



Digital Accessibility Overview

Updated 5/29/2025

Alexandra Belanich
Center for Teaching and Learning

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Upcoming Accessibility Rule

Deadline

April 2026

What does this mean?

On April 24, 2024, the Federal Register published the Department of Justice's [final rule](#) updating its regulations for Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The rule specifies that all digital content must be accessible to adhere to [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\) Version 2.1, Level AA](#). See [Fact Sheet: New Rule on the Accessibility of Web Content and Mobile Apps](#) for a summary of the rule.

Will this affect my courses?

Yes. All course content such as Word documents, PDFs, PowerPoints, and videos must be revised to meet 100% compliance with WCAG 2.1, Level AA. Please see [How to Meet WCAG \(Quick Reference\)](#). To comply, levels A and AA must be met.

How can I learn to make my course content accessible?

The SUNY Center for Professional Development has partnered with Deque University to provide online, self-paced training to all faculty. Deque University offers a comprehensive suite of tutorials that explain how to revise or create accessible course content.

How do I sign up?

First, you'll need to request an account. Please see [SUNY plus Deque](#) for all the details.

Which modules should I complete?

The following modules are recommended. You will receive a certificate after completing each module. They do not need to be completed in this order. **Please note:** *You need to be registered and logged in to Deque to access these links.*

[Basic PDF Accessibility](#)

[Basic Web and Document Accessibility for Content Contributors](#)

[Fast Track to Accessibility for Microsoft Office](#)

[Fast Track to Accessibility to PDF Creators](#)

[Microsoft Excel Accessibility Techniques](#)

[Microsoft PowerPoint Accessibility Techniques](#)

[Microsoft Word Accessibility Techniques](#)

Screen Reader Software Demo

The video below demonstrates how screen reading software is used to navigate through a document. To view the video, click on the picture below or scan the QR code.

Figure 1 How a Screen Reader Works video

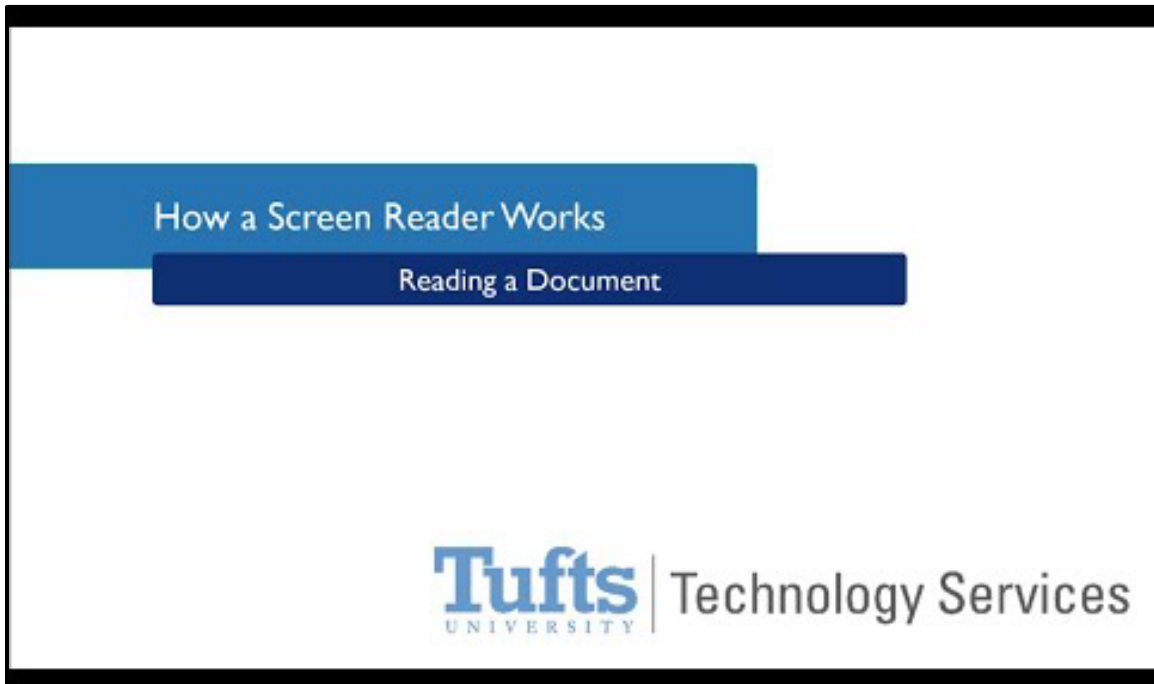


Figure 2 How a Screen Reader Works QR code



Microsoft Word

- ❑ Use a font size that is 12 points or larger. Text can be difficult to see when it is smaller than 12 points. This is especially important for printed documents where the text cannot be enlarged like on a screen. How to [change the font size in Office](#).
- ❑ Use standard sans serif fonts. Script or decorative fonts can be difficult to read. Serif fonts can be difficult to read on screen. Recommended fonts: Verdana, Calibri, Arial, Helvetica, Tahoma, Lato, Open Sans, Segoe UI. Do not use script or decorative fonts. Serif fonts, such as Georgia or Times New Roman, are ok for headings but should be avoided for body text. See [Understanding Accessible Fonts and Typography for Section 508 Compliance](#).
- ❑ Use hierarchical heading styles (Heading 1, Heading 2, etc.) to identify headings and subheadings. Headings that are created using heading styles allow screen reading software to jump to different parts of a document. Making headings visually different (bigger font, bold, etc.) is not enough. Heading styles must be used in order for screen reading software to identify headers from body text because this semantically designates the text as headings. How to [create heading styles](#). If you don't like the default options you can [customize the heading style formatting](#) to your preferences.
- ❑ Use Word's built-in formatting options to create lists, page numbers, headers and footers, and footnotes. Using the built-in formatting options allows screen reading software to differentiate lists, page numbers, headers and footers, and footnotes from body text. How to create:
 - [Bulleted/numbered lists](#)
 - [Page numbers](#)
 - [Headers and footers](#)
 - [Footnotes](#)

Note: Do not place important information such as the word "Confidential" in the header or footer.

- ❑ Include alt text for all non-decorative pictures, tables, graphs, charts and graphics. Alt text is a description of images or graphics. Screen reading software reads alt text out loud for the user. How [improve accessibility with alt text](#). If the picture or

graphic is only used for decoration, select “Mark as decorative” in the alt text options. This way screen reading software will disregard it.

- ☐ Make sure there is appropriate contrast between the text color and background. Light text on a light background or dark text on a dark background is hard to see. Use a contrast checker such as the [WebAIM contrast checker](#) to ensure there is enough color contrast in your document.
- ☐ Do not use color as the only means of conveying information. People who are colorblind might not be able to differ the color differences. Do not say “Take note of the text in red.” Include an additional way to differentiate the text. For example, “Take note of the text that is red and with an asterisk.” How to [use color and other sensory characteristics plus text to convey meaning](#).
- ☐ Avoid using the Enter key to skip lines. Instead, use the line spacing options or page breaks to skip lines or go to the next page. Screen reading software will repeat the word “Blank” every time there is a line that was skipped using the Enter key. This can be annoying especially when there are many skipped lines. How to [use line spacing options](#) and [page breaks](#).
- ☐ Make sure data tables have a header row and/or first column. There needs to be a designated header row and/or first column in order for screen reading software to read the contents in a data table in the correct order. When creating tables used for data (vs. just for layout), check the header row option (and if needed, the first column row) in table style options. If you are using a table for layout purposes, make sure to uncheck both the header row and first column options. Please see [Use Built In Features to Create Layout and Data Tables](#) for in-depth instructions on how to do this, and for further instructions on how to accessibly create tables, please see [Create accessible tables in Word](#). **Note:** Do not use the “Draw Table” option as that is will not result in an accessible table.
- ☐ Use meaningful text for links. Descriptive hyperlink text provides context that allows people who use screen reading software to identify and sort through links. **Important:** For documents that might be printed, full URLs can be included within the text body or at the end of the document. Instead of typing “Click [here](#) to log in to MySCCC,” type “Log in to [MySCCC](#).” Please see how to [create accessible links in Word](#).

- ❑ Place images, text boxes, or other graphic elements “In line with text.” Doing this ensures that the reading order of elements is preserved and that screen reading software will identify the elements in the proper order. **Note:** *Screen reading software might not detect text that is in text boxes at all unless the text boxes are placed in line with text.* [How to create accessible text boxes](#). Although this video pertains to text boxes, the instructions are the same for placing images in line with text.
- ❑ Avoid using tabs or the space bar to create columns. Using tabs or the space bar does not ensure that the text would be read in the correct order. Instead, [create columns](#) using Word’s built-in column options.
- ❑ Avoid using symbols. Not all symbols are accessible to screen readers. If you must use a symbol, use a text alternative next to it. For example: ♦ diamond **Note:** *Emojis are accessible.*
- ❑ Use Equation Editor to format mathematical equations. Equations or scientific notation that is typed out without the Equation editor will not be read correctly by screen reading software. How to [use the Equation Editor](#). Do not use symbols as they will not result in an accessible equation.
- ❑ Do not rely on the Accessibility Checker to pick up all issues. The Accessibility Checker is an excellent supplementary tool, but it will not identify every issue. How to [use the Accessibility Checker](#).

Microsoft PowerPoint

- ❑ Use the preset slide layouts. These layouts will preserve the reading order of text and other elements on your slides. How to [use preset slide layouts](#). If you decide to manually create text boxes instead of using the preset slide layouts, they need to be placed onto the slide in reading order. This does not refer to positioning, but rather the order in which the text box was placed onto the slide. The reading order can easily be checked or rearranged by using the [Reading Order pane](#).
- ❑ Use a minimum font size of 18 points. Text that is smaller might be difficult to see. This is especially important if the presentation is shown in person. How to [change the font size in Office](#).

- ☐ Use standard sans serif fonts. Script or decorative fonts can be difficult to read. Serif fonts can be difficult to read on screen. Recommended fonts: Verdana, Calibri, Arial, Helvetica, Tahoma, Lato, Open Sans, Segoe UI. Do not use script or decorative fonts. Serif fonts, such as Georgia or Times New Roman, are ok for headings but should be avoided for body text. See [Understanding Accessible Fonts and Typography for Section 508 Compliance](#).
- ☐ Make sure that there is appropriate contrast between the text color and background. Light-colored text on a light background or dark-colored text on a dark background is difficult to see. Use a contrast checker such as the [WebAIM contrast checker](#) to ensure there is enough color contrast in your document.
- ☐ Include alt text for all non-decorative pictures, tables, graphs, charts and graphics. Alt text is a description of images or other objects that have a visual component. Screen reading software reads alt text out loud for the user. How to [improve accessibility with alt text](#). If the picture or graphic is only used for decoration, select "Mark as decorative" in the alt text options. This way screen reading software will disregard it.
- ☐ Do not use color as the only means of conveying information. People who are colorblind might not be able to differentiate the color differences. Do not write "Take note of the text in red." Include an additional way to differentiate the text. For example, "Take note of the text that is red and with an asterisk." How to [use color and other sensory characteristics plus text to convey meaning](#).
- ☐ Make sure data tables have a header row and (if needed) a first column. There needs to be a designated header row and/or first column in order for screen reading software to read the contents in a data table in the correct order. When creating tables used for data (vs. just for layout), check the header row option (and if needed, the first column row) in table style options. If you are using a table for layout purposes, make sure to uncheck both the header row and first column options. Please see [Use Built In Features to Create Data and Layout Tables](#) for in-depth instructions on how to do this, and for further instructions on how to accessibly create tables, please see [Create accessible tables](#).
- ☐ Use meaningful text for links. Descriptive hyperlink text provides context that allows people who use screen reading software to identify and sort through links.

(Important: For documents that might be printed, full URLs can be included within the text body or at the end of the document.) Instead of typing “Click [here](#) to log in to MySCCC,” type “Log in to [MySCCC](#).” Please see how to [create a more meaningful hyperlink](#).

- ☐ Avoid using blinking or flashing animations. Blinking and flashing animations can induce seizures in people with photosensitive epilepsy. Ensure that animations do not blink or flash more than 3 times per second. See [Set the start time and speed of an animation effect](#).
- ☐ Disable autoplay. If a video is set to autoplay, the audio can interfere with the screen reader audio. How to [Set the start time and speed of an animation effect](#).
- ☐ Do not rely on the Accessibility Checker to pick up all issues. The Accessibility Checker is an excellent supplementary tool, but it will not identify every issue. How to [use the Accessibility Checker](#).

Microsoft Excel

- ☐ Make sure that cell A1 contains content. Screen readers will begin reading from cell A1. Make sure there is content in cell A1. This cell can also be used to alert users that there are hidden rows and columns, data filters or frozen rows and columns.
- ☐ Give each worksheet name a unique title. This allows people using screen reading software to know what is in the worksheet without having to open it to read the content. How to [rename a worksheet in Excel](#).
- ☐ Use a font size that is 12 points or larger. Text can be difficult to see when it is smaller than 12 points. This is especially important for printed documents where the text cannot be enlarged like on a screen. How to [change the font size in Office](#).
- ☐ Use standard sans serif fonts. Script or decorative fonts can be difficult to read. Serif fonts can be difficult to read on screen. Recommended fonts: Verdana, Calibri, Arial, Helvetica, Tahoma, Lato, Open Sans, Segoe UI. Do not use script or decorative fonts. Serif fonts, such as Georgia or Times New Roman, are ok for

headings but should be avoided for body text. See [Understanding Accessible Fonts and Typography for Section 508 Compliance](#).

- ☐ Avoid using images. Images in Excel float above the cells and screen reading software might not detect them. If you must insert a picture in Excel, insert it in a cell and include alt text. See [how to insert a picture in a cell](#).
- ☐ Do not rely on color alone to convey meaning. People who are colorblind might not be able to differentiate the color differences. Do not write "Take note of the text in red." Include an additional way to differentiate the text. For example, "Take note of the text that is red and with an asterisk." How to [use color and other sensory characteristics plus text to convey meaning](#).
- ☐ Make sure there is sufficient contrast between the text color and the background. Light-colored text on a light background or dark-colored text on a dark background is difficult to see. Use a contrast checker such as the [WebAIM contrast checker](#) to ensure there is enough color contrast in your document.
- ☐ Make sure that table headers have unique, meaningful names. There needs to be a designated header row and/or first column in order for screen reading software to read the contents in a data table in the correct order. See [Create more accessible tables in Excel](#).
- ☐ Include alt text for any charts or graphs. Alt text is a description of images or other objects that have a visual component. Screen reading software reads alt text out loud for the user. See [Create more accessible charts in Excel](#).
- ☐ Do not leave cells blank. Blank cells confuse screen readers. Indicate no data in a cell with "N/A" or "no data."
- ☐ Do not merge or split cells. Split or merged cells are difficult for screen readers to read. Try to format your data in a way that does not require merging or splitting cells. This might mean multiple tables are needed.
- ☐ Avoid freezing rows or columns. Frozen rows or columns might make it difficult for screen readers to identify. If you must freeze rows or columns, put a note in cell A1 that alerts the user.

- ☐ Avoid hiding rows or columns. Spreadsheets with hidden rows or columns can be difficult for screen readers to navigate. If you must hide rows or columns, write in cell A1 that this has been done. In this way, a user using a screen reader will know.
- ☐ If data filters are applied, alert the user in cell A1. Screen reading software might not alert the user that data filters have been applied. Include a note in cell A1 if data filters are applied.
- ☐ Use meaningful hyperlink text. Descriptive hyperlink text provides context that allows people who use screen reading software to identify and sort through links. ***Important:*** For documents that might be printed, full URLs can be included within the text body or at the end of the document. Instead of typing "Click [here](#) to log in to MySCCC," type "Log in to [MySCCC](#)." Please see how to [create accessible links](#).
- ☐ Avoid using the Insert Equation option. Equations created using "Insert Equation," float about the cells, so they might be missed by screen reading software. If you need to insert mathematical equations, use Microsoft Word or MathType. To inquire about MathType, contact ITS.
- ☐ Do not rely on the Accessibility Checker to pick up all issues. The Accessibility Checker is an excellent supplementary tool, but it will not identify every issue. How to [use the Accessibility Checker](#).

D2L Brightspace

Please note: In D2L Brightspace, "[Brightspace editor](#)" refers to the text editor panel (formerly called the "HTML editor") that enables you to type, insert pictures, files, etc.

- ☐ Set font size to at least 20 pixels. Unlike Office programs which measure font size in points, Brightspace measures it in pixels. This is why the font size needs to be set to at least 20, not 12. How to [change course font settings \(this link is safe to open\)](#). ***Note:*** This will change the default font setting for anything new that you type in your course. It will not change the font for type that is already there. This text will need to be changed manually in the Brightspace editor.

- ❑ Use hierarchical heading styles (Heading 1, Heading 2, etc.) to format headings when typing in the Brightspace editor. Headings that are created using heading styles allow screen reading software to jump to different parts of a Brightspace page. Making headings visually different (bigger font, bold, etc.) is not enough. Headings must be semantically designated in order for screen reading software to differentiate headers from body text. Do not select heading styles based on font size. If the size is too big, you can just edit the size. How to [use headings in the Brightspace editor](#).
- ❑ Create bulleted and numbered lists using the formatting options in the Brightspace editor. The built-in formatting options allow screen reading software to differentiate lists from body text. In the Brightspace editor, use the bullets and numbering option to create lists. Learn how to [create lists in Brightspace](#).
- ❑ Include alt text for all non-decorative pictures, tables, graphs, charts and graphics. Alt text is a description of images or other objects that have a visual component. Screen reading software reads alt text out loud for the user. How to [include alt text to images in Brightspace](#).
- ❑ Do not use color as the only means of conveying information. People who are colorblind might not be able to differentiate the color differences. Do not write "Take note of the text in red." Include an additional way to differentiate the text. Instead, write "Take note of the text in red and with an asterisk." How to [use color and other sensory characteristics plus text to convey meaning](#).
- ❑ Make sure there is sufficient contrast between the text color and the background. Light-colored text on a light background or dark-colored text on a dark background is difficult to see. Use the [Brightspace editor color contrast checker](#).
- ❑ Make sure tables are created in a specific way that renders them accessible in Brightspace. Tables that are not created following specific steps will not be accessible in Brightspace. How to [create accessible tables in Brightspace](#).
- ❑ Use meaningful text for links. Descriptive hyperlink text provides context that allows people who use screen reading software to identify and sort through links. Instead of typing "Click [here](#) to log in to MySCCC," type "Log in to [MySCCC](#)." How to [create accessible links in Brightspace](#).

- ☐ Make sure your Video or Audio Notes contain captions. All video and audio must contain captions in order to be accessible. How to [create a Video Note with captions](#) and how to [edit captions in a Video Note](#).
- ☐ Use the equation editor in the Brightspace editor to type out equations or scientific notation. The equation editor ensures that mathematical or scientific notation will be read correctly by screen reading software. See making [math and science content accessible in Brightspace](#).
- ☐ Make sure that all documents that are uploaded to Brightspace are accessible. Documents must be accessible inside and outside of Brightspace. Follow the directions for creating accessible Word documents, PDFs and PowerPoint presentations.
- ☐ Take advantage of the accessibility checkers that are integrated in Brightspace. These will help to identify any accessibility issues that you might have missed. Learn how to check your course's accessibility score using the integrated [Anthology Ally](#) tool. How to [run the accessibility checker in the Brightspace editor](#).

PDFs

- ☐ Make sure that the PDF is searchable and not a picture of text. Text on a PDF that is scanned as a picture is not accessible and thus not able to be read by a screen reader. Make sure that the scan setting in your printer or scanner is set to "Scan as searchable PDF."
- ☐ Start off with a simple source document. Word documents that have a simple structure are less likely to "break" when converting to PDF format. Ensure that the source Word document is formatted accessibly. Tables or lists that span across pages that are accessible in Word might break when converting to PDF. In this case, remediation with Acrobat Pro is required.
- ☐ When saving a Word document as a PDF, make sure that the Word document is accessible. PDFs must start off as accessible Word documents in order for the PDF to be accessible. Follow the Word accessibility guidelines. Then when saving the PDF, make sure that "Document structure tags for accessibility" is checked. See [Create accessible PDFs](#).

Videos

- ☐ Make sure that your video contains closed captions. All video and audio must contain captions in order to be accessible. How to create captions using:
 - [Brightspace Video Notes](#)
 - [Microsoft Stream](#)
 - Teams (enabled by default)
 - [YouTube](#)
 - [Yuja](#)
 - [Zoom](#)
- ☐ Include audio description if needed. Actions or imagery that do not contain audio but that are essential to understanding the content of a video must contain audio description. Audio description is a separate track that contains narration that explains what is happening. Audio description can be added to videos uploaded to Yuja: How to [add audio description with Yuja](#).
- ☐ Also, [YouDescribe](#) is a free site that will allow you to add audio description to videos you created and even videos on YouTube that you did not create.

Microsoft Teams

- ☐ Turn on closed captioning. Closed captioning provides captions in real time for those who need them. All Teams meetings have a live closed captioning function. The meeting organizer does not need to enable this feature. Captions can be turned on as needed by the meeting participants. Include captions in your recordings. All recorded video and audio must contain captions in order to be accessible. When recording a Teams meeting, captions will automatically be generated. Make sure to choose the correct language when prompted. English is the default.

Zoom

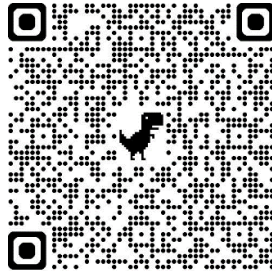
- ☐ Allow Live Transcription (aka automatic captioning) during your meetings. Live Transcription provides captions in real time for those who need them. How to [start automatic captioning in Zoom](#).

- ☐ Include captions in your recordings. All recorded video and audio must contain captions in order to be accessible. How to [enable captions in Zoom Cloud recordings \(this link is safe to open\)](#).

Digital Copy of This Document

Scan the QR code below to access a digital copy of this document.

Figure 3. Digital copy of document QR code



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