Digital Accessibility Requirements Overview

This document provides an overview of the digital accessibility requirements set by the WCAG 2.1 AA standard, which is mandated by Subpart H of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Title II Regulations for all digital content (course materials, UM-Dearborn's website, public content, and all U-M/UM-Dearborn systems) by April 26, 2027. Following are the most common items in course materials that should be reviewed and updated as needed, but is not an exhaustive list of the requirements. For detailed information visit the UM-Dearborn's Digital Accessibility Course.

All content provided to a student in a course, whether it's on Canvas, Google Drive, Dropbox, Github, a vendor/publisher site or other 3rd party site must meet accessibility requirements. When content is placed in Canvas, U-M's accessibility add-on for Canvas, Yuja Panorama, can help identify errors and guide you towards fixes. If content is hosted elsewhere, Panorama will not be able to assess the content or assist in any fixes, though the accessibility requirements are still applicable. In addition to Yuja Panorama, U-M has purchased the Grackle suite to assist with identifying and fixing problems with Google Suite documents, and Microsoft Office has some built-in accessibility checking options.

When looking at a Yuja Panorama report, in order to ensure no major issues are present, the general target score for each item and the overall course is **91% or higher**, though we recognize this target may not make sense or be achievable for every document at this time (more info included in the sections below) Any major issues identified by other tools like Grackle or the Microsoft Office accessibility checker should be addressed. It is important to recognize actions are just as important as the score/reporting from our assistance tools, and that scores provided by Yuja Panorama are not official "compliance scores." Active course content should be made accessible, and these tools assist in meeting our obligations.

The requirements below must be implemented any time new documents, webpages, emails, etc are being created. Existing content in use after April 24, 2026 must be updated to meet the requirements as well.

Color Contrast

Contrasting colors should always be used for text and backgrounds. For example, yellow text should not be used on a white background, and similarly, dark blue text shouldn't be used on a black background. The specifications state there should be a 4.5:1 contrast ratio for normal text or 3:1 for large text. Further contrast ratio details, calculations, requirements, and fix guides are available in the UM-Dearborn's Digital Accessibility Course.

Headings

All documents and web content should make use of officially styled headings (often referred to in editing programs as “Heading 1 / H1”, “Heading 2 / H2”, etc). All documents and web content should have at least one Heading 1/H1. Heading levels should be thought of like an outline. Heading 2s would be subtopics of a Heading 1, Heading 3s would be subtopics of a Heading 2, etc. Heading levels should never be skipped (Heading 3 shouldn’t come immediately under Heading 1 without having a Heading 2). Headings must be selected properly, not just by increasing font size, bold, etc. Further heading details, requirements, and fix guides are available in the UM-Dearborn’s Digital Accessibility Course.

Image Descriptions (alt-text)

All images/graphs need to have text descriptions or be marked as decorative only (where appropriate). Descriptions should communicate an image's content in a meaningful way while being as concise as possible (120 or fewer characters preferred, though some descriptions of academic content will be considerably longer). Imagine how you would describe an image/graph over a voice-only phone call. Further image description details, requirements, and fix guides are available in the UM-Dearborn’s Digital Accessibility Course.

Audio/Video

All audio and video content in a course (recorded videos, lecture captures, links to external video providers like YouTube, Video, etc) must have closed captions. Captions should be as accurate as possible, with inaccuracies being edited for correctness). Having a transcript which matches the captions is ideal. As a best practice, any important content being shown visually should be described verbally as well so the captions and transcript would reflect the visual content. Further A/V caption and transcript details, requirements, and fix guides are available in the UM-Dearborn’s Digital Accessibility Course.

Descriptive Links

Links in all content should be descriptive. Avoid having a link like “click here,” “here,” “page,” etc. For example, use “Access the Fall 2025 - HIST-101-001 Syllabus” instead of “click here to access the syllabus.” Also avoid using URLs as the link. Use “The UM-Dearborn Homepage” instead of “https://umdearborn.edu.” Further descriptive link details, requirements, and fix guides are available in the UM-Dearborn’s Digital Accessibility Course.

Tables

Tables should only be used for data presentation, not for layout purposes in a document or web page. All tables should have a title. In programs which support them (like Microsoft Office), tables should have a caption added as well. Tables should have either a header row, header column, or both defined. Further table details, requirements, and fix guides are available in the UM-Dearborn's Digital Accessibility Course.

Specific File Type Platform Cases

Save As / Download As

Avoid using the "save as" feature in many programs to save documents in formats other than those native to the program or site you're using. For example, do not save an Apple Pages document as a Microsoft Word doc, or the "save as PDF" option in any editing program. When changing formats away from the native one, accessibility information is often lost as part of the transformation. Use the native program of whatever document format you intend to give to your students.

Presentations

Check the "reading order" and make corrections as needed. The reading order tells assistive software the order content blocks should logically be read in, since it is not easy for systems to interpret on their own.

Microsoft Office Documents

Microsoft Office documents should have a title entered in the file properties area (in addition to being visually present on the first page). Microsoft Office has an accessibility checker built in, though it is not as thorough as Yuja Panorama.

Google Suite Documents

U-M has purchased the Grackle accessibility checker extension for the Google suite. Please use the Grackle extension to identify and fix any issues with your Google Apps content. More information about Grackle can be found at the following links: Grackle for Docs, Grackle for Slides, Grackle for Sheets.

PDFs

The PDF format itself was originally designed to be very visual-first display/print oriented, where a file could be opened and look identical on a multitude of devices. The format works well for display and print, but is almost the opposite of what is required for accessibility. There are ways to make PDFs accessible, but they can be very cumbersome. We offer the following advice for PDFs:

If the PDF file is a book (full or excerpt), journal article, or other published scholarly work, please work with your subject librarian to find a permalink to the resource. We expect publishers and journal databases to update their PDFs to be accessible by the deadline. Using a permalink instead of placing a downloaded copy of the file somewhere will ensure users will have access to the latest and most accessible copy.

If the file was something you created yourself in Word/Powerpoint or some other software system, please replace the PDF file with the native document version. It would also be acceptable to replace the file with a Google Docs/Slides/Sheets version instead, which could be shared as a read-only link (this is especially useful if there are concerns about file ownership or modification).

The U-M PDF Decision Tree provides guidance for additional scenarios. If use of a specific PDF file cannot be avoided, the file will need to be remediated to make it as accessible as possible. Yuja Panorama or Adobe Acrobat may provide some remediation options, but results vary greatly from file to file. Please reach out to the Digital Accessibility Team (umdearborn-de-accessibility@umich.edu) so we can take a look at your specific file(s) and provide guidance.

Further image description details, requirements, and fix guides are available in the UM-Dearborn's Digital Accessibility Course.

Current U-M Documented Accessibility Issues

Equations

The only way to create equations content that is likely to be fully compliant with requirements currently is to use MathML in HTML. Using the Equation Editor in Canvas (which generates MathML content via MathJax in the background) is the easiest way to accomplish this.

The equation editor in Microsoft Office does not produce accessible equations, nor do any LaTeX typesetting systems we have found (like Overleaf). We recommend creating equations in HTML via the Equation Editor in Canvas wherever possible. Some content with equations is provided in

document formats for a variety of reasons, and these formats will have some accessibility limitations due to the current state of document authoring technologies.

Since this is a technical limitation that we at U-M cannot address ourselves, we have documented this issue and will not require changes to equations in Word/PDF documents at this time. U-M is engaged with several groups that are researching these issues and working toward solutions. We expect the technical issues to be resolved, so while immediate changes are not required, work in this area will likely be required in the future. Courses that contain some equation content should still be made accessible to the extent possible with current technologies and documentation.

UM-Dearborn Assistance

The UM-Deaborn Digital Accessibility team is here to help! Please email us (umdearborn-de-accessibility@umich.edu) with any questions, concerns or requests for assistance with Digital Accessibility.