

Introduction for Top Ten Accessibility Tips

In response to the 2008 ADA Amendments Act, institutions of higher education are required to make their course curricula, internet information and resources, and academic and administrative systems independently accessible to the public and members of the University community who have disabilities. While providing a reader or an assistant was an appropriate accommodation prior to 2008, the newer legislation explicitly articulates the institutional obligation to provide the individual *independent* access.

Brandeis now has approximately 330 undergraduate and graduate students with documented print disabilities, including 10 students with visual impairments. Students with disabilities are able to access course curricula if the formatting of the course material allows use of their assistive technology. It is critical that the course material used in class and/or *uploaded* to LATTE allows access by screen readers such as BrailleNote, WindowEyes, VoiceOver, Kurzweil, JAWS, Read&Write Gold.

Creating/Converting Course Material:

The need to create and convert accessible course materials extends to all faculty, for all courses. It applies to assignments, texts, videos or films, online surveys or placements tests. Course materials must be accessible-ready because we do not always have sufficient advance notice of a student's enrolling in a course to undertake this work in time to meet a student's need. As a university community, we are making resources available to support faculty efforts to achieve accessibility (see Help section below.)

The *Top Ten Accessibility Tips* posted here provides guidance to faculty for creating and converting documents to be generally accessible; the fact that some unique formatting may be required to meet the needs of a particular student's use is a process that Disabilities Services will manage.

Course materials typically accessible:

- Articles that are pulled from databases such as JSTOR, LexisNexis, EBSCO
- PDFs that are not images
- Word documents
- Recently published textbooks (generally easier to find in e-text)

How you can check:

One way to know is if you can navigate the source without the use of the mouse. Also, try to read the document with a screen reader on your computer or a free screen reader available at www.balabolka.com or at <http://www.nvaccess.org/>.

Help is available:

Technology is an ever-changing tool that assists us in increasing usability for students with disabilities. The *Top Ten Tips*, created by Disabilities Services and posted here will support your efforts to create or convert course materials that are "accessible-ready" for students using assistive technology tools. Disabilities Services (brodgers@brandeis.edu) can assist with questions about a particular student with a disability.

LTS has posted an online guide, www.brandeis.edu/latte/help/accessibility/, describing fairly easy ways to improve the accessibility of Microsoft Office and PDF documents, audio and video files, and files of other types. Contact Academic Technology, academictech@brandeis.edu, for assistance with creating accessible course materials.

TOP TEN ACCESSIBILITY TIPS

Ten issues that make course materials inaccessible, and how to make a document “accessible-ready” for students who use assistive technology tools

INACCESSIBLE	“ACCESSIBLE READY”
A book available in print only	Request the electronic version (the publisher’s source file) when the books are ordered <i>*Not Kindle or any ‘locked’ e-Reader format</i> <i>*EPUB files are best</i>
Scanned handouts with markings and notes in margins <i>Handouts that have been scanned multiple times lose their accessibility</i>	Scan a clean copy, without handwritten markings <i>*Scan original source, ensure straight alignment, with book as flat as possible to eliminate light, or single pages without binding</i>
A PDF or Word doc that is ‘protected’ <i>Screen readers cannot read protected or locked text</i>	Provide the student with an unprotected PDF or Word document
A document isn’t ‘navigable’ <i>Screen readers can only read it beginning to end, without the ability to tab-navigate to different sections</i>	Use ‘Styles’ rather than plain ‘formatting’ to design the document. <i>Press Ctrl Shift S or click Home → Styles</i> <i>[Paragraph level styles (Title, Heading) are indicated by a P; Character level styles (Strong=Bold, Emphasis=Italics) are indicated by an A]</i>
Tables are used for document layout	Use tables only for aligning related data. <i>Tables should be ‘inserted’ and not ‘drawn’</i>
Files aren’t named clearly	Use naming conventions <i>*I.e., Author name, document title, lecture number</i>
Pictures and graphics aren’t captioned and described <i>In PPT, Word, or book chapters</i> <i>Is the graphic informative or decorative?</i>	Create ‘Captions’ and/or ‘Alt Text’ descriptions for all images, graphs, etc. <i>Right-click on the image → Add Caption → type in the caption name you want (i.e. Figure 1.2, Map of Asia)</i> <i>Right-click on the image → Format picture → Alt text → enter description (8-10 words)</i>
Links aren’t labeled and described <i>‘Click here’ as opposed to ‘Click here to watch the video’</i>	Create ‘Alt Text’ on Links <i>Right-click on the image → Format picture → Alt text → type in ‘Watch the video’ or ‘Click here to watch the video’</i>
Text boxes <i>Text-to-speech technologies cannot access the information inside text boxes</i>	Use ‘Styles’ rather than Text boxes to create the desired appearance of your document
Video without ‘descriptive audio’ <i>YouTube clips, News videos, select films</i>	Options: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Locate described version • Provide typed description of visual action relevant to the intended purpose of the assignment

Contact Academic Technology, academictech@brandeis.edu, for assistance with creating accessible course materials.

Sources:

Ron Stewart, Technology Advisor, Association on Higher Education and Disability
Robert Beach, Assistive Technology Specialist, Kansas City Kansas Community College
Gaeir Dietrich, Director, High Tech Center Training Unit, California Community Colleges

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