

# Tips for Accessible Educational Materials

## 1. Don't assume digital means accessible.

**We used to think** that if an educational material was digital it was automatically accessible.

**We now know** that digital content is not inherently accessible so we provide learners with customizable digital content - content they can personalize. **And we are noticing** that many learners (not just those with disabilities) are more engaged, have improved fluency and skills, and better comprehension when using content they can make their own.

### Learn How

- [Personalize the Reading Experience](#)
- [Personalize the Writing Experience](#)
- [Teaching with Accessible Math](#)
- [Teaching with Accessible Video](#)

## 2. Add “alt text” to images.

**We used to think** text was the only barrier in our curricular materials. **We now know** that images can create a barrier for learners who use screen readers, if an alternative means for perceiving the information in an image is not provided. **And we are noticing** that adding alternative (“alt”) text (e.g., “photograph of a moose crossing a road”) reduces this barrier and can help all learners better understand the relationships represented in the images.

### Learn How

[Adding Alternative Text to Images](#)

## 3. Add closed captions to videos.

**We used to think** all learners could learn from videos. **We now know** that audio without accompanying text may create a barrier for learners who are deaf, hard of hearing or who are emerging bilingual learners so we add closed captions to video content. **And we are noticing** that lots of learners are using those captions for lots of reasons (e.g. viewing the video in a quiet setting, comprehension support).

### Learn How

[Creating Accessible Video](#)

## 4. Use styles for document structure.

**We used to think** that a document that appeared organized, with section headings created with the formatting options (e.g., making the text larger and bold), made the content easier to navigate and understand for all learners. **We now know** that section headings and other elements need to be created by assigning the proper styles (e.g., heading 1, heading 2, list). **And we are noticing** the table of contents created from these properly styled documents reveals how information is organized and improves understanding and navigation of long documents for all learners.

Learn How

[Using Styles for Document Structure](#)



## 5. Use high contrast colors for text and background.

**We used to think** we could simply pick favorite colors, seasonal colors or our schools' colors for the fonts and backgrounds of the educational materials we created. **We now know** that when there is not enough contrast between the font color and the background color it can create a barrier for learners with low vision so we use high contrast color combinations (i.e. a light background with a dark color font). **And we are noticing** that our educational materials look bolder and sharper across varied devices for all learners - especially in harsh lighting where glare might be a problem.

Learn How

[Checking Color Contrast](#)



## 6. Use more than just color and styling to highlight features.

**We used to think** we could use color or styling (bold, italics) to highlight key ideas and critical features in our educational materials. **We now know** that we cannot rely on visual style alone to convey meaning and that adding emphasis with text (e.g., “note” or “important”) is a better way to call attention to essential information. **And we are noticing** that decreasing our reliance on color or styling to highlight content has better supported many learners to find key ideas.

Learn How

[Color Coding](#)



## 7. Use descriptive hyperlinks.

**We used to think** naming our hyperlinks “click here” was simple and supportive. **We now know** that this and other non-descriptive link titles create a barrier for screen reader users who may have to navigate through multiple hyperlinks in a single document to locate a resource, so we use descriptive links (e.g. “Project Guidelines”). **And we are noticing** that descriptive links support the executive function of learners who like to copy hyperlinked content into their class notes.

Learn How

[Creating Descriptive Links](#)



## 8. Use plain language.

**We used to think** that what was clear to the content developer was clear to the user. **We now know** that plain language is more accessible than sophisticated vocabulary and complex sentence structure. **And we are noticing** this plain language supports lots of learners (e.g. emerging bilingual learners, learners managing anxiety, learners managing fatigue) to deeply understand concepts and instructions more fully.

Learn How

[Understandable: Create an intuitive experience](#)



## 9. Use built-in accessibility checkers.

**We used to think** only accessibility experts were able to evaluate the accessibility of documents, videos and webpages. **We now know** that many authoring tools have accessibility checkers built in to make sure your work meets basic accessibility requirements. **And we are noticing** that even accessibility checkers get it wrong sometimes and the ultimate measure of whether content is accessible or not is how well it supports learners in reaching their goals.

Learn How

[How to use the Office 365 Accessibility Checker](#)



## 10. Adopt principles for developing AEM.

**P.O.U.R.** is an acronym that supports educators who are creating and/or procuring educational materials to be sure they are accessible for the widest range of learners. POUR is a set of four principles presented as reflective questions:

- **P** Is the content **perceivable**?
- **O** Is the content **operable**?
- **U** Is the content **understandable**?
- **R** Is the content **robust**?

### Learn How

- [Designing for Accessibility with POUR](#)
- [National Center on Accessible Educational Materials \(AEM\) at CAST](#)
- [AEM Center Resources](#)
- [POUR Accessibility Principles from W3C's Web Accessibility Initiative \(WAI\)](#)