

Quick Accessibility Guide for Canvas

Text Formatting

You will want to format your text in a variety of ways. Sometimes you want something to stand out. In the example in Figure 1 I want “Great Information” to stand out because it is letting my students know that some great information is going to follow. By making it stand out I’m drawing their attention to it. The words “Great Information” would be a heading because there is related content that follows it. I want to use the formatting tools that are built into Canvas to format these words as a header.

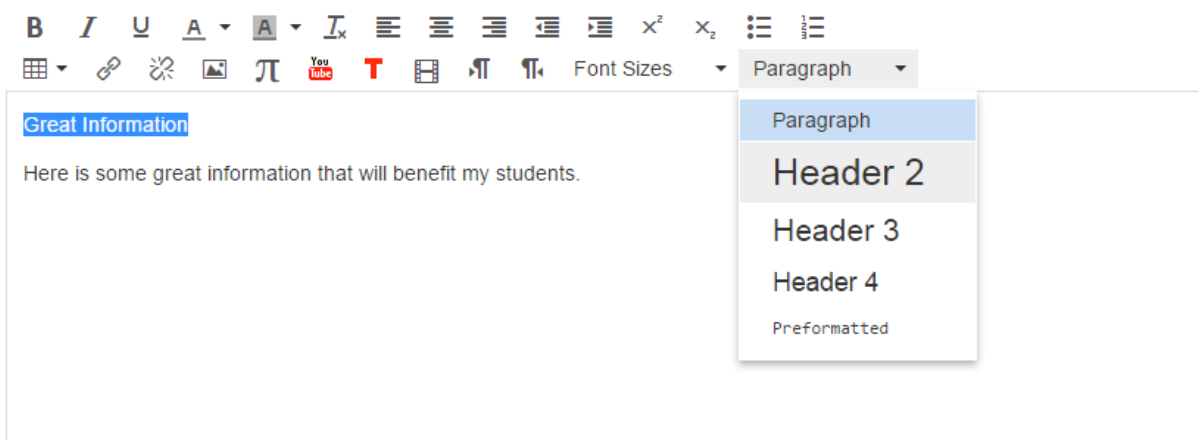


Figure 1

You can see in Figure 2 below that this looks just like I want it to. More importantly, both sighted and unsighted students can understand that you have included a header to make these words stand out.

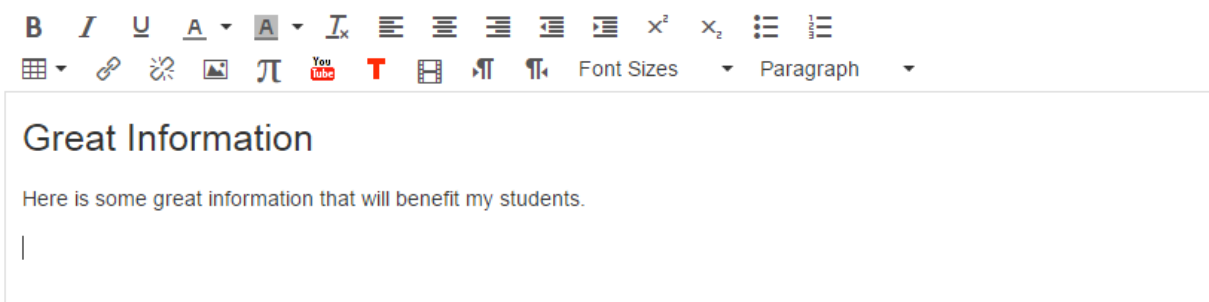


Figure 2

Some questions and answers

Question: How do I know which heading to use?

Answer: Great question. Headings should follow a logical pattern, similar to an outline. The title of each page is automatically set as a Header 1. Everything on that page should be related to the topic of the page title. That is why the first option that you have is Header 2, and that should be your first header. Your next header should either be down one level (Header 3) or on the same level (Header 2). It would be down one level if the topic was a sub-topic of Header 2. However if it's a new topic, on an equal or similar level of importance, then it would also be a Header 2.

Links

A link, short for hyperlink, is a set of words on which the user can click their mouse in order to access a file or website. There is a right way and a wrong way to format links. The right way will have some words that clearly explain what is being clicked on. These words would be the link. See the examples below.

- To learn more about volcanos visit the [Volcano Information Center](#). << **CORRECT**
- <http://www.scienceinformationresources.com/locations/vol-info-cntr> << **INCORRECT**

You notice how the first example, the correct example, has a very clear and understandable description built into the link. The second example, the incorrect example, has gibberish and the link.

Let me show you how to create the correct type of link in Canvas.

In Figure 3 below I made a mistake. In the process of adding my PowerPoint lecture I did not select any clearly descriptive text to use as my link. Instead I just clicked on the file that I wanted to link to. You can see that the link is not descriptive at all.

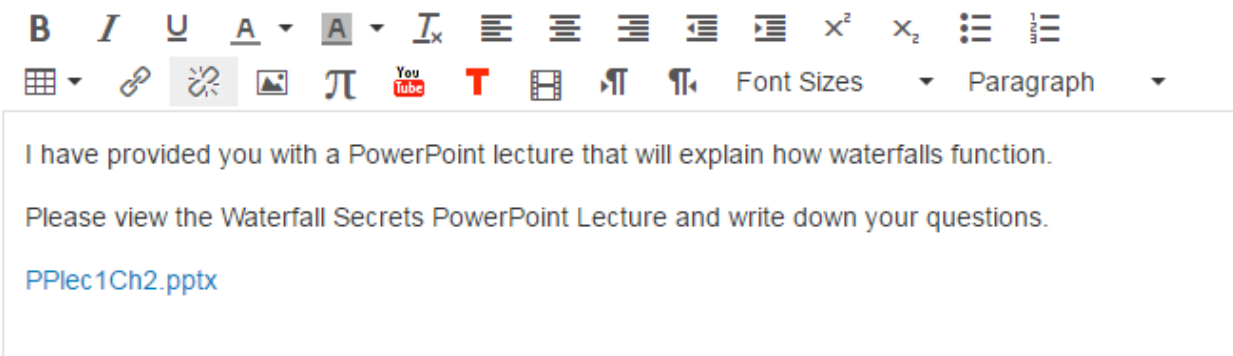


Figure 3

In Figure 4 below you can see that I have highlighted text that I want to use as my link. Once I have highlighted the text I simply click on the file that I wish to link to.

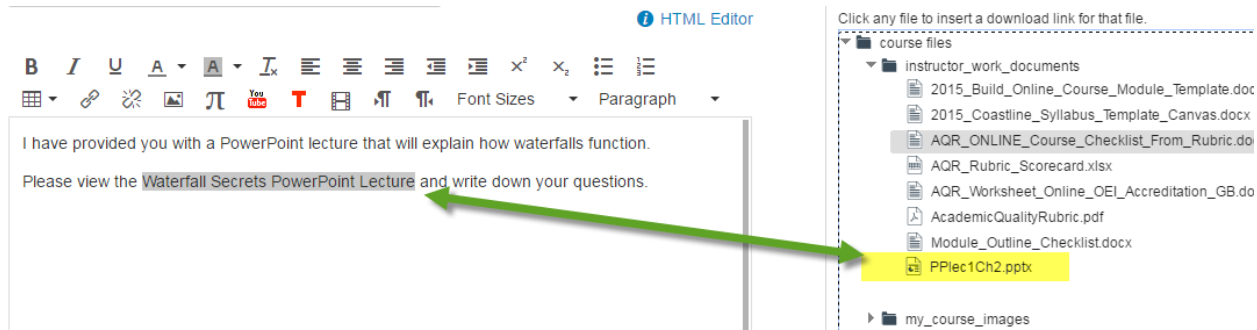


Figure 4

In Figure 5 below you can see how much easier it is to read and understand when the correct formatting is applied.

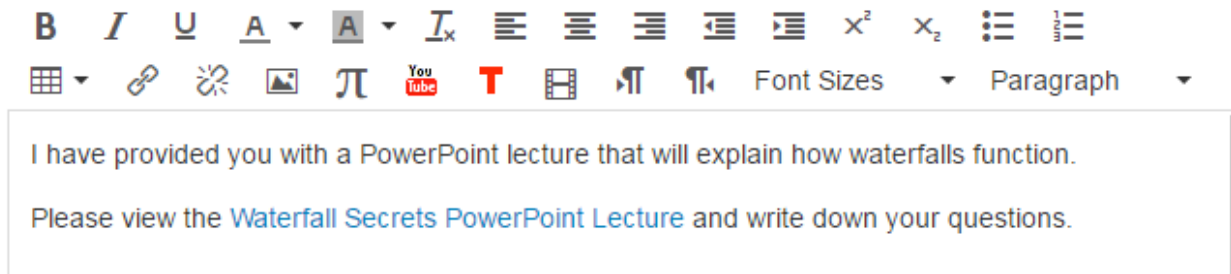


Figure 5

Some questions and answers

Question: I provide my students with a PDF copy of resources that they can print and take with them. If the link is words, rather than the URL, they won't be able to read it. What can I do?

Answer: Great question. If you are providing something that might be printed, make the clearly identifiable text a link, then provide the URL but do not make it a link. It might look something like this: Visit the [Library of Congress](https://www.loc.gov) (URL: <https://www.loc.gov>).

Images

You have probably heard about using ALT text in images, but what does that mean? ALT is an abbreviation for alternative text. It's an alternative for seeing the image. If the image were not visible due to Internet problems, what would you want your students to know from this image? That means a couple of things. First, you should not have the file name as the ALT text. That wouldn't be helpful at all. Second, if you have a great deal of information on an image, for example lots of words, you might want to include a description of the image on the page. Third, imagine that you are telling someone on the phone what information the image is conveying. Those are the words that you want to use for your ALT

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text.

B *I* U A A *I*_x x^2 x_2

Font Sizes Paragraph

Here is a beautiful gem in it's raw form. Can you guess what type of gem this is?




Figure 6

Setting ALT text in Canvas is very simple. Looking at Figure 7 below you can see that after inserting your image you will see the attributes information fields. Notice how the ALT text that Canvas inserts by default is the file name? We want to change that. Simply type your clear, accurate description in the “Alt text” field. Now click Update. It doesn’t get much easier than that! Now if we look at the page code (Figure 8) we will see that the ALT text reads “Transparent grey gem with a cubic shape, and trigons visible on one surface”.

Attributes

Alt text

Describe the image to improve accessibility

Dimensions

x

Aspect ratio will be preserved

Cancel

Update

Figure 7

```
alt="Transparent grey gem with a cubic shape, and trigons visible on one surface." v
```

Figure 8

There are two things I want to mention. First, you should not say “Picture of ...”, or “Image of ...”. Your students already know it’s a picture. Second, if you have decorative images there is no reason to describe them. Simply put a blank space in the “Alt text” field.

Some questions and answers

Question: If I am showing drawings or sculptures would I say “drawing of ...” or “sculpture of ...”?

Answer: Great question. Yes, “drawing of ...” or “sculpture of ...” is fine. You would not say “Picture of a sculpture of Homer”.

Color

Colors can be very pretty and can certainly brighten a mood. But they can present a problem. Let's look at how to use color in your course.

First let's look at a "typical" course that uses color. In this example (Figures 9, 10, and 11) the instructor assigns topics by color. The assignment is to read the red text and provide your thoughts. Each of these examples is the exact same page, but each is being viewed by different people with different forms of color blindness. Which one is the red text?



Figure 9

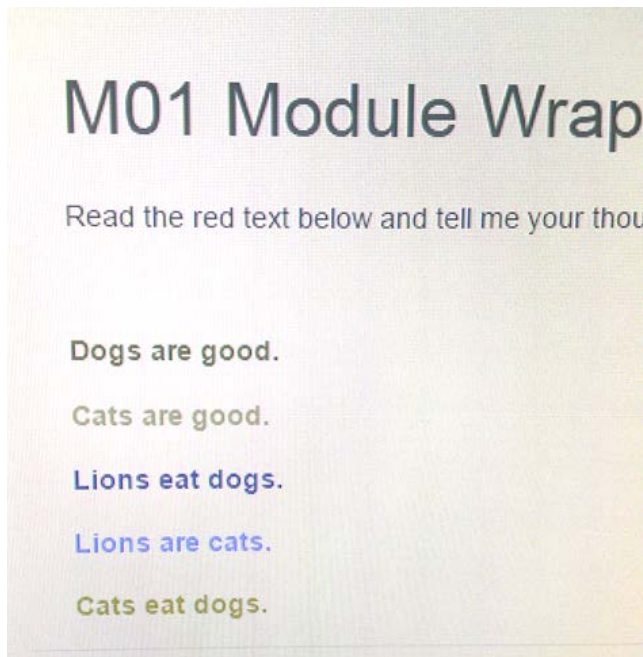


Figure 10

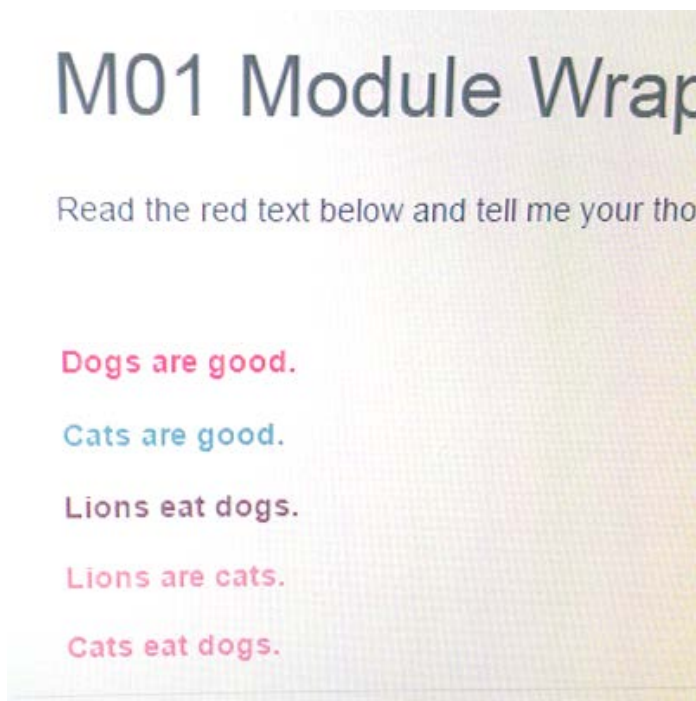


Figure 11

I think the message is clear. If you are going to use color, don't ever use it to direct someone to a specific color. Now what about using color to brighten a page. Upwards of 20% of the population have some level of color blindness. What you think is pretty might look atrocious to someone else. And here's a thought, if you have a little color blindness you might be frightening 80% of your class with your color

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choices. In the three examples we just looked at, the actual colors are very different from what you see. If you are using color to make topics stand out, you might want to re-think that. How about using bold or italics?

Some questions and answers

Question: I love using color. Can I just make my background a pretty color?

Answer: Great question. Not all color issues are related to colorblindness. Sometimes the contrast between a background and a font color is not sufficient for students to read the text. It is always safest to stick with extremely light background and extremely dark font, the safest being black on white. However, if you are set on taking a path less traveled, then contact your college accessibility compliance officer. They can provide you with resources that will help you determine if your pink background and lime green text will work together.

Tables

Let's think about tables for a moment. Which is the correct way to read them? Do you read from left to right across each row? Or do you read from top to bottom in each column? Normally it's pretty obvious by looking at the table, but what if you can't actually see the table? The reason that we want to format tables is so that a blind student using a screen reader can easily understand what your intention is.

Here are some things to keep in mind when creating a table.

- Use the simplest table structure possible.
- Avoid merged cells. Often merging cells is done for appearances, not for function.
- Avoid empty cells. Let your users know why there is no data in a cell.
- Use the tools available to you to format tables. Designate which cells contain headers.
- Avoid using tables for visual layout when possible.
- Use guidelines. They make it easier for a partially sighted student to see the table.

In Canvas there are many tools provided to you, so that you can clearly format your table. In Figure 12 below I have created two tables. The first one contains no formatting and the second one is properly formatted.

Rainfall	January	February	March
Morning	1.23	2.33	0.58
Afternoon	0.98	1.24	0.03
Evening	3.84	2.69	0.0

Rainfall	January	February	March
Morning	1.23	2.33	0.58
Afternoon	0.98	1.24	0.03
Evening	3.84	2.69	0.0

Figure 12

Let's take a look at how I formatted the table. First I select the cells that I want to format. In this case (Figure 13) I want to format the column headings of January, February, and March.

Rainfall	January	February	March
Morning	1.23	2.33	0.58
Afternoon	0.98	1.24	0.03
Evening	3.84	2.69	0.0

Figure 13

In the Canvas text editor tool bar I select the table icon from the menu, then I select Cell, and then select Cell Properties (Figure 14).

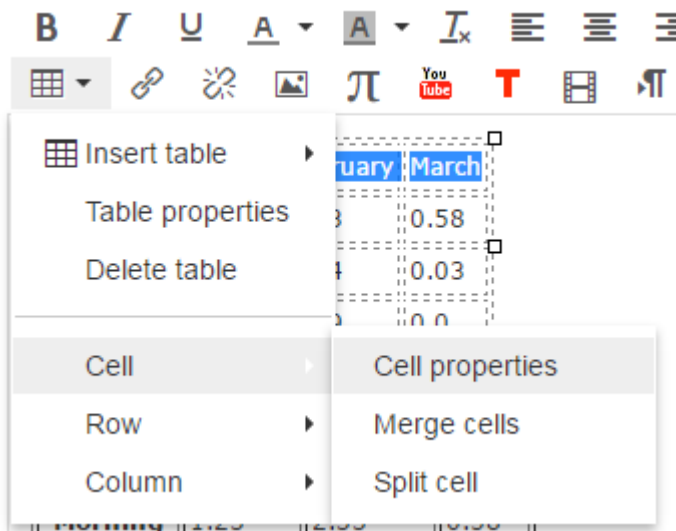


Figure 14

In the Cell Properties window I'll change Cell Type from Cell to Header Cell (Figure 15).

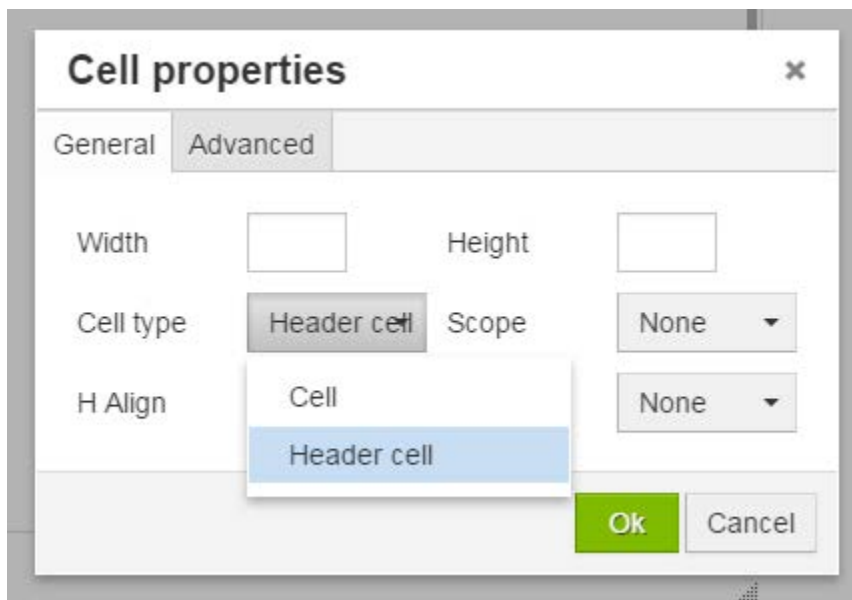


Figure 15

Also in the Cell Properties window I'll change Scope from None to Column (Figure 16). I'm changing it to Column because these cells are Column Headers. I'll now click OK to save my changes.

I'll repeat this process for Morning, Afternoon, and Evening with some differences. While these will be Header Cells also, the scope for these will be Row.

Finally, I will format Rainfall as a Header Cell, but I will not give it a Scope.

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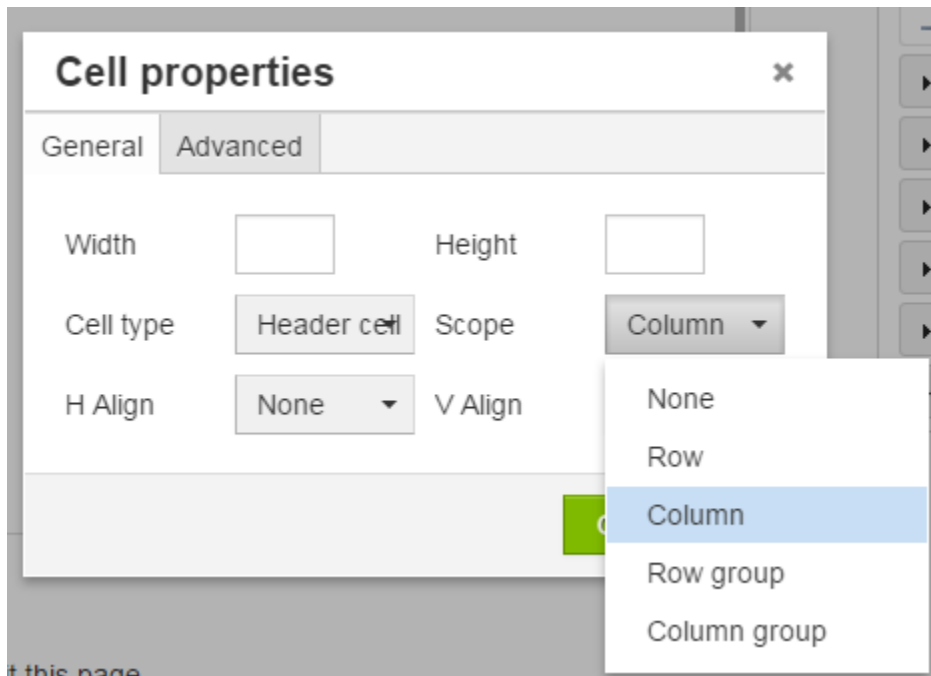


Figure 16

There is one more thing I will do to finish making this table accessible. I'll use the Canvas text editor again. I'll select the table icon in the Canvas text editor and then select Table Properties. In the Table Properties window (Figure 17) I'll place a 1 in the Border field. You can try different numbers in this field to see how it looks. Then click OK.

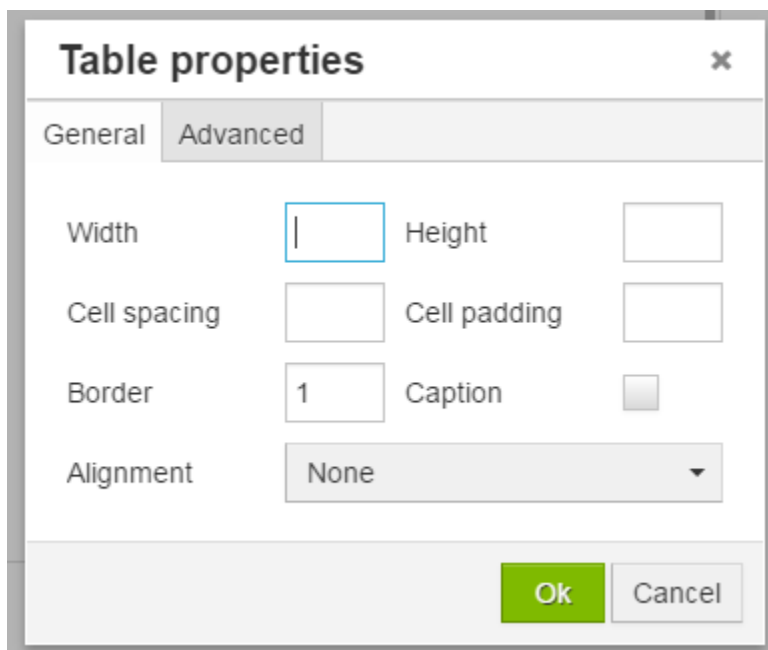


Figure 17

It took me less than one minute to format this table, and I think you'll agree that it looks much better. More importantly, it is now readable by a blind student.

More to Know

We have looked at several things that you can do in Canvas to make your course more accessible. There are also some things you can do that are outside of Canvas.

Files

When you upload a file into Canvas you should ensure that it is accessible.

PowerPoint

Creating an accessible PowerPoint is very simple. Microsoft has also included a built-in accessibility checker in PowerPoint, so there is no excuse not to have accessible PowerPoints. If you receive a PowerPoint from your publisher, use the built-in accessibility checker to verify that it is accessible. If it's not accessible, demand that your publisher fix this.

Word

Word has tools in the tool ribbon to make all of your Word documents accessible. It also has a built-in accessibility checker.

PDF

Most PDF's are created from another document, frequently from a Word or PowerPoint. If you start with an accessible document, your PDF will be very close to accessible. Adobe Acrobat Pro has a built-in accessibility checker.

Video

If you create your own video, work from a script. You can then use the script to create your closed captioning. If you're using video from YouTube or another source, only use properly captioned video. Just because a video has closed captions does not mean the closed captions are correct. If they are auto-generated, then they are probably wrong. Review them yourself.

Audio

Provide a transcript for all audio. If a student can't hear an audio, you can at least let them read it.

Information

If you have any questions you should contact your college's Accessibility Compliance Officer or your Office of DSPS.



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