Accessible Course Content

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Table of Contents

Section 1: Why accessibility?

Watch [Section 1 Short Video](#) or read content below.

Accessibility ensures that your excellent course content is designed to work for all students, and across the various hardware, software, assistive technologies, and abilities that students bring to your course. Accessibility lends credibility to our values of inclusivity and openness by ensuring that these values show up in practice.

When I first encountered accessibility, I found it daunting. You mean all my hacks for making my word documents look pretty are wrong? You mean I have to add an extra line of text in for *every* image I use? What about all the potential rules that I can't possibly keep track of? Am I breaking the law?

But if we really step back and look at what accessibility is all about, it's actually simpler than we might imagine. First, a lot of [the programs you already use have some excellent tools built in](#) to check for accessibility. Secondly, accessibility simply involves a slight shift in thinking about how we can help facilitate better human and computer interactions **by being *more human*.**

And you don't have to be a software engineer to do that. **As scholars in the humanities, you excel at this practice already.** With a few overarching principles in your head, and a few tools, you'll find that a) you either already do many of these practices or b) it comes as second nature with a bit of practice.

CSU Resources

We're all still learning, and fortunately [CSU does have many resources](#) to help us out. I've found the content on the [Accessibility by Design](#) website informative, and I've tried to help curate some additional resources here.

You can also contact the [Assistive Technology Resource Center](#) with specific questions. They might redirect you to the appropriate IT coordinator for your inquiry, but they're here to help us.

Legal & Ethical Imperatives

As an institution that receives federal and state funding, it's part of our land-grant mission to ensure that we respect the civil rights of students with disabilities. More than reading policy bullet points, though, I found [CSU's Video Stories of Inclusive Technology](#) compelling. This was put together by the Assistive Technology Resource Center and the Student Disability Center.

From CSU's Policy on Accessible Content:

"*Accessible* refers to making electronic and information technology (EIT) equally accessible to and independently usable by individuals with disabilities, so that they are able to acquire the same information, engage in the same interactions, and enjoy the same services as individuals without disabilities, with substantially equivalent ease of use, using reasonable accommodations when necessary. It does not mean that the means of access must be identical, but that an equally effective means of access is afforded."

Read the [CSU Policy: Accessibility of Electronic Information and Technologies](#) for more information.

Ethics as Humanities Scholars

Perhaps more than these legal imperatives, though, **as humanities scholars, we value diversity, inclusivity, and openness**. When we ensure accessible content, we participate in the change we hope we're creating with our course content. Accessibility is powerful and empowers all our students.

Accessible Content Means Usable Content for *Everyone*

Fortunately, accessible content also ensures *usable* content. If you make your content more accessible for students who require the use of assistive technologies, you're also creating content that's easier to navigate for all kinds of students experiencing any of the following:

- Limited internet access (low-bandwidth on home computers)
- Cell-phone or tablet users
- Students who get stressed out navigating Canvas

With that, accessible content brings all content up to better standards. For more on this, watch Elise Roy's TedTalk "When We Design for Disability, We All Benefit."

Section 2: Broad Themes to Inform Practice

Watch Section 2 Short Video or read content below.

This section covers the broad themes or heuristics to keep in mind as you revise or create course content. This is not an exhaustive list, but these recommendations are intended to convey some of the foundational components of accessible design; if we can get this type of thinking into our heads, we will enhance our capacity for creating accessible course content.

Four core principles that inform accessible content:

Accessible content is content that is:

- **Perceivable**: people can see the content and hear it
- **Operable**: people can navigate the content by mouse, typing, or by voice
- **Understandable:** precise language and clear design
- **Robust:** people can use assistive technologies and access the content across platforms

These principles come from the World Wide Web Consortium.

Design Content that Works with Assistive Technologies

As we discuss accessibility with Canvas or our course documents, one of the most crucial questions we can ask is: **How will my content be mediated and experienced? How will students using assistive technologies be able to access my content?**

- Screen Readers
- Keyboard Inputs
- Navigating by Voice
- Transcripts for Audio/Video

View examples of [people using these tools](#) -- this, perhaps more than anything here, can help you see how these technologies work.

Another way I would encourage you to enhance your understanding of accessibility is **by exploring the tools that are on your own computer.**

- [Accessibility on Mac](#)
- [Accessibility on Windows](#)
- [Accessibility on Chromebook](#)

If you've never done this, I think by **using your computers with those tools for just 10-15 minutes** or more you can at least gain some understanding of how those features work. By no means can you replicate the experience that a student might have, but you can at least get a sense of what's possible.

Hierarchical content

Designing content that works with assistive technologies doesn't have to require computer wizardry -- it mostly comes down to hierarchical content. Meaning, do your headings logically break up the page, and are they used in the appropriate order? [Read more in the How Tos about Content Hierarchy.](#)

Clear Directions and Clear Content

Links describe where they lead

For instance use: "hook's article titled 'Love as the Practice of Freedom'" rather than "click here" or "read more" or "[https://a-super-long-url.com/with-lots-of-numbers/123456](#)"

Using document elements as intended

For instance, sometimes we use tables to organize content and add spacing, but without proper attention to how screen readers use tables, we can inadvertently complicate our documents. [Watch this clip of University of San Francisco IT Director Mark Sutton](#), who is blind, explaining how screen readers encounter content.

Text is easily identifiable in context.

As an example: avoid using color alone to convey meaning. Some users and screen readers would struggle to translate this nuance without additional context or description.

Additionally, ensure that scanned PDFs are accessible; ensure that copies don't "squish" or warp text around the edges. I've found that giving students access to the source document via a Google Document or Word document empowers them to access the text as needed -- a PDF, unless extra attention is given to ensure accessibility, can introduce access barriers. That said, this advice could have implications for copyright that are well out of the scope of my discussion here.

Alternative Descriptions for Images

Ensure that images have descriptive alternative text. In Canvas, you can do this when you upload a photo. ([See UDOTIT tools or Resources Below](#)) The broader imperative here is to think about the way you're using images: make sure that it's clear why the image is there, what is it of, which part of the text does it connect to.

- Canvas will default to the file name; by changing "IMG02156.jpg" to "American Jazz Legend Billie Holiday singing on stage in New York" you give all users a chance to comprehend what's in the photo.
- Quick tip: omit "image of" or "photo of" in these alt tags.

Conclusion

Once you begin to just look out for these practices: hierarchical design, asking yourself how would this content be mediated and navigated, you'll start to internalize these broader themes of accessibility.

Section 3: How Tos for Common Accessibility Requirements and Tools

The following resources are curated to address common accessibility issues. Find additional resources in [Section 4](#), too.

Accessibility Checking Tools

Many popular programs and platforms that we use every day have accessibility checkers built in. Use the links below to learn about each of these checkers. If you don't know about the UDOIT tool, that one is particularly useful if you're using Canvas.

- [UDOIT](#) is Canvas's built in accessibility checker. **IMPORTANT: If you do nothing else, use this tool.**
- [Checking Accessibility in Word](#)
- [Microsoft 360 Accessibility Checker](#) Short Resource from CSU
- [Other Accessibility Checkers](#) for web design and other programs & platforms.
- [Contrast checker](#) for color and design contrast

Content Hierarchy / Heading Styles

These resources will help you learn about content hierarchy for your course documents or canvas pages. Review section 2 for my brief explanation of why hierarchy is important for accessibility.

- [Using Headings in Microsoft Office](#)
- CSU Resource: [Headings](#)
- [Headings and Document Style](#) from the University of Loyola

Alt Tags for Images and Tables

- CSU Resource: [Alt Text For Images](#)
- [Screen Capture Guide](#) for Including Alt Text for Images on Canvas
- [Alt Text for Microsoft Office](#) (Word, PowerPoint, etc.)
- [Creating Accessible Tables](#) in Word

Descriptive Links

- [How to Format Links on Canvas](#)
- Example of how a [Screen Reader Handles Links](#) (begins at 4:10 on the video)
- [Using Descriptive Links](#) -- Resource from Oregon State

Transcripts for Audio, Video

- [CSU Resource about YouDescribe](#) for YouTube
- [Editing the Transcript of a Meeting in Microsoft Teams](#)
- [Tips for Transcripts](#)

Captions for Video

- [CSU's accessibility resource on captioning](#) -- Excellent guide for adding captioning on various video platforms.
- One of Laura's CO302 Writing in Digital Environment students, Janessa Bryant, [recently designed an excellent resource about video captioning.](#) Bryant discusses some

imperatives for captioning informed by her research and her own experience with these technologies.
- [Editing YouTube automatic captions](#) -- while YouTube generally creates a good starting place, editing is required to meet accommodation needs.
- [Editing Microsoft Teams Video Captions](#) -- generally, I've heard that Teams does a superior job with captioning functionality; that said, you might need to go in and edit some of the captions for accuracy.

Section 4: Even More Resources!

NCDAE Cheat Sheets

[Cheat Sheets for Accessibility](#) from the National Center on Disability and Access to Education (NCDAE): Comprehensive but succinct cheat sheets/guides organized by software type. Specifically, see these guides (select the version of the program you're using to see specific step-by-step instructions):

- [Microsoft Word](#)
- [PowerPoint](#)

WC3 Resources

The World Wide Web Consortium (WC3) is the standard for best practices for accessible and functional digital content.

- [Full List of WC3 Accessibility Resources](#)
- [Principles of Accessibility](#)
- [Video Overview of Accessibility Principles](#) -- while this video discusses web principles, these same principles show up in our document designs and online course content.
- [Video Web Accessibility Perspectives](#): necessary for some, useful for all.
- [WC3 Resources for Educators and Trainers](#)

Canvas Resources

- [CSU Resource for Canvas Accessibility](#)
- [CSU Resource about UDOIT Accessibility Checker](#)
- [General Accessibility Design Guidelines](#) -- Quick and easy overview
- [Creating accessible canvas courses](#) -- This source is useful because it highlights the known accessibility issues with various sections of the Canvas interface.

Additional CSU Resources

- [Accessibility by Design](#) -- Excellent comprehensive resource
- [Assistive Technology Resource Center](#)
- [Disability Legislation History](#)
- [Inclusive Language](#)
- Submit a ticket for a question or issue via the [Keep Teaching page](#)
- [CSU Policy: Accessibility of Electronic Information and Technologies](#)

Perspectives on Accessibility

- [CSU's Video Stories of Inclusive Technology](#)
- Elise Roy's TedTalk [“When We Design for Disability, We All Benefit.”](#)
- User Experience (UX) Expert Jacquelyn Iyamah's [“Black People Have Always Been UX Designers: Space Making is An Iterative Design Process”](#)

Videos That Show Users Interacting with Assistive Technologies

- [Screen Reading Technology](#)
- [Accessibility Settings for Voice-Over on Mac](#)
- [Navigating Documents with JAWS Accessibility Tools](#) -- While this overview is about websites, the same heading and link principles apply to our documents and canvas.