

Accessibility Considerations for Online Courses

Listed below are some ways that you can be proactive about creating an accessible online course. For specific questions or more information about accessibility, please contact Kent State's Student Accessibility Services (SAS) at 330-672-3391, or visit their webpage at <http://www.kent.edu/sas>

What you can do now

Use the Accessibility Checker feature for Microsoft software

- For PCs the Accessibility Checker is located 1) File -> Info, 2) Select the "Check for Issues" Button, 3) In the Check for Issues drop-down menu, select "Check Accessibility".
- To access on a Mac, select Review > Check Accessibility.

Always post a transcript with audio.

Different learners engage with materials in different ways. Providing content in different forms not only benefits students that require accommodations, but all students. For instance, if a student is in a café they may prefer to watch a video with captions instead of listening to the audio. If they are having technology problems with a narrated presentation, they can read the transcript instead. When creating presentations, *always* include a transcript. If a video needs to be closed-captioned in the future, having the transcript will also be a great help for those assisting with that task.

Use markup for documents you create.

The markup or styles used in a word processor, such as Headings, Titles, and Subtitles, provide not only a visual difference to the reader, but also metadata used by screen readers that help users navigate the document. Use the Styles section when creating documents in MS Word and when you are adjusting type size and adding bold/italics to materials. Doing so without the Styles section makes the document much more difficult to navigate for those using screen-readers.

Use a shallow folder structure.

Organize your course to keep your structure to as few "levels" deep as you can, while still giving it the organization it needs. Having your structure be fewer folders deep is also easier for screen readers to navigate. A great start is using the structure provided in the Kent State Online template.

Provide the accessibility policies for the technology in your course.

Sites and technologies (not content) used in your course should have the accessibility policy stated, or say that there is no accessibility policy for them if none exist. The accessibility policy issued by Blackboard Learn about their LMS is already listed on the [Getting Started in your Online Course](#) page. However, sometimes software is accessible only in certain areas, even though the policy may state it is fully accessible. Ensure that *any software you use or additional platforms and materials from publishers* are accessible. If not, your course may be rendered inaccessible for certain students with disabilities, and you would be unable to use those platforms/materials.

Use videos with captions.

Video content needs to have captions. However, many videos that might be appropriate for your online course, such as TED talks, PBS videos, material from NBC Learn, and Lynda.com tutorials, are already captioned. Links to these videos can be found on the [Usable Media for Online Courses](#) page. The Kent State University library also has [closed captioned](#) materials available. Also, it's important to

confirm that captioned pieces contain accurate captions; auto-generated ones, like those frequently found on YouTube, may not include accurate captions.

Use alt tag descriptions on images.

Alt tags are descriptions of images that describe the image to those who are blind or low-vision and use screen reader technology. When adding any images to Blackboard, include an informative description to convey important information about the image. Your alt tag is what will be read by a screen reader when it reaches that image. More information on alt tags can be found on the [WebAIM website](#).

Avoid using color to convey meaning.

Color can affect how your students see (or don't see) course materials, especially those who are colorblind or low-vision. Avoid using color to denote importance or meaning. Instead, consider making a word larger or using bold text. Also, avoid color that is distracting, such as bright colors or patterned backgrounds. Finally, use colors that have a high contrast; for example, do not use green text on a red background or yellow text on a white background.

Use informative link names.

Just as you use chapters to assist in navigating a book, it is important to label your hyperlinks to assist screen readers in navigating your course for blind or low-vision students. Write your hyperlink names to describe the content, rather than pasting the actual link or writing "Click Here". The screen reader will read the hyperlink aloud, so ensure that it is descriptive of the actual linked content.

Areas to think about

Below are items that are difficult to make accessible on your own, but about which you can still be pro-active.

Accessible PDFs

It can be difficult to make a PDF fully accessible, but if you use PDFs in your course, avoid using ones that are simply scanned images.

Accessible websites

Not all websites are created equal when it comes to accessibility. If you have questions about the accessibility of the content on the sites you use in your class and have a student with accommodations including publisher materials or platform, contact [SAS](#).

Captioning videos you create

Kent State is researching several options that would make producing a timed text file for your transcript more readily available. Until that system is in place, you can provide a separate transcript of your video as a good beginning step. Although providing a transcript is helpful for all students and will aid the closed captioning process, keep in mind that it is *not* a substitute for closed captioning.

Tables

Tables can be difficult for screen readers to navigate in the best of circumstances, as they are a visual means of organizing information. Save the use of tables only for areas where the content *requires* it, and format the information properly with markup. Consider using a list or other means of displaying the information. If a table is the best means of conveying your information, format it correctly using headings and a title and avoiding excessive length, merged cells, or blank cells. Penn State has a page dedicated to information about [tables and accessibility](#).