DIGITAL ACCESSIBILITY TOOLKIT

Cedar Crest College

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Contents

Introduction

Welcome to this resource on **digital accessibility**—and thank you for taking the time to learn how we can make our digital spaces more inclusive for everyone in our college community!

This manual is designed to support faculty, staff, administrators and students in understanding the importance of accessibility and how to apply it in everyday digital communication, course design, campus services, and more. Whether you're creating a document, sending an email, building a webpage, or designing a presentation, accessibility helps ensure that everyone can engage fully and equitably!

Before continuing through the toolkit, take a moment to explore three related but distinct concepts:

Accessibility is about designing environments, tools, and content that work for people of all abilities—right from the start. It removes barriers and ensures that everyone can participate without needing to ask for special support.

Accommodation involves making specific adjustments to meet the needs of individuals with disabilities. These are often provided in response to a request and tailored to a person's unique situation. For example, a student may need extended time on exams or alternative formats for course materials.

Equality means giving everyone the same resources or opportunities. But true inclusion often requires more than equality—it requires accessibility and accommodation to ensure equitable outcomes.

Accessibility is proactive and inclusive. Accommodation is reactive and individualized. Both are important, but accessibility benefits everyone—whether they disclose a disability or not!

Why it matters

Digital accessibility is more than a legal requirement—it's a reflection of our values as a community! Here's why it matters:

- It supports all users, including those with temporary conditions, different learning styles, or limited access to technology.
- It reduces the need for accommodations, making content usable for more people from the beginning.
- It demonstrates respect and care for every member of our community.

Getting Started with Accessibility

You don't have to be an expert to make a difference! Here are a few tips to help you begin:

- Start with one skill at a time!
- Use accessibility checklists to guide your work. It's easier to build accessibility in from the beginning than to retrofit materials later!
- Be patient with yourself. Accessibility takes practice, and it gets easier with time!

Understanding Screen Readers

Many of the tips included in this toolkit cover how to make content accessible for people who interact with digital content using **screen-readers**. This section will take a closer look at how screen readers work to help understand why designing with them in mind is important!

Why it matters

Screen readers rely on keyboard navigation to move through digital content. If your content is not accessible using a keyboard, people who are blind, have low vision, or don't use a mouse will struggle to access the information and navigate your content.

How it works

Screen readers convert digital text into speech as the user navigates through the content using standard key commands to move through the headings, links, and other page elements. The following videos demonstrate this!

- How do Screen Readers work?
- An Introduction to Keyboard Navigation

Useful resources

- Want to experience how a screen reader works? Download the NVDA screen reader tool, a **free**, open-source screen reader—and test your content firsthand!

Typography

Typography is defined as the style and appearance of printed or online material.

Why it matters

Typography—the visual style and appearance of text—plays a key role in how students read and understand written content. Thoughtful font choices and formatting can significantly improve readability, especially for people with cognitive, vision, or reading disabilities.

How to do it

- Use Sans Serif fonts for digital content! These are simpler and less decorative then Serif fonts and generally more legible. Some common examples are Roboto, Arial, Helvetica, Tahoma, Lucida Sans, Verdana, and Calibri.
- Use real text, not images of text.
- Use appropriate font sizes:
    - Body text: 12–14 pt
    - Large text: 18 pt+
    - Footnotes/endnotes: 9 pt+
- To set a default font in Outlook, select **File** then **Options**. In the **Outlook Options** dialog box that appears, select **Mail** then **Stationery and Fonts**. Under **New mail messages** or **Replying or forwarding messages**, select **Font** and make the desired changes.

Helpful Tips

Accessible typography isn't just about style—it's about ensuring everyone can engage with your content effectively. It is best to keep font choices consistent throughout your documents and pages to support reading speed and retention.

Color Contrast

Color contrast refers to the difference in brightness between foreground and background colors.

Why it matters

Color can enhance clarity and focus, but poor contrast can make content difficult—or even impossible—to read, especially for people with visual impairments or color blindness. Even those without disabilities may struggle with low-contrast text.

How to do it

- Use **light text on dark backgrounds** or **dark text on light backgrounds**.
- Avoid placing words on images.
- Microsoft now offers the option to select **high contrast only** when changing the font or highlight color to ensure accessibility!

Helpful tips

- Avoid using **color alone** to convey meaning. Instead, use **bold**, *italic*, or underline for emphasis—these are recognized by screen readers!
- Avoid red and green combinations, which are especially difficult for people with color blindness.

Free tools to check contrast

- **Web Aim Contrast Checker**
- **Chrome Web Helper Extension**

*To use these tools, you can either enter a foreground and background color in RGB hexadecimal format or choose colors directly from a web page or document using the Color Picker tool!

Alternative Text

Alternative text (alt text) is a short description added to an image that allows screen readers to convey visual content to users with visual disabilities.

Why it matters

Without it, important information in images is lost to those relying on assistive technologies. Alt text also helps sighted users when images fail to load, ensuring your message still gets through, as demonstrated in the following example:

National Organization on Disability logo, in a blue background and white text
A man sitting in a wheelchair with a laptop on his lap. He is a Black man with round glasses and a tan blazer. In the background is an office setting, with glass doors and plants visible. A blue geometric circle partially outlines him.

Now, here's the image it is describing:

How to do it

- When adding an image into a Canvas page, you will be automatically prompted to enter alt text once an image is added.
- In Word documents and Outlook, alt text can generally be entered by **right clicking the image** and **selecting 'add alternative text'.**
- The description should cover any relevant *content* or *functions* of the related image.

Helpful tips

- Avoid phrases like *"image of"* or *"picture of"*—screen readers already know it's an image.
- Keep descriptions under **125 characters** when possible.
- Skip symbols, abbreviations, and acronyms.
- If the image is decorative and doesn't convey meaningful content, mark it as **"Decorative."**

Free tools to help with alt text

- The **Poet Diagram Center** is a great tool for learning how to describe a variety of images ranging from graphs, maps, tables, and diagrams to mathematics.
- **Free AI image alt text generator from Arizone State University**

Accessible Hyperlinks

A hyperlink is a clickable item that takes you to another location which may be a webpage, document or other online content.

Why it matters

Accessible hyperlinks enhance the readability of digital content for people using screen readers by providing meaningful context about where a link leads. They also create a cleaner, more intuitive experience for sighted users by avoiding cluttered or vague link text.

How to do it

- Copy the webpage address directly from the site you want to link to.
- In **Outlook** or **Word**: **right-click** the selected text you want to feature, choose "**link**", paste the URL in the **address field**, and click **OK**.
- In **Canvas**: **Highlight** the selected text you want to feature, select the **paperclip icon**, select "**External Link**", paste the URL, and click **Done**.
- The link text should clearly describe the destination!

Helpful tips

- Use descriptive, readable link text that reflects the content being linked.
- Avoid using raw URLs as link text.
- Skip vague phrases like *"Click here," "More,"* or *"Read more."* Instead, write out the purpose of the link!

Consider the following examples. Which one is the best option?

- For more information, please go to https://my.cedarcrest.edu/ICS/Faculty/Academic_Services/.Links to an external site.
- To view more information on Faculty Resources from Student Accessibility Services, click here.
- For more information, please review the Student Accessibility Services resources on the My Cedar Crest web page.

The last example follows best practices — it's descriptive, clear, and accessible!

Accessible Headings

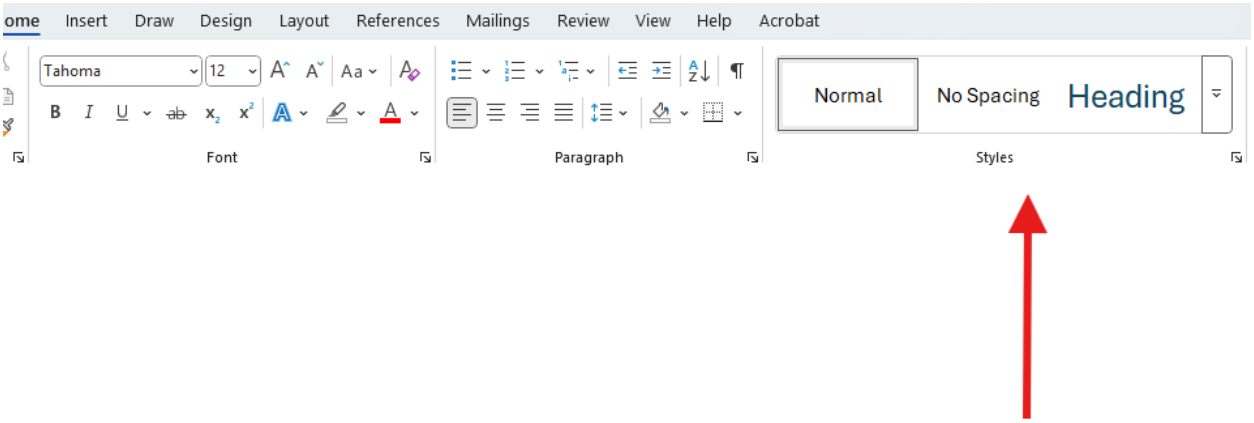
Headings communicate the organization of the content on the page.

Why it matters

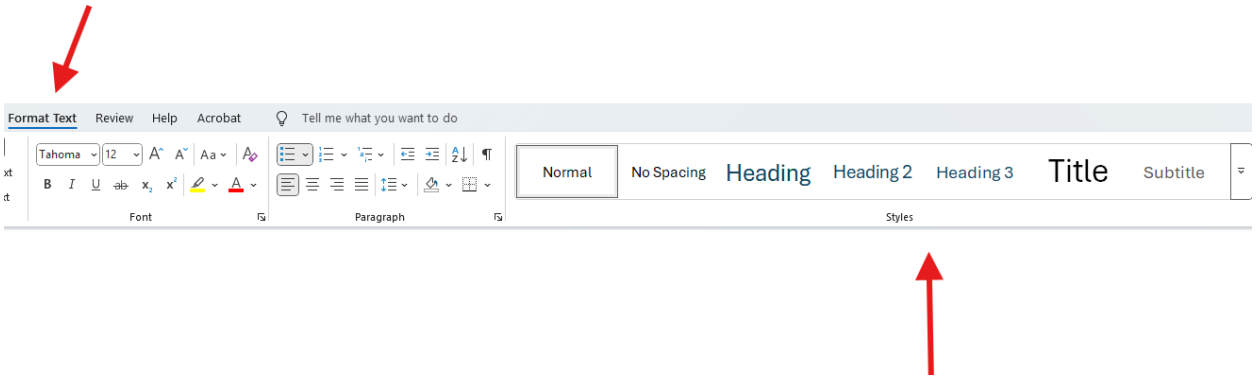
- Headings are the easiest way to make content clear and organized. Screen reader and other assistive technology users can skip from heading to heading when they are properly applied. Sighted users also benefit greatly from headings since they typically gravitate toward headings to quickly find what they want on the page. When used correctly, headings create a clear hierarchy that improves comprehension and retention.
- Setting correct headings gives **ALL** people access to:
- Chunked content that is easily scanned
- A quick overview of the type of content on the page
- A way to organize the content they read so they better understand and retain it
- An easy way jump to the section with the content they need

How to do it

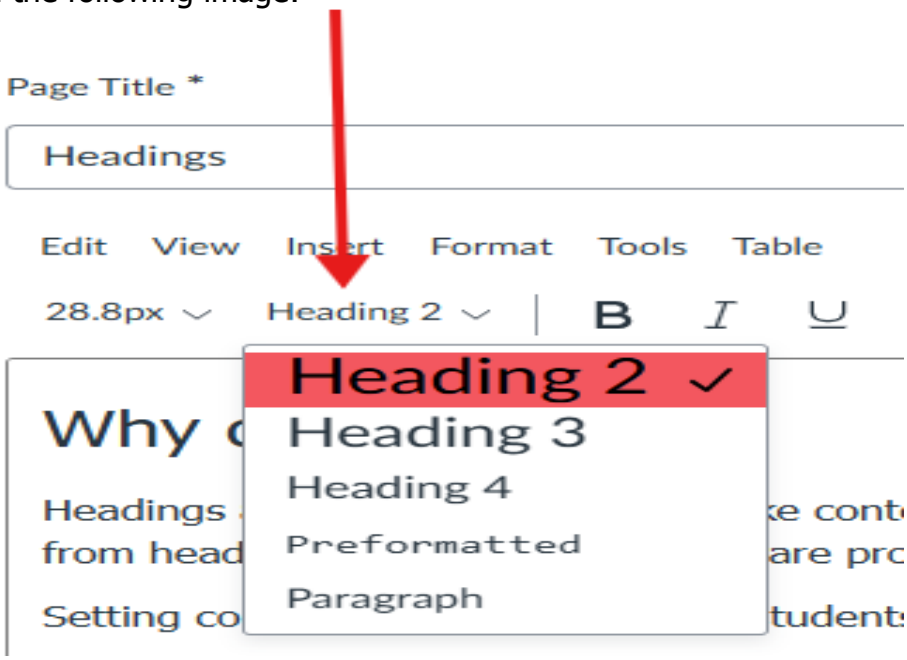
- Make sure to use <u>true</u> headings when developing your pages instead of using tab, bold font, asterisks, or larger sized font to lay things out.
- Select to use them sequentially (*i.e. Heading 1, Heading 2 instead of Heading 1 to Heading 4*).
- In **Microsoft Word**: Select the **Styles** tab from the **home** tab to locate and select appropriate heading options as shown in the following image.



- In **Outlook**: Select the **format text** tab to locate **styles** as show in the following image:



- In **Canvas**: Select **"Paragraph"** from the rich content editor in Canvas. From the dropdown, you can select the **heading** that fits the level of your content as shown in the following image:



Helpful tips and tools

- Headings should not contain more than 120 characters.
- A table of contents should be listed for long outlines!

Accessible tables and lists

Lists are a useful format to organize information in documents. Tables present information in a grid which a sighted user can scan visually to understand the relationship between columns, rows, and data.

Why it matters

Accessible lists and tables are beneficial to all people, regardless of disability. Creating lists allows someone using a screen reader as well as sighted students to skim your content and identify the number of items in a list before beginning to read the items. While tables may be useful for organizing information visually, inaccessible tables will not be able to be read by people who use screen reader technology!

How to do it

- When using tables, you will want to include a **caption** describing the contents of the table, and also use **designated header rows** so that a screen reader can easily navigate the table.
- To designate a row as a header when creating tables in **Microsoft** (*i.e. Outlook, Powerpoint, Microsoft Word*):
    - Right-click the table
    - Select **Table Properties**.
        - Select the **Row** tab, and check **Repeat as header row at the top of each page**. Uncheck **Allow row to break across pages**.
        - Select the **alt text** tab to describe a table.
    - Select **insert caption** to add a title for the table.
- **Canvas**: The built in accessibility checker will automatically provide support to add a caption and header row!

The following is an example of an accessible table with a header row and caption:

Table 1

Task	Person Responsible	Deadline
Task 1	Director	October 10th
Task 2	Manager	October 15th

- To create accessible lists, select the **bulleted or ordered lists** tool from the layout settings.

Helpful tips

- It is best to only use tables for displaying data and information. Using tables to create layouts for your pages causes issues for people who use assistive technologies!
- Try navigating all the way through the table using only the 'tab' key - if it runs smoothly through the table, the screen reader should not have any issues reading it!
- Don’t use asterisk's or dashes to create lists.

PDF Accessibility

A PDF is a Portable Document Format file. PDF accessibility refers to optimizing documents so they can be easily accessed, read, and navigated by individuals with disabilities.

Why it Matters

Accessible PDFs are easier to navigate, searchable, and compatible with screen readers and text-to-speech (TTS) tools. When PDFs are not created with accessibility in mind—especially if they are scanned images—they become unreadable to people who rely on assistive technology.

How to Do it

- **Start with an accessible source document.** Use Microsoft Word or PowerPoint to build in headings, alt text, and reading order *before* converting to PDF.
- **Check if your PDF is scanned.** Try selecting or highlighting text in the PDF. If you can't, it's likely a scanned image and not readable by screen readers.
- **Use Optical Character Recognition (OCR) in Adobe Acrobat to fix scanned PDFs:**
    - Open the scanned PDF.
    - Go to **Tools** and select **Scan & OCR**.
    - Select **Recognize Text** and then **In This File** or **In Multiple Files**.
    - After OCR is complete, **save** the file to preserve the changes.

Helpful tips

- **Avoid using "Print to PDF."** Instead, use "Export as PDF" or "Save As PDF" to preserve accessibility features.
- Use the built in PDF accessibility checker from Adobe!
    - Select **tools** then **prepare for accessibility**
    - Select **check for accessibility.**
    - Select **start checking**.
    - Once the check is run, you can **right click any errors** and either select **fix** to auto correct errors or **explain** to open a webpage with more instructions on steps to take for PDF accessibility.

Helpful tools

- Try the free **Ally Testing Tool**, an Adobe plug-in that checks for tags, alt text, contrast, reading order, and more.

Microsoft Word Accessibility

Microsoft Word is a word document processor that supports digital accessibility by providing built-in tools and features to help users create content for everyone.

Why it matters

Word documents are a staple that many of us utilize daily, so ensuring they are accessible is essential for supporting inclusive communication.

How to do it

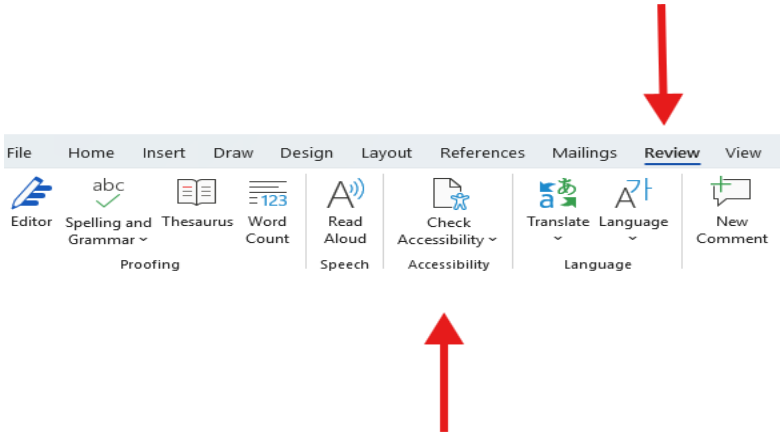
Follow these universal design principles (many of which we already been reviewed in prior tips!) to create accessible Word documents:

- Use **left-aligned text** for readability
- Ensure **sufficient color contrast** between text and background
- Set image **text wrapping to "in line with text"**
- Choose **accessible fonts** (e.g., Arial, Calibri) and sizes (11pt or larger)
- Use **descriptive hyperlinks** (e.g., "Read more about accessibility" instead of "Click here")
- Apply **clear heading structures** using built-in styles
- Include a **table of contents** for documents over 20 pages
- Use **simple tables** with captions and consistent cell counts per row
- Add **alt text** for all images
- **Avoid text boxes**, which can disrupt reading order for assistive technologies

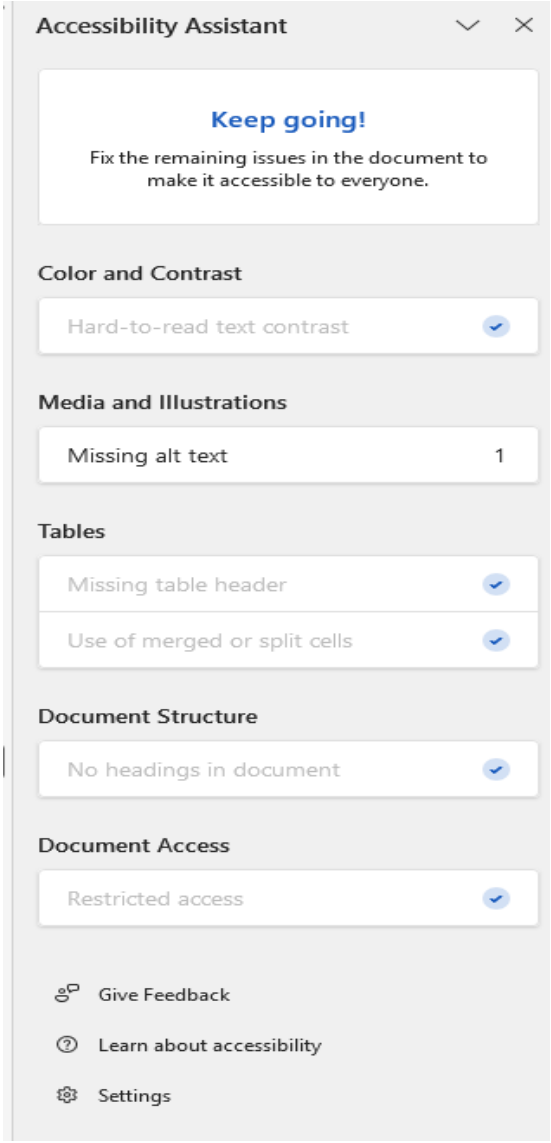
Helpful tips

To complete an accessibility check in Microsoft word:

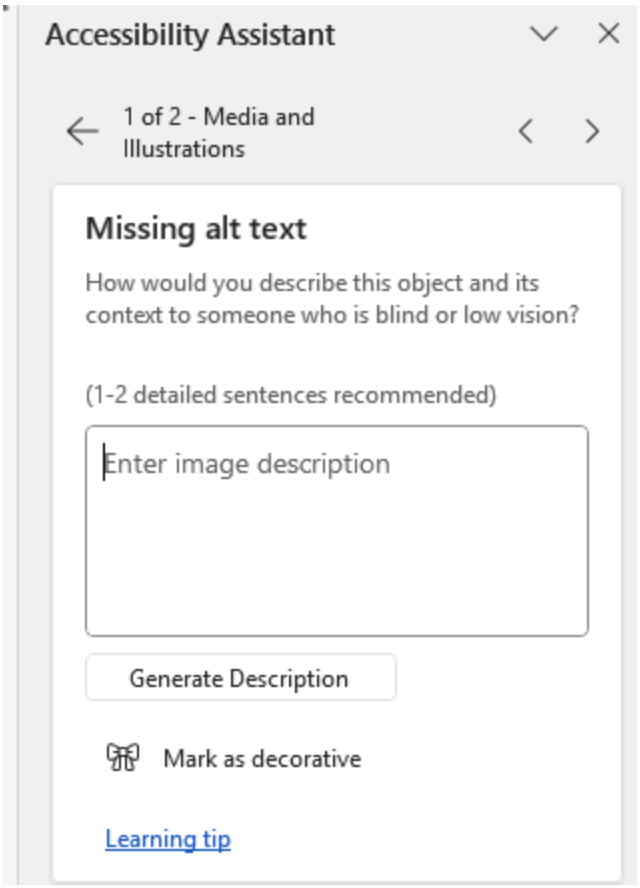
1. Select "**Review**" from the options on the top of the word document.
2. Next, select **Check Accessibility** to have an automatic review completed.



3. The **Accessibility Assistant** that generates on the right side of the page will walk you through any changes that are needed, as shown in the image below:



4. Select any errors that are generated through the accessibility assistant to be directed to the specific changes that need to be made!



To export your word document to an accessible PDF:

- **On a Mac**: Name your file, and then choose **PDF** from the **File Format** menu. Select **Best for electronic distribution and accessibility** to create a tagged PDF. Click **Export**.
- **On a PC**: Choose **PDF** from the **Save as Type** menu.
  Select **Standard** (optimize for) and click **Options**. Make sure that **Document structure tags for accessibility** is selected. Click **OK**, then **Save**. Check out this video demonstrating how to save a word document as an accessible PDF for the step by step breakdown!

Power Point Accessibility

Microsoft Powerpoint is a slideshow presentation program that supports digital accessibility by providing built-in tools and features to help users create content for everyone.

Why it matters

Ensuring your power point slides are accessible supports all learners and promotes inclusive learning environments.

How to do it

Follow these universal design principles (*many of which we have already reviewed in prior weekly access tips!)* to create accessible power point presentations:

- **Choose accessible templates**: Use themes with high contrast and simple backgrounds.
- **Use readable fonts and sizes**: Aim for 44-point titles and 36-point content text to improve readability and create better handouts. Stick to fonts that are easy to read and widely supported.
- **Add slide titles**: Titles help screen reader users navigate. If you prefer not to display a title, you can hide it. On the **Home ribbon** choose **Arrange** then **Selection Pane**. Select the **toggle hide/show button** to the right of the title.
- **Include alt text**: Describe images with alternative text so screen readers can convey visual content.
- **Use descriptive hyperlinks**: Avoid "click here"—instead, describe the link destination.
- **Embed accessible media**: Use captioned videos or provide transcripts for audio.
- **Design simple tables:** Keep table structures consistent with the same number of cells per row/column.
- **Limit animations:** Avoid flashing or distracting effects.

Helpful tips

- To convert your accessible PowerPoint into an accessible PDF:
    - Avoid using "Print to PDF"—it won't preserve accessibility features! Instead, Go to **File** then **Save As Adobe PDF**, then click **Options** and check "**Enable Accessibility and Reflow with tagged Adobe PDF**."

- To use the **Accessibility Checker** that is built into PowerPoint:

- Choose **File** then **Check for Issues** and select **Check Accessibility**.

Captioning and Transcripts

Captions describe dialogue, music, and sound effects in videos, while transcripts are documents that describe audio-only and video-only content, such as podcasts and animations.

Why it matters

Captions make video content accessible to over 30 million Americans with hearing loss. They also support visual learners, non-native speakers, and anyone who benefits from reading along while watching. Captions help all people better process and retain information.

Transcripts offer an additional way to study, organize, and review information. They're especially helpful for people who prefer reading, need to revisit concepts, or use assistive technology — with or without formal accommodations.

How to do it

The following steps focus on how to use captions in **self-produced videos** and **Microsoft Teams meetings**. For accommodation-related needs — such as lengthy videos, large batches, or live captioning — Student Accessibility Services can help with outsourcing or vendor support.

Canvas

- Select **record** or **add** from the studio section to get a video on Canvas.
- Once it is added, hover over the video and select **view.**
- Select **captions** from the options at the bottom of the screen to see the status of the automatic generation process. You will get an email when it is complete!
- Once it is done, select **edit** from the dropdown box to further edit captions for accuracy and timing. *This is an important step, as accuracy for the AI generated captions is only around 85%!*

Stream/Clipchamp

- Click on **Camera Recording** or **upload** to add a video. A transcript will be autogenerated.
- Select **Video Settings** from the options on the right-hand side and then expand the **transcript and captions** section.
- Select **generate** to produce automatic captions if they are not automatically generated.
- Once finalized, select **transcript** from the menu on the right side of the screen and **edit** for accuracy. *This is an important step, as accuracy for the AI generated captions is only around 85%!*

- Once this is done, the captions can be turned on through the **CC** controls at the bottom of the video and adjusted through the **settings** function.

Microsoft Teams

Teams can detect what's said in a meeting and present real-time captions:

- Go to **meeting controls**
- Select **More actions**
- Select **Language and speech**
- Select **Show live captions.**

You can also create a live transcription that can be downloaded following the meeting:

- Go to your **meeting controls**
- Select **More actions**
- Select **Record and transcribe**
- Select **Start transcription**

Helpful tips

- Ensure proper word order, spelling, punctuation and grammar
- Ensure text is synchronized with audio, and that captions are placed without obstruction
- Include sound effects
- Use search filters to find videos that already include captions.
    - **Please note:** YouTube's "English (auto-generated)" captions are not sufficient for providing equal access. Look instead for "English" in the list of languages. These are captions uploaded by the user instead of generated by voice recognition software!