

# Accessible Course Design in Canvas

## Formatting & Writing

- Use headings in appropriate, nested order. In Canvas, the page title is H1, so the first heading on a page should be H2, with H3 nested under that, etc.
- URLs must be embedded as unique, descriptive links ([Canvas at Northwestern](#) rather than <https://www.it.northwestern.edu/education/login.html> or “[click here](#) for Canvas”).
- Use HTML-coded bulleted or numbered lists (by clicking on the appropriate button in the Rich Text Editor), rather than typing out numbers or symbols for lists.
- Designate header cells and header cell scope in tables. Tables should have captions and titles. All information can be added via the Tables menu in the Rich Text Editor.
- Use white space and headings to break up long blocks of text.
- Pages should have unique and descriptive titles (Module 2 Quiz: U.S. Constitution vs. Quiz 2).
- Write out dates and use full stops at the end of sentences (including bullet points).

## Images

- All images (except decorative images, like icons or stock photos) have [quality alt text descriptions](#).
- Alt text descriptions should convey the information of the image, not merely describe the image. Alt text should be an equivalent substitute for the image.
- Alt text must consider the context in which the image appears.
- Complex images like graphs, charts, diagrams, and maps must also have alt text descriptions. Lengthy descriptions of complex images can be linked to on a separate Canvas page.
- Avoid using images of text as much as possible. If unavoidable, alt text must contain all text in the image.

## Color & Contrast

- Color should not be the sole means of conveying information. Use texture, pattern, size, shape, etc. in combination with color.
- Use colorblind filters (available in Adobe products and via sites like [COBLIS](#)) to test color combinations for colorblind perception.
- Ensure a high contrast ratio between background and foreground colors. Test using tools like [WebAIM's Color Contrast Checker](#).

## Audio & Video

- All audio content (pure audio recordings and audio tracks on video recordings) must have a complete text equivalent in the form of transcripts (audio) or captions (video).
- Auto-generated captions are only 60-70% accurate and cannot be used on their own; they must be corrected to full accuracy to be acceptable.
- Ad-hoc recordings (announcements, discussion replies, etc.) should come with a text equivalent that conveys the same information.
- Pre-recorded media should have scripts that can be converted into transcripts and/or captions.

## Accessible Documents

- Word Documents: create in latest available version of Microsoft Word and run accessibility checker. Correct all highlighted issues.
- PDFs: create in latest available version of Microsoft Word and run accessibility checker. Correct all issues.

- Use [Sensus Access](#) to convert the document to an accessible PDF.
- Convert to PDF using Adobe plugin. Using Adobe Acrobat Pro DC, run accessibility checker and correct all issues: read order, alt text, tables, language, title, etc. Must have OCR (optical character recognition)—a scanned book will read as an image and cannot be processed by a screen reader.
- Excel Spreadsheets: Avoid blank cells as much as possible. Use for intended purpose—organizing data. Do not include lengthy sentences, images, etc.
- PowerPoint Presentations: Use notes section to describe content of slides. Notes should serve as equivalent to the information on the slides. Images should have alt text descriptions. Ensure that read order of items on slides is correct.

## Course Resources & Learning Technology

- Text Format: digital formats are always preferable, as they can easily be read aloud by a screen reader or other text to speech software. Must have OCR. For ebooks, epub is the preferred format. Look for opportunities to obtain library resources or accessible OERs.
- Learning Technology: LTIs, apps, etc. must be assessed *and tested* for accessibility. Locate or request a VPAT. Verify accessibility by obtaining a demo and testing keyboard navigation, screen reader compatibility, color, headings, captions, etc.

## Course Content

- Pronouns and Names: in introductions, invite students to share their names/nicknames and pronouns (but don't make it a requirement). Include this information in instructor bios.
- Bias: be aware of bias around gender, race, religion, sexuality, disability, etc. entering into course content (i.e. using the generic *he*, "ladies and gentlemen," racial divisions in America being referred to as black and white). See [APA guidelines on reducing bias](#) and Portland State University's guide on a [Culturally Responsive Curriculum](#) for more information.
- Content Warnings: include annotations on all course materials and highlight resources that contain troubling content (graphic violence, sexual assault, discussions/depictions of bigoted language, hate crimes, etc.) to empower students to make decisions about when and how to engage with it.

## Resources

- [WebAIM.org](#): excellent resource for all things web accessibility. Explains technical standards in laymen's terms.
- [SPS Distance Learning Accessibility](#): expanded information on many of these topics.
- [University of Washington DO-IT](#): extensive resources for accessibility (both physical and web) in higher education.
- [Dos and Don't's on Designing for Accessibility](#): posters with general advice on design considerations for different types of disabilities.
- ["Technology Can Address Digital Accessibility—to an Extent."](#) *Inside Higher Ed, May 2 2018.*: examines benefits and limits of automated accessibility checkers and highlights the places where human interaction is required.