Guide to Creating an Accessible Syllabus

Pre-Development

Step 1: **Choose your syllabus document format**

* Typical document formats include: Word Document, PDF and/or even a syllabus web site! It is up to you to decide the most suitable syllabus format that will best meet your students’ needs.
* Once you select your format, you will need to familiarize yourself with the relevant ways to ensure accessibility in your syllabus. Visit the Universal Design Center (UDC) Document Accessibility Website (<https://www.csun.edu/universaldesigncenter/document-accessibility>) for more information.

Step 2: **Decide how you will distribute your syllabus**

* A syllabus must be distributed or posted no later than the first class meeting (either in print or by email).
* How you plan to distribute your syllabus will determine what rules you need to follow.

Developing an Accessible Syllabus

Step 1: **Make your document headers stand out**

* Use header styles for titles of each section in your document.
* Headers should provide structure and order to the document and make it easier to understand the document flow.
* Headings should be easy for users to clearly identify.
* Headers should be organized based on the importance of the content. Less important content should be styled with lower-level headers.

Step 2: **Review your styles and formatting**

* + Use a text size of 11 or 12 and choose an easy-to-read font
  + Universal design recommends using a serif font for printed text and a sans serif font for on- screen text
  + Avoid underlining text unless it’s a link
  + Use ***strong*** and ***emphasis*** (abbreviated ***em***) in your styles menu instead of ***bold*** and ***italic***.
  + When adding lists to your syllabus, use bullet points for unordered lists and numbered points for ordered lists.

Step 3: **Using color in your syllabus**

* + Do not use color alone to convey meaning or importance! (Color is a design feature.)
  + When using color, provide enough contrast between the foreground and the background so that users can easily read your content
  + Use a color contrast checker to determine if the colors you have selected have enough contrast between foreground and background. Visit the UDC Web Accessibility Color Website (https://www.csun.edu/universal-design-center/web-accessibility-criteria-color) for color contrast tools.

Step 4: **Provide clear and descriptive hyperlinks**

* + Links should be easy to identify
  + Provide descriptive link text so that users know where the target of the link will take them.
  + For a digital syllabus, do not use link text such as “click here,” “read more,” “about,” etc. When read out of context, these links do not make sense and do not tell the user where the link is taking them.
  + Link appearance should not be conveyed by color only. Universal design best practice is to use a combination of bold, italics or underline (preferred).
  + Make the reader aware if the link is going to a different file type (PDF, .docx, etc.)
  + For documents meant to be printed, you can use a URL generator to shorten links, but also provide meaningful text to let users know where the link is going

Step 5: **If your syllabus has images…**

* + When images provide important, relevant information, include a text alternative description.
  + Your text alternative can be inserted as alternative text for electronic images or as a caption for printed documents. However, universal design recommendation is to use captions for both electronic and printed documents so that everyone can see the same description.
* Images used solely for decoration do not need alternative text or captions
* When inserting alternative text or captions avoid phrases such as “**image of**…” or “**photo of**….” Those phrases cause redundancy with assistive technologies.

Step 6: **When adding tables to your syllabus…**

* Use tables only to organize data.
* Do not use tables to format information (e.g. tables for layout)!
* Avoid complex tables as much as possible
* Provide table heading markup to differentiate table headers from table data cells.
* Include a table caption or description for complicated data.

Post-Development

Step 1: **Check for accessibility!**

* If you use a PDF, use Adobe’s built-in “accessibility checker.” Also, use Adobe’s “read-out-loud” feature to ensure your syllabus is read in the order you want it to be.
* For a Word file, use Word’s built-in “check for accessibility” tool (File 🡪 Info 🡪 Check for issues).
* If you make a syllabus webpage, there are a variety of tools to use to check for accessibility. The most common easy-to-use tool is the WAVE Evaluation tool from WebAIM. Visit the UDC Intermediate Accessibility Evaluations Website (<https://www.csun.edu/universal-design-center/intermediate-evaluation-techniques>) for more information on web accessibility evaluation tools.

Step 2: **One more thing to consider**

* Include a statement about the accommodations and services available to support students’ academic success at CSUN. Including it in the syllabus is key to ensure students have this information from the beginning. You can find sample language at the DRES Accommodating Students website (<https://www.csun.edu/dres/accommodating-students>).

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