

»» Going Digital »»

Tips to Ensure the Digital Learning Experience Is Accessible



In light of the continued nation-wide transition from traditional classroom instruction to online instruction, the Center for Inclusive Design and Innovation (CIDI) recognizes the value and importance of providing a fully inclusive online experience for people with disabilities so they are not left behind. CIDI is also aware that this shift does not happen overnight.

Throughout this document, you will find resources and instructions for how to create accessible documents. In addition, the following resources are available to assist in universal understanding of why accessibility is important:

- [Overview of Disabilities and Assistive Technology Solutions \(MP4 Video\)](#)
- [Why Creating Accessible Word and PDF Documents is Important \(MP4 Video\)](#)
- [What an Accessible PowerPoint Looks and Sounds Like \(MP4 Video\)](#)

As we navigate through the challenges of adapting to this environment, building accessibility into a Learning Management System (LMS) and the resources you post will help all students and may lessen the need for some individual accommodations. Adopting a [Universal Design for Learning](#) approach can also help to address the needs of many students in an online learning environment.

It is our hope that the following considerations are of value to your institution as you make the transition to online classes and instruction.

Web Conferencing and Online Tools

Taking time to organize assignments with clear headings, plain language, clear instructions, and accessible links will aid students greatly in following your online curriculum.

Depending on the LMS and its contents, students with disabilities may require alternative formats and test taking materials that are not accessible within the LMS. If a student with a disability cannot access the LMS itself because of accessibility issues, consider alternative measures that the student may be more comfortable with. For example, providing content and tests in an accessible Word document or PDF may be a possible solution.

Students with disabilities should be given additional time to complete assignments if needed. It is important to keep in mind that the student may need additional time to understand and access both the content and LMS with their respective Assistive Technology solution.

If existing accessibility barriers are preventing a student with a disability from participating in online learning or accessing essential course material, ensure that a mechanism is in place for the student to communicate this.

An email and phone number should be made available to the student, and if at all possible, a faculty member or staff should respond within 24 hours in order to minimize the student's frustration and to explore alternative solutions with the student.

Assistive Technology

As the physical location of learning changes in these trying times there are many online supports for students to use in order to keep up with their studies.

The [Tools for Life App Finder database](#) has a variety of options for mobile devices to ensure that people can still learn and work whether in a classroom or a dining room.

The Tools for Life website also hosts a variety of [downloadable presentations](#). Finally, check our social media for updates and suggestions for working and learning remotely.

Multimedia Access

Audio files will need a transcript in order to be considered accessible. Videos used for educational purposes that contain non-verbal demonstrations and instructions require accurate and synchronized captions. Captions on YouTube videos may need editing to be accurate.

Remote RealTime Captioning

Remote Realtime Captioning is possible in a variety of systems. The important consideration is supplying the captionist with clear audio from the instructor.

Use of a microphone or speaker headset greatly enhances audio quality and is recommended for remote realtime instruction and conversations in general.

PowerPoint Accessibility

If using PowerPoint slides, use the default layout templates to enter in your content. Make sure to include alternative text descriptions for each image, give each slide a unique title, and avoid interactive transitions or animations if possible.

It is best practice to export PowerPoint presentations as an accessible PDF if this is the student's preferred format.

Access a step-by-step tutorial on creating PowerPoint documents here: [Accessible Microsoft PowerPoint \(MP4 Video\)](#).

Reading Materials

When posting readings or assignments, ensure these are accessible and that text can be highlighted and read aloud by students using text to speech screen reading software.

If you upload handouts or readings to your learning platform or send handouts via an email listserv, test these and make sure they are accessible and the text can be highlighted and accessed by text to speech screen reading software.

If you can reduce the file size and make sure pages are oriented the same way, this increases access for students, as well.

Create an outline of your discussion points or lecture so that your students can follow along or refer back to key points. This can increase participation for all students.

Access a step-by-step tutorial on creating Microsoft Word documents here: [Accessible Microsoft Word Documents and Saving as PDF \(MP4 Video\)](#)

Braille Materials

Changes in students' reading order, timelines, and shipping location may impact the availability of braille orders.

If braille materials are delayed, we recommend that you reach out to the braille department at CIDI or the respective braille provider in order to communicate an existing delay as soon as possible.

Student Interaction

For classroom discussions in an online environment, students' reading and typing speeds will vary considerably.

Offering participation points for discussion posts that students can take their time with will help alleviate pressure on students who feel overwhelmed with the fast-moving group chat experience.

Providing discussion questions ahead of time may help students prepare their thoughts and respond better in an online chat.

Preparing your own discussion questions and having them available in a separate document will make it easy to copy and paste into the chat, freeing up your time and attention to read students' comments.

If you are facilitating a discussion online, it is strongly recommended that the chats be made available after the class. This allows students to go back and review key points or take notes on what was said.

Contact Information

For further information on how CIDI can assist your specific institution's unique needs through the transition to an online environment, please reach out to us.

**Email: cidi-support@design.gatech.edu or
Phone (toll-free): 1-866-418-2750**

We would be happy to provide you with further assistance.