

FAQ

Web Content and Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG)

WHAT IS CHANGING?

Overview of the Change

The Department of Justice (DOJ) has updated the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Title II to set a specific technical standard for digital content. Previously, “accessibility” was a broad goal; now, it has a strict legal definition:

WCAG 2.1 Level AA.

DOES THIS APPLY TO ALL COURSE MATERIALS?

The rule explicitly covers “services, programs or activities,” which includes:

- Learning Management System (Blackboard)
- Syllabi and course documents
- PDFs, slides, handouts
- Third-party tools, videos and platforms

ARE THERE EXCEPTIONS?

A small number of materials may be exempt:

1. **Archived Content:** Materials created before the deadline that are not currently being used.
2. **Preexisting Social Media:** Posts made before the deadline.
3. **Third-Party Content:** Content you don’t own or control (though if you require it for a course, you are still responsible for providing an accessible alternative).
 - Title II accessibility is about consistent effort. For third-party tools, always request and save a PDF of the vendor’s accessibility statement or VPAT before the semester starts as proof of due diligence. If a tool isn’t fully accessible, prepare an alternative way for students to meet the same objective. Include our accessibility statements in your syllabus to encourage early student feedback and resolve issues informally.

Recommendation: Focus on “High-Impact” content first. Start with the syllabus, the first two weeks of course content and any high-stakes assignment instructions.

CHECKLIST: ACCESSIBILITY STANDARDS

Most Microsoft Office Applications include an Accessibility Checker Button!

How to Open the Accessibility Checker

- In Word, PowerPoint or Excel, click the **Review** tab at the top.
- Select **Check Accessibility**.

Check and Understand the Results

- A window pops up on the right. You will see:
 - **Errors:** Must fix (like missing Alt Text).
 - **Warnings:** Might be an issue (like unclear links or no headers).

Quick Fix Options

- Click the arrow next to an error.
- Choose the suggested action (like “Add a description”).
- The program usually takes you right to the problem so you can fix it simply.

KEY WCAG REQUIREMENTS

Page Titles (WCAG 2.4.2)

Think of the <title> as the label on the outside of a folder. It's the first thing a screen reader announces when a page loads.

- There is a <title> that briefly and adequately describes the page's content.
- Each page on the site has a unique <title> that is adequate to distinguish from other pages.
- When possible, place the most specific information first in the <title>.

Alt Text (WCAG 1.1.1)

Alt text is the “voice” of your images. If the image disappeared, what words would you use to convey the same meaning?

- Every image element has an alt attribute.
- Decorative images should be hidden from screen readers by marking as decorative.
 - **IMPORTANT** – click the checkbox labeled Mark as Decorative. Do not just type it in. If you leave the alt attribute out entirely, the screen reader might try to be “helpful” by reading the actual file name, which is frustrating for the user.
- Alt text is descriptive for functional image elements (e.g. informative elements, image links, image buttons).

Headings (WCAG 2.4.6)

Headings aren't just for making text “big and bold.” They create an outline that screen readers use to jump around the page.

- All text that looks like a heading is marked up as a heading.
- All text that is marked up as a heading function as a heading.
- The heading hierarchy is meaningful and properly hierarchically nested.

Color Contrast (WCAG 1.4.3)

- The contrast ratio for normal sized text is at least 4.5:1.
- The contrast ratio for large text (19px and bold or 24px and normal) is at least 3:1.

Tips for Color Contrast:

- Stick to dark text on light backgrounds. If you want to use colors (like red or blue text), use a Contrast Checker tool to make sure it's dark enough for your students to read.
- If you squint your eyes and the text starts to disappear into the background, it's going to fail the contrast test. When in doubt, make the text darker and the background lighter.

Multimedia Alternatives (WCAG 1.2.1, 1.2.2, 1.2.3 and 1.2.4)

- Videos must include clear, accurate captions.
- Audio descriptions should be provided when visual information is essential to understand the content.

Additional Resources

[USI Syllabus Statements](#)

[Creating Accessible Digital Content](#)

[Creating Accessible PDFs](#)

[Ally for LMS Help for Instructors \(Blackboard\)](#)

[Anthology's Ally Help Center](#)

[ADA Fact Sheet from ADA.gov](#)

[USI Tech Takeaways YouTube Channel](#)

[Web Accessibility of Content Guidelines](#)

[SOAR \(Scholarly Open Access Repository\) research guide](#)

[USI Handbook B.28 Disability and Accessibility](#)

[Creating Inclusive Documents](#)



Three Common PDF Issues- One Quick Fix Workflow

A Guide to Ally's PDF Quick Fixes

Remediating PDFs: It's Complicated

PDFs can be difficult to remediate, often requiring external tools and technical proficiency. Ally simplifies this with inline remediation that identifies and fixes 3 common issues: scanned PDFs, missing title, and missing a language set. Instructors remain fully in control by reviewing and approving every change. Instructors can still use the guidance in Instructor Feedback, but quick fixes offer a faster, more efficient path.

Quick tip: to streamline your time spent on PDF remediation, use the Course Accessibility Report to quickly pinpoint scanned PDFs and filter for missing titles or missing language settings—ideal starting points for applying the PDF quick fixes.

PDF Quick Fix #1: OCRing Scanned Documents

0%

This PDF is scanned

What this means

Scanned PDFs are images that assistive tools cannot read.

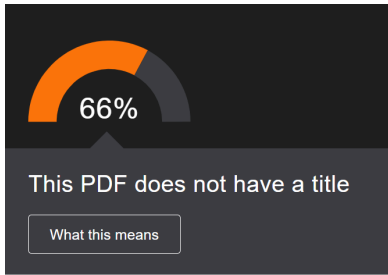
Applying OCR adds a hidden text layer, making the content accessible without changing its appearance.

Preview and Apply

Scanned PDFs are essentially images of text, which screen readers and other assistive technologies cannot interpret. Scanned documents must go through OCR (Optical Character Recognition) to convert images into machine readable text.

When using the OCR PDF quick fix, Ally adds a text layer to improve readability for students using assistive technology. The instructor must approve the preview before the fix is applied. OCRing a scanned document will raise your Ally score from 0 to 66%!

PDF Quick Fix #2: Missing Title



A PDF title helps screen readers announce the document. The title is not visible in the document.

Set PDF Title

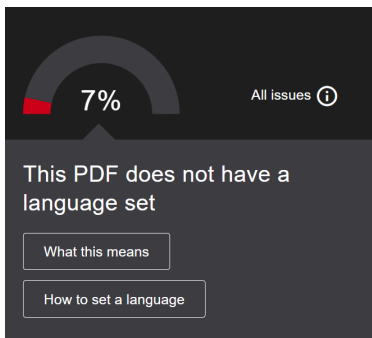
Apply fix to update the document.

Apply fix

A title is essential in a PDF because it's the first piece of information a screen reader announces, helping users understand what the document is before they begin reading. It also supports navigation and organization by clearly identifying the document in tabs, bookmarks, and assistive technology lists.

This fix contributes a 1% boost to the Ally score while significantly improving usability and providing screen reader users with essential context right away.

PDF Quick Fix #3: Missing Language Set



A PDF with a language set can be accurately interpreted by screen readers.

Add PDF Language

Important: This fix will add a language to the file and replace the current version.

Apply fix

A scanned PDF needs a defined document language so screen readers can correctly interpret and pronounce the recognized text. Without it, assistive technologies may misread content.

By helping screen readers deliver accurate and understandable output, this fix provides a significant accessibility benefit—and also adds 5% to the Ally score.

Resources & Support

Please refer to the following PDF Quick Fix resources as needed.

- [Quick Fixes, Big Impact: Accessibility Wins for your PDFs \(Blog Post\)](#)
- [PDF Assisted Remediation FAQ \(Blog Post\)](#)
- [PDF Quick Fixes \(Ally Support Article\)](#)