

Accessible Distance Learning



Motivations

Distance learning designers make courses accessible to students with disabilities:

- Accessible design is good design, and often benefits all users.
- Accessible design ensures that content is reaching the largest possible audience.
- Web users are diverse. They include people using phones, tablets, and a wide variety of other devices. People with disabilities are part of this diverse mix.
- An accessible website makes people with disabilities feel welcome.
- Accessibility is required by law.

Access Challenges

Mainstream technology is inaccessible to some people.

- People who are blind may use screen reader software or Braille devices to access a website; they can only access content that is text-based.
- People who are deaf cannot access audio content unless it is captioned or transcribed.
- Some individuals may not be able to use a mouse; they need to be able to navigate a web page and access all content with the keyboard alone.
- Some people with low vision, dyslexia, attention deficit, or cognitive disabilities have difficulty processing long lines of text and/or cluttered screens, and depend on white space, simple screen images, and good color contrast.

Principles

Design websites to be:

PERCEIVABLE

- Provide text alternatives for non-text content.
- Caption multimedia.
- Present content in different ways.

OPERABLE

- Make all functionality available from keyboard alone.
- Allow enough time to read content.
- Help users navigate and find content.

UNDERSTANDABLE

- Make content appear and operate predictably.
- Help users avoid and correct errors.

ROBUST

- Maximize compatibility with current and future user tools.

Program Accessibility

Explore ten indicators of distance learning program accessibility at

uw.edu/doit/Resources/1111_access.html

In an iterative process, the *Indicators* were shared with and refined with formative feedback from disabled student service and distance learning staff at sixteen postsecondary institutions as part of a DO-IT project.

Each *Indicator* relates to one of four key stakeholders in the delivery of distance learning courses:

- students and potential students,
- distance learning designers,
- distance learning faculty, and
- distance learning program evaluators.

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Impact

Making courses accessible to students with disabilities benefits society by:

- enhancing academic and career fields with the expertise and perspectives of people with disabilities.
- making learning opportunities available to more citizens.
- providing more and better structured data for indexing and searching websites, documents, and media.

Resources

The following resources can help you get started in designing inclusive distance learning programs.

STANDARDS & GUIDELINES

- W3C Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0
w3.org/TR/WCAG20
- Section 508 Standards
section508.gov

FURTHER GUIDANCE

- AccessDL
uw.edu/doit/Resources/accessdl.html
- Web Accessibility in Mind (WebAIM)
webaim.org
- W3C Web Accessibility Initiative
w3.org/WAI/train.htm
- UW Accessible IT Tools and Resources
uw.edu/accessibility/tools.html

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Leadership

DO-IT: Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology

DO-IT is a collaboration of:

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