

Best Practices for Accessible Course Materials

Online @ UT (Canvas)

Course Syllabus

- Use the University of Tennessee, Knoxville [Accessible Syllabus Template](https://teaching.utk.edu/the-syllabus/) to create your syllabus (https://teaching.utk.edu/the-syllabus/).
- Post an alternative file format, such as Word, RTF or a web page, for a PDF syllabus.

Course Organization and Navigation

- Organize your course materials in a logical and consistent manner.
- Use descriptive, meaningful names in the modules and course content items.
- Hide the course menu items that are empty and are not used in the course.
- Avoid long content pages to minimize scrolling.
- Use white space on pages.

Course Content Editor

Follow the guidelines below when using the Online@UT (Canvas) rich content editor.

Headings and Paragraph

- Use the heading styles in the Paragraph drop-down menu to format headings.
- Use headings in the correct nested order.
- Spell out acronyms and abbreviations.

Color

- Use color combinations that provide sufficient contrast to distinguish text from background.
- Avoid using font colors to convey meaning. Example: "All items in RED are required."
- Avoid using yellow-blue or red-green combinations, as colorblind students will not be able to read these combinations.

Hyperlinks

- Write meaningful link text that indicates the link's destination.
- Notify users when a link leads to a PDF file.

Images

- Provide the Alt text when inserting an image that brings meaning to the text content.
- In the Image Attributes section, place a checkmark in the decorative image checkbox to indicate the image is for decorative purposes.
- Write description of the image in the question or answer text field if you use images in assessment.

Lists

- Format the list of items using the Bullet List or Number List buttons.
- Select the Number List button if the order of items is important.

Tables

- Avoid using a table to arrange text and images.
- Provide an alternative text format for a table if it has multiple rows and columns, for example, a course calendar.

Accessibility Check

The Rich Content Editor includes an accessibility tool that checks common accessibility errors within the editor. This tool can help you design course content while considering accessibility attributes and is located in the Rich Content Editor menu bar. This tool only verifies content created within the Rich Content Editor and does not catch *all* accessibility errors, but is very worthwhile as a primary accessibility assessment tool.

Microsoft Word

Headings

- Use heading styles to format headings and subheadings.
- Ensure that all heading styles are in the correct nested order. For example: heading 2 is a subheading of heading 1.

Images

- Include alternate text for all visual elements that convey information: images, graphs, charts and complex data tables.

Links

- Provide descriptive text for links (e.g., "[learn more about accessibility](#)" is the hyperlink)

Lists and Columns

- Use the column feature to create a column.
- Use the list feature to create a bulleted list and/or a numbered list.

Tables

- Use the table feature to create a table.
- Specify the header row and/or column in table properties.
- Specify "repeat header rows" in table layout.
- Check the reading order by pressing the Tab key.
- Use simple table structure, without merged cells and columns.
- Avoid using blank cells in a table for formatting.

Font Color

- Provide sufficient contrast between text and background.
- Avoid using font color to convey meaning, for example, "All items in RED are required."
- Avoid using yellow-blue or red-green combinations, as colorblind students will not be able to read these combinations.

Text Size

- Make text easy to read, set your font to at least 12-point, 1.5 spacing.

Text Layout

- Avoid using floating text boxes or images.
- Avoid blank spaces created by hitting Enter, Tab, or Space bar multiple times.
Use page, column, or section breaks instead.

Math and Science

- Use the *MathType* plugin for Microsoft Word to create math and science equations, formulas and notations. Do not use the Microsoft Word equation editor. (<http://www.dessci.com/en>)
- Alternatively, use EquatIO (<https://www.texthelp.com/en-us/products/equatio/>) for mathematical notation to use anywhere (inc. Online@UT). Free instructor account creation required.

Document Navigation

- Create a table of contents for long documents (heading styles must be applied for the utilizing the Table of Contents feature).
- Use the Navigation Panel/Document Map feature to check the organization of the document and to quickly get to different sections of the document (heading styles must be applied by utilizing the document navigation feature).

Abbreviations

- Spell out abbreviations and acronyms, especially the first time you use them.

Microsoft PowerPoint

Outline View

- Create the text content and ensure its logical reading order by using the Outline View/Outline tab.
- Provide a unique title for each slide.

Slide Layouts

- Use slide layouts to create slides.
- Add text by typing in a slide placeholder, rather than by inserting a text box.
- Avoid using the “Insert Text box” feature.

Reading Order

- Correct the text reading order by using the “Arrange/Reorder” feature.

Images

- Include alternate text for all visual elements that convey information: images, graphs, charts and complex data tables.

Links

- Provide descriptive text for links.

Lists and Columns

- Use the column feature to create a column.
- Use the list feature to create a bulleted and numbered list.

Tables

- Specify the header row and/or columns in table properties.
- Use simple table structure, without merged cells and columns.
- Avoid using blank cells in a table for formatting.
- Check the reading order by pressing the Tab key in the table.
- Provide description of the table content in the Alt text field if the reading order of the table does not make sense.

Slide Transitions

- Avoid transitions and automatic timed animations on slides.

Slide Readability

- Provide sufficient contrast between text and background.
- Avoid using font color to convey meaning, for example, “All items in RED are required.”
- Provide ample ‘white’ space on slides.
- Avoid busy backgrounds on slides.
- Make text that is easy to read, at least 14-point.

Audio and Video

- Add a transcript of audio narration to the Notes section of slides.
- Provide a link to the video even if you have it embedded.

Math and Science

- Use the MathType plugin (<http://www.dessci.com/en>) for Microsoft Word to create math and science equations, formulas and notations. Do not use the Microsoft Word equation editor.
- Alternatively, use EquatIO (<https://www.texthelp.com/en-us/products/equatio/>) for mathematical notation to use anywhere (inc. Online@UT). Free instructor account creation required.

Accessible View

- Upload your Microsoft PowerPoint file to your Office365 OneDrive account and share the link with the students to provide an accessible web view of the Microsoft PowerPoint file.

PDF

- Ensure that a PDF is not an entire image by highlighting individual words in the text with the cursor.
- Ensure that the source file of the PDF, such as Microsoft Word or Microsoft PowerPoint, is accessible.
- Use a correct exporting method to convert a source file to an accessible PDF, for example, Microsoft Office, Adobe Acrobat Pro, UTK Office365, or third-party applications.
- Use OCR (Optical Character Recognition) scanner to scan a document, test it for accessibility, and make corrections if necessary.
- Run the Text Recognition utility in Adobe Acrobat Pro or Read&Write to convert inaccessible scanned document to text.
- Run Adobe Acrobat Built-in Accessibility Checker, make corrections if needed.
- If you cannot make PDFs accessible, provide an alternative format for the PDF that is accessible.

Video and Audio

- Give preference to captioned video and audio when searching for public material for your course. For example, YouTube has a function to search for human transcribed captioned videos (“keywords, CC”), as well as Google.
- Add captions and transcript to your newly created videos. Uncaptioned media that you created previously, may be accommodated at the time of the need.
- Correct auto-generated captions in your YouTube videos.

Other Resources

- [UTK Accessibility Website \(accessibility.utk.edu/\)](https://accessibility.utk.edu/)
 - Policy
 - Resources
 - Training
- [Microsoft Accessibility \(microsoft.com/en-us/accessibility/\)](https://microsoft.com/en-us/accessibility/)
- [Canvas Accessibility Group \(community.canvaslms.com/groups/accessibility\)](https://community.canvaslms.com/groups/accessibility)