

Creating Course Materials with Accessibility in Mind

1. A screen reader is a software application that reads text on a computer screen and converts it into an audio format. Many visually impaired students use screen readers to interpret course materials. To make sure that your course materials can be interpreted accurately by a screen reader, follow these guidelines:
 - a. Use short sentences.
 - b. Write out acronyms the first time you use them.
 - c. Use numbers rather than bullets or Roman numerals for lists.
 - d. Provide clear organization with an overview, subheadings, and summary.

2. Use “styles” in the MS word and PowerPoint toolbars to identify titles, headings, and other formats. The screen reader recognizes these codes and will announce them to the listener.



3. Be aware that some PDFs cause problems for screen readers. To test the accessibility of a PDF, try to copy and paste text from the document. If you can copy text, a screen reader will be able to process that information.
4. Keep tables simple because screen readers process table data from left to right. Be sure to label column and row headers. For complex tables, provide a summary.

5. Use alt tags for images. A screen reader uses this alternative text as a description of the image for a student who is visually impaired.



Young adult students in class

6. To improve readability for all students, use sans serif fonts such as Verdana and avoid justified block text formatting. Design slides with high color contrast between text and background but avoid pulsating colors and jumpy animations.
7. For hearing impaired students, provide transcripts and/or captioning for audio and video files. In PowerPoint, use the notes section to provide narrated text for the slides.
8. Talk to students who have disabilities, English as their second language, older operating systems, or other special needs regarding how to make your course material user-friendly. Providing clear documents also helps students who access materials with mobile technologies.
9. Consult the OIT site as a resource for developing accessible Web materials: <http://oit.semo.edu/>
10. Make friends with your disability services and instructional support staff! They are valuable resources of information on accessibility and universal design.