A1.6

Designing Inclusive Blended and Online Learning Environments

Inclusion at the University of Worcester

University of Worcester

This document is part of a series of support materials that form the University of Worcester's Inclusive Toolkit and focuses on the inclusive, digital accessibility elements of providing an inclusive blended and online learning environment.

What?

Agree with course team colleagues how you are going to structure your course and module Blackboard sites.

How?

Agree a site structure that everyone will adhere to. All Blackboard courses come with an agreed template but there is flexibility to change that.

Agree across all the modules where key documentation will be found, and if there are any agreed overall commitments to using particular learning technologies, i.e. PebblePad.

https://uwtel.co.uk/designing-accessible-courses/

The VLE base lines standards outline which documents all students can expect to find on all their BB modules.

https://lttu.uk/TEL/BaselineStandards/

Why?

Students value consistency and for students with a range of learning needs having to relearn different Blackboard layouts between modules can put cognitive load and stress on students when trying to navigate different layouts challenging.

By having a clear consistent layout across all the modules in a course, students benefit from knowing where to find key documents and information. It also reduces workload for staff by reducing the number of enquiries regarding key information.

What?

Make sure your site is clearly laid out in a logical fashion for screen readers

How?

Using the BlackBoard template ensures that students can navigate the learning materials and assessments in a logical fashion.

Make sure that any additional links in the left-hand menu are self-explanatory and unambiguous.

Content Folders should be self-explanatory i.e. Week 1 – Introduction to Cakes, Week 2 – Key Principles of Baking as opposed to Week1, Week 2

You can test how easy it is for a student to navigate using Student Preview.

More information about Blackboard for Visually Impaired Users can be found:

https://help.blackboard.com/Learn/ Administrator/Hosting/Accessibility/ Accessibility_Features#using-blackboard- learn-with-a-visual-impairment_OTP-2

Why?

Ensuring the menu items are logically laid out and are self-explanatory helps visual impaired students navigate the module more easily. Clearly differentiated menu names help direct all students to the right place more effectively where they can find the relevant module content and activities.

Ensure images have Alt-text added

The description needs to explain what is behind the link and not be the actual URL.

More information on adding weblinks in Blackboard can be found on the TEL Unit website:

https://lttu.uk/support/Blackboard/ Manual/add-weblinks.html

Visually impaired students need the alternative text field completed to understand what the image shows.

What?

How?

Why?

Make sure that web links are descriptive and open within a new tab or window

The description needs to explain what is behind the link and not be the actual URL.

More information on adding weblinks in Blackboard can be found on the TEL Unit website:

https://lttu.uk/support/Blackboard/Manual/add-weblinks.html

Visually impaired students can understand the context of the link better.

Opening the external link in a separate window allows the user to be able to continue to navigate the course content.

Ensure web content uses consistently formatted text and is available at least 48 hours in advance.

Use appropriate styles for formatting web content. Use BB text editor Heading Styles to help navigation and use a legible sans serif font, e.g. Arial to make text clear.

See Disability and Dyslexia support style guide on creating content for dyslexic students:

https://www2.worc.ac.uk/disabilityanddyslexia/content_images/BDA_Dyslexia_Style_Guide.pdf

Heading styles help visual impaired students navigate web content on your site.

Clear evenly spaced fonts reduce the visual stress for dyslexic students and make content easier to read for everyone.

Check use of colour and colour contrast

You need to check the contrast ratio of your text against the background. It should be at 4.5:1 and that any information where you use colour is not dependant on colour alone.

See TEL unit guidance on using colour in Blackboard:

https://uwtel.co.uk/designing-accessible-courses/colour/

Colour should not be the only ways of used to convey meaning. Students with colour blindness and other sight conditions cannot distinguish meaning. Dyslexic students can read more easily where there is a suitable contrast between the text colour and the background.

What?

Ensure that all your learning materials included in your Blackboard course are themselves accessible and made available at least 48 hours in advance.

How?

All learning materials need to be accessible, including PowerPoints, word documents, PDFs and any multimedia content.

Microsoft provide an accessibility checker tool within PowerPoint, Word and Excel to help you identify how to make your learning materials more accessible. The TEL Unit have more information on the accessibility checker: https:// uwtel.co.uk/designing-accessible- courses/accessible-documents/

Video content will need captions. There are several ways to do this and the TEL Unit have more details here:

https://uwtel.co.uk/designing-accessible- courses/using-video-captions/.

Why?

All learning materials being made available to students need to be as accessible as possible in order that students with a range of learning needs can make best use of them.

With thanks to Dr Jacqueline Houghton and Jenny Brady of the University of Leeds, and Dr Wendy Miller and Priska Schoenborn of Plymouth University, for allowing us to use and adapt their series of guides: **https://inclusiveteaching.leeds.ac.uk/; https://www. plymouth.ac.uk/your- university/teaching-and-learning/inclusivity.**

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