

# Faculty Tips for

## Creating Accessible Courses in Canvas

By: Gina Curasi, M.S.

---

### Why Accessibility Matters

Accessible course design ensures that **all students**, including those with disabilities and various learning styles, can fully engage with your course. It also improves usability for everyone and promotes inclusion.

★ **WCAG 2 Layers of Guidance, the four principals: perceivable, operable, understandable, and robust.**

---

### Course Structure & Navigation

- Include a vibrant homepage that includes information on navigating your canvas shell.
  - ★ **2.4.5 Multiple Ways**, “More than one way is available to locate a web page within a set of web pages except where the web page is the result of, or a step in, a process.”
  - ★ **2.4.2 Page Titled**, “Web pages have titles that describe topic or purpose.”
- Create a comprehensive “Syllabus and Orientation” or “Start Here” module where you house important policies and information relative to getting started in the course, student engagement, communication, and accessing feedback.
  - ★ **3.3.2 Labels or Instructions**, “Labels or instructions are provided when content requires user input.”
- Organize content using **Modules** (by week, topic, or unit)
  - ★ **1.3.2 Meaningful Sequence**, “When the sequence in which content is presented affects its meaning, a correct reading sequence can be programmatically determined.”
- Use clear, consistent naming (e.g., *Week 3: Research Methods*)
  - ★ **2.4.6 Headings and Labels**, “Headings and labels describe topic or purpose.”
- Keep layouts simple and predictable
  - ★ **3.2.4 Consistent Identification**, “Components that have the same functionality within a set of web pages are identified consistently.”
- Be sure that modules follow a consistent pattern and sequence (See example below):
  1. Module Introduction/Overview
  2. Readings affiliated with the module
  3. Lecture Video

4. Power point file used in lecture video
  5. Discussion
  6. Assignment #1
  7. Assignment #2
  8. Module Summary
  9. Optional Resources for Advanced and Remedial Learning
- ★ **3.2.3 Consistent Navigation**, “Navigational mechanisms that are repeated on multiple web pages within a set of web pages occur in the same relative order each time they are repeated, unless a change is initiated by the user.”
  - ★ **1.3.2 Meaningful Sequence**, “When the sequence in which content is presented affects its meaning, a correct reading sequence can be programmatically determined.”
- Be sure to include an introduction and summary page for each module. These pages are excellent at introducing and summarizing content taught in each module.
    - ★ **2.4.6 Headings and Labels**, “Headings and labels describe topic or purpose.”
    - ★ **3.3.2 Labels or Instructions**, “labels or instructions are provided when content requires user input.”
- 



## Page Design Best Practices

- Use **built-in and level headings**. Research supports correlative value between “chunking and retention.” Pages and assignments with content and instruction should include appropriate leveled headings.
    - ★ **1.3.1 Info and Relationships**, “Information, structure, and relationships conveyed through presentation can be programmatically determined or are available in text.”
    - ★ **2.4.6 Headings and Labels**, “Headings and labels describe topic or purpose.”
  - Break content into short and digestible sections for readability.
    - ★ **1.3.1 Info and Relationships**, “Information, structure, and relationships conveyed through presentation can be programmatically determined or are available in text.”
  - Use lists with bullet points. If you choose to use numbered lists be sure they are automatically numerated and that you are not formatting the numeration.
    - ★ **1.3.1 Info and Relationships**, “Information, structure, and relationships conveyed through presentation can be programmatically determined or are available in text.”
-

## Meaningful Links

- Refrain from vague instructions like “Click here.”
    - ★ **2.4.4 Link Purpose (In Context)**, “The purpose of each link can be determined from the link text alone or from the link text together with its programmatically determined link context, except where the purpose of the link would be ambiguous to users in general.”
  - When building assignments, be sure that all the links to external resources or content that are required to be used for the assignment are embedded within that assignment page. We want to avoid students having to click around the canvas shell in the pursuit of content.
    - ★ **2.4.5 Multiple Ways**, “More than one way is available to locate a web page within a set of web pages except where the web page is the result of, or a step in, a process.”
  - Be sure that links are descriptive. Many times, when we copy a link from a source, it is not meaningful or descriptive. We cannot tell by looking at the link what type of content we are about to see. Thus, it is important that we revise the link to make it meaningful and descriptive.
    - ★ **2.4.4 Link Purpose (In Context)** “The purpose of each link can be determined from the link text alone or from the link text together with its programmatically determined link context, except where the purpose of the link would be ambiguous to users in general.”
  - Be sure that all your links work and do not bring students to an error page. This can easily be addressed using the “link validator” in canvas.
    - ★ **4.1.2 Name, Role, Value**, “For all user interface components (including but not limited to: form elements, links and components generated by scripts), the name and role can be programmatically determined; states, properties, and values that can be set by the user can be programmatically set; and notification of changes to these items is available to user agents, including assistive technologies.”
- 

## Images & Visuals

- Images are a fantastic tool to hold student interest!
- We must be sure that we are choosing images that are appropriate in color contrast and are easy for Screen Readers to translate.
  - ★ **1.4.3 Contrast (Minimum)**, “The visual presentation of text and images of text has a contrast ratio of at least 4.5:1”
  - ★ **1.4.11 Non-text Contrast**, “The visual presentation of the following have a contrast ratio of at least 3:1 against adjacent color(s): User Interface Components: Visual information require to identify user interface components and states, except for inactive components or where the appearance of the component is determined by the user agent and not modified by the author; Graphical Objects:

parts of graphics required to understand the content, except when a particular presentation of graphics is essential to the information being conveyed.”

- Additionally, it is equally important that we use diverse and representative images that mirror the diverse population of students that we serve.
    - ★ **1.1.1 Non-text Content**, “All non-text content that is presented to the user has a text alternative that serves the equivalent purpose”
  - A wonderful website I use for all my stock images is [Getty Image Collection - Lean In](#). By using this website for images, I have never received a color contrast alert in canvas.
  - Add **Alt text** describing the purpose of each image. If an image is used in our course, we want to be sure that it can be enjoyed and experienced by all students, including those with visual impairments.
    - ★ **1.1.1 Non-text Content**, “All non-text content that is presented to the user has a text alternative that serves the equivalent purpose”
  - Mark decorative images appropriately. **This demarcation should only be used if the image is solely there for aesthetic purposes and not conveying any meaning.**
    - ★ **1.1.1 Non-text Content**, “All non-text content that is presented to the user has a text alternative that serves the equivalent purpose”
- 

## **Multimedia Accessibility**

- Consider creating lecture videos of your lecturing. This is a wonderful way of promoting accessibility and engagement. Students are likely to watch these videos and appreciate seeing you.
  - ★ **1.2.1 Audio-only and Video-only (Prerecorded)**, “For prerecorded audio-only and prerecorded video-only media, the following are true, except when the audio or video is a media alternative for text and is clearly labeled as such: Prerecorded Audio-only: An alternative for time-based media is provided that presents equivalent information for prerecorded audio-only content; Prerecorded Video-only: Either an alternative for time-based media or an audio track is provided that presents equivalent information for prerecorded video-only content.”
- When creating videos, consider using YouTube Studio to create captions and ChatGPT to add punctuation, grammar, etc.
  - ★ **1.2.2 Captions (Prerecorded)**, “Captions are provided for all prerecorded audio content in synchronized media, except when the media is a media alternative for text and is clearly labeled as such.”
- Provide **accurate captions** for videos. All videos within a canvas shell must have captions. If you are selecting YouTube videos, TED Talks, etc., please be sure they have captions. If they don’t, select another video.
  - ★ **1.2.2 Captions (Prerecorded)**, “Captions are provided for all prerecorded audio content in synchronized media, except when the media is a media alternative for text and is clearly labeled as such.”

- ★ **1.2.4 Captions (Live)**, “Captions are provided for all live audio content in synchronized media.”
  - Avoid relying on audio-only instruction.
    - ★ **1.2.1 Audio-only and Video-only (Prerecorded)**, “For prerecorded audio-only and prerecorded video-only media, the following are true, except when the audio or video is a media alternative for text and is clearly labeled as such: Prerecorded Audio-only: An alternative for time-based media is provided that presents equivalent information for prerecorded audio-only content; Prerecorded Video-only: Either an alternative for time-based media or an audio track is provided that presents equivalent information for prerecorded video-only content.”
- 

## Color & Contrast

- Use high contrast between text and background. Again, check out [Getty Image Collection - Lean In](#).
    - ★ **1.4.3 Contrast (Minimum)**, “The visual presentation of text and images of text has a contrast ratio of at least 4.5:1”
- 

## Accessible Documents

- **Generally, the heuristic we should use is minimize PDFs in that most are not accessible and very difficult for screen readers.**
    - ★ **1.3.1 Info and Relationships**, “Information, structure, and relationships conveyed through presentation can be programmatically determined or are available in text.”
  - Instead, create canvas pages inclusive of all course content. Using the HTML in canvas provides ultimate accessibility and is far easier than re-formatting PDFs. **However, now with our new BOT for PDF conversions, we are in a strong position!**
  - Include headings and readable fonts.
    - ★ **2.4.6 Headings and Labels**, “Headings and labels describe topic or purpose”
    - ★ **1.3.1 Info and Relationships**, “Information, structure, and relationships conveyed through presentation can be programmatically determined or are available in text.”
  - Avoid scanned PDFs when possible.
    - ★ **1.1.1 Non-text Content**, “All non-text content that is presented to the user has a text alternative that serves the equivalent purpose”
-

## Use Canvas Accessibility Tools

- Always check your pages prior to publishing using the Pope Tech icon. By doing this for each page, you will ensure a stronger cumulative Pope Tech and ALLY reading.
- Be sure to use the “Link Validator” to ensure that your links are active and not broken.

★ **4.1.2 Name, Role, Value**, “For all user interface components (including but not limited to: form elements, links and components generated by scripts), the name and role can be programmatically determined; states, properties, and values that can be set by the user can be programmatically set; and notification of changes to these items is available to user agents, including assistive technologies.”

---

## Accessible Assessments

- Provide clear instructions and expectations. For example, when publishing a multiple-choice exam, it is intuitive for students to see the items and answer them. Be sure to include directions.
    - ★ **3.3.2 Labels or Instructions**, “Labels or instructions are provided when content requires user input”
  - For assignments, be sure to include specific instructions on how to complete the assignment and what needs to be done to receive full credit.
    - ★ **3.3.2 Labels or Instructions**, “Labels or instructions are provided when content requires user input.”
  - Employ rubrics and descriptive criteria on each assignment.
    - ★ **3.3.3 Error Suggestion**, “If an input error is automatically detected and suggestions for correction are known, then the suggestions are provided to the user, unless it would jeopardize the security or purpose of the content.”
- 

## Inclusive Teaching Practices

- Use clear, concise, and inclusive language.
  - ★ **3.1.5 Reading Level**, “When text requires reading ability more advanced than the lower secondary education level after removal of proper names and titles, supplemental content, or a version that does not require reading ability more advanced than the lower secondary education level, is available.”
  - ★ **3.1.3 Unusual Words**, “A mechanism is available for identifying specific definitions of words or phrases used in an unusual or restricted way, including idioms and jargon.”
- Provide content in multiple formats (i.e. text, video, visuals). This will attract and maintain the attention of various students and learning styles.
  - ★ **1.3 Adaptable**, “Create content that can be presented in different ways (for example simpler layout) without losing information or structure.”

- Be friendly in your introduction and welcome students to contact you and ask questions.
    - ★ **3.3.5 Help**, “Context-sensitive help is available.”
- 

## ✓ Pre-Publish Checklist

Before publishing your course, confirm:

- ✓ Headings are structured properly.
    - ★ **1.3.1 Info and Relationships**, “Information, structure, and relationships conveyed through presentation can be programmatically determined or are available in text.”
    - ★ **2.4.6 Headings and Labels**, “Headings and labels describe topics or purpose.”
  - ✓ Links are descriptive.
    - ★ **2.4.4 Link Purpose (In Context)**, “The purpose of each link can be determined from the link text alone or from the link text together with its programmatically determined link context, except where the purpose of the link would be ambiguous to users in general.”
  - ✓ Images include alternative text.
    - ★ **1.1.1 Non-text Content**, “All non-text content that is presented to the user has a text alternative that serves the equivalent purpose, except for the situations listed below.”
  - ✓ Videos are captioned.
    - ★ **1.2.2 Captions (Prerecorded)**, “Captions are provided for all prerecorded audio content in synchronized media, except when the media is a media alternative for text and is clearly labeled as such.”
  - ✓ Documents are accessible.
    - ★ **1.3.1 Info and Relationships**, “Information, structure, and relationships conveyed through presentation can be programmatically determined or are available in text.”
  - ✓ Accessibility checker shows no errors.
- 

“Design with Access in Mind. Everyone should have access to learning.”

Gina Curasi

[gcurasi@saddleback.edu](mailto:gcurasi@saddleback.edu)

(909) 533-1052