Guidelines for ADA Compliance for Online Classes

Source: (HigherEd Education and Universal Design Standards)

The Americans with Disability Act (ADA) of 1990, Section 504 of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act, states that all individual should have equal accessibility -- including online instructional opportunities. ADA requires that all online courses be fully compliant from the start of the course, which can be challenging.

As instructors, we should do our due diligence to develop ADA-compliant courses. Below are some simple strategies for creating accessible courses and demonstrating due diligence.

1. Hyperlinks

To support ADA compliance in online courses, we recommend beginning with ensuring all hyperlinks are text within a sentence to foster readability. The text samples below demonstrate various ways instructors attempt to hyperlink text.

Text 1: To view ADA regulations can be found here: https://www.ada.gov/

Text 2: To view ADA regulations click here.

Text 3: To view ADA regulations visit https://www.ada.gov/

Text 4: ADA Regulations

Although they may all seem correct, only Text 3 and Text 4 are ADA compliant.
Text 3 places the link within a sentence (this option should only be used for short links). Text 4 increases readability, especially with longer website links. Text 1 and Text 2 do not lend support for learners who have a screen reader.

2. Text Design

When designing informational material, **a sans serif font is easiest to read**. Sans serif is a font style that does not have additional strokes attached to the letters. Times New Roman and Palatino have the additional strokes and should be avoided. **Examples of acceptable sans serif fonts are Arial and Helvetica.** Once a sans serif font is selected, it is best to use the same font throughout the course. Minimizing font variation helps make courses ADA compliant, and it can help all learners stay focused.

Another factor to consider with text design is accessibility and usability. For accessibility and usability, **it is best to have a dark-colored font on a light-colored background**, also known as high contrast. The best option for readability is a black font with a white background. If instructors want to use color, they need to avoid using extremely bright background colors, such as red.

It is especially advantageous to avoid red-green or yellow-blue combinations as contrasting colors because individuals with colorblindness are unable to differentiate the text from the background.

After text colors are chosen, text formatting should be examined. Text formatting should follow the 'less is more' rule, particularly with the use of bolds and italics. Use them sparingly and only to emphasize extreme items. Concerning underlining, the only text that should be underlined is text that is hyperlinked to meet ADA compliance.

3. Images/Graphics

Images and graphics can be a powerful addition to any course as they can exemplify content; however, even images have ADA regulations. Images and graphics should be relevant to the content, visibly easy to see and in high resolution. It is best to avoid animated or blinking images.

The last step to make images and graphics ADA compliant is to add an alt tag or alt text. Alt text stands for Alternative Text and is a word or phrase that can be added to describe the image or graphic. Most Learning Management Systems (LMS), like Blackboard, Canvas, Moodle, etc., have an alt tag option when adding the image or graphic.

4. Audio/Video Items

Just like with images and graphics, it is important to ensure that courses have clear audio and video. Clear audio requires minimal background noises, clear word pronunciation and consistent volume. Clear video has minimal movement to avoid blurred refocusing and high resolution in rendering.

Both audio and video files require written transcription, also known as closed-captioning for videos. Including transcriptions with lectures shows due diligence towards ADA compliance, and so does providing transcripts of audio feedback.

It is best practice to have audio or video clips that are 3 to10 minutes in length. If the content that takes longer to cover, it is best to create short, segmented videos, each ranging from 3 to 10 minutes in length.

The final aspect for audio and video accessibility is to use a universal audio or video player. We recommend using MP3 (audio) or MP4 (video) file formats.

5. Documents

All text in a course should be searchable, which allows learners to search for words or phrases within a document. If a PDF document is not searchable, an accompanying plain text version should be available. When linking documents within a course, the label of the link should have the file extension type at the end (.doc or .docx for a Word document, .ppt for PowerPoint, .xlsx or .xltx for Excel, etc.).

Tables and charts can also exemplify content being covered and must adhere to ADA compliance. Any table or chart needs to have identifying headers and labels as well as summaries. In addition, the course syllabus is a document that should include an accessibility statement for students which outlines ADA procedures.

By integrating a few of these steps, instructors are establishing their due diligence towards creating ADA compliant courses. While we exhibit due diligence, we should also strive to meet all ADA compliance regulations as we design and redesign our courses.