

Creating and Using Accessible Course Content

Most college classes include students with a diversity of ages, learning styles, and abilities. Students come from a variety of backgrounds, including those for whom English is not their first language. An increasing number of students with disabilities are to be found in the classroom, with visual, auditory, mobility and cognitive impairments. In addition, with many returning military veterans entering school, impairments to health are becoming more prevalent.

All of these students come to learn, and you can apply some basic principles to ensure that your course content is accessible to all students.

Electronic Documents

- Invite students to meet with you to discuss their learning needs.
- Distribute documents in a text format (MS Word, etc.) whenever possible.
- Use Quick Styles for headings instead of changing font size and bold or italicized font. Quick Styles can be redefined to match desired visual styling.
- If you use PDFs, ensure that they are accessibly tagged. PDFs that are not tagged are completely unusable by students who need a screen reader (such as students who are blind, low-vision, or have cognitive impairments such as dyslexia).
- Ensure that any images in a document are accompanied by a textual description of the image content. This is especially important for charts and graphs.
- Choose course textbooks that have an alternative format available for students with disabilities or submit your textbooks to Accessible Media Services (AMS) at Disability Resources and Educational Services (DRES) before the start of the class. Contact AMS for more information.

Multimedia

- Only use videos that have been captioned. Captions are essential for deaf students, and they benefit ESL students as well. You may submit videos to be captioned to the AMS before the start of the class. Contact AMS for more information.

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- If possible, use videos that have been audio described so that blind students can be aware of what is happening visually on screen. Be prepared to describe what is happening for blind students when audio descriptions are not available.

Tip: if you are creating your own video lectures, it is possible to create videos that do not need audio descriptions. In the video, narrate what is happening on screen or have the speaker describe what they are doing, such as in the case of a lab or other procedure.

Websites and Software Applications

Check that websites and other software you use in your course can be operated with only a keyboard, and presents information in multiple modalities:

- Can you complete necessary tasks without a great deal of difficulty by using only a keyboard (tab, arrow keys, spacebar/enter)? Does the way the tab key moves you through the application make logical sense?
- Make sure that any videos in a web page or application window can be navigated to and played with only the keyboard. Can the user turn captions on and off? Can they navigate away from the video again with only the keyboard?
- Check that the web page or application displays error conditions and other status indicators in multiple ways, e.g. color, worded messages, etc.
- Consider the contrast of textual elements in the web page or application window. Are they easy to read?

Tip: Contact an accessibility consultant on campus if you are unsure of the accessibility of a website or other software application you would like to use.

Resources

- Disability Resources & Services (disability.illinois.edu)
- Accessible Media Services at DRES (E-mail: dres-accessible-media@illinois.edu)
- IT Accessibility website (itaccessibility.illinois.edu) - Though still expanding, this site has some excellent information about accessibility assessment and creating accessible electronic documents. Check back often and submit questions for any topics you would like to see added.

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- Section 508 (www.section508.gov) - The website for federal information technology accessibility law.
- IITAA (<http://www.dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?item=32765>) - The website for Illinois IT accessibility law.
- Titles II and III of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA.gov/2010_regs.htm)

Accessibility Professionals on Campus

Your unit's IT Accessibility Liaison (ITAL) can assist you with ensuring that your course content is accessible. The list of current ITALs can be found on the [IT Accessibility Website](#). If your unit does not have an ITAL, contact Tim Offenstein.

You may also contact:

- Allison Kushner, J.D., Director ADA Division, *Office for Access & Equity*
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- Christy Blew, Accessibility Information Technology Group (AITG), *DRES*
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- Ann Fredricksen, Coordinator Accessible Media Services, *DRES*
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- Keith Hays, Web Accessibility Specialist, *Technology Services*
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- Lori Lane, Accessibility Information Technology Group (AITG), *DRES*
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- Tim Offenstein, Campus Accessibility Liaison, *Technology Services*
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