

Accessibility for UMass Instructors

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Introduction to Accessibility

Web accessibility means ensuring that there are no barriers in place to prevent people with disabilities from accessing web content. According to a U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) report, 25.7% of Americans over the age of 18 reported having a disability. Despite the prevalence of disability in American society, people with disabilities face many societal barriers. Many of these barriers come from the medical model of disability, which reduces people with disabilities to their medical diagnoses. In contrast, the social model of disability emphasizes the shortcomings of society in regard to people with disabilities as well as the capabilities of people with disabilities. The social model of disability goes hand in hand with the concept of universal design applied to web content, which highlights the importance of designing web content with people of all abilities in mind. Universal design addresses the needs of people with disabilities without the stigmatization that comes with designing web content specifically for people with disabilities.

As a UMass instructor, it is important to apply universal design principles to your course content. By applying these principles, you will make your course content accessible to students of all abilities. Using this guide, you will learn the skills necessary to improve the accessibility of your documents, such as providing alt text, formatting accessible headings, and using the MS Office Accessibility Checker.

Checking Color Contrast

Color contrast refers to the difference in light between the text and the background of a document. By providing color contrast, you can improve readability for low-vision and blind users as well as users without a visual disability. One way to check the color contrast in your document is by downloading [TPGi's free color contrast checker](#).

WRITER'S DASHBOARD: We get our ideas for writing from everything around us. We might hear a podcast that makes us think of something, see a video on social media we want to respond to, or hear something in a lecture from another class that gives us an idea for an essay. We also get our ideas for writing by doing low-stakes writing that enables us to question, explore, and work out our thinking. As a way for us to keep track of the things that spark our writing ideas, each of us will create a Writer's Dashboard--a digital folder to collect things that we find interesting and our ongoing low stakes writing. As we move through the semester, some weeks you'll be given specific prompts and some weeks will be up to you to write or gather something that is of interest to you. Although the majority of

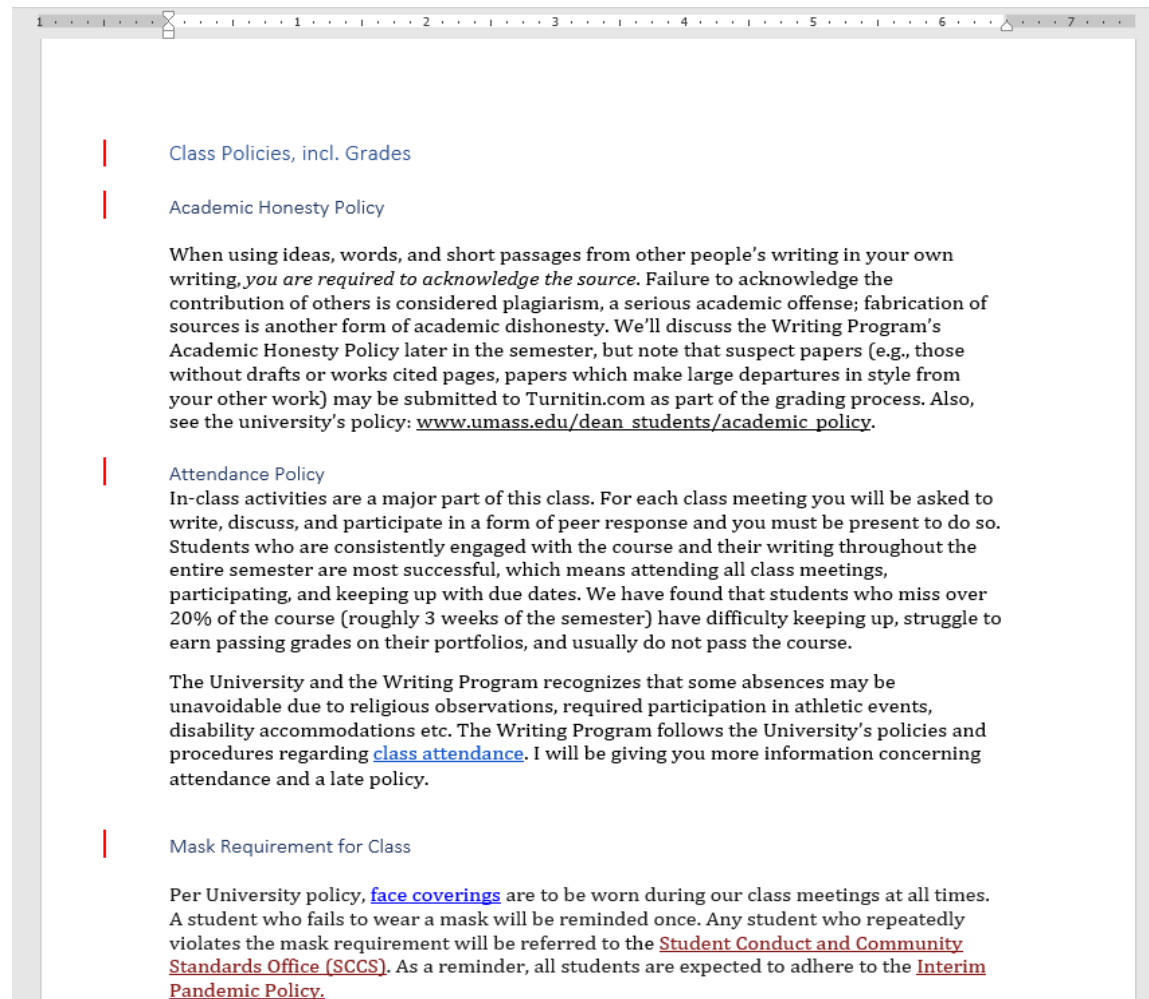
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Elements of a Consistent Layout

A consistent layout means keeping repeated elements on a website the same. Providing a consistent layout improves the skimmability of documents and makes information more readable to screen readers.



The screenshot shows a web page layout with a sidebar on the left and a main content area on the right. The sidebar contains three red vertical bars, each followed by a blue link: "Class Policies, incl. Grades", "Academic Honesty Policy", and "Attendance Policy". The main content area contains three sections, each starting with a red vertical bar followed by a blue link: "Class Policies, incl. Grades", "Academic Honesty Policy", and "Attendance Policy". The text in the main content area is as follows:

Class Policies, incl. Grades

When using ideas, words, and short passages from other people's writing in your own writing, *you are required to acknowledge the source*. Failure to acknowledge the contribution of others is considered plagiarism, a serious academic offense; fabrication of sources is another form of academic dishonesty. We'll discuss the Writing Program's Academic Honesty Policy later in the semester, but note that suspect papers (e.g., those without drafts or works cited pages, papers which make large departures in style from your other work) may be submitted to Turnitin.com as part of the grading process. Also, see the university's policy: www.umass.edu/dean_students/academic_policy.

Academic Honesty Policy

In-class activities are a major part of this class. For each class meeting you will be asked to write, discuss, and participate in a form of peer response and you must be present to do so. Students who are consistently engaged with the course and their writing throughout the entire semester are most successful, which means attending all class meetings, participating, and keeping up with due dates. We have found that students who miss over 20% of the course (roughly 3 weeks of the semester) have difficulty keeping up, struggle to earn passing grades on their portfolios, and usually do not pass the course.

The University and the Writing Program recognizes that some absences may be unavoidable due to religious observations, required participation in athletic events, disability accommodations etc. The Writing Program follows the University's policies and procedures regarding [class attendance](#). I will be giving you more information concerning attendance and a late policy.

Attendance Policy

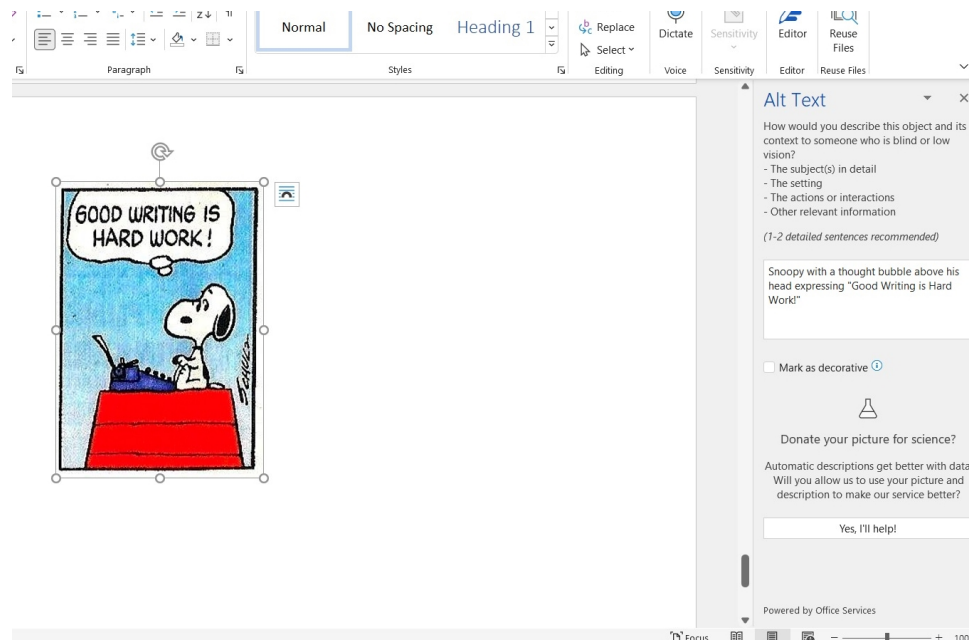
Per University policy, [face coverings](#) are to be worn during our class meetings at all times. A student who fails to wear a mask will be reminded once. Any student who repeatedly violates the mask requirement will be referred to the [Student Conduct and Community Standards Office \(SCCS\)](#). As a reminder, all students are expected to adhere to the [Interim Pandemic Policy](#).

Providing Alt Text

Alt text allows you to describe visual content for low-vision and blind users accessing the content via screen readers. Without alt text, low-vision and blind users are unable to discern the function and appearance of visual content.

Adding Alt Text to an Image

1. Right click on an image in Microsoft Word.
2. Click on the **Edit Alt Text** button.
3. Provide a description of the image you want to add alt text to.

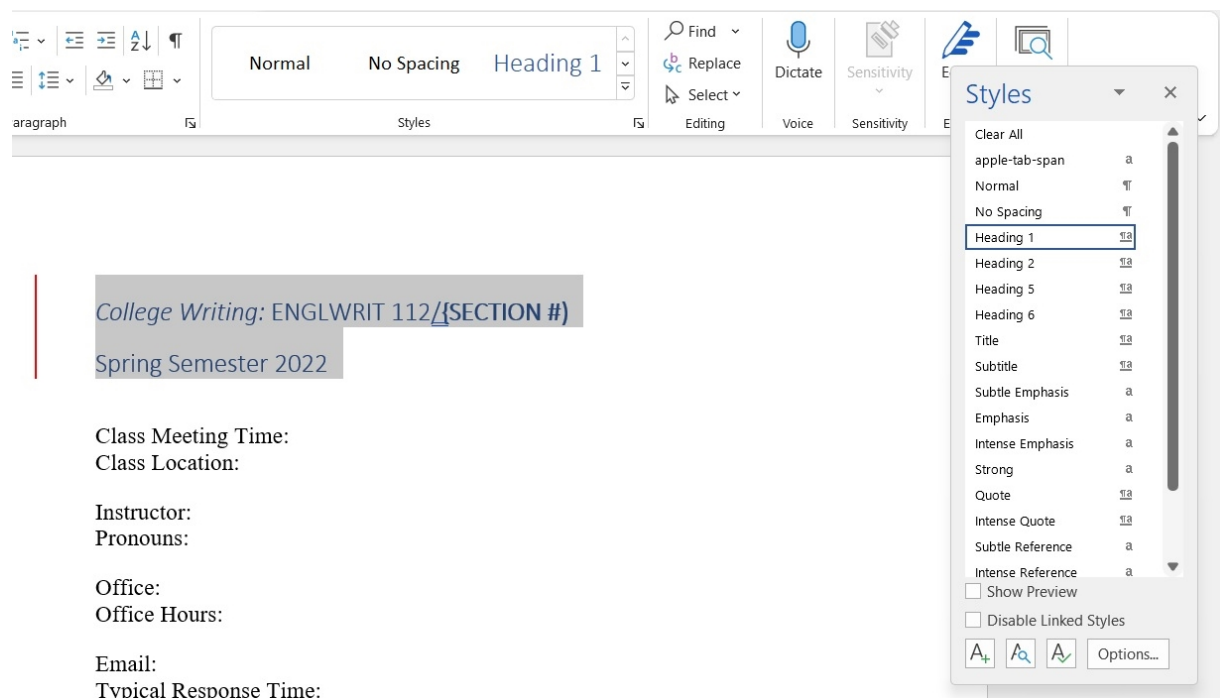


Formatting Accessible Headings

Headings give users a sense of the organization and structure of a document at a glance. By using different heading levels rather than altering text to look like headings, you can organize content in a format accessible to screen readers.

Add Headings to Your Word Document

1. Drag your cursor to select text you want to turn into a heading.
2. Click on the **Home** tab and navigate to the **Styles** group.
3. Select a heading option.



The screenshot shows the Microsoft Word interface. The **Home** tab is active, and the **Styles** group is expanded. The **Heading 1** style is selected in the Styles pane. Below the ribbon, a document snippet is visible with the following text:

College Writing: ENGLWRIT 112/{SECTION #}
Spring Semester 2022

Below the snippet, the following text is displayed:

Class Meeting Time:
Class Location:

Instructor:
Pronouns:

Office:
Office Hours:

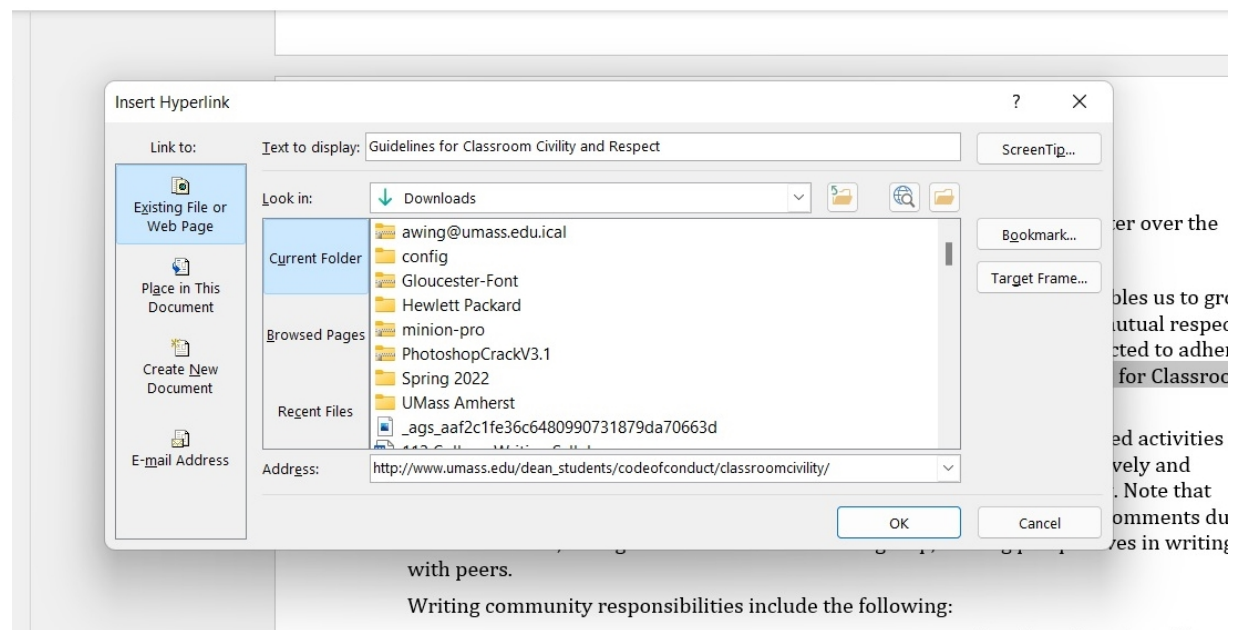
Email:
Typical Response Time:

Formatting Accessible Links

Providing descriptive link text helps users accessing content via screen readers to navigate your documents more easily. By using words like "click here" and "more" as links, users have no way of knowing where the links will take them.

Add Links to Your Word Document

1. Drag your cursor to select the descriptive text you want to turn into a link.
2. Right click the selected text and click on the **Link** button.
3. Paste the link into the **Address** box and click on the **Ok** button.

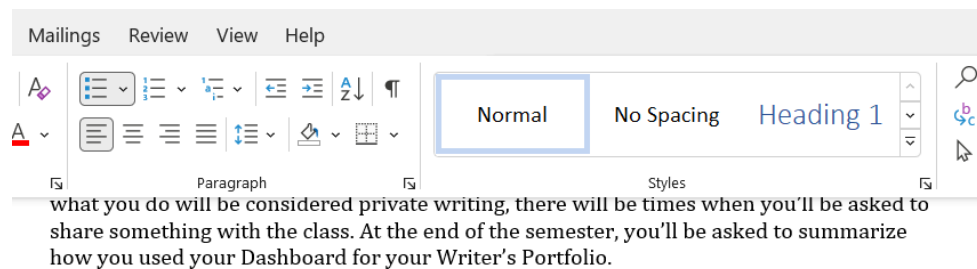


Formatting Accessible Lists

Formatting lists as proper lists allows screen readers to access content in the correct order. If content is not formatted as a proper list, screen readers will read information as a string of words rather than as a cohesive group.

Add Lists to Your Word Document

1. Drag your cursor to select text you want to turn into a list.
2. Click on the **Home** tab and navigate to the **Paragraph** group.
3. Click on either the **Bullets** or **Numbering** button to add a list to your document.



ESSAY ASSIGNMENTS: Students in all sections of *College Writing* are required to write three essays (each 1,000-1,250 words); each will go through an extensive writing process, and each will introduce new challenges.

- **INTERACTING WITH TEXTS** asks you to develop and write a critical response to one or more published texts and tailor the response to an academic audience.
- **ADDING TO A CONVERSATION** asks you to pursue a question that interests you, engage in effective library research, and develop a purpose to a more public audience.
- **CIRCULATING THE CONVERSATION** asks you to take the research you have done for "Adding to the Conversation" and remediate this into a digital form for an online audience.

Formatting Accessible Tables

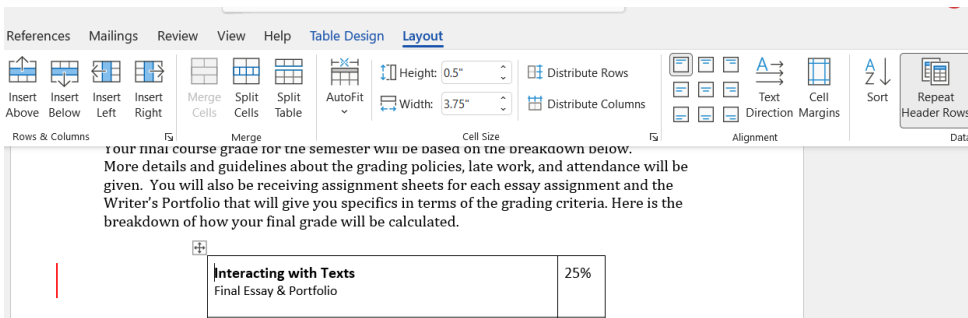
Formatting tables with column and/or row headers ensures that screen readers read content in the proper order. Visual cues alone are insufficient for indicating the different elements of a table.

Indicating Column Headers

1. Click your cursor in the top row of your table.
2. Click on the **Table Design** button at the top of your screen.
3. In the **Table Style Options** group, check the box next to **Header Row**.
4. Click on the **Layout** button to the right of **Table Design**.
5. In the **Data** group, click on the **Repeat Header Rows** button.

Checking the Reading Order

1. Click your cursor in the top row of your table.
2. Press the **Tab** key to navigate through the cells in your table.

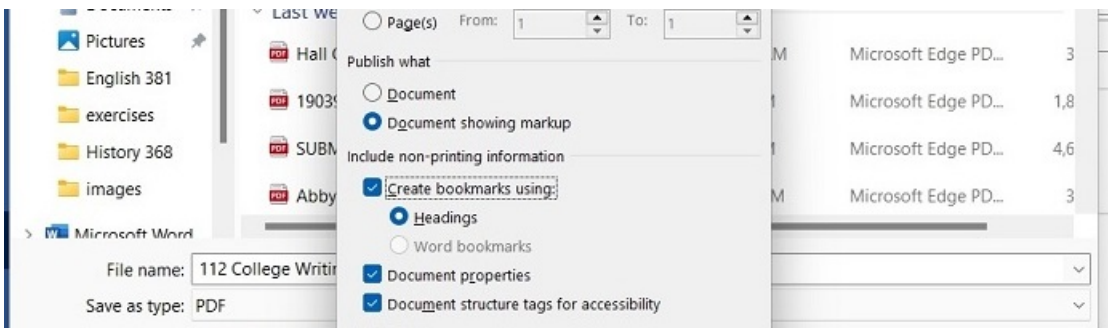


Converting MS Office to an Accessible PDF

Converting an MS Office document (.docx, .pptx) to an accessible PDF ensures that screen readers can read your content.

Converting a Word Document to an Accessible PDF

1. Click on the **File** tab and select **Save As**.
2. Type a descriptive name into the **Save As** field and select **PDF** from the drop-down menu.
3. Click on the **More options** button and click on the **Options** button.
4. Check the boxes next to **Create bookmarks using: Headings** and **Document structure tags for Accessibility**.
5. Press **Ok** and Click on the **Save** button. Your document converts to an accessible PDF.

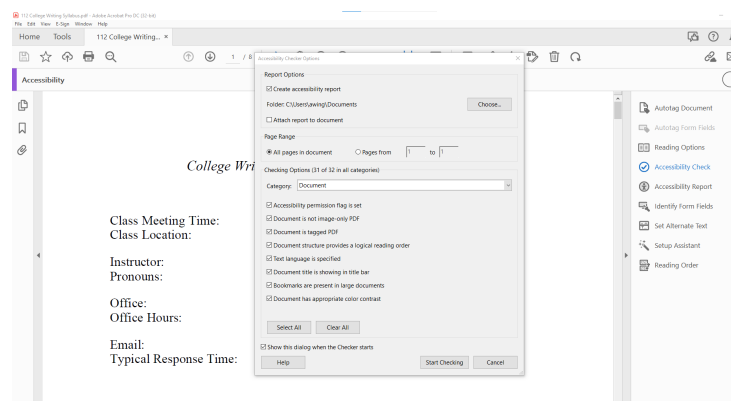


Using the Adobe Acrobat Accessibility Checker

Adobe Acrobat Professional can scan your documents to make sure that they are accessible.

Checking the Accessibility of Your PDF

1. In Adobe Acrobat, click on the **Tools** tab in the top-left corner of your screen.
2. Click on the **Accessibility** button. A new tab appears.
3. On the right-hand side of your screen, click on the **Accessibility Check** button. A dialog box appears.
4. Click on the **Start Checking** button. An accessibility report appears on the left-hand side of your screen.

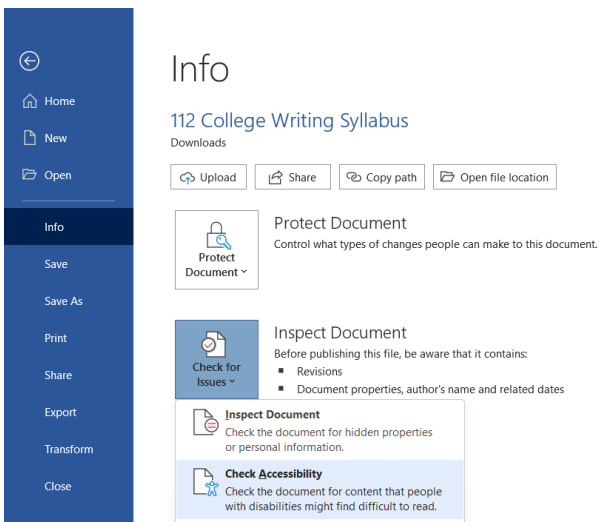


Using the MS Office Accessibility Checker

MS Office's Accessibility Checker allows you to check the accessibility of .docx and .pptx files.

Checking a Word Document's Accessibility

1. Click on the **File** tab and select the **Info** button.
2. Under the **Check for Issues** drop-down, click on the **Check Accessibility** button. The accessibility checker opens on the right-hand side of your screen. It returns a list of errors, warnings, and tips.



Disability Laws and Resources

For more information on disability laws and resources, check out the following sites:

- [Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973](#) prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in programs that receive federal funding, including public colleges and universities.
- The [Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 \(ADA\)](#) prohibits disability-based discrimination. The ADA requires employers to provide accommodations for employees with disabilities as well.
- The [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\) 2.0](#) provides recommendations on how to make Web content more accessible for people with a broad range of disabilities.
- [Disability Services](#) at UMass Amherst offers services for people with all forms of disability as well as training and development for the UMass community.

About the Author

My name is Abigail Wing and I am a junior at the University of Massachusetts Amherst pursuing a dual degree in English and History as well as a double minor in French and Information Technology (IT). In addition, I am in my university's Professional Writing and Technical Communication (PWTC) certificate program. Currently, I am taking coursework related to technical writing. In addition, this semester, I have an internship with my university's IT Communications department where I work on a variety of projects such as updating the web hosting section of UMass IT's website. Outside of academics, I enjoy working out at the UMass Recreation center and taking hikes in the Pioneer Valley area.

I created this project for the course English 381: Advanced Software Documentation, which is a part of the PWTC certificate program. In this course, I learned about accessibility concepts such as the medical/social models of disability and universal design.



About the Project

I first became interested in accessibility after watching the documentary Crip Camp, which exposed me to disability rights activists' fight to pass Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. The documentary also opened my eyes to society's mistreatment of people with disabilities. I next read Adobe Interactive Design Workshop's module on Disability, which exposed me to concepts such as the medical and social models of disability. After reading Adobe Interactive Design Workshop's module on Disability, I read the first chapter of Accessibility for Everyone by Laura Kalbag, which introduced me to the concept of universal design. I then read part of a Web for Everyone by Sarah Horton and Whitney Quesenbery, which used personas to contextualize the experiences of people with disabilities.

In my project, I updated the HCC Accessibility Guidelines for Online Course Content to fit the latest versions of Microsoft Word and Adobe Acrobat Pro. The HCC Accessibility Guidelines for Online Course Content include information on how course instructors can address various aspects of web accessibility when creating course content according to the internationally accepted Web Content Accessibility Guidelines AA standards (WCAG 2.0). I have permission to remix, add, and build upon these guidelines for non-commercial purposes under the [Creative Commons license](#).

I used MadCap Flare, a single-source authoring program, to create my project in both HTML 5 and PDF formats. To access MadCap Flare from my personal laptop, I used Azure Virtual Desktop to remotely connect to a lab computer. I created all of

the screenshots included on this website in Microsoft Word using the program Snip & Sketch. I took the hero image on the front page of my website from Adobe Stock's collection of stock images.

