Easy Accessibility Practices for Blackboard

At GW Health Sciences we are committed to making our courses as accessible as possible to all. Below are some easy things faculty instructors can do to help make course materials more accessible. The more you use these strategies on an ongoing basis, the more prepared you will be if/when there is a student with a documented disability.

Organize content in Blackboard with headings using the styles provided

Headings and subheadings make it easier for all users to navigate content. In addition, screen readers use headings and subheadings to help students with visual disabilities to skim the content. The formatted headings and subheadings tell screen readers the order and relationship of the sections. Use heading styles provided. Change the look afterwards if you want, the underlying code will still tell screen readers that the content is a header. To apply a heading, highlight the words and choose a style in the dropdown menu.

Provide meaningful link text

A link has two parts, the text (which is visible) and the URL web address (which generally starts with http:// and in not visible). When including links, the text of the link should be the title of the webpage or the subject that is being linked to. Do not describe the link and then write "click here." Do not use the web address as the text of the link. The screen reader's computer voice will read all the letters, symbols, numbers and words.

Use this:

- Please explore the CDC's information on [emergency preparedness and response.](#)

Not these:

- Please explore the CDC's information on emergency preparedness and response (http://emergency.cdc.gov/bioterrorism/).
- Please explore the CDC's information on emergency preparedness and response. Click here to access the page.

To set up a link to a document:
- Place your cursor where you would like the link.
- Click the Attach File paperclip icon (see figure below).
- Browse for your file.
- Next to Name of Link to File in the dialogue box, put the text that you would like to be visible. By default, that field has the filename and extension of your document.

To set up a link to a website:
- Write out the link text and highlight it.
- Click on the Hyperlink chain link icon.
- Paste the URL address of your link.
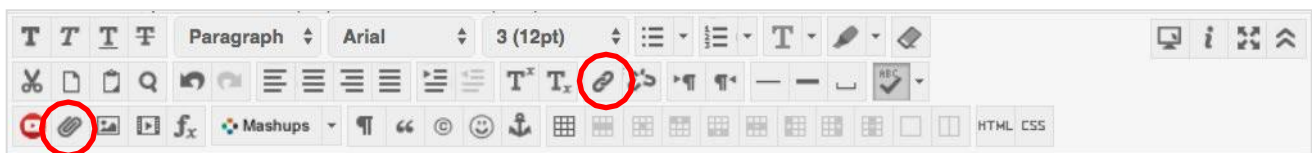
Avoid using only color to convey meaning

About 8 percent of males and 0.5 percent of females have some degree of color blindness or ("color deficiency"). This means that to them, some colors appear more similar or are muted. It is good to avoid using color to convey meaning, such as highlighting or changing the font color of words to emphasize them. Use logical formatting to signal importance. If you must use color on text, be sure to also change the style or size of the font.

Avoid using tables for layout

Avoid using tables to layout text on your page that could be arranged using headers and sub headers. Tables can be difficult to interpret because screen readers read from left to right by default.

Copy and paste text from Notepad

When you copy and paste text from a Word document to the Blackboard (Bb) editor, you are also pasting a lot of hidden Microsoft-specific code which interferes with how the editor works and how web browsers display your text.

There are Bb editor tools to strip formatting, such as the Clear Formatting button. This does not work as well as Notepad, the text editor that comes with MS Office. To find it, click on the Windows icon in the task bar and search. The Mac editor is called TextEdit, and is found in Applications in the Finder.

Copy your text in the Word document and paste it into Notepad/TextEdit, which strips the text of all code (except for useful paragraph and line breaks). Then paste the text into Blackboard. You will then need to re-do any formatting you want to keep, such as heading styles or bulleted/numbered lists.

Attached documents can be made accessible

Microsoft Office and Adobe PDF documents can be made accessible. Refer to our other guides or online resources from GW's office of Disability Support Services.

Photo, video and audio can be made accessible

Multimedia files which convey meaningful information (i.e. are not decorative) can be made accessible. This involves providing alternative text and creating captions. Ask us for help with multimedia files.

Need more assistance?

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