10 Tips for Creating Accessible Course Content

If you’re anything like us, you want to get accessibility “right.” However, it can be overwhelming knowing where to start and deciding what to do. Use these three framing questions to help you get started:

- How do the course format and the course content support accessibility or limit accessibility?
- What prior technology knowledge or skills will the learner need to be successful?
- What course goals, skills, concepts (if any) may be an obstacle for students with:
  - visual disabilities?
  - auditory disabilities?
  - cognitive disabilities?
  - motor disabilities?
  - English as a second language?

The tips below will generally improve the experience for individuals with non-apparent disabilities and who use adaptive technologies to support their learning. The tips will also improve accessibility and usability for other users as well.

To get started we hope you’ll view the video presentation below and use the tips as a guide, view the Accessibility at ISU: Top 10 Tips to Make Your Course Accessible YouTube video ([https://youtu.be/1bJdKpOYKXY](https://youtu.be/1bJdKpOYKXY)) [46 mins 56 seconds] or Download full transcript (PDF) ([http://bit.ly/2Ib9G5a](http://bit.ly/2Ib9G5a))

**Tip 1: Plan Your Online Teaching-Learning Strategy**

**Be consistent:** Online course design should follow a consistent structure throughout the entirety of the course. The image below (Image 1) outlines clear steps for students. For each module there is a lecture, a video, slides, assignments (online discussion and a task) and a quiz.

![Image 1](above). A flowchart showing the process for students to follow for navigating the course.

**Learning styles:** Every student has a unique profile of abilities, strengths, learning styles, and previous experience. The Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework guides educational practice, flexibility in presenting information, and reducing barriers in instruction. To learn more about UDL about visit CELT’s Universal Design for Learning Overview website ([http://bit.ly/CELTUDL](http://bit.ly/CELTUDL)).

**Provide adequate time:** How am I ensuring students have adequate time to complete activities and assessments? To determine if students have adequate time to complete activities and assessments consider using Rice University’s Course Workload Estimator website tool ([http://cte.rice.edu/workload](http://cte.rice.edu/workload))
Build in course feedback: You can learn a great deal about how your students are learning in a course, and what adjustments both you and your students might make, by asking your students to give your course a mid-term evaluation. One way to do this is by using a PLUS/DELTA feedback tool. The beauty of this tool is that it asks students to focus on what is working to advance their learning in the course and what could be improved by the teacher and by the student. This tool is available through the CELT’s Mid-term Formative Evaluation: Using a PLUS/DELTA Assessment Technique website (http://bit.ly/isu-plusdelta).

**Tip 2: Constructive Course Alignment**

Constructive alignment in teaching links the constructivist theory of learning (where students link new material to previous knowledge and experiences, and extrapolate to future understandings) with outcomes-based teaching. Implementing constructive alignment in course design results in explicitly linking teaching and learning activities, to classroom assessments and evaluation, to course learning objectives, and ultimately to course learning outcomes.


Tip 3: Developing Assessments and Evaluation

Once learning objectives are established, the next step is to create assessment and evaluation tools that will allow you to determine if students have achieved a learning objective.

Using a combination of assessment (not graded) and evaluation (graded) approaches provides students a variety of opportunities to show their mastery of the course content. For a broad range of evaluation methods visit CELT’s Classroom Assessment Techniques website (http://bit.ly/2DZauYx).
Tip 4: Use the Quality Matters (QM) Framework

Quality Matters is a learner-centered course framework with a faculty peer review process that is designed to certify the quality of online and blended courses. All of the 8 QM course components (listed below) work together to ensure that students achieve the desired learning outcomes. When aligned, each of these components is directly tied to and supports the course learning objectives.

1. Course Overview Introductions
2. Learning Objectives (Competencies)
3. Assessment and Measurement
4. Instructional Materials
5. Course Activities and Learner Interaction
6. Course Technology
7. Learner Support
8. Accessibility and Usability

To become a part of the QM professional development cohort visit (http://bit.ly/1MCedP5). For more information about QM or to access the full rubric visit the Quality Matters website (https://www.qualitymatters.org/).

Tip 5: Use Consistent Page Titles and Headings

For users who rely on screen readers to interact with content, this step is crucial. Consistent and clear page titles help to orient visually impaired users who are unable to see the full layout of the site. For examples of this practice View the Section Headings/Structure – Do It Yourself Digital Access website (http://bit.ly/2na5Yz6).

Tip 6: Use Alt-Text, Captions, or Long Descriptions on All Images

Every image must have alt-text, which can be set in Canvas, visit the How do I embed images from the web in the Rich Content Editor? web guide (http://bit.ly/2E2GtH3). This alt-text should be a concise description of the information conveyed by the image. Visit the Alternate (alt) Text – Do It Yourself Digital Access website (https://www.digitalaccess.iastate.edu/do-it-yourself/alt-text).

Three examples of how-to use alt-text for the image 5 above:

- If it is for a Story about tulips use alt = “Yellow tulips blooming in the Spring”
- If it is for a Horticulture Class use the image alt=“Tulipa gesneriana”
- If it is being used as a decorative Image alt=“”

Tip 7: Account for Users with Visual Disabilities

Ensure color is not the sole means of conveying important information. The examples below show the differences between not accessible and accessible color-coding.

Mon-Wed
12-1 pm

Tues-Thurs
3-4 pm

Image 6 (above). Example: What makes red team and green team example not accessible? If someone is colorblind and there isn’t labeling they may not know which time represents red team and which represents red team
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Tip 7: Color

Image 7 (above). Example: Accessible – Coding with descriptive words and colors – the each team is represented by not only the color – also the name of the team

Image 8 (above). Example: PowerPoint colors are not accessible due to insufficient contrast - Textured background of orange and brown leaves overpowers blue and green text rendering it nearly unreadable

Image 9 (above). Example: This PowerPoint images shows that it is readable because of the contrast because it is Brown background with white writing saying, Welcome to Fall Ornamentals, John H. Doe and Susan Sanders, Specialist

For additional resources about color visit the Color your website accessible web article (http://bit.ly/2E2tW6t) from Inside Iowa State.

Tip 8: Use Descriptive and Unique Hyperlinks

This is another strategy to help users who use screen readers. When providing a hyperlink, the link text should describe what is being linked to. Learn how through the Links that do the job web article (http://bit.ly/2E3rdKe) from Inside Iowa State.

• Accessible: View the How-to Guide for Student Accommodations in Canvas web guide (http://bit.ly/2I2SqiI)
• Not Accessible: For information about incorporating course content in Canvas, click here
• Not Accessible: For information about incorporating course content in Canvas, https://canvas.iastate.edu/courses/75/pages/how-to-guide-for-student-accommodations-in-canvas

Tip 9: Create Accessible Media

PDF, MS Word and PowerPoint

PDF files, MS Word documents and PowerPoint are all popular tools used when presenting information to students. These files need to in an accessible format, or content must be provided to students in an alternative format. One-page accessibility resources, or “cheatsheets,” have been developed to assist in creating accessible content, view the National Center on Disability and Access to Education Cheatsheets website (http://ncdae.org/resources/cheatsheets/)

Audio/Video Transcripts and Captioning

Provide transcripts for audio clips and synchronous captioning for video clips. Captions also benefit non-native speakers or students experiencing audio glitches.

How: Visit the Captioning, with an assist from YouTube web article (http://bit.ly/2E2uR6V) from Inside Iowa State website or Captioning, Transcripts and Audio Descriptions WebAIM website (https://webaim.org/techniques/captions/).
Example: Create a syllabus overview using a combination of different media

Instead of using class time to read through the syllabus on the first day of class, consider creating a video that explains your syllabus. Your students can watch and re-watch the video as many times as they need. And you can be certain that everyone hears and reads the same message, even students who add the class later.

**Tip 10: Include the Accessibility Statement in the Syllabus**

Include the university’s syllabus statement for students requesting accommodations for a documented disability. Consider placing the information towards the start of your syllabus to emphasize the importance of the information. **How:** For the appropriate wording visit CELT’s Faculty Senate Recommendations for Syllabus Inclusion website [http://bit.ly/isuaccessibility](http://bit.ly/isuaccessibility).

**Next Steps: Scaffold for Success**

Break down the barriers, develop implementation strategies, and begin using a timeline to parcel out “Accessifying” your course. Use a resource such as CELT’s Individual Action Plan Digital Accessibility: Online Course Design (PDF) [http://bit.ly/2p63E7k](http://bit.ly/2p63E7k).

**Instructional Support**

If you aren’t sure where to start with digital accessibility, or have additional questions, contact a staff member from your college via the College-based instructional support website [http://bit.ly/college-support](http://bit.ly/college-support), or make an appointment with the CELT Online Learning Innovation Hub staff (281 Parks Library) via email celt@iastate.edu or call 515-294-5357.

**Additional Resources**

- Download the University of Washington’s Universal Design in Higher Education: Promising practices (PDF) [http://bit.ly/2E1WE0](http://bit.ly/2E1WE0) (70 pages)

**Presentation adapted from**

- Office of Distance Education and eLearning. (n/d). UDL in Course Design. The Ohio State University. Retrieved from [https://odee.osu.edu/udl-course-design](https://odee.osu.edu/udl-course-design)
- Sherer, C. (2015, June 15). 10 steps to make your course accessible with WCAG 2.0, part I. Blog post retrieved from [http://dl.sps.northwestern.edu/blog/2015/06/1326/](http://dl.sps.northwestern.edu/blog/2015/06/1326/)

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