Making Accessibility Accessible: Engaging Instructors Empathetically

Cynthia Sarver
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MAKING ACCESSIBILITY ACCESSIBLE
Engaging Instructors Empathetically

Cynthia Sarver, M.E.T, Ph.D., University of St. Thomas
Compliance. How is this relevant to me?

Dumbing things down

The technologists’ job

I don’t have time

Accessibility

All this work for maybe 1% of our students (maybe)

Job creep

A list of (tedious) rules to follow
Changing the conversation
A civil rights issue, not a compliance one

✓ Frame accessibility within context of inclusion, an ethic already existing at the university and to which most faculty are already committed to supporting.
But WCAG 2.0 Guidelines are User-Centered

Understanding the User's Perspective and Needs

The techniques and guidelines of web accessibility were not invented to make life harder for people with disabilities. Instead, they are designed to help ensure that everyone can access and use the web.

Moving Beyond Technical Accessibility

Techniques and guidelines are important because they represent best practices for creating accessible websites. However, it's also important to consider user perspectives and needs when designing and promoting websites.
Situate within a Social Context

- Situated learning theory: Put material to be learned in authentic context (Jean Lave & Etienne Wenger, 1991)
- Build relationship and understanding where there may be none
- Build empathy
Humans are “hard-wired for empathy”

“With familiarity, other people become part of ourselves. Our self comes to include the people we feel close to."

-- Dr. James Coan, Psychology, University of Virginia (2013)
Making Course Content Accessible Using the RTF Toolbar

Cynthia Sarver
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How screen reader users access documents

“Introduction to Screen Readers” Neal Ewers, Trace Research Center (2:27-3:41)

Demonstration of screen reader navigating Word and PowerPoint docs
Sighted Users See the “Visual Landscape” of the Page

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**Instructor Information**
Dr. Joe Blogs  
Office location: JRC 407  
Office hours: 12:00-1:30  
Email: drjoeblogs@stthomas.edu  
Office phone: 651-962-5555

**Course Information**
Class days/time: Tuesday & Thursday 1:30 to 3:10  
Classroom: JRC LL01

**Course Description**

**Course Guidelines and Policies**

**Students with disabilities**
Academic accommodations will be provided for qualified students with documented disabilities including but not limited . . .

**Academic Integrity**
Students will be expected to adhere to the guidelines regarding Academic Integrity and plagiarism and cheating as outlined in the Student Handbook . . .

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**Evaluation**

This graph illustrates how your grade in this course is derived from the following category weights.

- Attendance/Participation 10%
- Assignments 10%
- Midterm website project 20%
- Design Document 20%
- Final Project 40%

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**Course Schedule**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates (Normal)</th>
<th>Topic/Readings (Normal)</th>
<th>Assignments (Normal)</th>
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Sighted Users Provide a Map for Screen Reader Users to Navigate this Landscape
Overview of “Landmarks” We Can Place in Our Documents

• Headers
• Hyperlinks
• Lists
• Images
• Tables
Headers = Table of Contents

In MS Word

In Blackboard
Hyperlinks = Exit Signs

- Screen Readers can scan links
- Therefore use descriptive links (not urls)
- Similarly, avoid “click here” or “more”
- Avoid links longer than 100 characters
- Don’t capitalize – screen readers spell out all caps

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Example:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Don’t</strong>: Open up <a href="https://www.google.com/">https://www.google.com/</a> and search.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Do</strong>: Open up <a href="https://www.google.com/">Google</a> and search.</td>
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</table>
Lists = Arrays of important illustrative details

Use true numbered and bulleted lists to make information “scannable” by screen readers
Tables = Important information analyzed a particular way

- Let the screen reader know the table is there (tag the table with Alt Text)
- Indicate a header and (if possible) a first column row, to give users a way to get an overview of the table
- Avoid split or merged cells
- Strive for a uniform number of rows and columns
Images = Worth 1000 Words (sometimes)

Don’t Describe Decorative Images. Enter “”” in description instead.

Use “Alt Text” to Describe Images Containing Important Information
Complex Images: Need Textual Equivalents
Complex Images: Need Textual Equivalents (cont’d)

Source: The Story of Stuff
How empathy is fostered?
Empathy fostered through...

• Featuring the experience of a screen reader user
• Analogies that build bridges between the experiences of the sighted faculty member and the person with blindness
• Standing in the shoes of the screen reader user
“Scaffolded Empathy”

Bloom’s Cognitive Hierarchy

- Knowledge (Remember)
- Comprehension (Explain)
- Application (Use knowledge in new context)
- Analysis (See Part/Whole Relationship; Pattern Recognition)
- Evaluation (Justify decision based on knowledge)
- Creation (Build something new using knowledge)

Wiggins & McTighe’s 6 Facets of Understanding

- Explanation
- Interpretation
- Application
- Perspective
- Empathy
- Self-Knowledge

Individual

Community

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Thank you!

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