Providing Accessible Course Content
for Blind/Low-Vision Students

Part of the SLDS "Quick Reference Guide" series. **For more guides, visit go.osu.edu/slds-guides**

Providing course content in an accessible format is essential for ensuring an equitable educational experience for students with disabilities. Accessibility features can also benefit all learners through the principles of universal design. This document provides guidance on how to provide accessible content for students who are blind or low-vision. Please review this document, and contact Disability Services for consultation or media conversion requests.

General Tips

- A good rule of thumb: **"If it's visual, make it auditory. Describe what is displayed."**

- **When possible, provide electronic notes, slides, handouts, etc. to students in advance.**

- **Material conversions take time.** Therefore, please submit any materials needing converted to an accessible format to SLDS with plenty of advance notice (typically 1 week minimum).

- **Microsoft Office products have a handy built-in Accessibility Checker feature** (*File* > *Check for Issues* > *Check Accessibility*) that will catch access issues in your documents, slides, etc.

Accessible Presentation Techniques

- **Provide presentation materials in advance to students.**

- **Verbally describe visual content** (see next section for details).

- **Use large, color-contrasting fonts and sufficient white space** for low-vision readability.

- **Be aware of how content conveyed through non-verbals or vague language can be lost on a blind student.** Instead, narrate non-verbals as they occur with descriptive language.

- **If you are bringing in a guest speaker, inform them of the audience's access needs and how the speaker can provide access** (e.g. verbalizing visual content).

Verbal Description of Visual Content (i.e. Audio Description)

- **"Audio Description" (AD)** is the verbalizing of visual content (such as videos, images, and whiteboard drawings), which conveys the essential elements to the listener.

- **The amount of AD needed is dependent on the complexity of the visuals.** For example, a TED Talk would typically require minimal AD, while a full-length film would likely require AD throughout. Many films rely on visuals to convey plot, theme, etc.

- **AD for videos can be accomplished through pre-recorded tracks** (e.g. Netflix), **pre-viewing explanation by the instructor** (e.g. "In this clip, we'll see…"), **or with the help of an in-class or out-of-class assistant** (typically coordinated by Disability Services upon student request).

- **Click here to watch an example of pre-recorded AD.**

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Accessible Documents

- **Use Microsoft Word's built-in formatting features** (e.g. heading styles, bulleted/numbered lists, columns) to organize documents.
    - **Circumventing these features manually creates less accessible documents.** For example, manually adjusting font type/size for headers without using header styles may look like the same document to a sighted person, but the end result is a document that is much more difficult to navigate and understand for screen-reader users.
    - **For your reference:** how-to guides for (1) heading styles, (2) lists, and (3) columns.

- **If the document has images/graphs, include alt text.**
    - **"Alt text"** is a nonvisible text description of an image, which allows students using screen-reading software to access that content.
    - **To add alt text to an image:** *Right click image > Format Picture > Alt Text > Description*
    - Alt text should capture the important aspects of the image so that the reader can properly understand the content (click here for tips on writing alt text).

- **Hyperlink text should be descriptive** (instead of the entire URL or "click here").
    - Bad example: "To access the annual crime report, click here."
    - Bad example: "Annual Crime Report: http://www.crime.com/annualreport"
    - Good example: "Annual Crime Report" or "click here to download Annual Crime Report"

- **Provide searchable PDFs.**
    - A **"searchable PDF"** means that Adobe recognizes the text and the text can be searched through or highlighted. A non-searchable, or "flat", PDF is inaccessible to students who use screen-readers or text-to-speech software.
    - Word documents saved as PDFs are typically searchable PDFs by default.
    - Example of searchable PDF / Example of Flat PDF
    - If a flat PDF is of high enough quality, you can use Adobe's OCR tool to convert.

Accessible Digital Content

- **Digital course content** (e.g. software, learning modules) **must be compatible with screen-reader software.** Disability Services staff members are available to instructors and departments to help determine digital accessibility and alternative options.

Accessible Course Activities

- **Consider the access needs of a blind/low vision student when planning course activities**, following the basic tenants outlined in this document.

- **If a hands-on activity cannot be made independently accessible, Disability Services can arrange for an in-class assistant to work with the student** (advance notice required).