

Universal Design for Learning: Taking that First Step

The purpose of this tutorial is to:

- Explain the importance of using Universal Design for Learning techniques when designing your online or hybrid course.
- Provide four ‘first steps’ for making your course documents accessible to all students.

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What is Universal Design for Learning?

According to the [National Center on Universal Design for Learning](#), the term **Universal Design for Learning (UDL)** “is a set of principles for curriculum development that give all individuals equal opportunities to learn. UDL provides a blueprint for creating instructional goals, methods, materials, and assessments that work for everyone--not a single, one-size-fits-all solution but rather flexible approaches that can be customized and adjusted for individual needs.”

Some use the following terms interchangeably:

- Universal Design for Learning
- Accessibility
- Design for All

Why be concerned about making my courses accessible?

It's the right thing to do

- Students with disabilities run the risk of falling behind if their course materials are inaccessible.
- Students without disabilities can benefit from your efforts in making your course materials accessible.
- Instructors would be following Standard 8 of the Quality Matters Rubric.

- Examples from San Diego State University:
[From Where I Sit: Kelvin Crosby](#) (06:14)
[From Where I Sit: Lana's Story](#) (07:18)

It's the law

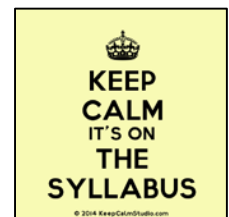
- [Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973](#) requires that agencies receiving Federal dollars allow people with disabilities to “have access to and use of information and data that is comparable to that provided to the public who are not individuals with disabilities, unless an undue burden would be imposed on the agency.”
- The [Web Accessibility for Online Learning](#) web site offers an outline of legal reasons to provide equitable access.
- Minnesota adopted the [Accessible Technology Bill](#) in 2009 which “requires the state to adopt Section 508 standards and Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0 (WCAG 2.0) to develop and maintain accessible statewide information and telecommunications technology systems and services.”
- In 2014, Governor Dayton signed [MN Executive Order 14-14](#): Providing for Increased State Employment of Individuals with Disabilities.
- Campuses are coming under legal pressure to make their course materials accessible for all students:
 - [U. of Montana improving access for disabled](#) (Education Dive, March 2014)
 - [“Dropping the Ball on Disabilities”](#) (Inside Higher Ed, April 2014)
 - [Colorado University-Boulder response to DOJ Inquiry](#) (Open Letter to Campus January 2015)

First Steps: Creating Accessible Course Documents

There are many aspects to making sure your course is accessible to all students. This tutorial will touch only on a few tips when **creating your own digital content** (e.g., documents, handouts, articles, syllabi, schedules, etc.).

1. Include an Accessibility/Disability Statement in your Syllabus

Your syllabus must include a statement about how students can contact Disability Services. The Disability Services staff has prepared a [recommended disability access statement](#) for this purpose. (You may want to add additional information as appropriate for your course.)



Accessibility Statement (*other headings: Disability Statement, Special Circumstances, or Universal Learning*)

Minnesota State University Moorhead is committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities for all students. The Disability Resource Center (DRC) is the campus office that collaborates with students who have disabilities to provide and/or arrange reasonable accommodations.

- If you have, or think you may have, a disability (e.g. mental health, attentional, learning, chronic health, sensory or physical) please contact the DRC at (218) 477-4318 (V) or (800)627.3529 (MRS/TTY) to schedule an appointment for an intake.

- Additional information is available on the [DRC website](http://www.mnstate.edu/disability/): <http://www.mnstate.edu/disability/>
- If you are registered with the DRC and have a current Accommodation Letter, please schedule an appointment to visit with me, during my office hours, to discuss implementation of your accommodations.

2. Use Headings in All Documents You Create

A student with low vision issues is at a disadvantage when it comes to reading documents. It may be difficult, if not impossible, for the student to visually scan a document to find the material that she wants. If the student is using assistive technology such as a screen reader, how will she know what is covered in the document if there is no organized structure to the material? How does she find a specific piece of information unless she reads the entire document?

For an example of the challenges one faces when using a screen reader to read unstructured documents, view the following YouTube video: [Intro to Screen Readers](#) - University of Wisconsin-Madison (07:05).

Solution:

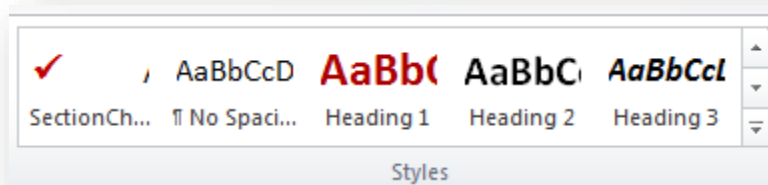
- Organize your content into a logical outline format.
- Place important information or instructions at the top, when possible.
- Use the built-in heading structure of your authoring tool (e.g., Word, SoftChalk, PDF, and HTML).
 - Headings create bookmarks so that students can navigate through your document.
 - Use heading styles rather than bolding or enlarging text.

Organizing your content under heading levels also helps to visually organize the content of your document for sighted readers, including those with cognitive challenges.

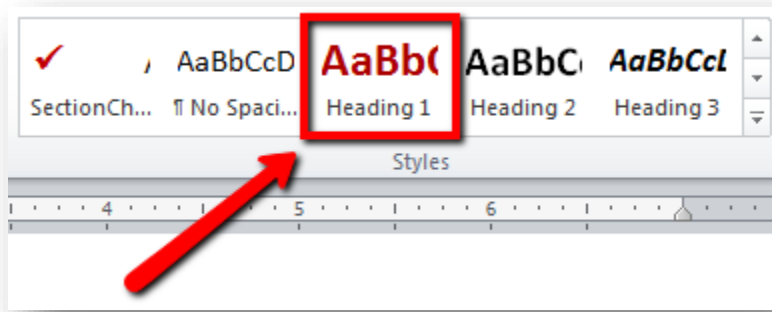
Use the following information for tips that are specific to the authoring tool used.

Headings in Word & PDF

- In Microsoft Word, headings are found on the **Home** tab in the **Styles** group. When using Word for Macintosh, the Styles options are found on the Formatting palette.



- Select **Heading 1** for the main title of your document.



- You can change the formatting of the headings by using the **Change Styles** options or by adding your own customizations.

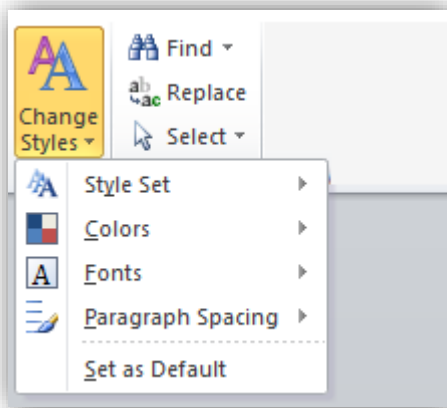


Image 1: Use Change Styles menu options to modify format of headings

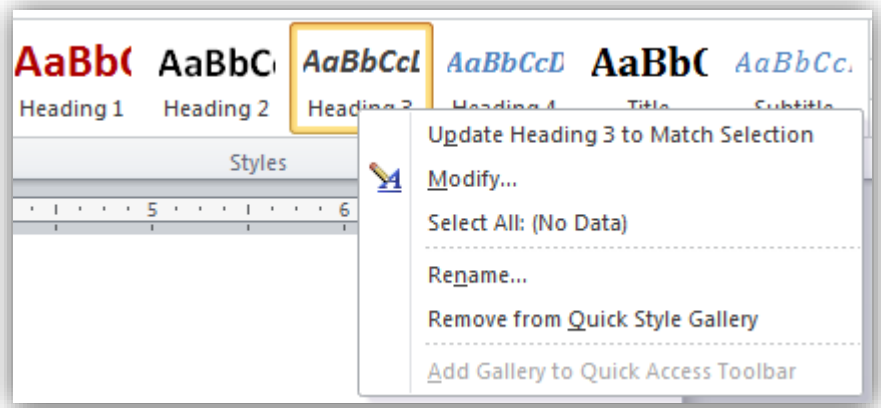


Image 2: Right-click on heading to customize heading format

If you create your document using headings in Word and then convert it to PDF, the headings will be preserved and carry over to the PDF version of the file. It is usually easier to fix a document's accessibility in Word rather than using Adobe Acrobat Pro after it has been converted into a PDF.

For more info...

- Additional information is available online regarding [using headings in Word](http://webaim.org/techniques/word/) to create accessible documents: <http://webaim.org/techniques/word/>.
- Documentation for [applying Headings in Word](http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/word-help/add-a-heading-HA010368882.aspx) is available online at: <http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/word-help/add-a-heading-HA010368882.aspx>.
- Extended documentation for [using Styles](http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/word-help/style-basics-in-word-HA102647012.aspx?CTT=1) is also available online at: <http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/word-help/style-basics-in-word-HA102647012.aspx?CTT=1>.

Headings in D2L Brightspace

The **HTML Editor** in D2L Brightspace can be found virtually anywhere you enter text – News, Content, Discussions, Quizzes, etc. Built-in heading styles are found in the Editor’s toolbar. If you are copying into the Editor from Word, use the **Paste from Word** option to retain any formatting already done in Word, or **Paste as Plain Text** to strip the formatting so you can do all the formatting within the Editor.

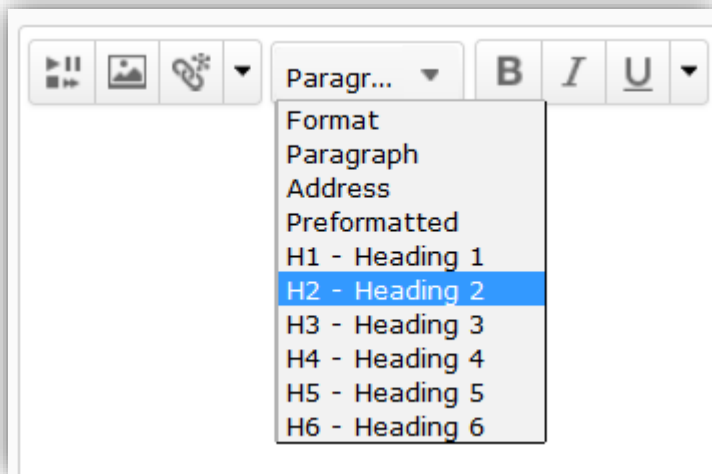


Image 3: D2L HTML Editor - Pre-defined headings are available

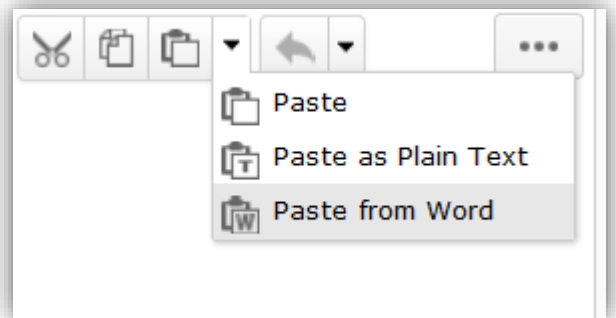


Image 4: D2L HTML Editor: when copy-pasting from Word choose Paste as Plain Text to strip out formatting or Paste from Word to retain formatting

Headings in SoftChalk

SoftChalk also has built-in headings to select for organizing your content visually and hierarchically.

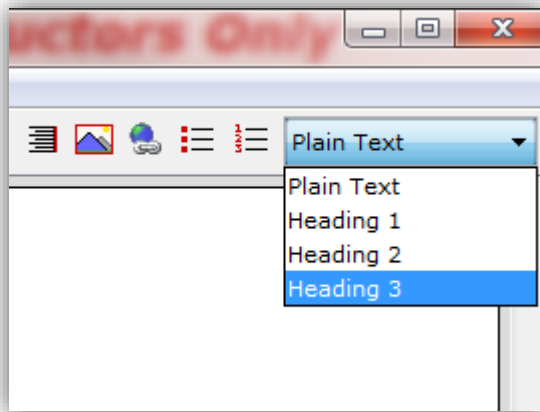


Image 5: Find pre-defined headings in the SoftChalk toolbar

3. Choose Accessible Fonts, Colors, and Text Effects

The choices you make for your font are also important in making your course more accessible for students with visual issues.

Use Sans Serif font

- The selected font can either hinder or help a student with low vision issues.
- Choose sans serif font (e.g., Calibri, Verdana, Helvetica) for easy readability on computer and mobile devices. Serif fonts (e.g., Times New Roman) are used only if the content is to be printed (not read online).
- Try to avoid using serif fonts (e.g., Times New Roman) as most documents are now created for either/both online reading and printing – few documents are created strictly for printing.

Be Mindful of Color Choices

- Students with low vision issues need high contrast to read text on a screen. Making wise color choices will also reduce eye fatigue for your sighted students and help those with color blindness.
- Use dark font colors on a light background (e.g., black text on white background).
- Avoid extremely bright colors as a background color.
- Use one font and color for text.
- Avoid using color to distinguish between information.
- Consider using bold and italics to emphasize text when necessary, and use textures in addition to color when creating charts. Generally red-blue and yellow-blue color combinations are safe.

Be Mindful of the use of CAPS and Text Effects

- Students with low vision issues might find words in all capital letters confusing and difficult to read.
- Be mindful to limit your amount of bolding and italicizing.
- Avoid overuse of all CAPS.
- Too much use of emphasis causes it to lose impact and all CAPS may be considered shouting.

Avoid use of underlined text

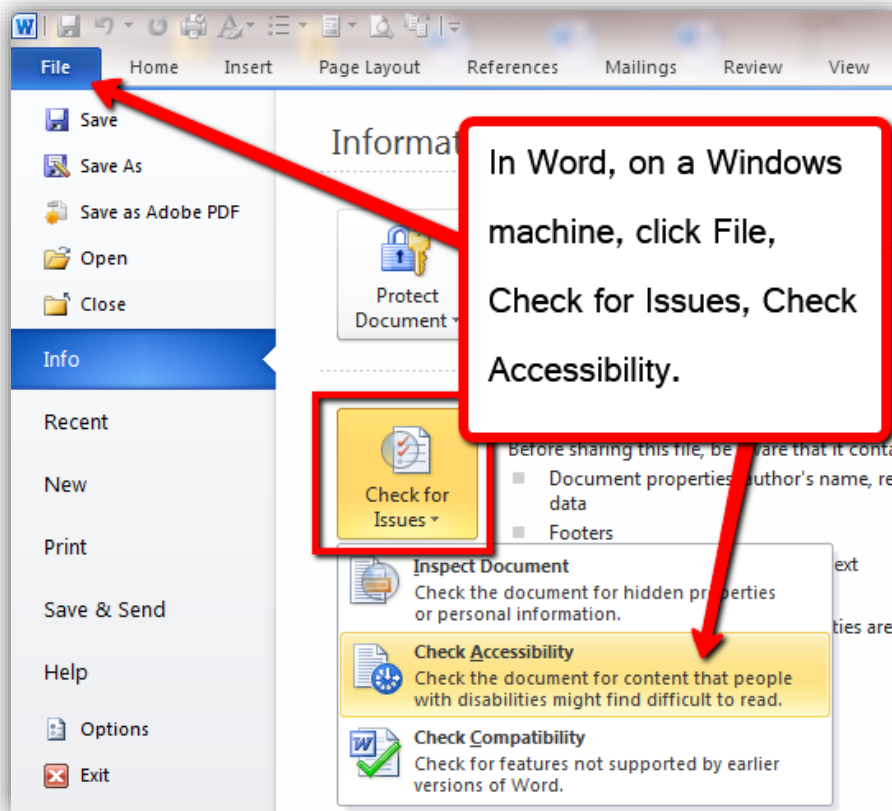
- Students with low vision issues might be confused by underlined text that is not serving as a link.
- Avoid underlining words for emphasis.
- Underlined text denotes a link to assistive technologies.
- Instead use styles, bolding, and italicizing where appropriate.
- Reserve underlining for navigation links.

4. Use the Word Accessibility Checker for Word 2010 & 2013 Documents

A tool has been built directly into MS Word that allows you to check the accessibility of your document if using MS Word 2010 or 2013.

- At this time, Word 2011 for the Macintosh does not offer the Accessibility Checker feature.
- Along with identifying problems, the checker offers solutions to resolve the accessibility issues.

- To use the tool, select **File > Info > Check for Issues > Check Accessibility**.



Other Resources

Additional information on [Word 2010 Accessibility Checker](#) and [Word 2013](#) is available online: <http://webaim.org/techniques/word/#checker>.

For More Information

Additional information about [accessible course design](#), including a comprehensive Accessibility Checklist can be found on the Instructional Technology webpage: <http://www.mnstate.edu/instructional-technology/accessibility.aspx>.

Additional faculty resources can be found on the [Disability Services](#) webpage: <http://www.mnstate.edu/disability/>.

Please contact Instructional Technology Services at support@mnstate.edu or 218.477.2603 if you have questions about this material or would like to schedule a consultation to discuss accessible course design.