Working with Content: Attending to Accessibility

Course materials are of no value if students are not able to access them. Access refers to the ability to open files, read/view/hear them, navigate them, and/or otherwise interact with the content provided. Some students do not see, hear, move, or communicate in the same manner as most; often these students use special tools and supports to access course materials. It is necessary to ensure that all course materials address as many accessibility concerns as possible to ensure that all students have the opportunity to benefit from the course.

There could be a variety of reasons that access is problematic, and there are many steps we can take to improve the accessibility of course content.

To begin, ask yourself the following questions to identify the kinds of problems students might experience:

- If I couldn't see well, or hear well, could I use these materials?
- If these graphics were in black and white, would they make sense?
- If I couldn't use a mouse, would I be able to engage with these materials?

The answers to questions like these will help you understand and address student accessibility needs. Follow best practices from the start!

Ensure **documents** are as accessible as possible.
- Use 12 point Arial font.
- Ensure links are embedded under meaningful text. For example, instead of "Learn more by going to Google at http://www.google.com," use "Learn more by going to Google."
- Use headings and subheadings from the Style menu in Word (not just bold and italics to indicate headings and subheadings).
- Add alt-text to images and tables.
- Create only simple tables with no split or merged cells and with the header row identified as a repeating header.
- Run the accessibility checker in Word and make any revisions needed.
- Save as a doc/docx (to have an easily editable version), then save again as a pdf (to preserve formatting across devices).

Create **video content** such as welcomes, orientations, tutorials, demonstrations, and so forth with closed captions.

- Use a phone, video camera, webcam, or screen capture software to record the video.
- Ensure that essential visual aspects of demonstration, role play, or other graphic content are included in the verbal aspect of the video.
- Post the video with closed captions.

Create **mini-lecture content** from PowerPoint or GoogleSlides files. Avoid posting slide files as stand-alone items. Instead, create (1) short written lectures, (2) short audio lectures or podcasts (along with a transcript), or (3) short video presentations from selected slides (with closed captions added). It might also be a good idea to create some combination of these options so students have some variety in how lecture content is provided to them.

(1) To create a **short written lecture** from slide files:
- Determine the key points to address - the information that requires explanation or explicit connection to other points in the topic, the points that are not addressed in other content, and/or that require your expertise for students to understand them.
- Select illustrative slides (not text based slides) to include in the written lecture. Take a screen shot of those slides and save them as a picture (jpeg, png).
- Write the essential lecture out in a Word doc explaining all of the relevant details.
- Insert the pictures of the illustrative slides and add appropriate alt-text so a screen reader can adequately explain the illustration.
- Run the accessibility checker in Word, then save as a doc file and as a pdf file.

(2) To create a **short audio lecture**:
- Determine the key points to address - the information that requires explanation or explicit connection to other points in the topic, the points that are not addressed in other content, and/or that require your expertise for students to understand them.
- Write the essential lecture out in a Word doc explaining all of the relevant details.
- Record yourself with a hand-held recorder or other recording device to create an mp3 audio file.
- Post the file along with a transcript.

(3) To create **short video presentations** from slide files:

- Determine the key points to address - the information that requires explanation or explicit connection to other points in the topic, the points that are not addressed in other content, and/or that require your expertise for students to understand them.
- Plan essential slides carefully – focus on key concepts, relevant underlying relationships/processes, and visual content that illustrates the desired information. Avoid text based slides.
- Script the voice over so you include descriptions of the visual content within the verbal explanation.
- Use one of the following methods to create video from slide files:
    - Use PowerPoint narration and save as a video file.
    - Use screen capture software to create a short video file.
- Post the file with closed captions.

Make **content typed directly into Blackboard** more accessible.
- Use the eraser icon to remove format when necessary from content that was pasted in.
- Use 12 point Arial.
- Use the tools in the content editor to create bulleted and numbered lists.
- Use the Heading Levels provided in the content editor to create headings and subheadings.
- Embed links under meaningful text. For example, instead of "Learn more by going to Google at http://www.google.com," use "Learn more by going to Google."

You can learn more by viewing the following brief videos:

- Moving Lectures Online
- Improving Accessibility Using the Blackboard Content Editor