GW | Libraries &
Academic Innovation

Digital Accessibility Checklist

Guidelines for making course materials accessible

"The George Washington University is committed to providing all Digital Content and functionality, including University Website(s), necessary for participating in university programs, services or activities in an accessible manner to all users." From [GW's Web and Digital Content Accessibility Policy](#)

This checklist is designed to enable faculty, program directors, and other support staff to make improvements to the accessibility of online course materials. Following accessibility guidelines helps ensure that *all* students are able to access instructional material, including students with disabilities. This entails evaluating documents, tools, and Blackboard items used in courses. The steps in this checklist improve usability not only for students with disabilities, but makes course materials more clear and usable for all.

The authoring of this checklist was driven by the following standards:
- [The Quality Matters Higher Education,](#) Design Standards for online and blended courses, 6th Edition
- [GW's Web and Digital Content Accessibility Policy](#)
- [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1](#)
- [Universal Design for Learning Guidelines](#)

Below the checklist are resources and instructions to implement these changes.

Checklist, using the Quality Matters Rubric as a guide in workflow order for ease

- ❏ [Make GW's disability support resources clearly available to students](#)
- ❏ [Use the built-in accessibility checker for Blackboard, Microsoft applications and Adobe files](#)
- ❏ [Use consistent styles for headings and subheadings](#)
- ❏ [Provide text alternatives for graphics](#)
- ❏ [Provide captions and/or transcripts for videos and provide transcripts for audio](#)
- ❏ [Make links that state the purpose of the link, not the url](#)
- ❏ [All multimedia in the course is easy to view, operate, and interpret](#)
- ❏ [Use tables only for tabular data and use table headings to organize](#)
- ❏ [Use best practices when providing PDFs in your course: PDFs should be selectable and searchable, and use PDFs provided from the library whenever possible](#)
- ❏ [Make vendor accessibility statement available to students](#)

Make disability support resources clearly available to students

Why

GW has centralized resources in the [Office of Disability Support Services](#) (DSS) for students that have differentiated needs. Through DSS, students can request [accommodations](#) as needed, in both physical and online classrooms.

How

In your syllabus and in Blackboard, you must alert students to the existence of [DSS](#) so students who require accommodation can provide documentation and get necessary support. Visit DSS's [Faculty Support](#) for a Syllabus Statement.

QM Standard 7.4: Course instructions articulate or link to the institution's student services and resources that can help learners succeed.

Use the built-in accessibility checker for Microsoft Office, Adobe, and Blackboard

Why

Programs you are already using to create your course materials have built-in features to help you identify areas where you can improve your accessibility without needing extra expertise or training.

How

Below are guides for using some of the built-in accessibility checkers:
- [Guide for Microsoft Accessibility Checker](#)
- [Guide for Adobe Accessibility Checker](#)
- [Guide for Blackboard Ally](#) (contact the Instructional Technology Lab to turn this on in your course.)

QM Standard 8.3: The course provides accessible text and images in files, documents, LMS pages, and webpages to meet the needs of diverse learners.
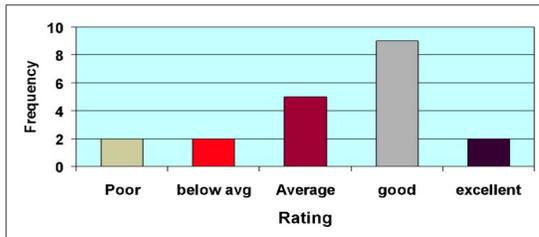
Provide text alternatives for graphics

Why

Students with visual impairments will miss crucial parts of your instruction in graphs or charts if there is no alternative text (or "alt-text") given for their assistive technology to read.

How

Alternative Text
The following information is displayed in bar graph form:
Y-axis increases in frequency by 2. Y-axis points are 0, 2, 4, 6, 8, 10.
X-axis provides the following ratings: poor, below average, average, good, and excellent.
Poor Rating is 2, Below Average Rating is 2, Average Rating is 5, Good Rating is 9, and Excellent Rating is

When you add an image into a document or on Blackboard, enter into the image description or Alt Text field. Your text should be descriptive, but not verbose. For instance, describe the general activity or name the person in a headshot. If there is text in the image, all of that text must be included in the alternate text field.

If a graphic is purely decorative or background (not essential to learning the content), you can indicate this and the screen reader will pass over it.

For more information on creating alt text, visit the following sites:
- [Blackboard - Add Image Descriptions](#)
- [Microsoft Documents - Add alternative text to a shape, picture, chart, SmartArt graphic, or other object](#)
- [Adobe PDFs - Add alternative text](#)

QM Standard 8.3: The course provides accessible text and images in files, documents, LMS pages, and webpages to meet the needs of diverse learners.

Provide captions and/or transcripts for videos and provide transcripts for audio

Why

Adding more media enriches and diversifies a course, but be sure to include alternative means of access to meet the needs of your diverse learners. Students with hearing impairments will miss critical information if videos only have audio, and heavily visual videos will not be accessible for students with visual impairments. Students

with hearing impairments will be entirely unable to access a podcast or audio recording. Be mindful when creating and selecting instructional materials so all of your students can access the content.

How

[Here is a helpful guide from the Web Accessibility Initiative on making audio and video media accessible](#).

Media should include captions and/or transcripts. When you create any multimedia pieces for your course, be sure to provide:
- **Captioning for video:** use a captioning service, such as [Rev](#), [CaptionSync](#), or another tool, to add captions to your video. Some are fee-based, while others require editing effort and time. Be sure to leave some room at the bottom of your slides/video so that captions won't overlay content.
- **Scripts for video**: as an alternative to captions, consider writing out scripts before recording videos.
- **Transcripts for audio:** use a transcription service, such as [Rev](#), [CaptionSync](#), or another tool, to transcribe audio-only files.
- **Written transcripts for any heavily-visual video:** think from the perspective of someone who is blind or low-vision - would they be able to understand your content with just audio? If not, you may need to write out a brief explanation for any visuals (similar to alternative text).

For live, synchronous sessions in courses: DSS can provide live captioning when there is a student with a documented need. This can be provided regardless of the web conferencing tool being used (Blackboard Collaborate, Zoom, WebEx, Skype, etc.). If this is done, any recorded sync sessions will include the captions. Recordings of live sync sessions that are not live captioned and will not include closed captions if saved in the course. Integration with third-party captioning service for recorded sync sessions in Blackboard with 3Play Media exists at a cost. Contact [DSSAT@gwu.edu](#) for more information.

Check for captions and transcripts for third-party materials you use: When you select third-party materials from places such as YouTube, Vimeo, news organizations, podcast providers, etc. they must have closed captions or a transcript. If not, link to a transcript.

QM Standard 8.4: The course provides alternative means of access to multimedia content in formats that meet the needs of diverse learners.

Make links that state the purpose of the link, not the url

Why

Links to websites should be contextual - they should be meaningful if they're read out of context and help users understand the destination if they click it.

How

Using only "Learn more" or "Click more" on the link doesn't provide information about where the link goes and should be avoided. Use descriptive text such as "Learn more about the Amazon rainforest" or "Visit our library resources". Visible urls should also be avoided. Having visible urls in a course can get ugly and means

that students using screen readers would need to listen to a computer read aloud a meaningless string of characters.

For example:
Use: [Tips for Writing for Web Accessibility](#)
Not: [Click here](#)
Not: https://www.w3.org/WAI/tips/writing/

For more information on creating links in Blackboard, visit: [Blackboard: Create a Web Link](#)

QM Standard 8.1: Course navigation facilitates ease of use.

Use consistent styles for headings and subheadings

Why

Easy-to-read and well-organized materials are not just accessible design - they are good design for all users. With simple built-in tools, you can make consistent, good-looking documents that are also readable to all students, including those with vision impairments. Assistive technologies rely on hidden "markup" or code to determine the structure of a document, and these are automatically included in document styles. [Watch a video on how screen readers read documents and how to use header styles from Microsoft.](#)

How

Use built-in headings and styles to format "chunks" of text: Microsoft applications have built-in title and header styles and [templates](#) that will not only make your content look more consistent and professional, but will also include the markup needed for accessibility. [Learn more about applying styles to your document using Microsoft.](#)

Do not use text-size, underlining and color alone to organize your document: If you simply make your titles or section headings larger font size, a screen reader won't be able to "skim" and find the important headings in the document. If you use color to show meaning (i.e. making important things in the color red), students with color blindness won't be able to distinguish what's important. If you use underlining for regular text, students may not be able to differentiate clickable links from plain text. Instead, identify importance by using a signifier in addition to color, such as headings, subheadings, or by using an asterisk by important items.

> **Insufficient Example:** Only indicating this date is important with the color red

> Due 9/30/20

> **Good Example:** can still use color, but also adds an asterisk and a "key" in the document

> *red text and asterisks in this document indicate important dates and items
> Due *9/30/20

Use good color contrast: Text color should have enough contrast from the background color so that people with low vision, color blindness, or other visual impairments can read all content. Black and white is a good standard for written text. If you want to add additional colors, use tools such as the [WebAIM Color Contrast Checker](#) to confirm your color combination is readable.

QM Standard 8.2: The course design facilitates readability.

All multimedia in the course is easy to view, operate, and interpret.

Why

All course users should be able to easily access and use multimedia elements, such as images, audio, animation, video, etc. in their course. Segmenting videos into manageable chunks leads to an increased student understanding and retention.

How

Use media that has clear, high-quality audio. The average listener should be able to comfortably hear the audio even when it's played at 50% volume. Videos should be broken into segments of no more than 20 minutes. Players should allow students the ability to control their movement through presentations and video. This includes the ability to navigate the video using only their keyboard. If possible, ask someone else to test the media in your course prior to providing it to students.

QM Standard 8.5: Course multimedia facilitates ease of use.

Use tables only for tabular data and use table headings to organize

Why

Tables are primarily designed for data - where row headers, column headers, or both are present, and where relationships between data are shown. Tables also are often used to layout information, like in a calendar. Screen readers for users with low-to-no vision are able to read tables generally speaking. However, if tables are used simply to layout pages and do not have defined headers, the screen reader will read the table to the user stripped of context and cause confusion.
[Here is an explainer from WebAIM on why to try and avoid layout tables versus data tables.](#)

Data Table

Period	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4
Cash Inflow	$0.00	$150.00	$150.00	$150.00
Cash Outflow	$200.00	$50.00	$50.00	$50.00
Net Cashflow	-$200.00	$100.00	$100.00	$100.00

Layout Table

| Module	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Week 1 - 1/14/19 to 1/18/19					
Module 1	**Watch** Course Introduction Video **Read** weekly readings		**Form** small groups or pairs for assignment	**Discuss** the weekly readings on the discussion board	**Submit** Paper 1

How

Designate header rows and header columns so screen readers can determine the relationship between data in the table. Avoid using split cells and merged cells. [Here is a video on creating accessible tables in Word](#).

QM Standard 8.1: Course navigation facilitates ease of use.

Use best practices when providing PDFs in your course: PDFs should be selectable and searchable, and use PDFs provided from the library whenever possible

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Why

PDFs that are scanned are not readable by screen readers. This is because scans save the page as an image and the text in that image is not readable by a screen reader - it would read as blank pages. Text must be scanned through Optical Character Recognition (OCR) so that screen readers can access it. Scanned PDFs might also be violating copyright law. Most readings can be provided legally and accessible as links to public websites or durable links to GW Library's subscriptions.
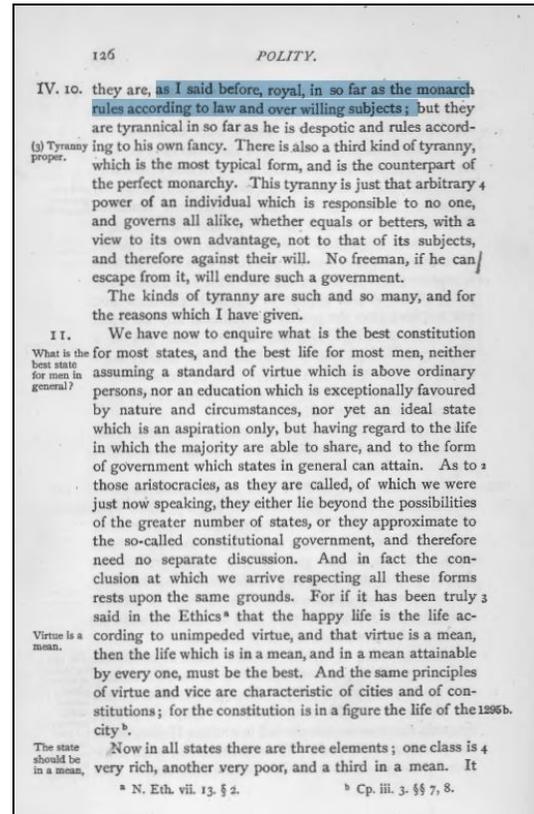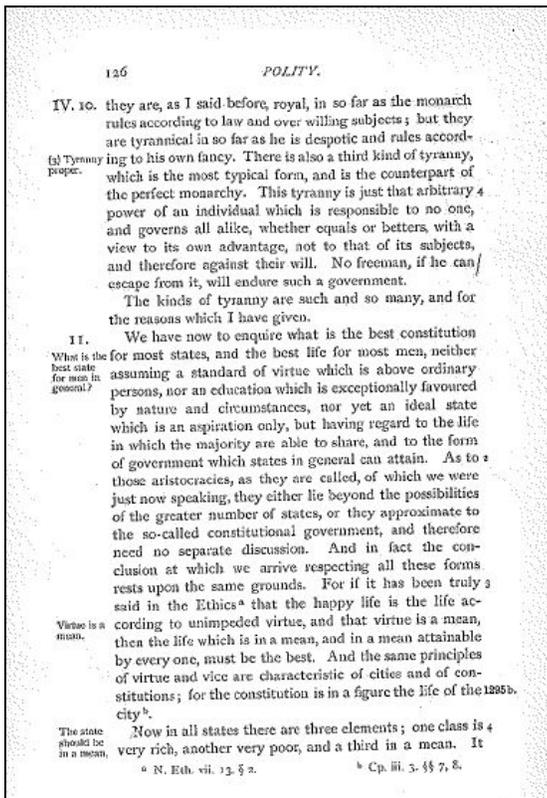
Scanned PDF - This is a badly scanned PDF. The text is off-center, not very clear, and not selectable or searchable with a mouse. This is not readable to a screen reader.

Readable PDF - This is a PDF scanned through an OCR from the library. Notice that the text is selectable with a mouse and therefore readable to a screen reader. It is also searchable so that all students can find what they need in the reading.

The best way to provide readings in Blackboard is by using durable links through the GW Libraries to link readings from the appropriate journal, new organization, website, or book in a fully accessible version. You can also review your own PDFs in Adobe to ensure they're readable for all of your students.

How

GW's subscription materials should not be converted into PDFs. Instead all subscription materials should utilize durable links that take students through Library subscriptions:

- [Creating Durable Links](#) from the Himmelfarb Library (for use at all GW schools and libraries)
- Consult a librarian if you need help with resource

Before sending or posting your own PDF for students:
- Try to select a line of text with your mouse - if you cannot do this, the text is unreadable with an assistive technology tool. Consult a librarian if you need help with this.
- Run the [Adobe Accessibility Checker](#) and make the recommended changes on all PDFs before distribution.

QM Standard 8.3: The course provides accessible text and images in files, documents, LMS pages, and webpages to meet the needs of diverse learners.

Make accessibility policies available to students

Why

Technology companies publish accessibility statements on their websites to describe their specific approach and policy on web accessibility. These statements may also include instructions on how to use specific accessibility technology available on the website, and they can encourage users to report any issues of inaccessible material.

How

Include accessibility statements for any tools you are using in the course. Here is a list of some of the most common:
- [Blackboard accessibility policy](#)
- [Kaltura (video platform) accessibility policy](#)
- [Microsoft Office accessibility policy](#)
- [Adobe accessibility policy](#)
- [Voicethread accessibility policy](#)
- [Google accessibility policy](#)
- YouTube accessibility policy - currently does not have its own accessibility policy, but [Google Help provides information on using a screen reader and keyboard with YouTube](#)

QM Standard 8.6: Vendor accessibility statements are provided for all technologies required in the course.

For support on implementing Blackboard Ally, see [Faculty Workshops at the Instructional Technology Lab](#) for all upcoming workshops about accessibility and Blackboard tools.