, emphasized text, or highlighted portions of the text.

- Using color as the only way to convey meaning is insufficient to meet accessibility standards.
- Color can be used to convey meaning as long as that meaning is also indicated in some other way, such as using italics, bold, a symbol, an identifier, etc.
- Use the Canvas Accessibility Checker to determine if sufficient contrast is present.

5 Lists

A list is simply an itemization if related items, often categorized as ordered or unordered. An ordered list may have numerical or alphabetical hierarchy. An unordered list does not have hierarchy and are often seen as bulleted lists. To ensure accessibility, educators should avoid fake lists. A fake list is created manually by using the return key to create a new row or by adding numbers or letters manually. It is best not to use fake lists as a screen reader will not recognize or announce the list or the items in it.

- Always create lists in the RCE "list tool."

6 Tables

Tables are used to organize complex data. To create accessible content, it is best to avoid using tables for styling purposes or to format content. Instead, use tables to help break up data by arranging it into rows and columns. Relying on visual cues of the table is not sufficient for a table to be accessible.

- Do not use tables to format content or style images.
- Add table scope to identify the purpose of the cell.
- Use a header row to describe the content in the cells directly below it.
- Header columns should be present to describe the rows directly to the right of it.
- Avoid manually styled tables with added color of highlighted cells.

7 Closed Captions

Audio and video files must be accompanied by complete and accurate transcripts and closed captioning containing proper punctuation, capitalization, and word matching. Captions provide dialogue or a narrative, and audio descriptions provide a non-verbal explanation of what's happening on the screen.

- Avoid using open captions, or those that are burned into the video and cannot be turned off.
- Provide instructions ahead of the video on where to access them.
- Strive to make captions accurate by reviewing them before posting video or audio files.

Reference: Stojic-Ito, S. (2023, August 23). *Why Accessibility Matters in Course Design.* Instructure. https://www.instructure.com/resources/blog/why-accessibility-matters-course-design