

10 steps to make your Canvas course accessible

Accessibility is important as it means all students will have equal access to course content. The following ten steps are small things you can do which make a big difference.

1. Plan for accessibility

Consider accessibility in the planning and creation phases of your course:

- when preparing and recording a video presentation, remind yourself to describe out loud any visual elements you are presenting or actions you are doing so that persons with a visual impairment are not missing out on vital information
- name your images and diagrams appropriately so you can use that information in your image descriptions
- use templates already configured for accessibility (such as PowerPoints) which will reduce the time needed to configure the file is accessible once you have added your content.

2. Structure your content on the page

Ensure the page title is unique

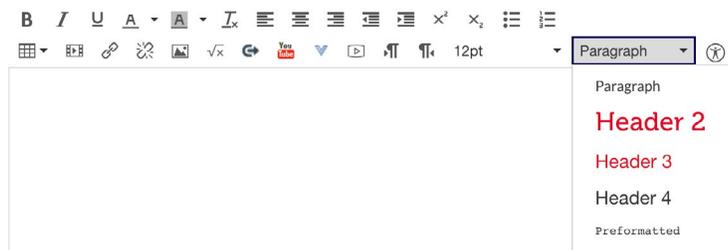
When naming pages ensure that the titles are short and accurately describe the content to follow in the page. For pages that are part of a multi-step process — include the step in the title.

Use a hierarchical structure

Make use of headings, paragraphs and bullet/numbered lists to organise information on the page. Hierarchy of information facilitates learning and guides the user through the content in a structured and meaningful way.

- Headings should show hierarchy — achieved through correct mark-up language (heading tags) where the tags descend in order of importance from H1 to H6 accordingly. Appropriately using html heading and paragraph tags makes it possible for accessibility screen readers to recognise and skim through content in logical order.
- Headings and important page content should not use colour as the only method of differentiation or hierarchy.
- Headings must accurately describe the content that follows it.
- Paragraphs should be left aligned (not justified). Try not to adjust the line height and default spacing configured in Canvas as this is the best set up for legibility.
- Do not use fonts that are difficult to read (it is best to use the default font supplied in Canvas).

You can find style tags (paragraph, h1, h2, h3 etc) in the Canvas rich content editor.



3. Use colour carefully

Colour should not be used as the only visual means of conveying information, such as indicating an action, prompting a response or distinguishing a visual element.

Colours and colour combinations must meet accessibility standards with appropriate level of contrast and hue in order for the user to be able to sufficiently read and discern differences in the information.

The visual presentation of text and images featuring text should have a contrast ratio of at least [4.5:1 using the WebAIM contrast tool](#).

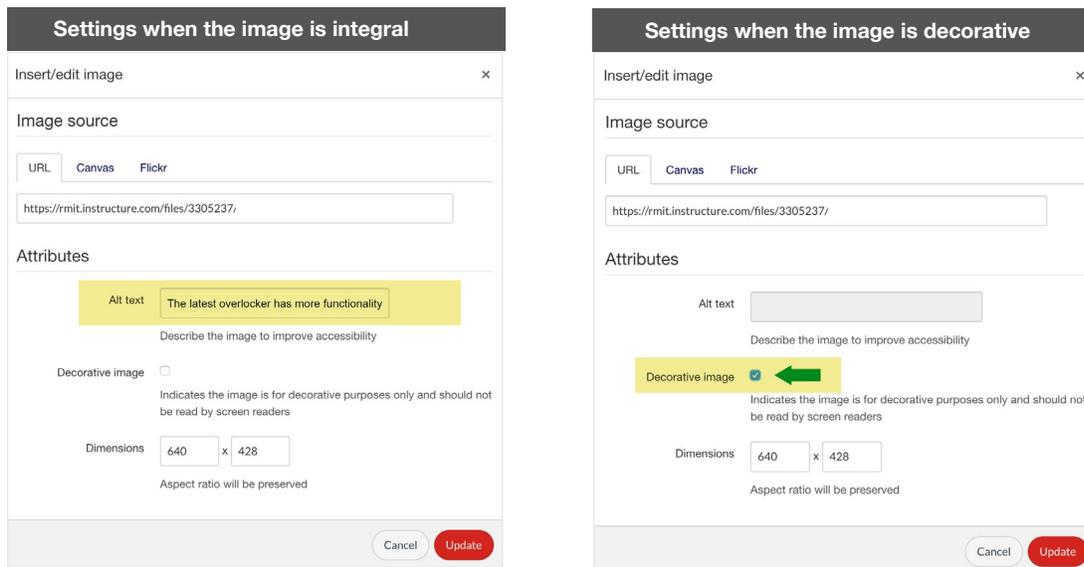
Do not use bright colours for text on a page. It is best to use default colours supplied in Canvas and the Heading tags found in the rich content editor.

4. Always provide alternative (alt) text to your images

Images of diagrams, graphs, charts, illustrations and maps that contain vital and complex information must contain a short caption underneath which describes the content, as well as a longer description in html alternative text html (alt text) to succinctly convey content and function of the image. If the description is too long or complex to fit in the alt text description box, then you will need to provide a descriptive text file (.txt).

Images that are decorative should be marked as decorative. A decorative image is an image that has no important content and consequently no impact on the user's understanding of the content or information on a page.

Image setting in Canvas. Select the image when editing your Canvas page, add your alternative text description. If the image is only decorative then ensure you tick the decorative image checkbox. Do not put in a description.



5. Build your tables via the Canvas Rich Content Editor

The purpose of data tables is to present tabular information in a grid, or matrix, and to have column or rows that show the meaning of the information in the grid (source: <https://webaim.org/techniques/tables/data>).

When creating tables in Canvas it is important to use the Canvas Rich Content Editor as it creates the correct html markup for users of screen readers so that they will hear the column and row headers spoken to them. If tables are not created correctly it can cause confusion with screen readers and/or accessibility tools.

Text content within each table cell should preferably be left aligned.

6. Make your links meaningful

When linking to another page, another section on a page or external resource, ensure your buttons and hyperlinks accurately convey the purpose and/or content of the button/link. Never use ambiguous words or phrases such as 'click here', 'read more', or 'this'.

It is important that your links look and behave consistently throughout the entirety of the Canvas course (the button/hyperlink must remain consistent in appearance, so users can recognise the purpose of that interaction — i.e. use same colours, shape, text size and roll-over behaviours).

If linking to a file make the user aware of the file type and size.

For example: [Timetable template \(Word, 195 KB\)](#)

7. Add captions to your videos

For time-based media (video, audio, animation) you should provide captions as a text alternative to the video and audio presented (for hearing impaired, students from non-English speaking backgrounds, and students with learning difficulties). You should provide a transcript of the words spoken for students with a hearing impairment to read, including audio descriptions of all essential actions and content presented in the media file that is integral to the understanding of the material.

Canvas Studio has captions functionality. Once you upload your video or audio file you can select it, and request captioning. This will take a short while (under 2hrs) to be completed. You should review the returned captions, edit any errors and then publish the captions.

8. Use simple language

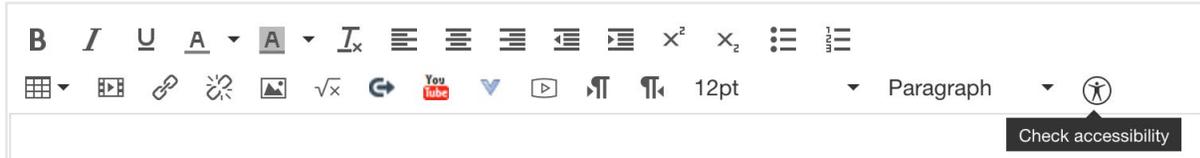
The use of language, words and phrases will reflect the particular discipline / industry you teach in. However, where possible, it is important to keep language as clear and simple as possible.

When writing content:

- use short, clear sentences and paragraphs
- avoid using complex words and phrases
- use list formatting when appropriate (bullets or numbered)
- it is useful to provide a glossary for terms readers may not know
- consider using images, illustrations, video, audio, and symbols to help clarify meaning
- expand acronyms to full meaning on first use with the acronym in brackets, then other occurrences in the text can be just the acronym on its own.

9. Use the inbuilt Canvas accessibility checkers

Canvas has an accessibility checker which you can use on your pages in order to check for accessibility of images and other content. This accessibility checker appears in your rich content editor when editing your page.



RMIT also has implemented [Ally](#) within Canvas — an accessibility tool — which will check certain elements in your course for accessibility and give you a rating, an explanation and suggested changes/updates for rectification. You will see a rating symbol next to a particular element that needs fixing or addressing.



10. Make additional files accessible

If you are embedding or linking to other file types (PowerPoint, Word, PDF etc) it is important that these files are also configured for accessibility — particularly if they contain vital course information and are the only source of that information. The following links offer information on making your files more accessible.

PowerPoints

[RMIT Teaching and supporting student guide on accessibility](#)

[Using PowerPoint themes guide \(PDF 6p, 450KB\)](#)

[Creating accessible PowerPoints \(PDF, 6p, 411KB\)](#)

[Learning and teaching hub resource videos](#)

Word documents

There are some steps you can take to make your Word documents more user/accessibility friendly.

[WebAIM guide to creating accessible Word documents](#)

[Microsoft guide to accessibility and Word documents](#)

[University of Washington guide to accessible Word documents](#)

PDFs

[Learning and teaching hub resources on accessibility and tagged PDFs](#)

[WCAG guide to accessible PDFs](#)