

Accessibility in Canvas: Seven Core Skills Checklist

As you work to make your Canvas content accessible, use this checklist to make sure that you have properly applied each of the seven core accessibility skills.

Alt Text

All images in a course, except for decorative images, must have alt text descriptions. These are text descriptions of an image so that students who are unable to see the image can still get the required information.

Alt text can be added by using the alt text field in the [Canvas Image Options panel](#). All Alt text conveys the information of the image, not just a description of the image. For example, describing a graph by saying that “the red line indicates passenger vehicle traffic” does not help someone who cannot see the red line. Instead, it should say “the data indicates a decrease in passenger vehicle traffic over the last five years.”

- ✓ All complex images like graphics, charts, diagrams, and maps have alt text descriptions. Lengthy descriptions of complex images are linked on a separate Canvas page, rather than embedded in the alt text field in Canvas.
- ✓ All alt text is written based on the context in which the image appears. Less information is provided in the alt text when information is conveyed in the surrounding text.
- ✓ All alt text is written based on what is crucial for students to take away from the image.
- ✓ Images of text are minimal and when used, the alt text includes all text in the image.
- ✓ Images that convey no information beyond visual interest are appropriately flagged as decorative in the Canvas Image Options panel.

Learn more about writing alt text, including for complex images, on the [Accessible Images in Online Courses](#) page.

Color Contrast

Students with visual disabilities, including blindness, low vision, and colorblindness, may have difficulty perceiving information with poor [color contrast or color use](#).

- ✓ Color is not the sole means of providing information anywhere in your course. When color is used to provide information, another method such as texture, pattern, size, shape, etc. is also used to ensure that everyone can understand what is being conveyed.
- ✓ A high color contrast ratio (4.5:1 or better) between the foreground text and background color is used throughout the course. Black text on a white background is very high contrast; you can check other combinations by using a tool like [WebAIM's Color Contrast Checker](#).

Headings

Properly styled headings improve readability for all students by breaking up large walls of text. They also make it possible for screen reader users to skim a page to find what they want to read. Bold, underlined, and/or enlarged text does not constitute a proper heading.

- ✓ Headings are used throughout the course. To add a heading, select the “Paragraph” drop-down menu in the Rich Text Editor and use the available heading styles instead.

- ✓ Proper heading structure is used throughout the course. The title of the Canvas page is Heading 1. The first heading level you use on the page is Heading 2. Any sub-headings under that are Heading 3. You can think of the headings as a bulleted list of your page. For example:
 - Page Title (Heading 1)
 - Introduction (Heading 2)
 - Historical Details (Heading 2)
 - Major Historical Event 1 (Heading 3)
 - Major Historical Event 2 (Heading 3)
 - Current Day Challenges (Heading 2)

Links

All URLs must be embedded in unique and meaningful text to help users identify where the link will take them.

- ✓ There are no raw URL's (<https://www.it.northwestern.edu/education/login.html>) posted in your course.
- ✓ All links are embedded in clear descriptive text like [Canvas at Northwestern](#) to clearly indicate where the link is going. You can embed a link in text by highlighting the text in the Rich Text Editor, clicking on the Hyperlink icon (the small chain links), and pasting the URL into the provided pop-up window.
- ✓ There are no instances of links embedded in non-descriptive or non-unique text ([Click here](#) for Canvas) in my course.

Lists

Using lists can make your text more readable for all users. Format text as a list by highlighting the text you want to have as a list, then select the appropriate list option from the Unordered List (bullets) or Ordered List (numbered) buttons. Read more about your [options for formatting lists](#) with this guide from Canvas.

- ✓ All lists in your course were created using the styled list options in the Rich Text Editor, rather than manually typing in symbols or numbers.

Tables

Tables are helpful for displaying data, but when used to format a page, cause accessibility issues, especially for screen reader users.

- ✓ All the tables in your course are used to organize data.
- ✓ There are no tables in your course used for page layout. Check out the accessible course templates for layout and design options.
- ✓ None of the tables in your course include blank cells or merged cells.
- ✓ All tables in your course include a properly styled header row and/or column. Read detailed instructions on how to add header rows and scope on the third tab of the [Accessible Text and Math page](#).

Audio and Video

All audio content (pure audio recordings and audio tracks on video recordings) must have a complete and accurate text equivalent in the form of transcripts and/or captions. If you're recording your own

content, writing scripts is strongly recommended when possible, as a script can be easily turned into a transcript or caption file. When recording without a script, use the auto-caption features in [Zoom](#) or [Panopto](#) to generate a transcript and/or caption file, then edit the file for spelling, terminology, grammar, etc. to ensure that they are accurate and understandable.

- ✓ All video components of your course have complete and accurate captions.
- ✓ All auto-generated captions for videos have been checked and edited for accuracy.
- ✓ All audio components of your class include a transcript.

Resources

- [Northwestern Accessibility](#) – the central hub for all things accessibility at Northwestern.
- [SPS Distance Learning Accessibility](#) – an in-depth resource site on accessibility in online courses.
- [WebAIM.org](#) – a general-use site on digital accessibility.

Advanced Accessibility & Inclusion

Readability and Page Design

- Use white space and headings to break up long blocks of text. This makes it easier for students to skim a page to find the specific area they need to focus on.
- Pages should have unique and descriptive titles. For example, Module 2 Quiz: U.S. Constitution is better than just Quiz 2.
- Fully write out words (points instead of pts; January instead of Jan) and explain abbreviations and acronyms the first time they are used.

Course Resources

- Try to provide digital formats of text whenever possible, as they can be easily read aloud by a screen reader or other text to speech software.
- Digital texts must be formatted as text, rather than as an image, which can happen if the document was scanned from a book.
- For non-digital texts, provide information about the book as early as possible so students can seek accessible alternatives.
- When using Learning Technology Integrations (LTIs) or other learning apps, consider how accessible it is. All LTIs and apps available through the Northwestern Canvas app store have been fully vetted for accessibility.
- If using a new technology, tool, or app that is not supported by Northwestern, reach out to Teaching and Learning Technologies for a consultation and accessibility check.

Course Content

- Ask students to use [Namecoach](#) to share the correct pronunciation of their names.
- Invite students to share their names, nicknames, and pronouns in their introductions—but don't require it, as that may put undue pressure on students who are struggling with their gender identity.
- Be aware of bias around race, gender, religion, sexuality, class, disability, etc. that may be present in course content. [Northwestern University Global Marketing](#) has an extensive guide on reviewing language around numerous identity categories to help you become more aware of potential bias.
- The [APA Style Guide](#) also has advice on bias-free language, and you can find more resources on the [Inclusive Course Content page](#).
- Consider the diversity of voices in your course resources. How many creators are from privileged groups (white, cis male, able bodied, Christian, etc.)? How many are from marginalized identities? What are you telling your students about how has a voice in their field?
- Portland State University has an excellent guide on developing a [Culturally Responsive Curriculum](#) to help answer many of these questions.