Creating Accessible Courses and Course Content

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Organizing your course in a way that supports the learning needs and styles of all users can be a difficult task. Your learning materials need to engage, educate, evaluate, and accommodate people effectively.

Set clear course expectations

There are some design decisions you can make that will help all learners use your online course effectively:

- Use the Content **Overview** page to help familiarize your learners with your course content.
- Add your course syllabus to the Content **Overview** page. This helps all users clearly understand your course expectations up front.
    - Link each syllabus item to the actual item in your course. This provides a navigation shortcut to important content and helps students with learning disabilities clearly see how course content relates to course expectations.
- Set up enumerations in the Content tool's **Settings** to establish a clear hierarchy in your course content. Well-defined course structure is easier to navigate for screen reader users and learners with learning disabilities.

Make time limits and deadlines flexible

Provide readings well in advance of deadlines so users can work ahead and prepare. Many learners need the extra time to read through content multiple times. If you use release conditions to control when to release course content on a module by module basis, make sure you give learners plenty of time to complete each component.

Provide alternative learning materials

One of the most effective course design decisions you can make to improve engagement is to offer course materials that appeal to more than one sense. For example, the same material can have an audio, video, and text component. This type of

redundancy helps engage learners with different learning types, reinforces important concepts, and helps ensure that users with physical disabilities can access content in a suitable format.

- Use the Content tool for readings and course material. HTML code is easier for assistive technologies to interpret than application-based files such as Microsoft Word. Follow web standards when creating your content.
- If you need to use PDF files for additional content, use optical character recognition (OCR) if you are scanning documents so the text can be read by screen readers. Also consider adding tags to your documents to enable screen reader users to navigate them more easily.
- If your readings and lecture materials use many graphics, tables, videos, or audio recordings, provide a text-only alternative. Text-only material should supplement, not replace, other delivery methods. Videos, graphics, and audio files are a great way to generate interest in a topic, present material from different perspectives, and help students with learning disabilities through redundancy. Make the text-only alternatives easy to compile for print so that all learners can use them as study aids at their leisure.

Tips when creating HTML content

Most of the following tips provided are web content standards set by the World Wide Web Consortium in the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines and should be considered when creating HTML content:

- Use a simple layout that does not organize content in tables or columns. Simply organized material is easier for learners to read and understand, is easier for assistive technology to interpret and present, and is easier for mobile and handheld devices to resize.
- Use headings to communicate the relationships between sections. Use Heading 1 for the title, Heading 2 for major sections, Heading 3 for subsections, and so on. If headings are used correctly, screen reader users can quickly search a page by heading and participants with cognitive disabilities can understand how sections and content relate easier.
- Make sure each heading is unique. Do not use the same text for a Heading 3 (subsection) that you used for your Heading 1 at the start of the document. The same principle applies to file/item names. Make sure each file or item you create has a unique name.
- For longer topics, include a table of contents that links to each section and "Back to top" links at the end of each section.

- Include alternative text descriptions (alt text) for all graphics. Use double quotes (null) "" as the alt text if the object is a decorative element that does not add meaning. If the graphic is a link, begin the alt text with "Link to". The Brightspace Editor automatically prompts you to include alt text when you insert an image.
- Include detailed captions below tables and graphs. These captions should explain what the objects convey, including important trends and statistics. This will help all learners interpret the objects. For tables, include a caption using the caption element that explains how the table is organized. Check that tables make sense when read from left to right. Screen readers have difficulty conveying information that reads from top to bottom.
- Use the same text on-screen and in the alt text for links. Make sure the text describes the action that will occur. Never use text such as "Click Here" as the link. Screen reader users often use a list of links to quickly navigate actions on a page; this is not possible if links are not descriptive.
- Include text alternatives of multimedia content, such as audio or video files. If you do not have the time to create a complete text alternative, include a descriptive label that summarizes the content.
- Do not use blinking or flashing multimedia as it can cause seizures in individuals with photosensitivity. Use animation when it helps convey a concept and not to draw attention to an unchanging object. Use a combination of size, color, and prominence to draw attention to objects.
- Never use only color to convey meaning. If you want to show how concepts and objects relate to each other use a combination of size, color, and text labels.
- Ensure there is a strong contrast between the text and background colors used in your course materials. Use relative font sizes and make sure the text and page layout adjusts when font sizes are changed. Users should not have to scroll horizontally.
- If you create PDF documents from a word processor (for example, Microsoft Word), make sure you format titles and sections using headings so they are tagged correctly in the PDF.
- If users can use text-to-speech software to read text aloud or highlight text as they go through it, test the software to ensure it functions correctly for specific tools and settings you want to create. For example, disabling right-click in quizzes can prevent some text-to-speech software from tracking text, so try your software to see if you experience similar issues.
- Take advantage of D2L-compatible tools, such as ReadSpeaker, Visual course widget, and audio topics. D2L recommends that instructors and instructional designers who want to make good default choices for learners with dyslexia

read Dyslexia Style Guide 2018: Creating Dyslexia Friendly Content from the British Dyslexia Association. Browser extensions such as OpenDyslexic Font for Chrome are also available for learners with dyslexia.