

ADA Compliance in Online Materials

ADA Compliance and Universal Design

Title 5 of the Americans with Disability Act (ADA) makes it clear that online classes must meet certain criteria to lawfully fulfill accessibility requirements. Additionally, section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act states: *“Distance education means instruction in which the instructor and student are separated by distance and interact through the assistance of communication technology. All distance education is subject to the general requirements of this chapter as well as the specific requirements of this article. In addition, instruction provided as distance education is subject to the requirements that may be imposed by the American with Disabilities Act (42 U.S.C. §12100 et seq.) and section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended.”*

Timeline of ADA Compliance

Steps to meet the goal of ADA compliance over the next two years are listed in the Timeline Chart below. The timeline is set up to assist instructors with reaching compliance in workable time increments.

Table 1 Timeline Chart - Meet ADA Standards with UDL

Semester / Task	Syllabus	Closed Captions	Color	File Format	Links	Alt Text	Tables / Charts	Evaluation
Fall 2017								
Spring 2018								
Summer 2018								
Fall 2018								
Spring 2019								
Summer 2019								

Tasks

Syllabus

All course syllabi will comply with styles and formats that are accessible by a screen reader system. Typically, this process uses the styles tool in Microsoft Word. Using the styles tool automatically creates a reading order on the page that is used by screen readers, and it conveys semantic structure beneficial to all students.

Closed Captions

Course videos must have time-synced closed captions to be ADA compliant. Closed captioning provides a critical link to individual who are deaf or hearing impaired. For individuals whose native language is not English, captions improve comprehension and fluency. Having the option of using closed captions also helps people who may not have audio available to them on their device or who are in a setting that is noise restrictive. Free closed captioning tools are available on YouTube.

Transcripts

For audio-only files, a transcript is required, and it is recommended that it is provided in PDF format for ease of use. Transcripts for all videos, while not required, are encouraged. Additionally, transcripts for videos do not replace the need for time synced closed captions.

Color Coding

A screen reader cannot emphasize or indicate color. Using color alone to highlight or emphasize, or to group things into meaningful categories will need to include textual markers as well. It is advised that color should not be the only method used to convey meaning.

Color Contrast

Color contrast needs to be considered. High contrast needs to be used between foreground and background colors to provide accessible readability to people with and without vision impairment.

Lists

All bulleted or numbered lists should be created with the list tool which provides the user with a means to quickly navigate between items as well as move in and out of lists as the screen reader will properly announce the text as being part of a list. When lists are made with repeated use of the Tab key or Spacebar, screen readers will not recognize them as lists, meaning that the list reading controls are inoperative.

File Formats

All documents uploaded to the course will be created in file formats that are accessible by a screen reader system. PDF is a recommended format because

- it is more web and mobile-friendly than a Word document
- students who do not have Microsoft Office cannot open Word files but can still open PDF files
- PDF is more printer-friendly and maintains its formatting across different platforms (especially the format of tables, graphics, math equations, etc)

Links

All hyperlinks to external websites should be descriptive. The purpose of the descriptive link is to provide users with context for where the link will take them. Instead of a “click here” text as the hyperlink, use words that describe where the link leads.

Alt Text for Graphics

Alternative text (alt text) will be used when a picture or image is used to ensure a screen reader can describe the graphic. The alt text is what is read out loud by the screen reader to describe the contents of the image or photo.

Tables and Charts

Tables and charts will be structured so that a screen reader can make sense of data when read aloud. Making sure clear column and row titles are used, and that spacing is created by inserting a table rather than simply using “tab” will allow a screen reader to tab through the contents of a table in a logical manner.

Evaluation

An evaluation of all courses by each Division, assisted by the Office of e-Learning, will occur to confirm compliance. A checklist and a rubric will be used for the evaluation.

Checklist

Accessibility

- Course incorporates accessible design features, including:
 - Word Documents
 - Title and headings use style tags
 - Bold, italics, underlining replaced with style tags
 - Color issues
 - Significant color contrast between text and background
 - Color not the only method used to convey meaning
 - Style tags for emphasis, not highlighting
 - Bulleted/numbered lists created with list tool
 - Descriptive hyperlinks
 - Alternative (Alt) Text for images, charts, graphics, etc.
 - Tables
 - Created using table tool, not by manually tabbing over
 - Header row defined
 - “Repeat header row” selected
 - Logical reading order
 - Word documents are recommended to be saved as PDF
 - Appropriate use of color
 - Significant color contrast between text and background
 - Color not the only method used to convey meaning
 - Style tags for emphasis, not highlighting
 - Descriptive hyperlinks
 - Accessible file formats (PDF recommended)
 - Alt Text for images, charts, graphs, etc.
 - Time-synced, accurate closed captions for all video content linked to or embedded in course
 - Text transcripts for audio-only content
 - Text transcripts for video content (optional but ideal)

Rubric for Accessibility in Online Courses

1. Word Documents

The quickest way to check for accessibility issues in Word documents is to run the accessibility checker. In Word, click the File menu. Click the “Check for Issues” button and select “Check Accessibility.”

Action Item	Annotation: What does this look like?	Meets Guidelines	In Progress	Not Found
1a. Title and Heading Styles	Title and heading “styles” should be applied to titles and headings in documents in order to establish document hierarchy for screen readers.			
1b. Bold, Italics, and Underline	Bold, italics, and underline formatting should be replaced with “strong” and “emphasis” style tags. Underlining for emphasis should be removed as it is used to indicate a hyperlink; use “strong” or “emphasis” styles instead.			
1c. Color Issues	Documents should be checked for use of color to convey meaning (ex. “Terms in red will be on the final”). An additional visual indicator must be added (ex. Asterisks in front of due dates). Highlighting should be used sparingly, if at all. Instead, use a “strong” or “emphasis” style tag. Highlighting may affect readability for those with color vision impairments. Text should be dark on a light background or light on a dark background. Avoid placing text over “busy” background images or designs.			
1d. Bulleted/Numbered Lists	Bulleted and numbered lists should be created using the list tool, not by manually typing in dashes/numbers and tabbing over. Highlight list items and use the list tool button to apply a list style.			

Action Item	Annotation: What does this look like?	Meets Guidelines	In Progress	Not Found
1e. Descriptive Hyperlinks	Hyperlinks should describe where the link will take the student. Avoid “click here” or using the full URL as the link text. Provide the full URL in parentheses after the descriptive link text so the links are still accessible from the printed document. [Ex. “ Visit the Helena College website ” (www.umhelenacollege.edu)]			
1f. Alt Text for images	All images, charts, tables, shapes, SmartArt, etc., should contain alternative text. Alternative text should provide enough information that a person using a screen reader will get the same information from the image as a person who can view the image. Decorative images still need alternative text; put the word “decorative” in the Alt Text field.			
1g. Tables	Tables should always be created using the Table tool, not by tabbing over to create artificial columns. The first row of the table should be set as the “header row,” and the header row should be set to “repeat header row” in the Table Design and Table Layout tabs. The Alt Text for the table should briefly describe the purpose of the table (ex. “A table displaying the course grading scheme”). Check the reading order of the table by clicking into the first cell and tabbing through the table. If cells contain lists of content, consider putting the items into separate rows to make sure the information makes sense when read with a screen reader.			
1h. File Format	Word documents are recommended to be saved as PDF for online delivery.			

2. Color Use

Action Item	Annotation: What does this look like?	Meets Guidelines	In Progress	Not Found
2a. Color used to convey meaning	Course content should be checked for use of color to convey meaning or emphasis (ex. “Terms in red will be on the final” or indicating due dates in red). An additional visual indicator must be added to items that use color to convey meaning or emphasis. For example, due dates typed in red could have asterisks placed around them.			
2b. Highlighting	Highlighting should be used sparingly, if at all. Highlighting may affect readability for those with color vision impairments. Instead, use a “strong” or “emphasis” style tag.			
2c. Color contrast	Text should be dark on a light background or light on a dark background. Avoid placing text over busy background images or designs.			

3. Hyperlinks

Action Item	Annotation: What does this look like?	Meets Guidelines	In Progress	Not Found
3a. Descriptive Hyperlinks	All hyperlinks should describe where the link will take the user. This includes links within documents and links created using the “Web Link” tool in Moodle. Avoid “click here” or using the full URL as the link text. Provide the full URL in parentheses after the descriptive link text so the links are still accessible from a printed document. [Ex. “ Visit the Helena College website ” (www.umhelena.edu)]			

4. File Formats

Action Item	Annotation: What does this look like?	Meets Guidelines	In Progress	Not Met
4a. Files saved as PDF	Documents are recommended to be uploaded as PDF unless students need to edit the document directly. For example, if a student needs to enter numbers and perform calculations in a spreadsheet, the spreadsheet needs to be uploaded as .xlsx. PowerPoint presentations can be uploaded as PDF to provide students with web-friendly versions to read, and as .pptx to give students different printing options (optional).			

5. Alternative Text

Action Item	Annotation: What does this look like?	Meets Guidelines	In Progress	Not Met
5a. Alt Text for Images	All images, charts, tables, shapes, SmartArt, etc., in documents and in Moodle content should contain alternative text. Alternative text should provide enough information that a person using a screen reader will get the same information from the image as a person who can view the image. Decorative images still need alternative text; put the word “decorative” in the Alt Text field.			

Tip: Usually, when you hover the cursor over an image in a document being displayed in a browser, alternative text will appear in a small pop-up box.

6. Closed Captions

Action Item	Annotation: What does this look like?	Meets Guidelines	In Progress	Not Met
6a. Video content	All video content (instructor-created, textbook publisher, YouTube, etc.) must have time-synced, accurate closed captions. Accurate captions reflect what is being said in the video and contain proper capitalization and punctuation.			

7. Transcripts

Action Item	Annotation: What does this look like?	Meets Guidelines	In Progress	Not Met
7a. Audio content	A text transcript must accompany all audio-only content.			
7b. Video content	Text transcripts are encouraged, but not required, for video content. (See 6a regarding captions for video content.)			