Educators: Now's the Time to Embrace Digital Accessibility

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Delivering a high-quality education has never been more dependent on technology. But the abrupt move to remote learning in response to the pandemic continues to reveal gaps in accessibility that can put students with disabilities of all ages at a major disadvantage.

Individuals with low hearing or deafness may find themselves watching a video or attending a virtual seminar without appropriate, accurate captioning. Those with low vision or blindness may try accessing course materials that aren't compatible with screen reading software or using a webpage that lacks alternative text for complex graphics and images. That's why integrating digital accessibility into every stage of curriculum development now, or remediating existing materials, could mean the difference between a student participating or falling behind their peers down the road.

As schools, colleges, and universities across the United States fine-tune full-time remote learning and hybrid learning models—blending traditional in-person classes with the flexibility of online instruction—and prepare for an unpredictable academic year, it's critical that all students have the tools to fully engage with the curriculum. And while remote learning presents a new set of challenges for educators, identifying and addressing accessibility shortfalls, and prioritizing the needs of a diverse student body, doesn't have to translate to a drain on time and resources.

Achieving an Inclusive Learning Experience

Schools and higher education institutions have an incredible opportunity to enhance the online learning experience for students with disabilities by designing new and reassessing existing websites, course materials, and virtual events.

Here are some simple questions to consider as you stay ahead of the digital accessibility curve and create a level playing field.

- **Has your school, college, or university adopted an accessible and inclusive culture?** First step – develop the best remote learning experience for all by communicating your digital accessibility policies and goals to staff and faculty. Ensure educators understand changes that need to be made to existing materials, how to actively include accessibility when developing remote lesson plans, and how to ensure new content meets compliance standards.

- **Have your course materials been remediated**? PDF, Word, and PowerPoint files should be appropriately converted for access by screen reading software. Equally important, the correct reading order must also be established by tagging heading and paragraph structure, properly formatting columns, and identifying the language.

- **Are your instructional videos captioned—and are the captions accurate?** Relying on auto-generated captioning can lead to textual inaccuracies that make your video content difficult to

understand for viewers with low hearing or deafness. Guarantee that every student gets the most out of instructional content by providing closed or open captioning.

- **Do you offer real-time captioning for virtual events?** Create a fully accessible audio-visual environment during virtual gatherings, livestreams, and webinars with CART (Communication Access Real-Time Translation) services, which provide real-time captioning by a professional transcriber.

- **Are you providing an inclusive web experience?** From online learning portals to complex images and graphics, establish an accessible virtual learning environment that all users can independently navigate and understand. This includes providing alternative text to visual content, setting logical reading order, and plain text links and contact information.

Looking for more guidance on ensuring your digital content is accessible? [We're here to help.](#)