

Create an accessible Canvas course

Glenis Wong-Toi and Paula Baty are Learning Disabilities Advisers at Student Learning Services, Libraries and Learning Services. Alongside Jackie Ede, they provide academic development to students with impairments, both visible and invisible. They offer six guidelines for creating accessible Canvas courses that if followed will benefit all students enrolled in a course.

1. Ensure information is clear, accurate and complete

Enhance productivity, reduce frustration and minimise confusion.

- Double-check all critical course information (such as hand-in dates and times), especially when it appears in multiple places.
- Provide clear assignment expectations – a brief summary, direct instructions and relevant grading criteria are especially helpful. Be sure to direct students towards any attachments that relate to the assignment.
- Use simple and concise language throughout.

2. Provide all information in a timely manner

Students with impairments, such as those with dyslexia, may need more time to process information and complete readings and/or written tasks. They can also have note-taking difficulties.

- Make slides available well in advance of lectures to allow plenty of time for students to print these and prepare. Lecture slides provide an essential framework and reduce the demands of writing and/or copying while listening.
- Make lecture recordings available as soon as possible after class (and definitely before the next).
- Upload coursework grades as soon as possible. These provide valuable feedback by helping students to gauge how they are doing and identify areas for development sooner rather than later.
- Provide reading lists from the outset and where possible provide prioritised reading lists so students can focus on the most critical readings.

3. Make content accessible with design, formatting and description

Layout and design

- Keep pages as simple, clean and uncluttered as possible and make navigation clear and consistent from page to page.
- Consider the number of clicks required to locate information or files. Key course information (such as course co-ordinator name, contact details and office hours, learning outcomes and assessment requirements) should be upfront rather than embedded within several layers.
- Provide links to printable copies.

Formatting

- Use descriptive words to name files and section headings (e.g., *Introduction and Course Overview of Lecture 1*). This makes them more meaningful and helps students to differentiate between files.
- Be consistent within courses and as much as possible across courses. Students find it hard to locate information when different aspects of the course are arranged differently or file names do not follow the same format.
- Chunk content topics together and use short paragraphs to allow students to scan for key points more easily.
- Use bold and italics to help students to see contrast in text and distinguish important content.
- Use text and background colour combinations that have sufficient colour contrast.

Images and non-text elements

- Provide alternative (alt) text description when embedding images, animation, audio files and so on. Alt text allows screen readers (such as read aloud or text-to speech programs) to access non-text content.

PowerPoints

- When creating lecture slides in PowerPoint, use the automated checker to check for accessibility. In PPT, select File > Info > Check for Issues > Check Accessibility.

Transcription

- If available, include a text transcription with video uploads.



4. Use Canvas Calendar comprehensively

Ensure Calendar entries are up-to-date and highlight key assessment and submission dates. Include important details such as topics or lectures covered, format and course weighting for tests; links to grading rubrics, format guidelines and Turnitin for assignments.

5. Keep the communication lines open

Tell students in lectures how or where to find files and ask for feedback about any difficulties. On your course information page include a statement such as:

If you are having difficulty accessing any of the online materials for this course, please notify [link to course co-ordinator] immediately.

6. Include a disability statement

Invite students to let you know if they have any specific learning needs. Your course information page should include a statement such as:

If you require academic accommodations based on the impact of a disability or impairment, please contact [link to course co-ordinator] at the beginning of the course to discuss your specific needs.

Guides

On Canvas Community:

- [General Accessibility Design Guidelines](#)

Contact Student Disability Services

Students with a documented disability or impairment are encouraged to register with Student Disability Services.

Student Disability Services are located in the Basement of the ClockTower.

Phone: +64 9 923 2936

Email: disabilities@auckland.ac.nz