

# Make Your Canvas Course Accessible

## Step 1: Add Alt Text to Images

Alt text is a brief written description of the content and purpose of an image, primarily for users with visual disabilities.

- ☐ **Images that are informative have descriptive alt text explaining the “why” of the content.**

Alt text should be used only on images that convey important information, such as a photograph illustrating an example of a concept. The alt text provided should explain why the content is important, not simply describe the surface features of the image.

- ☐ **Images that are decorative have the “Decorative Image” box selected.**

All other images, including images that contribute only to the aesthetics or mood of a page, should have the “Decorative Image” box checked.

- ☐ **Images that contain text are used sparingly and repeat that text exactly in the alt text.**

Try to avoid using images to convey important textual content. When you do, make sure the alt text also contains that text in its entirety.

## Step 2: Structure Section Headings Hierarchically

Section headings are an important part of how users of screen readers navigate page content, so they must be structured properly for accessibility.

- ☐ **Page titles and section headings are descriptive, clear, and concise.**

Write page titles and section headings that clearly indicate the content of the section. Users should know what to expect from the content by reading section headings.

- ☐ **Section headings are structured using the Rich Content Editor (RCE).**

Section headings must be identifiable as headings by a screen reader software. To do this, select the text of your heading, select the “Paragraph” dropdown, and select the proper heading level.

- ☐ **Section headings are structured hierarchically.**

All main section headings should be set as Heading 2 in Canvas. Subsection headings should be set as Heading 3 in Canvas, with further subheadings set as Heading 4.

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## Step 3: Create Concise and Descriptive Hyperlinks 🔑

Users of screen readers may use a list of all page links to navigate a page, and properly accessible links better enable this form of navigation.

### ☐ Links are concise and descriptive.

Links should clearly indicate what they are linking to. Users should not be surprised by a disconnect between the link text and the link destination.

### ☐ Links do not use phrases like “Click here,” “this link,” “follow the link,” etc.

These phrases put up barriers for users of screen readers, as they are unable to determine the link's contents from the link list.

### ☐ Links are the only underlined content on each page.

For emphasis, use **bold** or *italics* instead of underlining. Underlined text will be perceived by users as a hyperlink.

### ☐ Links are not portrayed as a URL and are attached to anchor text.

All links should use descriptive anchor text, rather than providing the URL directly in the text. This prevents frustrating experiences for users of screen readers.

## Step 4: Check PDFs for OCR 📄

Optical Character Recognition (OCR) ensures the content of a PDF is searchable and readable by screen readers. It is particularly important for scanned physical documents.

### ☐ Text in PDFs is selectable and searchable.

Check a PDF by searching for a phrase you know is in the PDF. If it is not searchable, run OCR in Adobe Acrobat by selecting “Edit PDF” from the right sidebar.

## Step 5: Use Structured Lists to Break Up Content ☰

Lists help break up walls of text for all users, and properly structured lists can benefit comprehension for users of screen readers.

### ☐ Longer text content is broken up by lists when possible.

Prevent reader fatigue and increase learning comprehension by breaking up longer blocks of text with relevant lists.

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## ☐ Lists are created using the Bullet list or Numbered list buttons in the RCE.

Use the list tool in Canvas to select the appropriate type of list. Never manually create a bullet or number, such as by inserting a hyphen.

## ☐ Lists are prefaced by a heading or lead phrase.

Leading into your list or providing a list heading helps users know what to expect from the contents of the list.

## Step 6: Ensure Strong Color Contrast

Color is a powerful tool for visual design, but it can cause issues with users who have visual disabilities.

## ☐ Content and background have high color contrast for readability.

Large text should have a contrast of at least 4.5:1 and small text should have a contrast of at least 7:1. Manually verify these using the [WebAIM Contrast Checker](#) tool.

## ☐ Color is not used solely to convey meaning.

While you may use color to convey meaning, it should be paired with other ways of conveying meaning, preferably another visual means and a textual means.

## Step 7: Format Tables with Headers and Summary

Tables are an important way to display data, but they can present many barriers to users of screen readers.

## ☐ Tables have a summary in the preceding text or as a table caption.

A summary helps users know what the table contents will be. It should be present either just before the table in the text leading up to it or as a caption.

## ☐ Tables include a properly defined header row and/or column.

Header rows and columns help users of screen readers locate and identify information within a table. In Canvas, the best way to set the header row or column is through the [Accessibility Checker](#).

## ☐ Tables are used for data, not layout.

Tables should only be used to display data, never for purely visual reasons, such as to place a photo next to text.

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## Step 8: Structure Documents for Accessibility

Documents linked in a course, such as a syllabus or readings, should be made accessible in the same ways that Canvas content is.

### ☐ Word documents and PDFs have alt text for informative images.

Alt text can be applied in almost any document editing program by right-clicking an image and selecting “Alt text” or “Edit alt text.”

### ☐ Word documents use the “Styles” panel to hierarchically structure section headings.

Section headings in Word should be set using the Styles panel (visible under the Home tab). Verify the document structure by going to View > Navigation Pane.

### ☐ PDFs have section headers properly configured.

PDFs should also have section headings structured for accessibility. This can be difficult to edit in a PDF, so your best bet is to go back to the source document and make these edits (see previous item).

### ☐ Word documents and PDFs use concise, descriptive hyperlinks.

### ☐ Word documents and PDFs have properly defined lists and tables.

### ☐ Word documents and PDFs have strong color contrast and do not use color to solely convey meaning.

For more information on these items, see Steps 3, 5, 6, and 7.

### ☐ Word documents and PDFs have been checked using the Accessibility Checker in both programs.

The built-in accessibility checkers in Microsoft Word and Adobe Acrobat can help you identify and fix accessibility errors.