



# Structure, content and style

Common-sense approaches for inclusive Canvas course design

## Why inclusive design?

**The University of Auckland is committed to being a safe, inclusive and equitable place to study and work.**

Inclusive course design is an equity area that you can play a role in and make a positive difference for our diverse community of students.

## About these approaches

The approaches outlined here draw on [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\) 2.0](#) and the work of the University of Auckland learning design community. In particular, the course structure approaches draw on the work of Nabeel Albashiry, Professional Teaching Fellow from ILT (Business School), with some modification.

## Learning design support

For help with the approaches outlined here, visit:  
[Learning design support at the University of Auckland](#)

## **Structure.** Establish a clear, concise and consistent course structure with systematic use of Canvas course components

### **Course navigation.** Conform to user expectations by using the Canvas left-hand course navigation menu

- The standard Canvas left navigation menu (the course navigation menu) is the primary navigation for the course. That is, the primary navigation is not an embedded menu, such as one created in Course Builder.
- Links in the course navigation menu are visible or hidden from student view as appropriate. For example, if the home page is set to the syllabus, the syllabus link (a repetition) is hidden.
- Course component labelling is descriptive and consistent. For example, files may be labelled by week/topic/resource type: "Week 1: Introduction to [...]: Lecture slides".

### **Modules.** Provide linear direction through the course with clearly labelled and sorted modules and module items

- Course content is divided into consistent modules with each module containing consistent module items: module overview/introduction, module contents (for example, slides, recordings and files) and a link to the Talis reading list for that particular module.
- Module labelling is descriptive and consistent, for example, by week/topic: "Week 1 (25/7): Introduction to [...]".
- Canvas pages are preferentially used to present course content under each module, with content created in the Canvas text editor.

### **Syllabus/Home page.** Offer a sense of purpose and paths to frequently viewed information with the syllabus as home page

- A syllabus, set as the course home page, provides course information as required by the University of Auckland. Presented concisely, this includes the course prescription and teaching staff contact details and hours. The automatically generated list of assignments and calendar is present.
- A brief course introduction (text or video) is present either on the home page or in an introductory module.

**Content.** Develop clear, concise and consistent course content with established communication conventions

**Language.** Support understanding with plain, concrete and descriptive language

- Plain language is used. For example, complex concepts are explained with concise and concrete descriptions.
- Headings and links are descriptive, making section contents and link destinations clear.
- A concise glossary of key terms is present.

**Editing.** Aid efficiency with chunked content

- Content is broken into distinct sections with headings and short paragraphs (chunked), with bullet lists as appropriate.
- Page summaries and module overviews are present and consistently presented.
- Information is presented at the relevant time and in the relevant place. For example, information specific to an assignment is presented within the assignment.

**Formats.** Offer choice by presenting information multiple ways

- Standard Canvas components are used to present information in multiple ways. For example, assignments are published at the start of semester with correct deadlines, meaning that they will automatically appear in assignments, the calendar and the syllabus.
- Content is provided in multiple formats. For example:
  - *Images:* Brief but descriptive alt text<sup>1</sup> is present for all images. Information conveyed in figures such as maps, diagrams and graphs is also presented in text or as tabular data.
  - *Video:* Videos are captioned and full text alternatives, including captions and audio description, are present.

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<sup>1</sup> On web pages, images have what's called an alt text attribute, which allows for concise descriptions. Unlike images, alt text is machine-readable, notably by search engines and screen readers. Canvas invites you add alt text to your images when uploading/editing, in the attributes section. Microsoft Word and other authoring programs also allow the addition of alt text for images.

**Style.** Maintain a clear, concise and consistent page style with established design conventions

**Layout.** Aid efficiency with simple and consistent page layouts

- Page layouts are easy to scan visually. That is, the page is easily scanned left to right, top to bottom. The most important information is at the top and on the left margin. For example, it is a left-aligned single-column layout with chunked content.
- Page layouts are consistent. For example, there is one layout for all module introduction pages and another layout for all module content pages.
- In-text links are presented below the relevant paragraph or as a grouped list of links.

**Typography.** Ensure accessibility through the consistent use of the default Canvas text editor styles, including heading styles

- The default typographic styles – font family, size and colour – are maintained. If they have been altered, the changes have a clear purpose and maintain a high level of legibility. For help with sufficient colour contrast, see the Paciello Group's [Colour Contrast Analyser](#).
- Canvas heading styles are used, meaning that the headings are coded correctly and are therefore machine-readable as headings.
- Images of text are avoided. That is, text is not presented as a jpeg or other image file.

**Files.** Measure inclusiveness with inbuilt accessibility checkers and save time with styles

- Microsoft Office:* In Microsoft Word/PowerPoint/Excel the inbuilt [Microsoft Accessibility Checker](#) does not present errors.
- Microsoft Office:* In Microsoft Word documents, [Styles](#)<sup>2</sup> are used.
- Adobe Acrobat Pro (PDFs):* The Adobe Acrobat Pro [Accessibility: Full Check](#) feature does not present errors. Alternatively, before converting to PDF from Microsoft Office, the Microsoft Accessibility Checker, as above, does not present errors.

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<sup>2</sup> Styles are more efficient to apply and maintain than manual styling. Heading styles are important for accessibility and their absence will be picked up by the Accessibility Checker.