# Why Digital Accessibility?

## Why is digital accessibility important?

MSU has a proud tradition of accessibility dating back to May Shaw (wife of President Robert Shaw) who founded the Tower Guard in 1934 to help meet the needs of blind and low vision students. Our goal is to create and support a campus culture and environment that is accessible, both physically and virtually, to all students, staff, faculty, and visitors with disabilities. MSU’s [Digital Accessibility Policy](https://webaccess.msu.edu/policy) predated the recently released federal digital accessibility regulations by 15 years.

## Why should we proactively maintain accessible digital materials?

In 2024, the Department of Justice published [a new rule](https://www.ada.gov/resources/2024-03-08-web-rule/) updating Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act and clarifying that digital materials must be accessible. The Department originally proposed an exemption to this rule for all digital course materials which would have allowed them to be made accessible within five days of a request. The exception was removed from the final rule after the Department received feedback that the exception would unfairly burden those with disabilities, requiring them to advocate for basic accessibility requirements. The Department also noted that maintaining course materials in accessible formats was easier than fixing them on short notice.

Digital materials that are accessible from the start provide a better experience for everyone and minimize barriers to access that would disadvantage people with permanent and temporary disabilities, and those who choose not to disclose their disability. Maintaining digital materials in accessible formats helps provide a minimum baseline of accessibility and makes digital materials more usable for everyone.

## What are we asking MSU employees to do?

1. Familiarize themselves with the [MSU Digital Accessibility Policy](https://webaccess.msu.edu/policy)
2. Read the [Basic Accessibility Checklist](https://webaccess.msu.edu/tutorials/basics/checklist) and any [tutorials on creating accessible content](https://webaccess.msu.edu/tutorials) for software platforms they frequently use. This will help them create materials that are accessible from the start, improving usability and reducing the need to fix accessibility issues later.
3. Utilize the digital accessibility checkers in Word, PowerPoint, and Acrobat, and the [Spartan Ally tools in D2L](https://webaccess.msu.edu/tools/Spartan_Ally) to help identify any additional accessibility issues.
4. Implement necessary changes for Accommodation Letters and Statement of Employee Accommodation Determination (SEAD).
5. Take prompt action to remediate any additional accessibility issues identified by our audiences. Employees can reach out to their unit’s [Digital Accessibility Liaisons](https://webaccess.msu.edu/liaisons) for assistance.

## What tips and tricks can make this easier?

1. Although removal of materials may not be required, it can be helpful to delete files from websites and courses that are no longer in use. This can improve digital accessibility metrics.
2. Avoid the need to remediate inaccessible PDFs by replacing scanned books and journals with digital library resources. Visit the MSU Libraries website to [create stable links to digital materials](https://libguides.lib.msu.edu/stablelinks) or work with your unit librarian to identify accessible digital resources.
3. [Use native file formats](https://webaccess.msu.edu/tutorials/basics/file-type) (such as Word or PowerPoint) where possible and/or convert files to HTML web pages to improve accessibility, rather than converting digital files to PDF.
4. When creating a video, try to [communicate all visual content in the audio track](https://webaccess.msu.edu/tutorials/video) rather than only showing information visually. This will reduce the need to create additional assistive audio description tracks.
5. Videos saved to MediaSpace and YouTube receive automatic machine captioning. To improve the accuracy of these captions and minimize the amount of time needed for correcting errors:
	1. Use a high/higher quality microphone.
	2. Speak slowly and clearly into the microphone.
	3. Minimize background noise.

## What digital accessibility resources are available at MSU?

* The [Digital Accessibility website](https://webaccess.msu.edu/) provides tutorials, training, and guidance to help promote accessibility and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) at MSU.
* [Digital Accessibility Liaisons](https://webaccess.msu.edu/liaisons) provide college and unit level support for accessibility.
* [The MSU IT Educational Technology Department offers consultations](https://tdx.msu.edu/TDClient/32/Portal/Requests/TicketRequests/NewForm?ID=7VJLS1-ZDF8_&RequestorType=ServiceOffering) and other options for assistance to anyone creating educational materials and can assist with digital accessibility.
* The [Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities (RCPD)](https://www.rcpd.msu.edu/) provides support for disabled students and assistance to instructors as they work to meet the requirements of accommodation letters.
* Employee and Labor Relations provides support to disabled employees and supervisors implementing a Statement of Employee Accommodation Determination (SEAD).