

# Best Practices for Accessible Course Design

---

1. **Provide alternative text.** Alternative text provides a textual alternative to non-text content (such as pictures and images) in web pages. It is especially helpful for people who are blind and rely on a screen reader to have the content of the website read to them. Alternative text should follow the following guidelines: **Clear, Concise, and Contextual.**
2. **Provide document structure.** Headings, lists, and other structural elements provide meaning and structure to web pages. They can also facilitate keyboard navigation within the page. Use the preformatted headings in word processing programs for best navigation and compatibility with a screen reader.
3. **Use short titles in headings.** When you use headings in a document, be sure to keep them short (fewer than 20 words). In general, headings should be one line long. This makes it easier for readers to quickly navigate the document.
4. **Tables:**
  - **Provide headers for data tables.** Tables should have appropriate table headers (the <th> element, or header row designation). Data cells should be associated with their appropriate headers, making it easier for screen reader users to navigate and understand the data table.
  - **Table structure should be clear.** Do not nest tables, merge or split cells inside of tables. Avoid using tables to layout pages or structure documents. Tables should ideally only be used to present tabular data.
5. **Ensure links make sense out of context.** Every link should make sense if the link text is read by itself. Screen reader users may choose to read only the links on a web page. Certain phrases like “click here” and “more” must be avoided. Hyperlink text should provide a clear description of the link destination, rather than only providing the URL.
6. **Provide synchronous closed captioning for media.** Videos and audio must have synchronous closed captions, and ideally include a transcript. A good practice is to look for multimedia material that is already captioned correctly, such as TED videos. Automatic YouTube captioning is not sufficient; editing may be required to ensure proper captioning.
7. **Ensure accessibility of non-HTML content, including PDF files, Microsoft Word documents, PowerPoint presentations, and Adobe Flash content.** In addition to all of the other principles listed here, PDF documents and other non-HTML content must be as accessible as possible. If this cannot be accomplished, consider using HTML instead or, at the very least, provide an accessible alternative. PDF documents should also include a series of tags to make it more accessible. A tagged PDF file looks the same, but it is almost always more accessible to a person using a screen reader.

## 8. Color:

- **Do not rely on color alone to convey meaning.** The use of color can enhance comprehension, but do not use color alone to convey information. That information may not be available to a person who is colorblind and will be unavailable to screen reader users.
- **Certain color contrasts may inhibit readability.** For instance, red/green contrast cannot be read correctly by a person who is colorblind. Prefer high-contrast color schemes such as black/white or black/yellow.

9. **Make sure content is clearly written and easy to read.** There are many ways to make content easier to understand. Write clearly, use clear fonts, and use headings and lists appropriately. Use sans serif fonts.

10. **Avoid flashing images.** Flashing or flickering images such as animated GIFs can trigger seizures.

11. **Create HTML documents in Desire2Learn.** When adding new text-based content, consider creating an HTML file rather than uploading a Word document. In the course content page, click “New” and then “Create a File.” HTML files load more quickly than Word files in D2L. They are downloadable and can easily be structured to be fully accessible.

12. **Validate documents for accessibility.** There are resources available to help validate that word processing and PDF documents are accessible. For example, Microsoft Word offers an accessibility checked under File > Info. In Adobe Acrobat Pro, accessibility options may be found under the Edit menu or under Tools, depending on the user version.