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.

3. Automated accessibility checkers: proceed with care.

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