



Web Accessibility Center

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Designing in Carmen with Accessibility in Mind.

Design Tips and Suggestions for Faculty and Course Designers.

Applies to: Carmen version 7.4.1

Although adaptable and usable on many levels, the current version of Carmen is not yet fully accessible, and the OSU Web Accessibility Center, TELR, and the Desire2Learn teams are working together to implement updates and repairs that will bring the system into full compliance with the OSU Standards. At the same time, regardless of how accessible the framework is, any course can be made inaccessible, if faculty and course designers include inaccessible content. The key, then, is to make sure that the elements you design and upload to the system are created with accessibility in mind.

Tip #1: Keep It Simple.

Accessing a course web site using assistive technology already adds a level of complexity that most students don't encounter. Add to that the navigation of the course management system (Carmen) and the modules (discussion boards, messages centers, content areas). Then arrive at a content page that consists of three tables within tables that "bleeds off" content to the right of the screen forcing the user to scroll left and right as well as up and down. The result can be a frustrating experience for assistive technology users.

To insure the easiest and quickest access, use simple designs and avoid "course clutter."

1. **Don't add modules you aren't using to your course home page.** The default course page may include many modules, such as "Events," "News," and "Articles" that you do not intend to use or will not use until later in the course. To help students move through the page faster, remove any unused modules (called "widgets" in Carmen) and set "planned" modules to be visible only when you are ready to use them.
2. **Avoid complex layouts in course content pages.** The best content pages are those that are single columns of text that can be read straight down. Avoid layering tables within tables or using combinations of spaces and tabs to place content "just so." All those techniques add additional navigation issues for assistive technology users.
3. **Open complex/lengthy content in a "new window."** The Carmen framework takes up a considerable amount of screen space at the top and side of each page. For longer documents, documents that require extensive navigation, and documents that you anticipate will be printed, consider setting them to open in a "new window" outside the Carmen frame. You can also encourage students to use the "UNDOCK" feature available within the CONTENT module of Carmen.

Tip #2: Design for the Web.

Users read Web pages differently than printed pages. Designing scannable/skimmable pages that can be read-through quickly will help your students access the information they need. In addition, pages



designed using correct mark-up to identify headers, paragraphs, tables, and graphs, will help all students, including assistive technology users.

1. **Divide content into small “chunks” of information.** Lengthy documents can be difficult to follow when read online. For example, If you currently have an eight-page handout on the life of Albert Einstein, consider breaking it up into several MODULES (e.g. “early life,” “education” “supporters and detractors”, etc.) under one TOPIC (e.g. “About Albert Einstein”).
2. **Uses HEADERS to define an outline within each page.** Headings divide content into sections and helps users access information quickly. In addition, using heading levels to indicate hierarchy (e.g. heading 1 is top-level, heading 2 is sub-level, heading 3 is sub-sub-level) adds an additional navigation option for assistive technology users and assists users with cognitive disabilities.
3. **Include alternate text for all images, graphs, video, and other non-text elements.** Adding a caption or ALT tag (in HTML) to images and other non-text elements insures the information included in those elements is available to users of screen readers and text-only browsers.

Tip #3: Use Text-Based Materials Whenever Possible.

Whether you create them in MS Word, Wordperfect, HTML, or NotePad, your text-based documents are more likely to be accessible to assistive technology users than other proprietary files like PDF, Flash, and PowerPoint. While all of these “special” formats can be made accessible, doing so usually requires specialized conversion software and/or advanced design skills. More often, it is easier and faster to use the “Save as Web Page” or “Save as Rich Text” option to create both a plain text and formatted version of non-text documents.

1. **Avoid the “Print to PDF” method of creating documents.** Course designers often like scan documents to PDF or use the “File - Print” option to create PDF documents. Unfortunately, these methods create documents with almost no accessibility markup. In general, the PDF format should be avoided, unless you are prepared to spend significant time editing the files after conversion. For more on creating accessible PDF, see the WAC PDF tutorials online at: www.wac.ohio-state.edu/pdf.
2. **Create text “Outline” versions of your PowerPoint documents.** The “Save as Web Page” feature in MS PowerPoint does not create accessible HTML documents. Using the “Adobe PDF” plug-in (installed in PowerPoint when you install Adobe Acrobat) does not create accessible PDF. Instead, try saving the document in “Outline/RTF” format and editing this text version in your word processor to add descriptions of images and other non-text elements.
3. **Do not embed video, music, or other multimedia elements in your pages.** Although “Flash”y objects may look “cool,” multimedia elements can cause assistive technology to freeze or crash. Make separate, dedicated links (TOPICS) to multimedia that opens in a new page/window and inform users when auto-play events will occur. And, be sure to provide a text transcript.

Get More Help

For more help with designing accessible content, visit the WAC online at www.wac.ohio-state.edu and check out our collection of tutorials and guides or sign-up for our next design workshop. You can also request one-to-one assistance with your course materials by contacting us at webaccess@osu.edu.

