

This tip sheet will help you to ensure the design of your online platforms is accessible and inclusive

Supporting Students with disabilities to study online: Accessible online design

ECU is proud of our diverse and inclusive learning and working environment and is committed to ensuring continued accessibility and inclusion for all members of our community. As ECU moves to delivering more units and courses online, it is important to ensure that students with disabilities are well supported during this time of change. This tip sheet will help you to ensure that the design of your online platforms is accessible and inclusive. For any questions regarding online accessibility, please contact the Access and Inclusion at inclusion@ecu.edu.au or (08) 6304 6170 who will refer you to an appropriate service. The below top 10 tips apply to any online or digital content created for units or courses, including Canvas sites, documents (e.g. Word, PowerPoint and PDF files) and any third-party tools or content.

1. Flexibility

During this uncertain time, it is important that students with disabilities feel well supported to continue their education. This may require some flexibility in order to offer alternative arrangements for student who require it. This includes students who may experience mental health challenges, encounter financial hardship or those who may experience heightened anxiety during periods of change. Be clear and direct about what changes are occurring, what is expected of students and where students can go for further support.

2. Provision of Materials and Resources

Wherever possible, resources and materials (e.g. lecture slides, PowerPoint, pre-readings) should be provided to students in advance so they can prepare and familiarise themselves with the content.

For students with processing difficulties this can support students to prepare what they want to say and increase their ability to contribute to online interactive and group activities. For students requiring manual captioning, Auslan interpreting or note-taking services, it is important to provide enough time for these supports to be put in place.

3. Communication

Ensure students know that there is support available for them should they experience any barriers to fully participating including accessing unit materials or participating in online interactive and group activities. This includes students who may not have previously been known to have additional accommodation requirements during face-to-face learning but are now experiencing barriers to accessing learning online. Ask the students what is and what

is not working for them through online learning and ensure there is ongoing dialogue between staff and students. Access and Inclusion at inclusion@ecu.edu.au are available to assist with overcoming any of these challenges.

A statement on accessibility can demonstrate a commitment to inclusion for all students and provides guidance to students who do encounter barriers. See below an example of a statement that could be included at the beginning of lecture/tutorials or on Canvas.

As ECU shifts units and courses online, we are committed to ensuring that our online learning environment is accessible and inclusive for all students.

Should you feel that there are any barriers to you fully participating in current

activities, please contact either myself or Access and Inclusion at inclusion@ecu.edu.au or on (08) 6304 6170 to discuss this further.

4. Audio and Video

For online audio and videos, wherever possible ensure that they have captions available. Automatic captioning should be made available wherever possible as there may be an increase in students who would benefit from this additional support as our learning shifts to online platforms. Automatic captioning can be inaccurate and therefore may not be appropriate for someone who relies heavily on captioning; however, this option can be useful for other students to use in addition to following along with audio. At the beginning of MS Teams meetings, lecturers/tutors should inform all students that they can select to have automatic captioning on during a live or recorded lecture/tutorial and how to do so (see instructions - [real time captioning](#) or [Microsoft Stream captioning](#)). If automatic captioning is not possible or is inappropriate based on a particular student's needs, please contact Access and Inclusion at inclusion@ecu.edu.au to discuss manual captioning options.

5. Content design

To ensure your content is designed in an accessible format when you are creating Word documents, PDFs or online web content (excluding PPT, see [PowerPoint Accessible Design Guide](#) (PDF 700KB), follow the below rules:

- **Font type:** Arial or Verdana
- **Font size:** 12-point type
- **Wording formatting:** Bold to emphasise words - rather than underline or italics
- **Page formatting:** Left-hand alignment - rather than right justified or centred
- **Capitalisation:** Sentence case only (first word of the sentence has a capital – no other capitals)
- **Line spacing:** 1.5 line spacing – rather than single or double

- **Titles:** Use clear titles that are specific and unique to the content
- **Lists:** Use bullet points and numbered lists for ordering
- **Tables:** Only use tables for tabular data (add alternative text to tables)
- **Colour contrast:** Black font on a light background is best for visual acuity. Do not combine colours such as red and green, blue and yellow. A colour contrast ratio for text of 4.5:1 is required and can be checked by using the [Colour Contrast Analyser](#).
- **Sizing:** Check that your web content can be made larger and smaller and that the page continues to make sense in Internet Explorer - select “view” and then “text size” and select “largest”.

6. Visuals, images or icons

Alternative text should be added to any visual (including shapes, pictures, charts, and graphics) to describe what the visual is trying to convey as people who are blind or have low vision may listen to alternative text to hear what the image represents.

When using visuals, images or icons, consider the below points on:

- **Using images and icons:** Text should be used rather than an image of text, unless the image is part of a logo or brand name.
- **Alternative text:** Ensure your images have alternative text unless they are purely for decoration. To add alternative text to an image on a word document or PDF, check out the [Word Accessibility Guides](#) and [PDF Accessibility Guides](#).
- **Check alternative text:** Put your mouse pointer over the image and a yellow box should appear with a description of what the image is.
- **Decorative visuals:** When images that are purely for decoration such as a bullet point or border are required to be used, the alternative text should be empty or null

- **Useful image use:** Images can make your content easier to understand. For example, combining text such as 'Contact us' with a phone icon can help some users to better understand what they need to do.
- **Communicating important information in writing:** Remember that some users may have images turned off and others may not easily recognise what an image means. Always ensure that important information is also communicated in writing.

7. Links and documents

For people using screen readers, they need to have clear and direct information about what a link or document is so they can choose if they want to go to that destination or open that document. When using links to direct students to further information or resources, consider the below points:

- **Link description:** Ensure that your link describes where the link is going, what the link is or the purpose of the link.
- **Document sizing:** If you link to a document, ensure that you state what type of document it is (DOC or PDF) and the file size.
- **Displaying links:** Check that links are displayed correctly (e.g. use Disability Services Commission not www.disability.wa.gov.au and never Click here or Read more....).

8. Colour and Contrast

Low contrast makes it difficult for people to view websites and online documents, more so for people with low vision. Using colour to convey information can be inappropriate for people with colour-related visual impairments. Consider the below information regarding the colour and contrast of your pages and documents:

- **High contrast:** Ensure that there is high contrast between the colour of the text presented and that of the background

- **Checking Contrast:** Check your contrast by ensuring that your backgrounds are light with dark text (ideal), or vice versa. Use the free tool [Colour Contrast Analyser](#) available from Vision Australia to test your contrast and it meets the ratio of 4.5:1 that is required
- **Using colour:** Ensure that colour is not the only prompt used to convey information (e.g. do not say “select the red circle to continue”)

9. Checking accessibility

Accessibility of documents should always be checked through word, PDF or PowerPoint prior to being uploaded. Microsoft Office 2016 and later have inbuilt accessibility checkers.

To start the accessibility checker:

- **On Windows:** File > Check for Issues dropdown menu > Check Accessibility
- **On Mac:** Review tab > Check Accessibility

To ensure your files are accessible, follow the instructions in the [Learning environment accessibility](#) Canvas page.

10. Inclusive content and language

Learning content should aim to challenge stereotypes, avoid bias and reflect diversity and real-life experiences. See ECU's [Checklist for inclusive curriculum design](#) (PDF 155KB) for more information.

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