

Using PowerPoint

Do you use PowerPoint slides in your lectures for students?

All students benefit from an organized, clear, concise and well laid-out PowerPoint presentation. These tips will help you make your presentations accessible to students with a wide range of learning styles, thereby limiting the need for specialized accommodations.

What makes a PowerPoint presentation accessible?

An accessible PowerPoint presentation is one that can be followed and understood by any student. Additionally, it can be easily read by a screen reader, has effective alternative text (Alt Text), and contains captioning or transcripts for any embedded audio or video.

Some students use assistive technology to adapt information into a usable format for their learning needs. Some examples of assistive technology are:

Screen readers: These read aloud information on a computer screen, such as written text, or the description of an image provided through alternative text or Alt Text.

Screen enhancement software: This allows users to magnify the computer screen or change the contrast to make the content easier to see.

Mac users should be aware that many versions of PowerPoint for Mac have serious accessibility limitations. For example, you cannot assign Alt Text to images or export the presentation as an accessible PDF file in the versions until and including 2008. Similarly, Apple's Keynote presentation software is not

recommended if you need to create an accessible presentation.

General tips

- Ensure that the type is large enough to read easily. If your presentation will be viewed via projector, the type should be larger than on printed handouts; 30-point type is recommended.
- Make sure there is a high contrast between the background and the text. If your presentation will be viewed via projector, the contrast often needs to be more pronounced than on printed material.
- If you use colours, use ones that are highly contrasting.
- Make sure the content can be interpreted in grey-scale, in case someone prints it in black and white.
- Use the slide layout templates provided by PowerPoint. They have been designed to be accessible.
- Use titles on each slide, so the flow of the presentation is easy to navigate.

- Use simple slide transitions or avoid animation-like effects altogether. Complex transitions, such as checkerboards, can be distracting during presentations; they may also cause problems with screen readers or other assistive technologies if someone views the presentation electronically.
- Use simple language.
- Don't overcrowd slides with text. Three to seven bullet points per slide is a good rule of thumb.
- If you embed video, make sure it is captioned and that the player controls — start, pause, stop — are accessible.
- If you embed audio, make sure a transcript is available.
- If your slides contain animations, make sure they are brief and do not distract from the most important content on the page.
- Use hyperlinks, and insert a descriptive title for the link rather than a long web address (see resource below).
- Use Alt Text to explain pictures, images, graphics, graphs, tables and flowcharts, so that a screen reader can access them.
- Use the notes pane to insert your lecture notes.
- Make the slides available electronically to your students on a learning management system, such as Moodle, Blackboard, WebCT,

Desire 2 Learn, Sakai or, on the course website or by e-mail.

Not everyone will have the software required to view PowerPoint presentations on their computer, so it is best to convert your file to an accessible PDF before sharing via email. (See "Using Word documents and/or PDFs".)

What is alternative text?

Alternative text describes an image so that the user's assistive technology may convey what information is being provided. It appears when you move your cursor over a picture or object. In situations where the reader cannot see the image, Alt Text ensures that no information is lost. For lecture presentations to be accessible, Alt Text must be assigned to all photos, images, multimedia, graphs, charts, text boxes, ClipArt, SmartArt, AutoShapes, etc.

Effective Alt Text:

- Communicates the purpose of the image accurately and succinctly.
- Contains a short description of the image that is important to the user's understanding of the information conveyed and a longer description for complex and detailed diagrams and images.
- Does **not** repeat the text of an adjacent caption. Screen readers read both the caption and the Alt Text, so avoid having the same details in both.
- Does **not** contain the words "Image of" at the start of the Alt Text. Screen readers tell the user that there is an image and then read the Alt Text.

- Does indicate "Screen shot of..." if it is an image taken from a computer screen.
- Does indicate "Photo of..." if it is a photo.
- Requires no text if an image is purely decorative. Simply provide two quotation marks (" ") as the Alt Text.
- Uses punctuation for full sentences.

The method for adding Alt Text varies from version to version of PowerPoint, but typically you will start by right-clicking on the image and then making a selection from the menu that appears (for instance, "**Format Picture**" or "**Size and Position**"). Earlier versions of PowerPoint for Mac don't have an option for adding Alt Text to images. Consult your software manual for detailed instructions.

More resources:

The [WebAIM](#) (Web Accessibility in Mind) site offers detailed information on how to create accessible PowerPoint presentations and [effective use of fonts](#). We used the article [PowerPoint Accessibility](#) to compile the "General tips" section of this document.

The Teaching Commons at California State University has [guidelines as well as a series of videos](#) on creating accessible PowerPoint presentations. These explain how to add Alt Text and hyperlinks, use the notes pane, and how to format tables and charts.

The [Accessible Digital Office Documents project](#) (ADOD), part of the Inclusive Design Research Centre at OCADU, has a number of resources, including step-by-step instructions for Microsoft Office programs such as Word, Excel and PowerPoint. This resource includes information on adding hyperlinks, Alt Text and using other accessibility features.

Microsoft has an online guide, [Creating accessible PowerPoint presentations](#).

To obtain this document in an alternative format, please contact:

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