

Accessibility Elements by “*Quality Matters*”

Standard 8: The face-to-face and online course components are accessible to all students

8.1. Courses must incorporate ADA standards and reflect conformance with institutional policy regarding accessibility in online and hybrid courses.

All web-based courses should comply with the institution's accessibility and/or disability policies and procedures. In the absence of institutional policy, courses should comply with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG).

Suggestions:

1. Include a link to the institution's ADA policy and/or guidelines, if available
2. Include a statement that tells the students how to gain access to an institution's disabilities support services (often known as ADA services)
3. If the course employs a Course Management System such as Angel, Blackboard, Desire2Learn, eCollege, WebCT, WebTycho, etc., a statement certifying ADA compliance from the CMS provider should be readily available or provided by the instructor.
4. If other tools and software are used to deliver the course, the instructor should provide documentation stating their degree of ADA compliance. The criteria mentioned in the annotations to 8.1 (and 8.2-8.4) should be met by these tools.

Additional elements of Section 508 are covered in the annotations to Standards 8.2-8.4.

8.2. Course pages and materials must provide equivalent alternatives to auditory and visual content.

Alternative means of access to course information should be provided for the vision- or hearing-impaired students, such as equivalent textual representations of images, audio, animations, and video in the course website.

Examples:

1. An audio lecture has a text transcript available.
2. A video clip, image, or animation is accompanied by a text transcript.
3. Text provides an alternative to non-text content in web pages. It is especially helpful for people who are blind and rely on a screen reader to have the content of the website read to them.
4. Videos and live audio have captions and a transcript. With archived audio, a transcription may be sufficient.
5. Form elements (text field, checkbox, dropdown list, etc.) have a label associated to the correct form element using the <label> tag. The user can submit the form and recover from any errors, such as the failure to fill in all required fields.

8.3. Course menus and pages must have links that are self-describing and meaningful.

Courses should provide Internet links that include useful descriptions of what students will find at the linked sites. These descriptions enable vision-impaired student to use screen reader software to understand links. In addition, instructors should provide directions that clearly direct students to the appropriate sub-pages within an external website.

Examples:

1. All file names and web hyperlinks have meaningful names. For instance, the link to take a quiz should say "Take Quiz 1," not "Click Here."
2. Icons used as links should also have HTML tags or an accompanying text link.
3. To facilitate access to Internet sites by screen readers, links are arranged in numeric or alphabetic order, rather than simple bulleted form.

8.4. Courses must ensure screen readability.

Courses should employ appropriate font, color, and spacing to facilitate readability and minimize distractions for the student. Presenting information in text format is generally acceptable because screen reader software (used by the vision-impaired) can read text.

Readability Tips List:

1. If using color-coding, use additional means to communicate information, such as bold or italics in conjunction, with color-coding.
2. Sufficient contrast is used in the font and background colors
3. Text size is consistent with typical View, Text, and Size settings.
4. Course pages provide an alternate, non-color-coded format.
5. Formatting and color coding are used to serve specific instructional purposes. For example, format and color are used purposefully to communicate key points, group like items, emphasize relevant relationships, etc.
6. Tables are used online for layout and to organize data. Tables that are used to organize tabular data should have appropriate table headers (the <th> element). Data cells should be associated with their appropriate headers, making it easier for screen reader users to navigate and understand the data table.
7. PDF documents and other non-HTML content should be as accessible as possible. If they are not, using HTML could be considered. PDF documents could also include a series of tags to make them more accessible. A tagged PDF file looks the same but is likely to be more accessible to a person using a screen reader.
8. Provide a method that allows users to skip navigation or other elements that repeat on every page. This shortcut is usually accomplished by providing a "Skip to Content," "Skip to Main Content," or "Skip Navigation" link at the top of the page that goes to the main content of the page.
9. Ensure JavaScript event handlers are device-independent (e.g., they do not require the use of a mouse) and make sure that the page does not rely on JavaScript to function. HTML-compliant and -accessible pages are more robust and provide search engine optimization.
10. Cascading Style Sheets (CSS) allow separation of content from presentation and thus provide more flexibility and accessibility of content.