

Producing Accessible Materials-a Quick Guide/Reference

Written material both online and in a physical classroom needs to be accessible in order for the individual to be able to easily extract information from the text, in addition to, making the material screen-reader accessible.

Word processing and various desktop publishing programs allow an instructor to make eye catching material, but it is often inaccessible to many readers due to unnecessary features and the use of colors or decorative fonts. You can however make a document that is both visually appealing, conveys the proper material, and is accessible. The easiest way to work with desktop publishing files such as Microsoft Word documents is to make that have a clear structure and layout. This includes using the Headers style located in the Home menu in MS Word. This structure allows students with screen reading software to easily move throughout the document. A lot of the features that make accessible Word documents can also be applied to online content. A website that is easily maneuverable and has a clear structure is much more accessible than one without structure and formatting.

This quick guide will highlight some of the issues that can prevent text from being accessible and ways to improve the accessibility of your documents.

Fonts

The type face you use can have an impact on the accessibility and readability of your document. Carefully choosing your font type for online content especially will greatly impact how it is read. The two main types of typeface are Serif and Sans Serif, the difference between the two is that the Serif font ends in a curl or stroke at the end of each character, an example of a Serif font would be Times New Roman. An example of a Sans Serif font would be Arial. Sans Serif fonts are considered to be easier to read particularly on screen, although certain characters such as 'a' may not be recognized as a. Sans Serif fonts like Arial, Verdana and Helvetica are often used in web site design because they are the more common fonts on a normal computer and they work on screen.

Sans Serif

Serif

Serif fonts are said to work better in print, but for accessibility it is often recommended that Sans Serif fonts be used as they are easier to distinguish for those with reading and visual impairment.

There is also a new, experimental font that is said to increase student's comprehension with severe to moderate dyslexia. This is a free font to download and results may vary, but it is good to be aware of these types of fonts.

Student Comprehension with Dyslexia

Color Contrast

Color contrast between the font color and background both on the web and in print can impact those with a visual impairment, if there is not sufficient contrast the text is harder to distinguish. Some color contrasts can be beneficial particularly to those who are dyslexic or have learning difficulties. Often times black text on a yellow background can be easier to view and comprehend so consider printing onto different color paper.



Images

Using images in a document can often help support what is being said in the text and therefore the use of images can often help readers with dyslexia and learning difficulties follow better. You can use alternate text or (alt text) to describe what the image is and how it is used in the context of the page or subject.



Formatting and .PDF's

Formatting is always a concern for accessibility. This document in Microsoft Word has been formatted in the header/body formatting to allow for easy navigation of the document. The formatting and steps to working with a .PDF is also very easy and can be done quickly to improve accessibility. There is already some links on the creating accessible material page on the Student Disability Services website. I have saved this document as a properly tagged document as well. If you open the .PDF version, you will be able to see the tags and in what order the document will be read.

Student Disability Services

As always, the Student Disability Services staff is here to offer help, training, and guidance to making materials in your course accessible. If you need more clarification or help, visit the "Creating Accessible Materials" page on our left side menu of the SDS website or call/email the SDS office.