Accessible Online Courses: How to Strategize, Prioritize, and Educate

Christine Scherer (she/her)
Senior Content Specialist, Northwestern University
Online Adjunct Instructor, University of Illinois-Springfield

Northwestern
We ask you to join us in creating a culture that reflects…
Access and Inclusion and Civility and Respect
…consistent with the AHEAD Statement of Civility during our conference and in all aspects of our organization.
Fall 2020: What do we do?

• Create a better experience for students.
• Educate faculty and staff.
• (Try to) reduce the load on DRC staff.
Agenda

• 10 Best Practices for Accessible Online Courses
• Question Break
• Strategies & Priorities
• Universal Design
• Educate Others
• Q&A
10 Tips for an Accessible Online Course (Abridged)
1. Include accessibility as early as possible.
2. Accessibility is everyone’s responsibility.
4. Vetting Vendors with VPATs.
5. Formatting Basics

- Headings
- White Space
- Embedded Links
- Bulleted/Ordered lists
- Color Use
6. Alternative Text

Text description of an image.

- Key Concepts
  - Context is critical.
  - File names are not alt text.
  - Describe the information, not the image.
  - Avoid images of text.

- Questions to Ask When Writing Alt Text
  - What would you write to convey the same info if you couldn’t use this image?
  - What are the top 3 things a student needs to take away from this image?
7. Accessible Documents

• Word, Excel, PowerPoint
  – Automated checkers are a good start.
  – Formatting rules, color use, and alt text apply!

• PDFs
  – Can be accessible but take a lot of time.
  – Works best if the source document is accessible too.
  – OCR is critical!

• Can it be a web page instead?
8. Captions & Transcripts

• Text equivalent of an audio medium.

• Scripts make accessibility easier.

• Auto-generated captions are only 70-80% accurate and can’t be relied on.

• Ask content owners for accessibility supports and look for accessible alternatives.
9. Inclusive Content

• Pronouns & Names

• Inclusive Writing & Materials

• Content Warnings
10. Technology Access
Question Break
How to Prioritize

• Unique to each institution and student population.
• Identify pain points: areas where you’ll have a lot of requests or where requests will take a lot of time/energy.
• Plan ahead and build partnerships.
Universal Design for Learning

• Likely won’t have time to implement fully in online courses, but some strategies can help reduce or remove accommodation requests.
• Remove time limits on online quizzes.
• Record lectures so students can listen as often as they need to.
Educate Others

- Tip sheets.
- Brief (two minutes or less) video tutorials focusing on simple, discrete tasks (how to add headings in your LMS).
- Remote, asynchronous workshops and synchronous webinars.
- Centralized resource hub with accessibility info.
Resources

- Accessible Courses in Canvas
- Accessible Tables in Canvas
- Alt Text Style Guide
- SPS Distance Learning Accessibility
Q&A and Thank You!

Link to Session Evaluation Form
tinyurl.com/AHEAD2020-SessionEval

Your feedback helps shape future programming.

Thank you for attending!

Christine Scherer
christine.scherer@northwestern.edu
sps.northwestern.edu/distance-learning