

Office of eLearning and Faculty Development

ADA Compliance in Online Materials Updated Version

6-14-2024

ADA Compliance in Online Materials

ADA Compliance and Universal Design

Title 5 of the Americans with Disability Act (ADA) clarifies that online classes must meet specific criteria to fulfill accessibility requirements lawfully. 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 Americans 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

The timeline chart below lists steps to meet the goal of ADA compliance over the next year. The timeline is set to assist instructors in compliance in workable time increments.

Table 1 Timeline Chart - Meet ADA Standards with UDL for Documents (Word, PowerPoint, Excel, PDF)

Semester/ Task	Syllabus	Headings	Lists	Alt Text	Descriptive Links	Tables/ Charts	Contrast	File Format	Evaluation
Fall 2024									
Spring 2025									
Summer 2025									
Fall 2025									

Table 2 Timeline Chart - Meet ADA Standards with UDL for Canvas Course Pages

Semester/ Task	Headings	Lists	Alt Text	Descriptive Links	Tables/ Charts	Contrast	Evaluation
Fall 2024							
Spring 2025							
Summer 2025							
Fall 2025							

Tasks

Syllabus

All course syllabi will comply with styles and formats accessible by a screen reader system. Typically, this process uses the styles tool in Microsoft Word. The styles tool automatically creates a reading order on the page screen readers use, conveying semantic structure beneficial to all students.

Headings

Clear, well-formatted headings can go a long way toward ensuring your Word documents meet global accessibility standards. Many people use screen readers to create a list of headings to skim the document to find the content they want. "Heading List Dialog, Headings List View, Reports Scope: 1, 1 of 9." This type of navigation works only when the document's author uses heading styles. Screen readers and text-to-speech tools are programmed to recognize them.

Lists

All bulleted or numbered lists should be created with the list tool. This tool allows the user to quickly navigate between items and move in and out of lists, as the screen reader will properly announce the text as 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 the list reading controls are inoperative.

Alt Text for Visuals

Alternative text (alt text) will be used when a picture or image is used to ensure a screen reader can describe the graphic. The screen reader reads the alt text aloud to describe the contents of the image or photo.

Descriptive 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.

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 logically.

Closed Captions

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

Transcripts

A transcript is required for audio-only files, and it is recommended to be provided in PDF format for ease of use. While not required, transcripts for all videos 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, emphasize, or group things into meaningful categories must also include textual markers. 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 must be used between foreground and background colors to provide accessible readability to people with and without vision impairment.

File Formats

All documents uploaded to the course will be created in file formats 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.)

Canvas Course Page Accessibility

Every page of a Canvas course must be accessible.

It means that:

- each file you have created and uploaded to Canvas is accessible
- each Canvas course page is formatted to be accessible

Evaluation

Each division will evaluate all courses, assisted by the Office of e-Learning, to confirm compliance. The evaluation will use a checklist and a rubric.

Checklist

Accessibility

- The course incorporates accessible design features, including:
 - Word, PowerPoint, Excel, PDF Documents
 - Title and headings use style tags
 - Bold, italics, and underlining replaced with style tags Strong, Emphasis, Strong Emphasis
 - Color issues
 - Significant color contrast between text and background (4.5:1 for normal text)
 - Color is not the only method used to convey meaning
 - Style tags for emphasis, not highlighting.
 - Bulleted/numbered lists created with the 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 PDFs.
 - Appropriate use of color
 - Significant (4.5:1 for normal text) color contrast between text and background
 - Color is not the only method used to convey meaning
 - Style tags for emphasis, not highlighting
 - Descriptive hyperlinks
 - Accessible file formats (PDF recommended)
 - Alt Text for all visuals (images, charts, graphs, etc.)
 - Time-synced, accurate closed captions for all video content linked to or embedded in the course
 - Text transcripts for audio-only content
 - Text transcripts for video content (optional but ideal)
 - Read-aloud options available (Immersive Reader enabled in Canvas)

Rubric for Accessibility in Online Courses

1. Word, PowerPoint, Excel, PDF 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 document titles and headings to establish document hierarchy for screen readers. Avoid skipping heading levels.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1b. Bold, Italics, and Underline	Bold , <i>italics</i> , and <u>underlined</u> formatting should be replaced with “ strong ” and “ <i>emphasis</i> ” style tags. Underlining for emphasis should be removed as it is used to indicate a hyperlink; use “strong” or “emphasis” styles instead.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1c. Color Issues	To convey meaning, documents should be checked for color (e.g., “Terms in red will be on the final”). An additional visual indicator must be added (e.g., Asterisks before due dates). Highlighting should be used sparingly, if at all. Instead, use a “ strong ” or “ <i>emphasis</i> ” style tag. Highlighting may affect readability for those with color vision impairments. The text should be dark on a light background or light on a dark background. Avoid placing text over “busy” background images or designs.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Action Item	Annotation: What does this look like?	Meets Guidelines	In Progress	Not Found
1d. Bulleted/Numbered Lists	Bulleted and numbered lists should be created using the list tool, not manually typing in dashes/numbers and tabbing over. Highlight list items and use the list tool button to apply a list style.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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 ” (HelenaCollege.edu)]	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1f. Alt Text for visuals	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; Check the word “decorative” in the Alt Text field.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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 (e.g., “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 ensure the information makes sense when read with a screen reader.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Action Item	Annotation: What does this look like?	Meets Guidelines	In Progress	Not Found
1h. File Format	Word and PowerPoint documents should be saved as PDFs for online delivery. PDFs need additional accessibility checks.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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 using color to convey meaning or emphasis (e.g., “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.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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. Take care of the contrast between the text and the background.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2c. Color contrast	The text should be dark on a light background or light on a dark background. Contrast has to be 4.5:1 minimum. Avoid placing text over busy background images or designs.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

3. Descriptive Links

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)]	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

4. File Formats

Action Item	Annotation: What does this look like?	Meets Guidelines	In Progress	Not Met
4a. Files saved as PDF	<p>Documents should be uploaded as PDFs unless students need to edit them directly. Before saving the document as a PDF, run Accessibility Check and fix any possible errors.</p> <p>For example, if a student needs to enter numbers and perform calculations in a spreadsheet, the spreadsheet needs to be uploaded as .xlsx.</p> <p>PowerPoint presentations can be uploaded as PDFs to provide students with web-friendly versions to read and as .pptx to give students different printing options (optional).</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

5. Alternative Text

Action Item	Annotation: What does this look like?	Meets Guidelines	In Progress	Not Met
5a. Alt Text for Visuals	<p>All images, charts, tables, shapes, SmartArt, etc., in documents and 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.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Tip: When you hover the cursor over an image in a document 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 the video says and contain proper capitalization and punctuation.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7b. Video content	Text transcripts are encouraged but not required for video content. (See 6a regarding captions for video content.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>