



20 Tips for Offering Accessible Online Campus Services

DO·IT

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Increasing numbers of postsecondary institutions are offering campus services partially or totally online, including student services such as academic advising, tutoring centers, and career services; services for faculty such as human resources and teaching and learning centers; and services that serve the needs of the entire campus community such as libraries and museums. Today's technology offers seemingly unlimited options to choose from for offering services. However, as technology is selected and online offerings are developed, it is important for campus leaders to take into account that potential users have a wide variety of characteristics, including those related to gender; race, ethnicity, and culture; socioeconomic status; age; religious beliefs; technical skills; and physical, sensory, learning, and communication abilities.

Although well intentioned, few student service personnel have an adequate level of awareness and skills regarding how to design online services that are accessible to all potential users, including those with disabilities. This publication provides a place to start as well as pointers to more comprehensive resources regarding the design of accessible online services.

Accessibility Issues

To ensure that services offered online are available to all potential users, it is important to be aware that

- online resources such as web pages and digital documents will be read using a variety of technologies, including screen readers (by individuals who are blind), text-to-speech software (by individuals with dyslexia and other reading-related disabilities), and other assistive technologies that emulate the standard keyboard but not a mouse (by people with mobility impairments);
- individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing will want to access online audio and video content; and



- online meetings and webinars will be attended by individuals who are blind, have low vision, are deaf or hard of hearing, are unable to speak verbally, and have a wide variety of other disabilities; as well as individuals who are English language learners, have low internet bandwidth, and are attending remotely from a noiseless or noisy environment.

The U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (OCR) has stated that "accessible" with respect to IT means that "a person with a disability is afforded the opportunity to acquire the same information, engage in the same interactions, and enjoy the same services as a person without a disability in an equally effective and integrated manner, with substantially equivalent ease of use. The person with a disability must be able to obtain the information as fully, equally, and independently as a person without a disability" (www.ed.gov/ocr/requirements/legal-cases-by-issue).

Accessibility Guidelines

There are many comprehensive sources of information about accessible design for IT. Presented below are 20 basic guidelines. Although they do not cover every potential accessibility issue, they provide a good start.



General Teaching Practices

1. Provide clear instructions for users who have a wide range of technology skills.
2. Present content and services in multiple ways (e.g., through text, video, audio, images, and live online meetings).
3. Address a wide range of language skills as you write content (e.g., spell out acronyms, define terms, avoid or define jargon).
4. On the website and in documents, provide instructions for how to request disability-related accommodations.
5. Make sure staff know about issues related to communicating with and offering services to individuals with disabilities.
6. Include images of people with disabilities on your website and within publications that present images of other potential service users.

For Web Pages, Documents, Images, and Videos

7. Use clear, consistent layouts and organization schemes for presenting content.
8. Use headings and sub-headings when creating digital documents, whether on web pages or in Microsoft Word and PowerPoints, Google Docs, PDFs, or other document formats.
9. Avoid using PDF documents; wherever possible, use web pages instead. If a PDF is necessary, use it only as a secondary source for the content and take steps to ensure it is designed to be accessible to people with disabilities.
10. Provide concise text descriptions of content presented within images for people who are unable to see the images using tools for adding “alt text” within document authoring platforms.
11. Use color combinations that are high contrast. Do not rely on color alone to communicate information (developer.paciellogroup.com/resources/contrastanalyser).
12. Make sure all content and navigation is accessible using the keyboard alone (uw.edu/accessibility/web/keyboard/).

13. Caption videos and transcribe audio content.
14. Consider accessibility when procuring IT tools and online resources; insist that vendors provide products and services that meet accessibility standards.
15. Become familiar with your institution’s IT accessibility policies and guidelines and learn how to apply them. Most higher education institutions in the US adhere to the World Wide Web Consortium’s Accessibility Guidelines (w3.org/WAI/standards-guidelines/wcag).

For Online One-On-One or Group Meetings

16. Provide flexible options for communicating and collaborating. For example, in an online meeting environment allow individuals to ask questions verbally or by typing in chat. Provide alternatives to meeting in an online meeting platform, including meeting by phone or communicating through email.
17. Distribute slides and all other materials, in accessible formats, to attendees, ideally in advance.
18. Clearly state the meeting agenda up-front, including which features of the meeting tool will be used.
19. In meetings with multiple participants, ask attendees to state their name each time they speak.
20. Create pauses during and between activities, so individuals who are taking notes, using slow internet bandwidth, or using captions or sign language interpreters can catch up.





For explanations of why these guidelines are important, how to implement them, and how to locate accessibility checkers, consult the following resources:

- University of Washington Accessible Technology (uw.edu/accessibility/)
- AccessDL (uw.edu/doit/programs/accessdl)
- “Services” within the Center for Universal Design in Education (uw.edu/doit/programs/center-universal-design-education/overview)

Checklist Updates

To increase the usefulness of this working document, send suggestions to doit@uw.edu. Each item, in keeping with the UD approach, should reflect a proactive practice that makes an online service more welcoming, accessible, and usable by individuals with a wide range of abilities.

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Communication Hints

Treat people with disabilities with the same respect and consideration with which you treat others. Here are some helpful hints when it comes to delivering a presentation, hosting an exhibit, and otherwise relating to people with disabilities.

General

- Ask a person with a disability if that person needs help before providing assistance.
- Talk directly to the person with a disability, not through their companion or interpreter.
- Refer to a person's disability only if it is relevant to the conversation.
- Avoid derogatory slang or negative descriptions of a person's disability. For example, "a person who uses a wheelchair" is more appropriate than "a person confined to a wheelchair." A wheelchair is not confining—it's liberating!
- Provide information in alternate means (e.g., written, spoken, diagrams).
- Do not interact with a person's guide dog or service dog unless you have received permission to do so.
- Do not be afraid to use common terms and phrases, like "see you later" or "let's go for a walk" around people with disabilities.
- Do not touch mobility devices or assistive technology without the owner's consent.
- Do not assume physical contact—like handshakes, high-fives, or hugs—is okay.
- Understand that not everyone uses eye contact.

Blind or Low Vision

- Be descriptive. Say, "The computer is about three feet to your left," rather than "The computer is over there."
- Speak all of the projected content when presenting and describe the content of charts, graphs, and pictures.
- When guiding people, offer them your arm rather than grabbing or pushing them.

Learning Disabilities

- Offer directions or instructions both orally and in writing. If asked, read instructions to individuals who have specific learning disabilities.

Mobility Impairments

- Consider carrying on a long conversation with an individual who uses a wheelchair from a seated position.

Speech Impairments

- Listen carefully. Repeat what you think you understand and then ask the person to clarify or repeat the portion that you did not understand.

Deaf or Hard of Hearing

- Face people and avoid covering your mouth, so they can see your lips. Avoid talking while chewing gum or eating.
- Speak clearly at a normal volume. Speak louder only if requested.
- Repeat questions from audience members.
- Use paper and pencil, or type things out on your cell phone, if the person who is deaf does not read lips or if more accurate communication is needed.
- When using an interpreter, speak directly to the person who is deaf; when an interpreter voices what a person who is deaf signs, look at the person who is deaf, not the interpreter.

Psychiatric Impairments

- Provide information in clear, calm, respectful tones.
- Allow opportunities for addressing specific questions.