

Digital Content Accessibility Checklist: Explanation and How-To

All **digital** documents, regardless of format (e.g., Microsoft Office, PDF, etc.), **must** apply the standards of [Section 508 of the American Disabilities Act](#) and the [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines](#) (WCAG).

Disclaimer: Not all standards may be applicable to your digital content, and there may be outlier cases not covered in this document.

Types of Digital Content

Text and Presentation

Word (e.g., Microsoft Word, Google Docs, Pages) & Presentation Documents (e.g., Microsoft PowerPoint (PPT), Google Slides, Keynote)

When creating your content, are you following the standards below?

Complete	Accessibility Standard	Explanation/Resources
	Current Filetype <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Word - .docx• PPT - .pptx	Enables accessibility features Required by assistive technology to correctly deliver or read the content
	Unique Titles <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Descriptive title• Set Title Property (title is not just in text)• Differentiate slide titles (PPT, Google Slides)• Use Master slide title placeholders (PPT, Google Slides)	Must be able to identify or distinguish content without opening, reading, or seeing the file Improves navigation and comprehension for learners (e.g., slides with identical titles confuse learners) Resources: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Microsoft How to Set Document Properties (PC)• Built-in Slide Layouts/Titles for PPT (UW)• Google Title/Headings
	Using Plain, Concise Language <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Avoid unreadable walls of text• Write clearly and simply• 7x7 rule for presentations	Plain language promotes comprehension for all learners and reduces the “translation” time needed to make sense of difficult or wordy documents. Resources:

Complete	Accessibility Standard	Explanation/Resources
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing Clearly and Simply (WebAIM) • Example of Wall of Text Slide • Example of 7x7 Slide
	<p>Font is Readable</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Select fonts where letters and words do not bleed together • Sans Serif font examples: Open Sans, Tahoma, Verdana, Trebuchet MS, Helvetica Neue • Serif font examples: Book Antiqua, Georgia, Times New Roman 	<p>Makes text more understandable and distinguishable, especially for those with reading disorders like Dyslexia</p> <p>Resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Font Readability (DO-IT) • WebAIM Font Readability
	<p>Font is Resizable and Selectable</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use built-in fonts • Choose large font sizes 18pt or larger (PPT, Google Slides) • Avoid saving text as graphic (e.g., scanned book pages create unselectable text) 	<p>Makes text legible (clear and crisp) when zoomed or magnified</p> <p>Required by those with low vision using assistive technology</p> <p>Required when using mobile technologies</p> <p>Resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Test Content Scaling (WebAIM) • Using Magnifier on Windows 10
	<p>Using Built-in Formatting and Features</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Headings and Styles • Lists (bullets or numbers) • Columns and Layout 	<p>Provides document structure required by assistive technologies such as screen readers</p> <p>Makes content easier to read and navigate for all learners</p> <p>Resources:</p> <p>Headings and Styles</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Word Document Headings • Google Docs Headings <p>Lists</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Microsoft Word Lists • PowerPoint Lists • Google Docs or Slides Lists <p>Columns and Layout</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Microsoft Word Columns • PowerPoint Columns • Built-in Slide Layouts/Titles PPT (UW):: • Google Docs Columns
	<p>Strong Color Contrast</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum Text (foreground) to Background Contrast Ratios: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 4.5:1 (fonts less than 18pt) 	<p>Makes content visible and legible, especially for those with color blindness or low vision</p> <p>Resources:</p>

Complete	Accessibility Standard	Explanation/Resources
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 3:1 (fonts 18pt and larger or 14pt if bold) ● Text to adjacent or inline content (links, images, charts, shapes, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Contrast and Color Accessibility (WebAIM) ● Contrast Checker (WebAIM) ● Color Safe (Color Palette Generator) ● Contrast Checker (WCAG) ● Accessible Color Contrast Examples (STUDIO)
	<p>Convey Meaning or Importance Using More than Color Alone</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Add secondary formatting to color (bold or italics) ● Add text explanation of visual color cues 	<p>Makes content visible and understandable, especially for those with color blindness or low vision</p> <p>Resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Use of Color (WebAIM) ● Visual Disabilities (WebAIM)
	<p>Descriptive Text Links</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Use descriptive language instead of a long URL ● Avoid meaningless link text like “click here”, “the website”, “link”, etc. ● Link titles should be unique ● If the same title must be used, they must be distinguishable 	<p>URLs read letter-by-letter by screen readers making them impossible to comprehend when spoken aloud</p> <p>Providing the link’s context and purpose makes it understandable</p> <p>Providing unique links makes them distinguishable and understandable (e.g., links with identical text confuse learners)</p> <p>Resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Links and Hypertext (WebAIM) ● Word Add Hyperlink Text ● PPT Add Hyperlink Text ● Google Docs and Slides Add Hyperlink Text
	<p>Underlines for Links Only</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Underlines should only be used to indicate a hyperlink ● Remove underline formatting from all other text 	<p>Using underlines for anything other than hyperlinks confuses learners as they perceive underlined text to lead to hyperlinked material.</p> <p>Resource:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Link Appearance (WebAIM)
	<p>Avoid Using All Caps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Use all caps for acronyms only ● Identify the acronym’s expanded form the first time it appears <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Example: Center for Learning & Teaching (CLT) 	<p>Words and letters in all caps are harder to distinguish, especially for those with low vision or reading disorders like Dyslexia.</p> <p>Resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Why Text in All Caps Is Hard for Users to Read ● Font Variations (WebAIM)

Complete	Accessibility Standard	Explanation/Resources
	<p>Table Structure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use for data, not layout (use built-in layout features; see above) • Use logical, linear data structure • Specify column header rows • Do not merge or split cells • Do not use text wrapping 	<p>Provides structure that is easily navigable for all learners, but especially for learners using assistive technologies such as screen readers</p> <p>Resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Word Use Table Headers • PPT Use Table Headers • Google Docs and Slides Add or Edit Table • Make Your Document or Presentation More Accessible (Google Drive)
	<p>Alternative Text Added to Non-Text Content</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Required for pictures, shapes, charts, embedded objects, video, etc. • Be specific • Avoid meaningless words like “image” or “image of” (screen readers already identify this) • If text within image, include it in the Alt text 	<p>Makes non-text content readable to assistive technology like screen readers</p> <p>Provides context and explanation to those with blindness or low vision</p> <p>Resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alternative Text (WebAIM) • What constitutes good alt text? • Word Add Alt Text • PPT Add Alt Text • Google Docs and Slides Add Alt Text
	<p>Content is Scalable</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Content or images remain legible (clear and crisp) when zoomed or magnified 	<p>Required by those with low vision using assistive technology</p> <p>Required when using mobile technologies</p> <p>Resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Test Content Scaling (WebAIM) • Using Magnifier on Windows 10
	<p>Text Not Saved as Graphic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Example: save data tables as text, not an image 	<p>Makes text and numbers available to assistive technology like screen readers</p> <p>Makes content easier to read and navigate for all learners</p> <p>Scanned documents (e.g., textbook pages, old worksheets, etc.) are not readable by assistive technology and should be converted to searchable PDFs as separate documents.</p> <p>Resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technique: Text and Images of Text (Harvard) • Foxit Create Searchable PDF/OCR

Complete	Accessibility Standard	Explanation/Resources
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adobe Acrobat Pro Create Searchable PDF/OCR
	<p>Verify Slide Read Order (PPT and Slides)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Verify slide contents are set to read in the order intended 	<p>When adding slide elements (e.g., text box, images, etc.), these added items are not always read in the order you intended them to be or at all.</p> <p>Table cell reading order will need to be adjusted in most cases to provide effective context. However, this is still more accessible than using an image of a table with a long description of the content.</p> <p>Resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PPT Set the Reading Order of Slide Contents • Google Slides <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Grackle Add-on Accessibility Checker (Virginia Tech) ◦ Grackle Slides Download
	<p>Eliminate Decorative Animation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid animation transitions • If animation is required, it should be simple 	<p>Animation and transitions are almost never considered essential to the functionality or information of the content and are distracting to all learners.</p> <p>Resource:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PowerPoint Accessibility (WebAIM) • Animations (WebAIM)
	<p>Run Accessibility Checker</p>	<p>Accessibility checkers help digital content meet accessibility standards.</p> <p>Resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Microsoft Accessibility Checker • Grackle Docs • How to Use Grackle Docs (UH)

Audio

Audio Only Pre-Recordings (e.g., Microsoft PowerPoint Slide Audio, Google Slides Audio, Audio Only)

When creating your content, are you following the standards below?

Complete	Accessibility Standard	Explanation/Resources
	<p>Provide a Transcript</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Text version of the speech and non-speech audio information needed to understand the content	<p>Transcripts allow learners with auditory disabilities to access course content.</p> <p>Provides multiple means of representation for all learners for studying, note-taking, and search functionality.</p> <p>Transcripts allow learners with auditory processing difficulties including English Language Learners (ELL) or students working in chaotic environments.</p> <p>Resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Does My Media Need a Transcript (Audio Only)? Checklist (W3C)
	<p>Recording Clear Audio</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Crisp audio• No, or low, background noise	<p>Clear audio assists learners with auditory processing difficulties, English Language Learners (ELL), or students working in chaotic environments in separating speech from background noise.</p> <p>Resource:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Audio (W3C)

Video

Video Only Pre-Recordings (e.g., Animation, Silent Video)

When creating your content, are you following the standards below?

Complete	Accessibility Standard	Explanation/Resources
	Descriptive Text Transcript <ul style="list-style-type: none">Describe visual components	<p>Transcripts allow learners with auditory disabilities to access course content.</p> <p>Provides multiple means of representation for all learners.</p> <p>Resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Example Descriptive Transcript Files (W3C)Does My Media Need a Transcript? (W3C)

Video Pre-Recordings

When creating your content, are you following the standards below?

Complete	Accessibility Standard	Explanation/Resources
	Human-Generated Closed Captions <ul style="list-style-type: none">Text version of the speech and non-speech audio information needed to understand the content displayed within the media player and are synchronized with the audioAutomatically generated transcripts must be edited	<p>SRTs (SubRip Subtitle File) allow learners with auditory processing difficulties or deafness to process recorded content.</p> <p>Provides multiple means of representation for all learners.</p> <p>Resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Does my Media Need Captions (W3C)Automatic Captions are Not Sufficient (W3C)Captions, Transcripts, and Audio Descriptions (WebAIM)
	Audio/Text Description <ul style="list-style-type: none">Provide an audible description of content elements, the SRT will include this information allowing learners with processing difficulties to comprehend recorded content	<p>Example: "As you see in this table..." does not provide enough context for comprehension.</p> <p>If you don't provide an audible description, a textual description must be included to add to the SRT.</p> <p>Example: Are you verbally explaining your equations?</p> <p>Resource:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Example Descriptive Transcript Files (W3C)

Complete	Accessibility Standard	Explanation/Resources
	<p>Provide a Transcript</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Text version of the speech and non-speech audio information needed to understand the content 	<p>Transcripts allow learners with auditory disabilities to access course content.</p> <p>Provides multiple means of representation for all learners for studying, note taking, and search functionality.</p> <p>Transcripts allow learners with auditory processing difficulties including English Language Learners (ELL) or students working in chaotic environments.</p> <p>Resource:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does My Media Need a Transcript (Audio Only)? Checklist (W3C) – suggested but not required for W3C AAA Convert SRT to Word Transcript (happyscribe)
	<p>Annotation Strong Color Contrast</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Text to adjacent or inline content (links, images, charts, shapes, etc.) Minimum Text (foreground) to Background Contrast Ratios: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4.5:1 (fonts less than 18pt) 3:1 (fonts 18pt and larger or 14pt if bold) 	<p>Makes content visible and legible, especially for those with color blindness or low vision</p> <p>Resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contrast and Color Accessibility (WebAIM) Contrast Checker (WebAIM) Color Safe (Color Palette Generator) Contrast Checker (WCAG) Accessible Color Contrast Examples (STUDIO)

General Accessibility

Overarching Accessibility Considerations

When creating your content, are you following the standards below?

Complete	Accessibility Standard	Rationale/Resources
	<p>Works with Assistive Technology</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examples: screen reader, keyboard with large keys, special mouse, screen magnifiers, etc. 	<p>Technology that allows users to perform functions that might otherwise be difficult or impossible</p> <p>Resource:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is Assistive Technology (DO-IT)

Complete	Accessibility Standard	Rationale/Resources
	<p>Multi-Use Technology</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Digital content works on multiple platforms: computer, tablet, mobile phone, etc. 	<p>Maximizes compatibility with current and future user tools</p> <p>Save base files for adjustments for future technological advances (e.g., Microsoft products rather than PDFs, editable video footage, etc.)</p> <p>Resource:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understanding the Four Principles of Accessibility (W3C)
	<p>Users Control Experience</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners control start/stop Ability to pause/rewind No automatic slide advancement Volume adjustment available 	<p>All learners benefit from being able to control the speed at which they review content. It is especially useful for those that may need additional time to process such information.</p> <p>Resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide an Accessible Media Player (Harvard) User Control Over Timing (WebAIM)