

Transcript Video 7 Principle 6: Accessible Design

In this video, we will explore some basic steps that you can take to design your syllabus in ways that makes it visually interesting, accessible, and easy to navigate.

Traditional syllabi are often dense, text-heavy and very hard to read, especially for students with dyslexia, AD(H)D, learning disabilities, or non-native speakers of English. An inclusive syllabus can become quite lengthy. In addition, many syllabi do not comply with accessibility requirements because screen readers cannot read them. The following steps will help you visually design an accessible and easy-to-read and navigate syllabus.

Consider creating an online syllabus using Google docs or similar. As an online document it can be easily accessed from anywhere. Updates are immediately viewable by your students. Assign styles (Title, Heading 1, Heading 2) to establish a hierarchical structure within the document. Google docs automatically creates a document outline from the headings so that readers can easily navigate to different points in the document. Google documents are also accessible and can be used with screen readers, screen magnifiers, and even a braille display. Access the Online Inclusive Syllabus Template using this link. You can also find it in the tools section.

Document-internal links and hyperlinks to external web-based resources offer instructors more organizational possibilities and foster the scaffolding of learning. They allow you to cut text related to information that students can find elsewhere. For students, such interactive tools provide easy access to academic and social support services on campus (i.e, disability services, counseling services, support groups, writing center, tutoring help, a program for non-native English speakers) and off campus (tutorial videos, study aids) as well as to administrative information (i.e., institutional information on academic integrity, academic calendar, dean's office).

Make sure to use meaningful labels that indicate where a link goes. For example, provide the name of the website or the name of the author and the title of the reading to which you are linking instead of "click here."

Increase the readability of the document.

- Arrange the text in discernible chunks. Break up the text into smaller paragraphs. Use text columns, text boxes, tables, and bulleted or numbered lists.
- Align text to the left.
- Use a 12-point sans serif font and at least 1.25 line spacing.

Create a course schedule in table form. This provides a concise overview of what students can expect to learn and what they need to do for each session.

- Frame topics, assignments and due dates in terms of questions/themes to explore, how to prepare for the class session, and quick reminders.

- Create accessible tables by designating defining header rows and first columns and repeating headers across page.

To add interest and to enhance the content in your syllabus, trade some text for accessible images and visual representations of content. Using images and visual representations of information quickly conveys information and increases understanding, particularly when students quickly skim a document. A collage of images, a single provocative image, photographs of key authors, the textbook logo, or a word cloud visualizing key terms can indicate themes of the course. Make sure to cite the image source and use alt text to briefly describe it.

Block together icons to illustrate essential course information, such as your email, office hours, the class location, class meeting times, and course texts. Use graphic representation for important information, for example, create a colored pie chart to illustrate the weight of different assignments for the grade.

Check out the tools section to find resources that will help you design a visually interesting, accessible, and easy-to-navigate and -read syllabus. The website *The Accessible Syllabus* at Tulane University provides information about design options regarding image, text, rhetoric, and policy. The *Diagram Center* offers a website on making images accessible.

It's time to pause so that you can reflect on the visual design of your syllabus.

1. Is your syllabus easy to read and navigate (i.e., hierarchical headings, electronic hypertext, course schedule in table format)?
2. Do you use images and visual representations of information?
3. Is your syllabus accessible?

Literature on syllabus designs highlights the importance of the syllabus for shaping the conditions for teaching and learning. Writing an inclusive and accessible syllabus is of practical and ethical importance. More attention needs to focus on the syllabus as a significant tool to promote inclusive and accessible learning environments for the increasingly diverse students in our classes.

I hope that you find the six principles of an inclusive syllabus design presented in this video series helpful as a guiding framework as you redesign your syllabi.

What's next? Please see the *EXPLORE & TOOLS* sections to take a deeper dive and to apply the six principles to your syllabi.

And be in touch if you have any questions. We'd love to talk with you about your course and syllabus design. You'll find our contact information on our CTL website.

References:

- [Tulane University - Accessible Syllabus](#)
- [Diagram Center - Making Images Accessible](#)