



October 9, 2015

# USAonline Accessibility Guide

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## WHAT DOES ACCESSIBILITY MEAN?

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Accessibility means designing things that are able to be used by all (or a great majority of) individuals, regardless of their impairments or abilities.

Accessibility, the ability to access—is not to be confused with usability which refers to overall ease of use. Making your course accessible not only means making the information available via “direct access” (i.e., visual text for hearing impaired students and audio for visually impaired students) but also designing in a way to meet “indirect access” via whatever adaptive technologies students might have (such as screen readers that need pdf documents developed using Optical Character Recognition/OCR, and so forth.)

Accessibility is often linked to Universal Design principles, which strive to make sure that products are user-friendly for all individuals, whether a person has an impairment or not.

## WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO MAKE MY COURSE ACCESSIBLE?

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As a conscientious educator, one of your top priorities is to make sure all of your students are successful. This means you want to make sure your course is accessible to all your students, including those who might have vision or hearing issues, problems with concentration, trouble distinguishing colors on a screen, among others.

Making your course accessible transcends good practice and personal choice—it is the law. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Section 504 states:

*"No otherwise qualified individual with a disability...shall, solely by reason of his or her disability, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance..."*

More U.S. laws concerning accessibility can be found on the following pages:

- ADA Standards--<http://www.access-board.gov/guidelines-and-standards/buildings-and-sites/about-the-ada-standards/ada-standards/single-file-version>
- Section 504 Standards--<http://www2.ed.gov/policy/rights/reg/ocr/edlite-34cfr104.html#S1>
- Section 508 Standards--  
[http://www.southalabama.edu/departments/ilc/resources/section508\\_standards1.pdf](http://www.southalabama.edu/departments/ilc/resources/section508_standards1.pdf)
- Section 508 Summary--  
[http://www.southalabama.edu/departments/ilc/resources/summary\\_section5081.pdf](http://www.southalabama.edu/departments/ilc/resources/summary_section5081.pdf)

In addition, the University of South Alabama has published a set of E-learning Accessibility Guidelines. These guidelines are focused mainly on educating online instructors in what they need to do to prepare their course materials for visually or hearing impaired students.

The E-learning Accessibility Guidelines can be found on the University's website at: [http://www.southalabama.edu/departments/academicaffairs/resources/policies/E-Learning%20Accessibility\\_Guidelines.pdf](http://www.southalabama.edu/departments/academicaffairs/resources/policies/E-Learning%20Accessibility_Guidelines.pdf)

## **TYPES OF STUDENT NEEDS**

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Each year, the USA Office of Student Disability Services receives requests from students with special needs. Upon approval, requests are forwarded to the instructors of their courses. Beyond this, there may be other students who have sight, hearing, or other issues who elect not to officially report them to the Office of Student Disability Services. The E-Learning Accessibility Guidelines were put into place to help instructors better prepare their online courses for all of these students. While the E-Learning Accessibility Guidelines do not officially encompass online course design for individuals reporting various disabilities, they are still important to understand how to accommodate these students for the best universally designed course possible.

### **VISUAL IMPAIRMENT**

Types of visual impairment and student experiences can vary considerably. Some students may be completely blind while others may be able to see large forms or magnified print. Still others may be able to see, but shapes are distorted or some students might see shapes and images sufficiently but cannot distinguish colors (color blind). Some students may have experienced their impairment since birth, while for others, it might be a result of an injury or illness.

Proper planning and design of your online course can greatly increase the opportunity for success with your students who have visual impairments.

### **HEARING IMPAIRMENT**

The phrase *hearing impairment* covers a broad range of varying degrees of hearing loss, from slightly hard of hearing to total deafness. Depending on the amount of hearing loss and when it began, this impairment could also affect speech development, something that should be kept in mind if requiring students to upload recorded oral presentations as part of their assignments.

While some students with hearing impairments may be able to compensate by using hearing aids or lip-reading, educators should not depend on this and should design their courses to accommodate hearing impaired students so they have the same opportunities to excel as their non-hearing impaired counterparts.

### **LEARNING DISABILITIES**

A student may be diagnosed with a learning disability when one has an issue that creates a gap between academic achievement and intellectual ability. While there are a myriad of different

types of learning disabilities, their impact tends to fall into four categories: speech and speaking ability, written language, mathematics, and reasoning.

Learning disabilities can be present from birth or can be caused by brain injury or illness. They can also present themselves with other disabilities such as motor or sensory impairments, ADHD, and psychiatric issues. These learning disabilities might be presented as problems with visual or auditory perception and processing, slower processing or comprehension speed, issues understanding abstract reasoning and concepts, and/or memory issues. Some students may have difficulties with mixing up the order of items when spelling or speaking or substitute incorrect terms than the ones they meant to write or say. Other students may demonstrate complications when doing mathematics, and/or have difficulties in time management or breaking larger projects down into achievable goals.

Good planning and course design can be used to accommodate students with different learning difficulties.

## **THREE BASIC UNIVERSITY ACCESSIBILITY REQUIREMENTS**

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### **MAKE PDFS READABLE (OPTICAL CHARACTER RECOGNITION)**

If a document originates in Microsoft Word and is saved in PDF format, it will likely be accessible, i.e., a screen reader will be able to narrate the text contained in it. The resulting document is said to be optical character recognition compliant or OCR-compliant. If the PDF consists of a scanned image, it requires special steps to make it accessible. For information on making PDFs accessible and verifying their accessibility, click on the links below:

[Create Accessible PDFs Using Word 2010](#)

[Check the Accessibility of Your Word and PDF](#)

### **CAPTION VIDEOS**

All videos have been captioned and can be played in a closed captioned-compliant player. The ILC offers free captioning service to assist instructors to help ensure all course videos are correctly captioned. For information on the free captioning service, click on the link below:

[Getting the Video Captioned for Free](#)

### **PROVIDE ALTERNATIVE TEXT FOR STILL IMAGES**

There are two types of text associated with still images in USAonline. The first type is the advisory title which displays text when the mouse is "rolled over" an image. The second type is the alternative text which can be read by a screen reader. For information on both of these types of descriptive text features for still images, click on the link below:

[Making the Images in a Rich Text Editor Accessible with Alternative Text](#)

## BEST PRACTICES

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Some suggested best practices in good course planning and design to help ensure students with the indicated physical challenges with the best accommodation possible include:

### VISUAL IMPAIRMENT

- Provide texts that have Optical Character Recognition (OCR) so the student's screen reader can easily read it.
- Provide written or audio files of details in images or other graphics, diagrams, charts, etc., that are used in the course.
- When selecting textbooks, choose those with Braille, audio, or electronic versions that can be read by screen reader technology.
- If using public domain works or Open Educational Resources (particularly texts), make sure that there is an audio file version available or that the text can be accessed by screen readers.
- If including websites, try to choose those with text-only variations.
- Use high contrast text.
- Use generously sized fonts.

### HEARING IMPAIRMENT

- Provide alternative methods of assessment if recorded oral presentations or projects are to be a part of the course grade.
- Provide captioning for all video materials created for the course (see USAonline Captioning Services on page 7).
- If using videos from other sources (i.e. YouTube, Vimeo, etc.) make sure they have captioning (automatic captioning is not proper captioning—review captions to make sure they are correct and make sense before adding the video to your course).
- Provide visual cues for anything that needs a student response.
- Provide a full text transcript for any audio materials in the course and make sure to include sound descriptions.

### LEARNING DISABILITIES

- Post your syllabus early and clearly lay out the course assignments, due dates, etc.
- Include information about the Office of Student Disability Services (<http://www.southalabama.edu/departments/dss/>), the Writing Center (<http://www.southalabama.edu/colleges/scesp/writing/>) and/or the MathTechnology Lab (<http://www.southalabama.edu/colleges/scesp/ds/mathlab.html>) or other support services information in your syllabus.

- Resist making changes or adding last-minute assignments to the course.
- Provide readings and texts early enough to give adequate time for those who need extra reading and comprehension time.
- Present lessons using several different modes/formats (include audio, video, and text).
- When preparing a lesson, make sure to include an overview with objectives, revisit what had previously been discussed (prior knowledge), provide summaries for each section, and review at the end. Informing students of what to expect next is also a help.
- Keep instructions uncomplicated and brief.
- Provide captioning for videos and full text for audio.
- Provide study guides or reviews.
- Have multiple types of assessment available so students can choose what they might be strongest in (such as a choice between exam, written report, oral report, etc.)
- For those students who have requested (through the Office of Student Disability Services) extra time on exams, see the resource How to Create and Grade "Extra Time" Tests in USAonline ([http://southalabama.edu/departments/ilc/resources/htg\\_usaonline/htg\\_create\\_and\\_grade\\_extra\\_time\\_test\\_072015.pdf](http://southalabama.edu/departments/ilc/resources/htg_usaonline/htg_create_and_grade_extra_time_test_072015.pdf)).

## UNIVERSAL DESIGN PRINCIPLES

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Universal Design is sometimes called Inclusive Design and, less often Design for All (DfA). Whatever the terminology, there are shared basic principles to help ensure products are designed to be used by the widest population possible.

North Carolina State University's Center for Universal Design lists the Principles of Universal Design as the following:

1. Equitable use—the design is useful for people with a myriad of diverse abilities.
2. Flexibility in use—the design accommodates a wide range of preferences and abilities.
3. Simple and intuitive-- the design is easily understood, regardless of prior knowledge and experience, focus, or language skills.
4. Perceptible information--the design effectively gives necessary information to the user, regardless of the user's sensory abilities or surrounding conditions.
5. Tolerance for error—the design lowers the risk of accidental or unintended actions, or minimizes the consequences for those actions.
6. Low physical effort—the design can be efficiently used with little or no fatigue.
7. Size and space for approach and use -- the design yields appropriate use for manipulation, regardless of the user's size, posture, or mobility.

## ON-CAMPUS RESOURCES

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### OFFICE OF STUDENT DISABILITY SERVICES

Students who have a disability or who need special accommodations should contact the Office of Student Disability Services on campus. Through this office, online instructors might be requested to provide students more time for exams, special proctors or other accommodations.

The Office of Student Disability Services is located at 320 Alumni Circle, Educational Services Building (formerly Faculty Court West), Suite 19. They can also be contacted at (251) 460-7212 or [specialstudents@southalabama.edu](mailto:specialstudents@southalabama.edu).

The USA Student Disability Services Student Handbook can be found at <http://www.southalabama.edu/departments/dss/resources/Student%20Disability%20Services%20Handbook.pdf>

### USAONLINE CAPTIONING SERVICES

As part of the Innovation in Learning Center, USA offers faculty free captioning services for their course videos:

1. Upload the videos you want captioned into the *Media Gallery* of your course or project site in USAonline.
2. Fill out the *ILC Caption Request Form* found at <http://tinyurl.com/usailccaptioning>.
3. While the average turnaround time is one week, return time can vary depending upon staff availability and work volume.
4. The captioned videos will be placed back into your course. If you discover that they have not been placed in one week, contact the ILC at (251) 461-1888.

### USA WRITING CENTER

The USA Writing Center offers consultants to assist and guide students through the writing process. While not an editing service, the Writing Center offers support to those who need assistance in learning how to better focus and organize their writing or need refresher help on grammar, among other topics.

The Writing Center is located in the Academic Support Center room 1390. Appointments can be scheduled by visiting its website <http://www.southalabama.edu/colleges/scesp/writing/index.html> or calling 460-6480.

### USA MATH TECHNOLOGY LAB

The USA Math Technology Lab has tutors on site to help students who need extra assistance in their math courses. It is located in the Academic Support Center room 1301A. Information about hours of operation are available at <http://www.southalabama.edu/colleges/scesp/ds/mathlab.html>.

## RESOURCES ON THE WEB

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### ILC RESOURCES

- How to Create Captions Using Amara.org --  
<http://www.southalabama.edu/departments/ilc/resources/How%20to%20Create%20Captions%20Using%20Amara.pdf>
- How to Create an MP3 Using Audacity--  
<http://www.southalabama.edu/departments/ilc/resources/How%20to%20Create%20an%20MP3%20using%20Audacity.pdf>
- How to Use the Captioning Profile in Techsmith Relay --  
[http://www.southalabama.edu/departments/ilc/resources/techsmith\\_relay/How to Use the Captioning Profile in TechSmith Relay 031615.pdf](http://www.southalabama.edu/departments/ilc/resources/techsmith_relay/How_to_Use_the_Captioning_Profile_in_TechSmith_Relay_031615.pdf)
- How to Caption Your YouTube Videos Using CaptionTube --  
<http://www.southalabama.edu/departments/ilc/resources/Using%20Captiontube%20on%20your%20own%20videos.pdf>
- ILC Accessibility Page -- <http://www.southalabama.edu/departments/ilc/accessibility.html>

# USAONLINE COURSE ACCESSIBILITY CHECKLIST

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## MULTIMEDIA

### RECORDINGS

- All videos have been captioned and are playing in a closed captioned-compliant player.
  - Videos housed in the course are in the Media Gallery and are using the MG CC player.
  - Videos being linked to on YouTube or elsewhere have actual captioning and are NOT using automatic captioning software.
  - Text descriptions have been included of any sound effects in the captions.
- Audio clips also have transcripts available.
- Audio clips are available for any text readings or texts are capable of being read by a student's screen reader program.

### IMAGES AND FIGURES

- Textual descriptions/alt text is provided for all images and figures.
- Audio descriptions have been included for any images, diagrams, or video in which the visual elements are key to understanding relevant concepts.

## DOCUMENTS

- PDFs have been scanned with OCR formatting so that they can be read by screen readers.

## COURSE INFORMATION/LESSONS

- The course syllabus is provided early.
- The syllabus is written clearly with defined directions and deadlines.
- A segment about the Office of Student Disability Services has been provided in the syllabus.
- Fonts used throughout are easily readable and generously sized.
- Colors used throughout are high contrast (for example: black text on white background).
- Websites used for the course include text-only versions for screen readers.
- Transcripts of real-time chats are provided so students can review.
- A variety of methods have been provided to contact the instructor.
- The course navigation is clear and easy to understand.
- Methods of peer communication have been supplied and promoted.
- Information is presented in a logical progression.
- Sentences used are short and use active voice.

- Alternative groups of students have been set up for specific needs if requested by students through the Office of Student Disability Services.
- Duplicate exams have been set up for alternative times if requested by students through the Office of Student Disability Services with Gradebook ready to accommodate the extras.
- Duplicate assignments have been set up for alternative times if requested by students through the Office of Student Disability Services with Gradebook ready to accommodate the extras.
- Students have been informed of how to get access to proctors if needed.