

Creating Accessible Documents Guideline

Guidelines: GDL-U1600.07

Introduction

Creating accessible documents benefits everyone, not just people with disabilities. This is because the same tools that make documents more accessible make them easier to use and read.

Document authors are responsible for ensuring documents conform to accessibility guidelines. Individuals and departments are responsible for ensuring document accessibility before distributing digital documents.

A. Portable Document Files (PDFs)

PDF Overview:

The best use case for PDFs is to distribute print-ready materials. Beyond this purpose, please consider other options before creating a PDF.

- If you are creating a PDF to post on a website or send in an e-mail, consider making the PDF into a web page instead.
- If you are creating a form as a PDF, consider creating an e-sign form, Microsoft Forms, or Drupal webform instead.
- If the content must be contained in a separate document, distributing the file as a read-only [.docx](#) file may be a better option.

PDF Course Material:

If your course material relies on PDFs, the [Disability Access Center](#) can help remediate the documents to become accessible. The remediated document should become available for all students and the original inaccessible version removed from course materials.

If you distribute information within your department or externally, it is your department's responsibility to create accessible documents. Web Communication Technologies (WebTech) supports software that can report documents on your website. WebTech can also provide access to PDF remediation software, but the work of fixing PDFs is up to the department.

Externally sourced PDFs:

Western might receive materials from third-party sources that are inaccessible. If you share these materials with faculty, students, or staff, you must have them remediated. [Contact WebHelp](#) if you have third-party materials that need further assessment. WebTech may work with the original provider, use a remediation vendor, or fix the documents to provide an accessible version.

B. Other Formats

Word documents (docx), Excel spreadsheets (often xlsx), and PowerPoint files (pptx) must be accessible. Up-to-date guidance is available for the following formats in the links below:

- Word - [Accessible Word Documents](#)
- Excel- [Accessible Excel Spreadsheets](#)

- PowerPoint- [Accessible PowerPoint Presentations](#)

C. Find Assistance

Ensuring accessibility is the author's responsibility. There are several offices at Western that can help. If you are unsure of where to begin, please email WebHelp at webhelp@wwu.edu in WebTech.

If a department wishes to outsource this work, existing vendor agreements are in place. You can review the enclosed link for options on the [third-party document remediation webpage](#).