

ADA COMPLIANCE IN CANVAS

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WHY COMPLY?

WCAG 2.1 LEVEL AA: WEB
ACCESSIBILITY COMPLIANCE

- 1: It's the **law**, not a suggestion
- 3: Reduces **legal risk and reputational damage**
- 4: **Benefits far more students** than just students with disabilities
- 6: Canvas gives you the tools, so **implementation is within reach**

ACCESSIBILITY

=

USABILITY

A “legal checkbox” vs “Does this actually work for the student using it?”

ACCESSIBILITY = USABILITY

- 1: Accessibility = a legal checkbox
- 2: Usability = does this actually work for the student using it?
- 3: A website or course page can be technically compliant (alt text present, headings tagged, contrast ratios met) and still be frustrating or unusable for someone relying on assistive technology. Accessibility standards are the bare minimum, not the goal.
- 4: Our goal = usability: can a real student actually complete the task (read the content, submit the assignment, navigate the module) regardless of how they're interacting with the page?
- 5: Every accessibility fix is really a usability fix that benefits everyone, not only students with disabilities.

ACCESSIBILITY TOUCHPOINTS

WORD DOCUMENTS

PDF DOCUMENTS

CANVAS PAGES

****POWERPOINT DOCUMENTS***

****EXCEL SPREADSHEETS***

CANVAS PAGES

- 1: Whenever possible, **convert documents to Canvas pages**. Screen readers handle native HTML far better than embedded files. Also eliminates downloading.
- 2: Must consider usability on **Discussion Boards, Assignments, Announcements, Quizzes**, and any other page created in Canvas.
- 3: **Mobile-friendly** by default
- 4: Easier to keep **accessible over time**
- 5: **Consistent** navigation and structure
- 6: Better for students using **text-to-speech, translation tools, or magnification**
- 7: **Good rule of thumb:** if a student is meant to read it in Canvas, make it a page; if they're meant to save and use it elsewhere, a properly tagged, accessible file is fine.

WORD & PDF DOCUMENT RULES

- 1: File name is descriptive
- 2: Set metadata (Title, Subject, etc.)
- 3: Heading styles are used
- 4: Lists are formatted using Rich Text Format options (bullets, numbers)
- 5: Links are descriptive
- 6: Add alternate text for images, charts, graphs
- 7: Review color contrast
- 8: Ensure reading order of tags is correct

POWERPOINT RULES

- 1: File name is descriptive
- 2: Set metadata (Title, Subject, etc.)
- 3: Slide titles are unique
- 4: Lists are formatted using Rich Text Format options (bullets, numbers)
- 5: Links are descriptive
- 6: Add alternate text for images, charts, graphs
- 7: Review color contrast
- 8: Only use elements from master theme (do not add text boxes)

ACCESSIBILITY TOUCHPOINTS

Styles

- 1: Styles = Headings {H1, H2, H3}
- 2: Hierarchy is very important.
- 3: Documents = Outline
- 4: Screen readers read documents based on the hierarchy you have created in your document.
- 6: Most accessible fonts are Tahoma, Calibri, Helvetica, Arial, Verdana

Tables

- 1: Keep tables very simple.
- 2: Use headings.
- 3: Do not use blank cells.
- 4: Do not use merged cells.
- 5: Do not use color to give cells meaning.
- 6: Use your styles to give hierarchy to your table information.

USABILITY TOUCHPOINTS

Hyperlinks & Navigation

1: Hyperlinks should be linked using linked text instead of pasting the full URL. The hyperlinked text should give context clues about the link.

2: Do not use the terms “click here” or “more info.”

3: Use clear visual clues to distinguish links from regular text (underline, color)

5: Navigation = Can students navigate your document with a keyboard only?

USABILITY TOUCHPOINTS

Images, Videos, Audio, Multimedia, Embedded Media

- 1: Images must have alternate text (or be marked decorative)
- 2: Complex images (charts/graphs) need a data table or long description
- 3: Videos must have accurate, human-reviewed captions
- 4: Videos with meaningful visual content need audio description
- 5: Audio-only content (podcasts, voice recordings) must have transcripts
- 6: Live video (Webex or Teams) needs real-time captions too
- 7: Avoid autoplay and rapid flashing content

ALTERNATE TEXT

What items need alt text?

- 1: Images & Illustrations
- 2: Image Maps
- 3: Charts & Graphs
- 4: Form Inputs & Buttons
- 5: Animated GIFS or Video Players
- 6: Images That Contain Text*
- 7: Logo Images

What items do NOT need alt text?

- 1: Purely Decorative Images
- 2: Redundant Images

ALTERNATE TEXT

Alt text is graded on usefulness.

If someone closed their eyes, how would you describe the image to them?

1: **Be descriptive** by telling the user what the purpose of the image is in **context**; use emotion where necessary (angry, sad, happy).

2: *Suggestion:* Use **less than 150 characters**: short & simple.

3: Describe all relevant information **related to the context**.

4: Mark decorative images as **decorative**. Does it add value?

5: Do not use “**picture of**” or **image of**” or “**in this picture**.”

6: Do not use an **image of text**.

7: Do not use **file name/file extensions** as your descriptions.

EXAMPLES



1: **Does Not Match**

Context: Photo of Greg and Becca Thorn

2: **Descriptive/Usable:**

Greg and Becca Thorn smiling together, Greg holding a studio light and Becca holding a vintage radio

3: **Best Practice:**

Greg Thorn, a Mississippi State lighting designer, and Becca Thorn, general manager of the university's radio station, posing with a studio light and a vintage radio

EXAMPLES



1: **Does Not Match Context:**

Woman in black sweater on dark background

2: **Usable:** Karyn Brown

3: **Best Practice:** Karyn Brown, assistant dean for communication and media in Mississippi State's College of Arts and Sciences

EXAMPLES



ABOUT THE MISSISSIPPI COMMUNICATION ASSOCIATION | Contacts: Kristen Bennett & Carrie McCormick | kbennett@comm.msstate.edu and cmccormick@comm.msstate.edu

The Mississippi Communication Association is a scholarly not-for-profit organization which promotes the study, criticism, research, teaching, and appreciation of the artistic, humanistic, and scientific principles of communication. MCA also seeks to create a sense of unity among high school, community college, and university communication departments in the state of Mississippi.



Client Needs: Strategic communication plan for its centennial conference to be held at Mississippi College February 6, 2026.

1: **Does Not Match Context:**
men.jpg

2: **Usable** (good if you do not have information about the men in the photo): Two men wearing sport coats smiling at the camera

3: **Best Practice:** Gil Carter, assistant professor of communication & media studies at Mississippi State, and Joe Smith, professor of communication at the University of Mississippi, at the Mississippi Communication Association's centennial conference

ALT TEXT: WHAT MATTERS MOST?

- 1: **Who/what is the subject** — always first, non-negotiable
- 2: **The action or purpose** — what they're doing, especially if it's the reason the image is on the page
- 3: **Only the details that add meaning** — not every visual element, just the ones relevant to why the image is there
- 4: **Setting/background** — usually cuttable unless it's the point (e.g., a "campus tour" photo where location matters)
- 5: **Ask yourself:** Would a sighted person mention this in one sentence if describing the photo verbally to a friend?

COLOR CONTRAST

1: Test color contrast manually

by using a free color contrast analyzer (see handout).

2: If colors fail the analyzer, a quick way to make sure you are using a compliant font and use black/white.

3: Do not assign color only to indicate something a student needs to know/understand, like highlighting missed assignments in red. A screenreader would not pick up on the highlighted text. as an additional visual cue.

EXAMPLES

X Not Accessible

Groups

Group 1: Carrie, Amy, Melanie

Group 2: Sheri, Mike, Mandy

Group 3: Sally, Maria, Eddie

Group 4: Erica, Charlie, Stanley

(green meet in hallway, yellow meet in classroom, pink meet in PRISM room, blue meet in office)



Accessible

Groups

Group 1: Carrie, Amy, Melanie

Group 2: Sheri, Mike, Mandy

Group 3: Sally, Maria, Eddie

Group 4: Erica, Charlie, Stanley

Meeting Locations

McComas Hall 216

Hallway Outside McComas Hall 216

PRISM Room, McComas Hall 212

Main Office, McComas Hall 102

Key principle: Color can reinforce meaning, but it should not be the only way meaning is conveyed.

EXAMPLES

X Not Accessible

Student	Assignment	Status
Alex	Essay	
Jordan	Essay	
Taylor	Essay	



Accessible

Student	Assignment	Status
Alex	Essay	Complete ✓
Jordan	Essay	Missing ✕
Taylor	Essay	Late ⚠

Key principle: Color can reinforce meaning, but it should not be the only way meaning is conveyed.

VIDEO CAPTIONS

- 1: **Captions** assume the viewer can't hear at all — they include dialogue plus non-speech audio: [phone ringing], [laughter], [tense music], speaker labels when multiple people talk. For ADA compliance, you need captions, not just subtitles.
- 2: **Auto-generated captions** are not compliant on their own; best practice is to add punctuation, speaker label(s), and non-speech sound cues if present.
- 3: **If a video conveys meaning visually that isn't spoken aloud** (an on-screen chart, a demonstration, text on a slide during a lecture), a captioning file alone doesn't help a blind or low-vision viewer. This content needs to be spoken aloud in the video itself, or provided as an audio-described version (a narrated track describing key visuals during natural pauses).

VIDEO CAPTIONS

4: **A full text transcript posted alongside the video helps:**

- Deaf-blind users (who use braille displays, not captions)
- Anyone who wants to skim, search, or reference content instead of rewatching
- Students with slow internet who can't stream reliably
- Captions and transcripts serve overlapping but not identical purposes (best practice is both).

5: **Live captioning** for synchronous sessions (Webex lectures, Teams).

CANVAS TOOLS

- 1: **MSU uses Pope Tech** for its accessibility checker (previously used Siteimprov).
- 2: You can use Pope Tech **directly in Canvas.**

BEST PRACTICES

- 1:** Avoid using images that contain text
- 2:** Write alt text based on context
- 3:** Use accessible fonts and font sizes
- 5:** Keep tables simple
- 6:** Do not rely on color alone for meaning
- 7:** Caption all videos
- 8:** Transcript all audio-only
- 9:** Remember to focus on hierarchy
- 10:** Use hyperlinked text
- 11:** Manually test your color contrast

APPENDIX 1: COMMON COLOR CODES



MISSISSIPPI STATE

UNIVERSITY™

MSSTATE COLOR PALETTE

PRIMARY COLORS



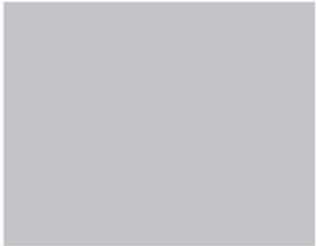
MSSTATE MAROON

HTML/HEX #5D1725

RGB: 93 23 37

CMYK 19 82 44 5¼

PMS 505



MSSTATE LIGHT GREY

HEX #C1C6C8

RGB 193 198 200

CMYK 10 4 4 14

PMS 428



MSSTATE DARK GREY

HEX #777777

RGB 117 120 123

CMYK 30 22 17 57

PMS Cool Grey 9

ACCENT COLORS

Accent colors may be used to highlight an area in a color that works with maroon. You cannot use the accent colors without using maroon. Maroon should always be the dominant color in university publications.



HEX #A69F88

RGB 166 159 136

CMYK 11 13 30 32

PMS 7536



HEX #A9431E

RGB 169 67 30

CMYK 5 83 100 27

PMS 1675



HEX #00A3AD

RGB 0 163 173

CMYK 97 0 30 0

PMS 7467



HEX #642F6C

RGB 100 47 108

CMYK 67 95 4 16

PMS 520



HEX #8F993E

RGB 143 153 62

CMYK 42 5 98 29

PMS 7495



HEX #6E4C1E

RGB 110 76 30

CMYK 20 55 100 60

PMS 1405



HEX #DAC79D

RGB 217 200 158

CMYK 6 10 30 2

PMS 7501



HEX #FFB81C

RGB 255 184 28

CMYK 0 31 98 0

PMS 1235



HEX #C99700

RGB 201 151 0

CMYK 6 27 100 12

PMS 117

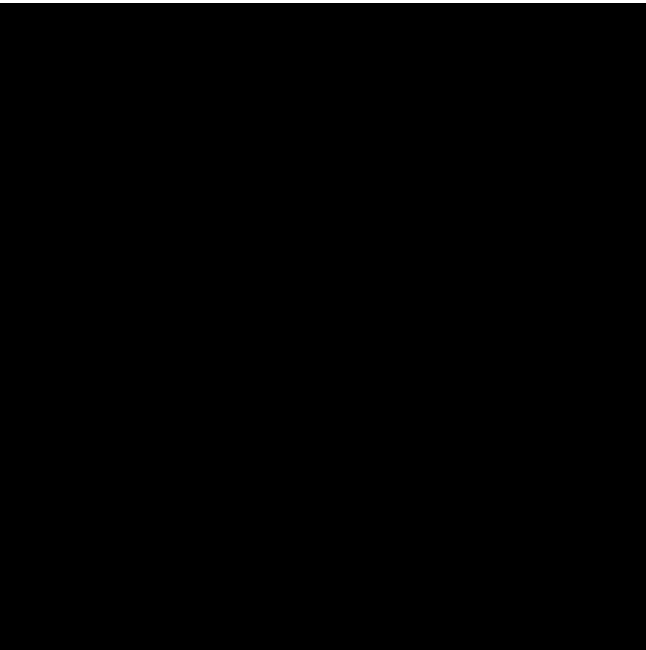


HEX #B7BF10

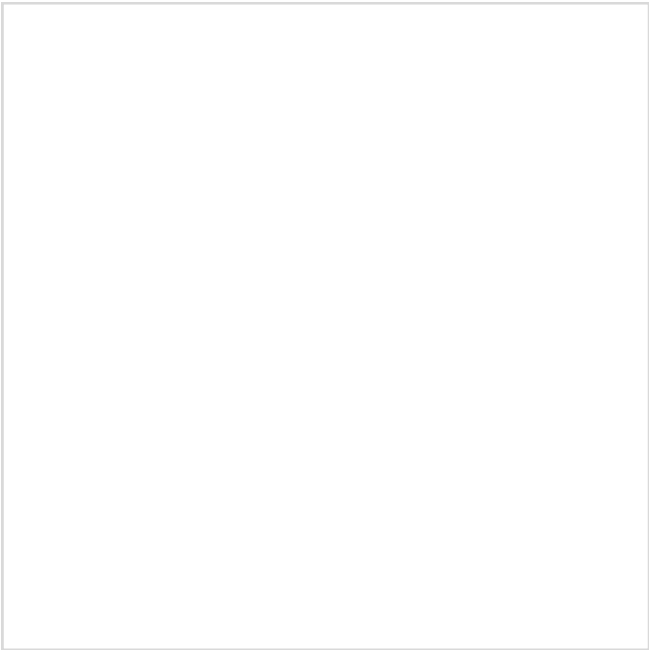
RGB 183 191 16

CMYK 26 1 100 10

PMS 583



BLACK HTML/HEX #000000



WHITE HTML/HEX #FFFFFF

APPENDIX 2: COLOR CONTRAST TOOLS

Color picker & color analyzer all in one link:

[Color Picker & Analyzer Tool](#)

*Scroll to the second section on the home page and click on from image; that will give you the ability to upload your screenshot or image to analyze the color and get the color codes if needed.

Analyze color codes only for accessibility:

[Color Analyzer Tool](#)

APPENDIX 3: THEMES/STYLES IN WORD

CREATE A CUSTOM THEME FOR WORD

MODIFY AN EXISTING STYLE MANUALLY

MODIFY AN EXISTING STYLE TO MATCH FORMATTING IN DOCUMENT

APPENDIX 4: SAVING TO PDF IN WORD

BEST PRACTICES FOR SAVING A WORD DOCUMENT AS A PDF ON A PC:

1. Run the built-in Accessibility Checker in Word (Tools > Check Accessibility) and fix any errors.
2. Go to File > Save As and choose PDF (Do NOT use file>Print).
3. Click More options or Options before clicking save.
4. Check the box for Document structure tags for accessibility.
5. Check the box for Create bookmarks using Headings (if more than 9 pages and if available).

APPENDIX 5: SAVING TO PDF IN WORD

BEST PRACTICES FOR SAVING A WORD DOCUMENT AS A PDF ON A MAC:

1. Run the built-in Accessibility Checker in Word (Tools > Check Accessibility) and fix any errors.
2. Go to File > Save As and choose PDF (Do NOT use file>Print).
3. Change the file format dropdown to PDF.
4. Select the radio button for Best for electronic distribution and accessibility.
5. Click Export to save the document.

APPENDIX 6: EXTRA HELPFUL RESOURCES

BEST PRACTICES FOR ALT TEXT

BEST PRACTICES FOR IMAGES