Basic Accessible Design Principles

Here are some key principles of accessible design. You can implement most of these very easily, and without impacting the overall "look and feel" of your web pages. Most will improve your website's usability for ***all*** users.

Provide appropriate alternative text

Alternative text provides a textual alternative to graphics in web pages. It is especially helpful for people who are blind and rely on a screen reader. (Right Click on a graphic and provide a description of the graphic in the Alt Text box.)

Provide easy to follow Word Documents

Use the built-in heading styles to help screen readers maneuver documents. By using Word's *styles* function you can ensure that each heading will be consistent and will maintain consistent structure.

Provide headings for data tables

Tables should have appropriate table headers. Data cells should be associated with their appropriate headers, making it easier for screen reader users to navigate and understand the data table. Students using screen readers hear the contents of the table read cell by cell and need to visualize the table. Try to keep tables on the smaller side when possible.

Ensure links make sense out of context

Every link should make sense if the link text is read by itself. Screen reader users may choose to read only the links on a web page. Certain phrases like "click here" and "more" must be avoided since there is no indication what the link content will be.

Caption video, provide transcripts for audio

Videos and live audio need synchronized captions (or transcription). All audio – whether as part of video, live or archived – should also have some type of text transcript.

Make file downloads (e.g., PDFs) accessible

Ensure accessibility of non-HTML content, including PDF files, Microsoft Word documents, Excel spreadsheets, and PowerPoint presentations. Usually you can do this in the files themselves, though sometimes it might be easier to use HTML instead of these file types.

Accessible PowerPoint files

Structure presentations thoughtfully, make use of clean typeface and use adequate font size. Avoid using text boxes and be sure to add "alt text " labels to graphics. Avoid animations, slide transitions and automatic timing for web posted

PowerPoint files. Provide a transcript of any narration for those who might have audio issues.

Do not rely on color alone to convey meaning

The use of color can enhance comprehension, but do not use color alone to convey information. That information may not be available to a person who is colorblind and will be unavailable to screen reader users (red and green provide the most difficulty.) If color is used provide another way to access the information such as lists which can also explain the colors.

Distributing Accessible Documents

Saving office documents with "Save As" PDF allows documents to be read by screen readers. You can find more info on accessible PDF documents in Acrobat www.adobe.com/accessibility/index.html and at www.karlencommuniations.com/AccessiblePDF.html

When scanning a hard-copy document to be shared in a class, use the optical character recognition (OCR) function so that the scanned document can be read by a screen reader, otherwise it will just appear as a blank graphic with the screen reader.

Science, Technology, Math Accessibility

To create online math content that is accessible you should:

1) install MathType,
2) publish the document as MathML (with file extension of .xhtml or .xht),
3) upload the file to the web or LMS.

Tactile graphics with significant visual impairments cannot be accessible online and students will need a hard copy (student disability services can help here.)

Sources:

Coombs, Norman. Making Online Teaching Accessible. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass: John Wiley, 2010)

http://webaim.org/intro/