

Important and Impactful Accessibility Tips to Improve Your Online Courses

Introduction

Howdy! In this module, we will talk about tips to make your courses accessible provided by Sandra Childers, our Web & Information Designer, for eSAIL.

This module will discuss the importance of developing accessible online courses and documents and provides a few important and impactful ways to get your courses more accessible. We will go over how to create alt tags for non-text-based content, look at how to test the contrast ratio for our documents, and provide captions and transcripts for all of our video and audio material.

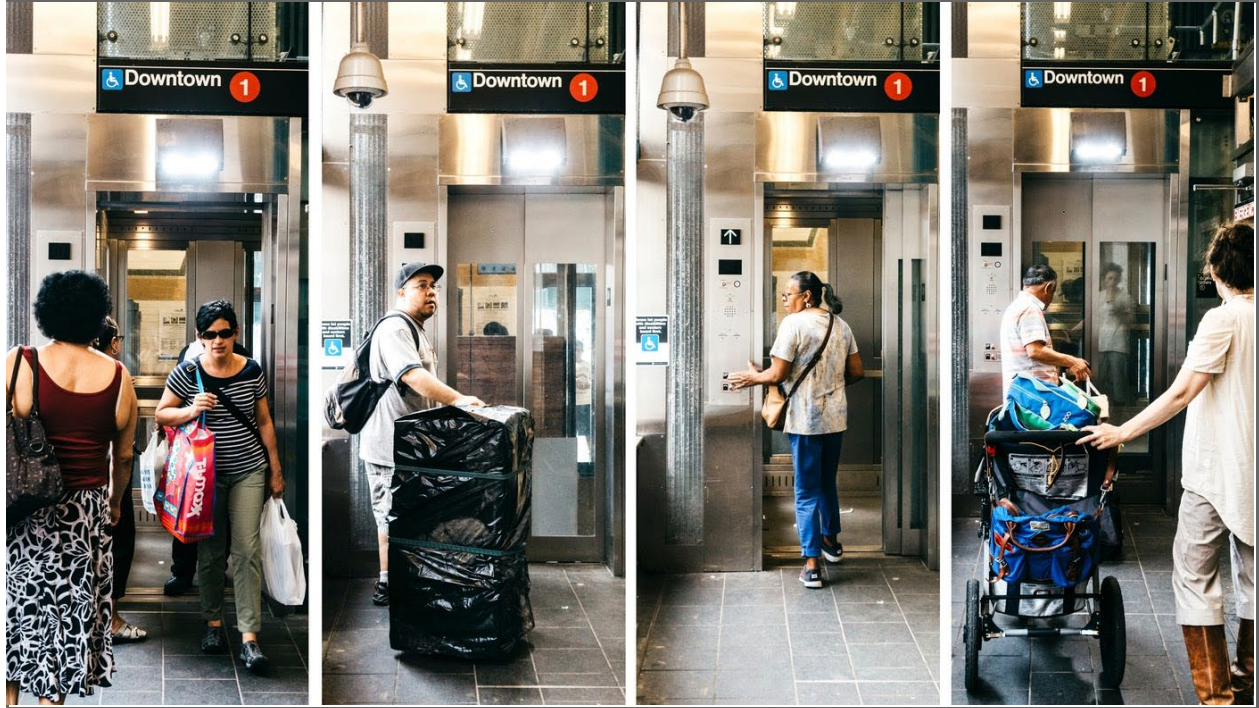
By keeping accessibility in mind while developing your online courses (on your own or with the assistance of our design team), you will be more prepared and less likely to need last-minute accommodation revisions, as most needs will be built in already. This should help reduce the anxiety that can arise when students ask for accommodations. Also, you will be helping **all** of your students learn, not just those with disabilities.

Why should we develop accessible online courses?

Some type of disability affects approximately 61 million, or [nearly 1 in 4 people \(26%\)](#) in the United States and more than [1 billion worldwide](#) (PDF). The highest percentage of people with disabilities in the United States are those living in the south (including Texas).

But making your online courses accessible isn't just for those with disabilities. It's about *all* of your students – providing what they need to succeed in your course. It's providing captions for those that can't use the sound to watch your videos or lecture captures. It's giving study aids by providing your review or notes in electronic form. It's helping visual learners follow along with captions so they can better retain the information you're teaching them.

When you visualize people using elevators, you probably don't see just those using a wheelchair. You see people going up to the 10th floor for work, parents with small children, someone with a bad knee, or people carrying shopping bags after a long trip to the mall. Everyone can benefit from elevators.



Photographer: Michael Rubenstein for NPR
[The Americans with Disability Act at 25](#)

We make online education accessible to ensure *all* students have equitable access to your instruction and materials. With this in mind, accessibility should be a concern for **all of us**, regardless of our roles on campus. eSAIL is committed to assisting faculty in the College of Engineering with this process, so no one person is expected to do this alone.

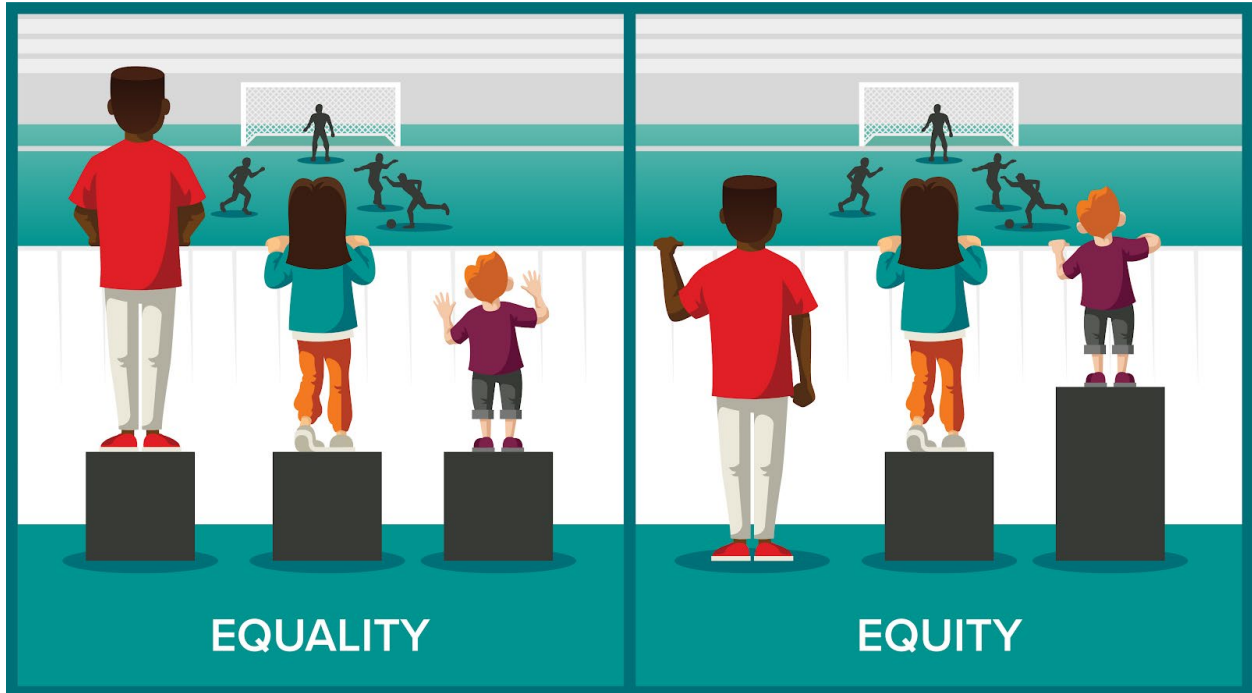


Illustration: McGraw Hill PreK-12

[What's the Difference Between Equity and Equality in Education?](#)

How do we make your online course accessible?

As a Texas A&M faculty member, you are the subject matter expert for your course. eSAIL's accessibility experts are here to help you design your content in an accessible manner, so you do not have to do this on your own.

Instead of waiting until the end of development, when it would be costly and time-consuming, accessibility improvements should be built into your development process, so improvements are inserted as your course is being built.

The most important and most impactful changes that can be made to your course for it to be accessible for your students are the following:

1. Create **Alt text** for all of your images.
 2. **Contrast Ratio** should be high enough to meet Level AA compliance.
 3. **Closed Caption** all videos and transcribe all audio content.
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Alt Text

Creating alternative text or “alt” text for images ensures their meaning is shared with students using a screen reader. This is important for online course content, Word and PDF documents, and PowerPoint presentations.

Here are a couple of guidelines for creating alt text descriptions:

- **Alt text** *should* be **accurate, equivalent, and succinct**. It should present the same content or function as the image in as few words as possible.
- Alt text *should not* be **redundant** (i.e., it shouldn't repeat words surrounding the image), and it shouldn't contain “image of” or “picture of” in its text. Screen readers will already state when they've encountered a “graphic,” so it's redundant to say it's an image.

Look for a link at the end of this module that is the ultimate guide to Alt Text. ([Alt-Texts: The Ultimate Guide](#))

Contrast Ratio

In the [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(or WCAG\) 2.0](#), contrast is defined as the measure of the difference in brightness between two colors. This brightness difference is expressed as a ratio. Even though the WCAG contains guidelines for the web, this ratio also applies to documents you create.

The part you should be concerned with is text color versus its background color. The ratio between text and its background must be **4.5:1 for normal** (body) text and **3:1 for large** text. You can use this [contrast checker](#) to check if your color choices are compliant. As a university, we must meet Level AA compliance.

Creating a high enough contrast helps students with visual disabilities see (or access) your content. Visual disabilities include vision conditions, low vision, blindness, and various types of color blindness.

Closed Captioning & Audio Transcripts

All video content must be captioned, and all audio content must be transcribed.

Closed Captioning

By law, videos we provide to students must be captioned at **99% accuracy**, meaning we should match the spoken words in the dialogue to the fullest extent possible (and any meaningful sound effects).

According to [EDUCAUSE Review](#), most students (regardless of disability) “use closed captions at least some of the time,” and about 90% of students who use closed captions find them “at least moderately helpful for learning.”

Captions should use correct spelling and grammar, and provide appropriate punctuation and capitalization. They should also be synchronized with the video.

If you work with our team, your videos will have the appropriate captions added for you. Otherwise, eSAIL recommends using [Rev](#), but it can get costly at over \$1 per minute, so this may not be feasible for lecture capture videos.

There are **free** captioning tools available, such as YouTube, but you **must** edit and correct the auto-generated captions for spelling and grammar, and provide appropriate punctuation and capitalization to get to that 99% accuracy.

Audio Transcripts

Audio transcripts should be available in electronic form for your students. They are useful for deaf and hard of hearing students, but they are also useful as study guides, so students don’t need to listen to the whole audio file to find the information they want to review.

Transcripts should include all dialogue within the audio file and any relevant sounds that add meaning to the audio. Transcripts, like closed captions, should be at least **99% accurate** and should have the correct spelling, grammar, capitalization, and punctuation.

By working with our team, you will receive the assistance you need to ensure your courses are accessible, including more than what was discussed with you today.