UNIVERSITY OF MONTEVALLO

ACCESSIBILITY HANDBOOK

ACCESSIBILITY APPLICATION

It's important to design course content with accessibility in mind so that all students will be able to access course content and be able to receive an equivalent education. It's best to think about ways to provide accessible content before you are in a situation where they are required. The goal is to develop courses that can meet the needs of all students and follow the university policy to provide accommodations for students with disabilities

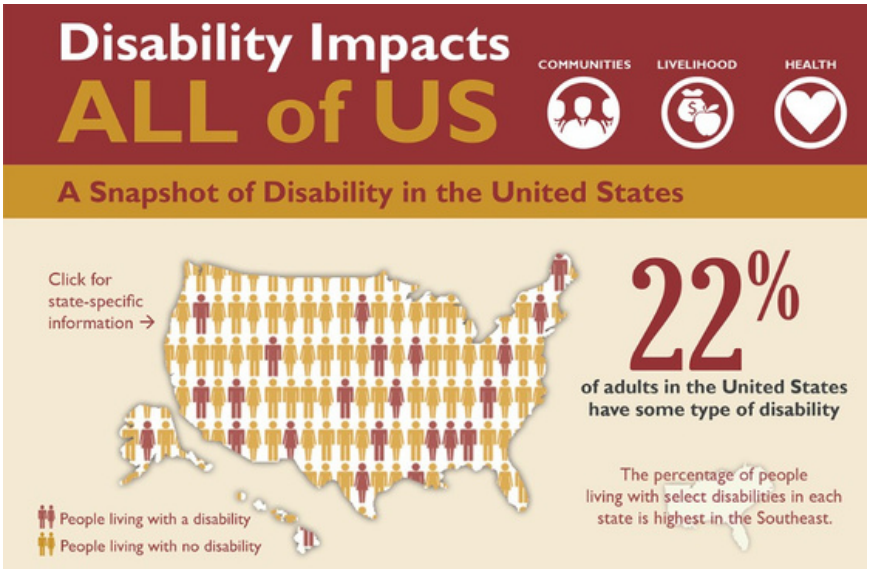
This handbook provides guidelines on how to ensure that the materials you design are ADA compliant, but these are not official UM policies.

BEST PRACTICES

Be aware that you may need to adjust assignments if you use a particularly visual or interactive tool. To prepare for this situation:

- Keep scripts of any lectures or recordings as you go.
- Make sure all text in your documents is selectable.
- Provide text instructions/descriptions to accompany any visuals.
- You may need to consider offering an alternate assignment that measures the same objectives but does not require the use of the particular visual or interactive tool.

Here is an example where these best practices were followed as materials were developed. In their infographic "Disability Impacts All of Us", the Center for Disease Control and Prevention has included a text version at the bottom of the page that includes the same information that is included in the infographic.



Description

Title: Disability Impacts all of us
•Communities
•Livelihood
•Health

A snapshot of disability in the United States.
•22 percent of adults in the United States have some type of disability. Graphic of the United States.
•The percentage of people living with select disabilities in each state is highest in the Southeast.

BEST PRACTICES

Always include the big three in your documents:

- Color contrast – Select text colors and background colors so that one does not blend in with the other. In general, use a dark text color on a light background, or a light text color on a dark background.
- Alternate text – Provide alternate text for any photos, charts, or graphs in your assignment instructions, lecture presentations, or course pages. Alternate text (often called alt text) is the text read aloud by screen reader programs that are used by students with vision impairments. Alt text is simple to add in Microsoft Word, PowerPoint, or within a learning management system (LMS). Instructions and links are provided in the Images section of this handbook.
- Headings – Use headings (like H1, H2, H3) in documents and lectures to designate different sections of content as you would if you were writing an article. Screen-reading programs are built to share this information with the student. Do not use headings simply as a way to highlight important words. If you want to highlight definitions or vocab, you can boldface or italicize these, and then provide a glossary at the end of the lecture or page.

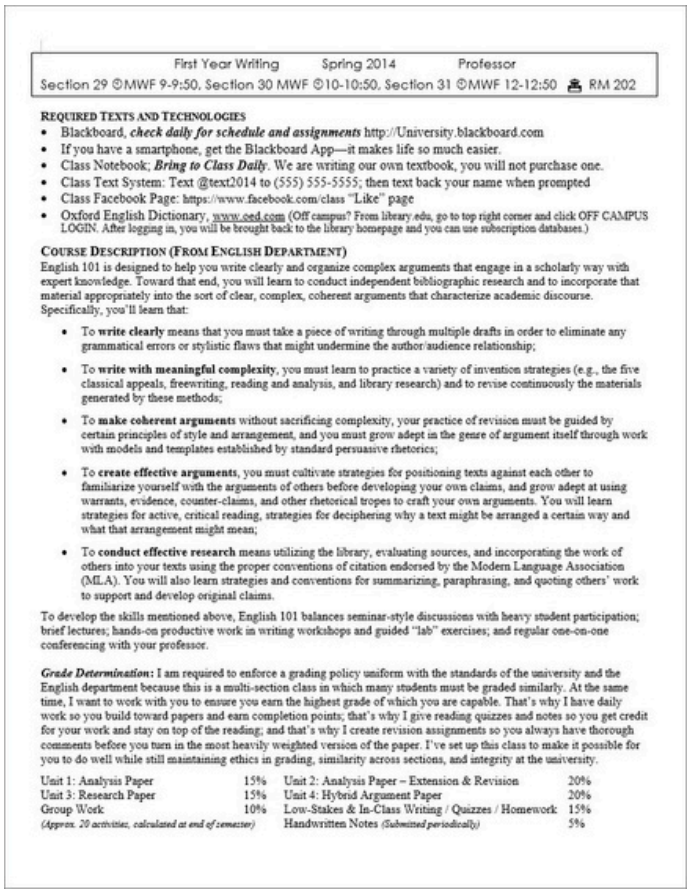
IMAGES

Ideas for Using Images

When students skim a document, images can quickly convey information and increase students' understanding of standard components of the syllabus. Here are some ideas for adding images to your syllabus:

- Use a visual representation of the grade distribution list like a pie chart
- Use images of key authors, required textbooks, or course management system logos such as Canvas or Blackboard.
- Use images to depict main concepts for class alongside a course description.
- Use word clouds for lists of key terms, generated by websites such as wordle.

The following before and after images illustrate one instructor's move from a traditional text based syllabus to a more accessible image driven syllabus.



First Year Writing Spring 2014 Professor
Section 29 ©MWF 9-9:50, Section 30 MWF ©10-10:50, Section 31 ©MWF 12-12:50 RM 202

REQUIRED TEXTS AND TECHNOLOGIES

- Blackboard, ***check daily for schedule and assignments*** http://University.blackboard.com
- If you have a smartphone, get the Blackboard App—it makes life so much easier.
- Class Notebook; ***Bring to Class Daily***. We are writing our own textbook, you will not purchase one.
- Class Text System: Text @text2014 to (555) 555-5555; then text back your name when prompted
- Class Facebook Page: https://www.facebook.com/class "Like" page
- Oxford English Dictionary, www.oed.com (Off campus? From library.edu, go to top right corner and click OFF CAMPUS LOGIN. After logging in, you will be brought back to the library homepage and you can use subscription databases.)

COURSE DESCRIPTION (FROM ENGLISH DEPARTMENT)

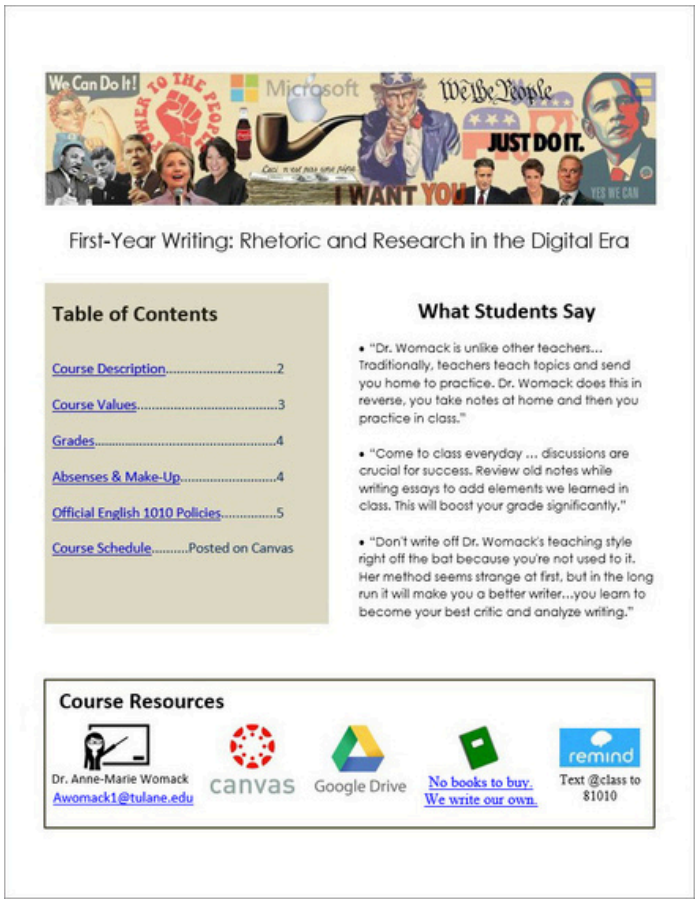
English 101 is designed to help you write clearly and organize complex arguments that engage in a scholarly way with expert knowledge. Toward that end, you will learn to conduct independent bibliographic research and to incorporate that material appropriately into the sort of clear, complex, coherent arguments that characterize academic discourse. Specifically, you'll learn that:

- To **write clearly** means that you must take a piece of writing through multiple drafts in order to eliminate any grammatical errors or stylistic flaws that might undermine the author/audience relationship;
- To **write with meaningful complexity**, you must learn to practice a variety of invention strategies (e.g., the five classical appeals, freewriting, reading and analysis, and library research) and to revise continuously the materials generated by these methods;
- To **make coherent arguments** without sacrificing complexity, your practice of revision must be guided by certain principles of style and arrangement, and you must grow adept in the genre of argument itself through work with models and templates established by standard persuasive rhetorics;
- To **create effective arguments**, you must cultivate strategies for positioning texts against each other to familiarize yourself with the arguments of others before developing your own claims, and grow adept at using warrants, evidence, counter-claims, and other rhetorical tropes to craft your own arguments. You will learn strategies for active, critical reading, strategies for deciphering why a text might be arranged a certain way and what that arrangement might mean;
- To **conduct effective research** means utilizing the library, evaluating sources, and incorporating the work of others into your texts using the proper conventions of citation endorsed by the Modern Language Association (MLA). You will also learn strategies and conventions for summarizing, paraphrasing, and quoting others' work to support and develop original claims.

To develop the skills mentioned above, English 101 balances seminar-style discussions with heavy student participation; brief lectures; hands-on productive work in writing workshops and guided "lab" exercises; and regular one-on-one conferencing with your professor.

Grade Determination: I am required to enforce a grading policy uniform with the standards of the university and the English department because this is a multi-section class in which many students must be graded similarly. At the same time, I want to work with you to ensure you earn the highest grade of which you are capable. That's why I have daily work so you build toward papers and earn completion points; that's why I give reading quizzes and notes so you get credit for your work and stay on top of the reading; and that's why I create revision assignments so you always have thorough comments before you turn in the most heavily weighted version of the paper. I've set up this class to make it possible for you to do well while still maintaining ethics in grading, similarity across sections, and integrity at the university.

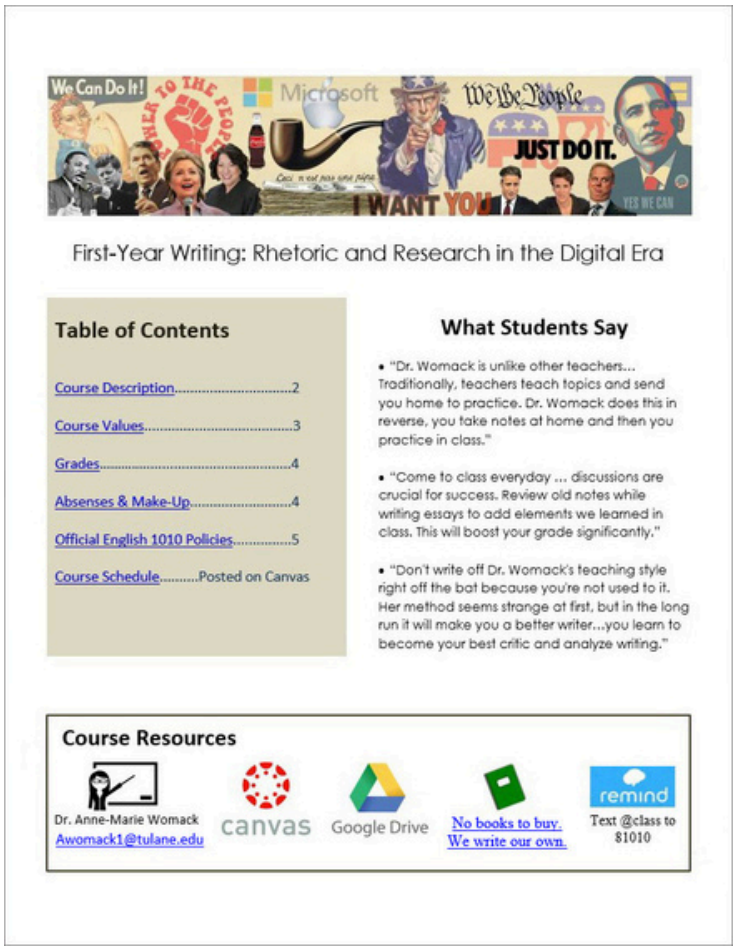
Unit 1: Analysis Paper	15%	Unit 2: Analysis Paper – Extension & Revision	20%
Unit 3: Research Paper	15%	Unit 4: Hybrid Argument Paper	20%
Group Work	10%	Low-Stakes & In-Class Writing / Quizzes / Homework	15%
(Approx. 20 activities, calculated at end of semester)		Handwritten Notes *(Submitted periodically)*	5%



The syllabus on the left shows dense text and undersized margins. The page contains the course information, required texts, course description, and grade distribution. There are bulleted lists, but the text covers almost every inch of the page.

In the newer version on the right, the information is organized in discernible chunks. At the top, a course banner contains a collage hinting at the rhetoric the course covers: famous politicians, including Martin Luther King Jr. and Hillary Clinton;
American slogans from "Power to the People" to "Just do It;" and iconic images from Uncle Sam to the Microsoft logo. Beneath the banner reads the course title, First Year Writing: Rhetoric and Research in the Digital Era.

Below on the left, a table of contents offers hyperlinks to the syllabus components, such as course description, grades, and official policies. On the right, three student quotes about the course provide a quick idea of the class structure. Blocked together at the bottom, hyperlinked images show essential course resources: a teacher icon with the instructor's name and email address, a Canvas learning management system icon, a Google Drive icon, a notebook icon that takes students to a prompt to create their own textbook, and the Remind logo for a class text message system. The new version strives to provide redundancy across modes: images for visual learners; alt text for auditory learners; and digestible sections for learners with reading disabilities.



Text Only Syllabus

What is not visible on the syllabus image above is a hidden hyperlink in a font color matching the background. At the top of the page, it reads “Text only version of syllabus” and hyperlinks to a version more legible to screen readers.

Many of the features that improved visual design here (such as text boxes) created difficulties for the Microsoft narrator we used to test the page. Narrator is described more in Microsoft’s Accessibility Guide for Educators. That doesn’t mean though that images or organizational tools such as bullet points do not convey useful information to people relying on text. The text-only syllabus still includes alternative text for images, but instead of embedding it in an image, it lists it in the main text and doesn’t include the image.

Alternative Text for Images (Alt Text)

Images are not automatically accessible to screen readers on a computer. Writers must build image descriptions into the code of a document or integrate image descriptions into the full text a demonstrated in earlier examples. This alternative text (alt text) allows images to be read by scree readers. Bryan Gould of the National Center for Accessible Media poses three questions to consider when creating alt text:

> Why is the image there?
>
> Who is the intended audience?
>
> If there is no description, what will the readers miss?

This third question, Gould points out, does not imply that alt text should include every visual detail, but rather that it should include the most important concepts.

What constitutes the most important concepts changes based on the context, so authors should consider the rhetorical situation when crafting alt text. STEM guidelines, for example, suggest that alt text be brief and focused on data, not extraneous visual details. In an English class where students will analyze the image, though, more description would be necessary. The following are general guidelines to consider when creating alt text:

- Don't enter "photograph" or "picture of." Screen readers already note the presence of an image.
- Move from general description to specifics to allow readers to choose whether to go further and deeper in the same way a visual reader does.
- Keep text as concise as possible based on the rhetorical situation. Many online sources recommend between 5-15 words, but this number is not an absolute. All of the alt text examples below use over 20 words to make room for crucial historical details.
- Ask someone who has not seen the image to review the alt text.

Alternative Text from National News Outlets

The alt text examples in this section come from national news sources. The descriptions demonstrate how important it is to know the context of the image as well as the people, events, and objects it depicts.

An American sailor kisses a nurse among the crowd in Times Square celebrating VJ Day, the long-awaited victory over Japan in WWII, on August 14, 1945.Wired Magazine

President Barack Obama walks across the tarmac as he prepares to board Air Force One before his departure from Andrews Air Force Base, Md., Oct. 9, 2015.Time Magazine

Using hydrotechnics and mist-based holographic projections, a 40-foot hologram of Carmelo Anthony was created in the Hudson River.CNN.

Alternative Text from Twitter's Alt Text Bot

The Twitter Alt Text Bot can help with crafting alt text. First, register at their site alttextbot.com; then tweet an image and mention @alt_text_bot. The bot will reply with an alt text description, which you can amend to convey essential information not detected by the bot.

The images on the right demonstrate both the strengths and drawbacks of the bot. The first image is the same famous VJ day kiss image cited above, but the bot describes just a couple kissing. The Times's lengthier description gave more necessary context so readers could understand the photo within its historical moment.

couple kissing at grayscale

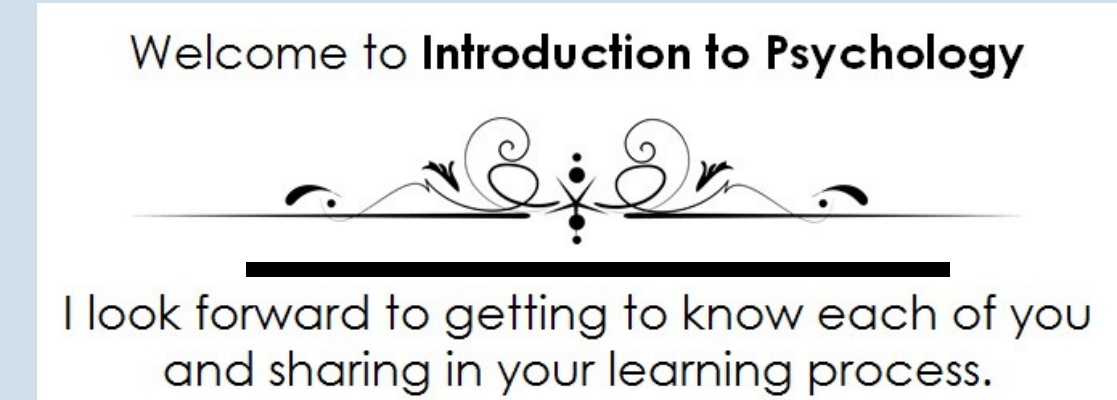
The second image on the right seems busy and complex, which could present challenges when creating alt text. It features a silhouette of a head being encircled by 50 small objects, including a computer, arrow, house, and star. In the middle of the circle is the word kNOWledge. The bot, though, does a good job of boiling it down to its essential meaning, a depiction of knowledge

knowledge illustration with silhouette of person

Null Alternative Text

If alt text is ever left blank, a screen reader will notify the student that an image is present but has no description. This omission excludes readers from the document.

Sometimes with purely decorative images, though, like a flourished line between text sections, as shown below, alternative text may seem unnecessary.



Flourished line separating two text sections

By creating null alt text instead, the screen reader will know to skip over the nonessential image entirely. Instead of leaving alt text blank, here are tips for using null alt text:

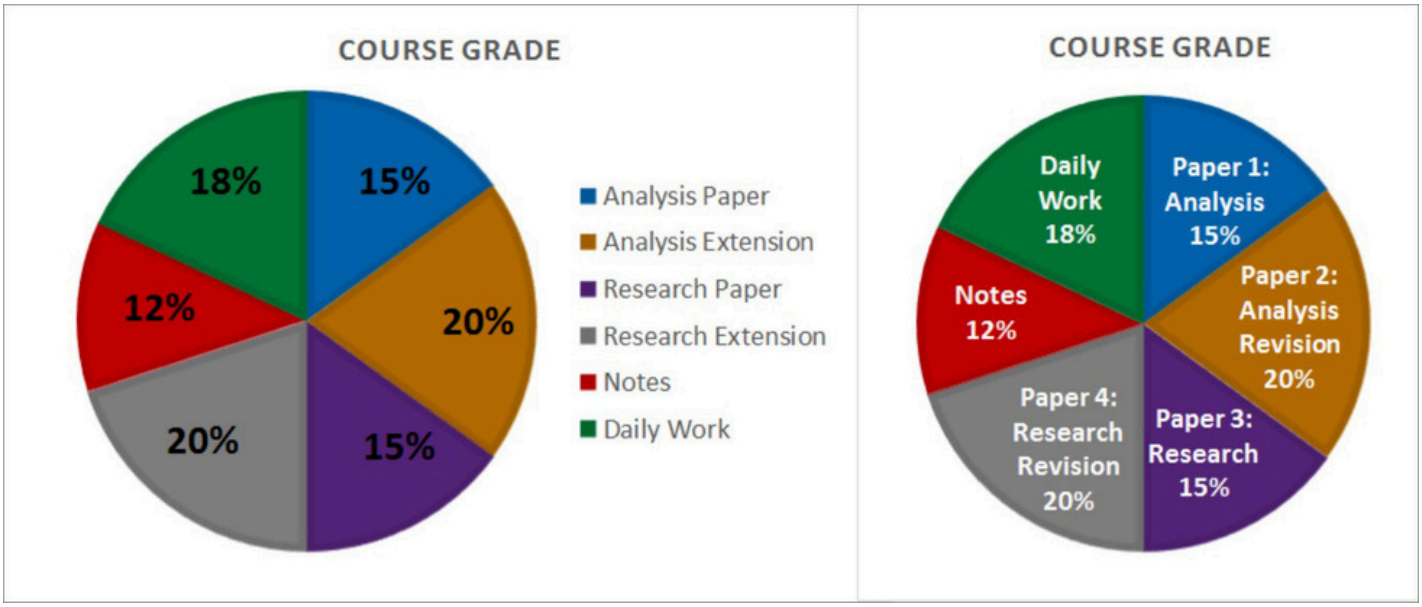
- To create null alt text, include two quotation marks in the alt text box: “”
- Don’t use null alt text if the image is the only thing identifying a link, otherwise a user will not be able to navigate to the link.
- If an image is described in a caption, use “refer to caption” as alt text instead of null.

Color Universal Design

Images often introduce color, a format not legible to all readers. Kei Ito and Masataka Okabe provide helpful guidelines for universal color design online, in which they discuss common types of color blindness that affect red, green, and blue color perception. Like all disabilities, colorblindness affects individuals uniquely, but the following guidelines can help make colors more accessible.

- Information should never be conveyed through color alone.
- Create contrast not only in color hue, but in brightness.
- Avoid layering black on dark red, which can appear as black on black. If you use laser pointers in class, choose green, which is more widely accessible according to Masataka and Ito.

Consider the two contrasting images as an example of applying the principles of universal color design.



Both visuals present assignments and their grade worth in pie chart form. Each uses differently color coded pie slices. But on the left, the less accessible pie chart lists a separate color coded key to the side that designates which slice goes with which assignment. It layers black text on dark chart colors.

In contrast, the sample on the right labels the assignments within the slices and uses white text on dark background colors. Moreover, each slice is outlined by a darker version of the hue–the blue slice is outlined by a dark blue line, for example. So contrast, not simply color divides the sections, which can prevent them from blurring together. Image-driven syllabi, when accessible in multiple modes, can create an engaging tone for the course.

TEXT

Flexible Text that Users can Manipulate

Images might not be an accessible format for all instructors to create, but text-heavy syllabi can also be substantially improved by considering the needs of disabled students. Most importantly, documents should build in options for users. Instructors cannot anticipate all individual students' abilities, so syllabi should allow users to alter text based on individual needs.

Digital text can offer that flexibility, allowing students to enlarge text, change colors, or use screen readers. Yet, these features are not automatic, and many digital spaces are still inaccessible to blind users, as described by Sushil Oswal describes in "Ableism."

Wrongly assuming that digital text is accessible leads to what Stephanie Kerschbaum calls multimodal inhospitality. If texts are "not flexible enough for users to modify them," they exclude users from the moment of communication. Deaf users, she explains, will not be able to join a discussion about an online video if there is no captioning or transcript.

Accessibility cannot be an afterthought and it cannot be assumed. With syllabi, for example, scanned-in versions of original paper documents wouldn't yield text that is readable to a screen reader. Syllabus text should be accessible through multiple modes–orally and visually.

Concise Text

Long text blocks can overwhelm readers, particularly those with dyslexia and ADD. Syllabi are particularly problematic because instructors try to fit so much in. However, instead of adding all assignment prompts to the document, for instance, instructors could introduce those guidelines over the whole semester and prevent information overload.

Research shows that it's a good idea for a class to revisit key sections of the syllabus in this way. Psychologists Angela Becker and Sharon Calhoon surveyed 863 students on how the syllabus and found that students pay less attention to the syllabus as the semester wears on. In particular, students don't pay as much attention to items like make-up and late policies at the end of the term, right when they have many assignments due (10).

Becker and Calhoon's research also shows which information students ignore. They "pay little attention to information they can find elsewhere" which includes textbook titles, course information, and withdrawal dates (9-10). Instructors can condense syllabi, then, by cutting material and hyperlinking information found elsewhere.

Reader-Friendly Text

English 1010 Course Description:

The purpose of English 1010 is to teach students to write clearly and to organize complex arguments that engage in a scholarly way with expert knowledge. Toward that end, students will learn to conduct independent bibliographic research and to incorporate that material appropriately into the sort of clear, complex, coherent arguments that characterize academic discourse. More specifically, in English 1010, students will learn that to write clearly means that they must take a piece of writing through multiple drafts in order to eliminate any grammatical errors or stylistic flaws that might undermine the author-audience relationship. They will also learn that, to write with meaningful complexity, they must learn to practice a variety of invention strategies, from the five classical appeals to freewriting to commonplaces to analytic reading strategies to library research – and to revise continuously the material generated by these methods. Students will also learn that, in order to make coherent arguments out of the material generated through these invention strategies without sacrificing complexity, their practice of revision must be guided by certain principles of style and arrangement -- for example, principles of emphasis, cohesion, parallelism, figuration, and syntactic variation, to name a few. Also, students must grow adept in the genre of argument itself through work with models and templates of the sort outlined in the standard rhetorics of argument. Students must learn, moreover, that in order to create effective arguments they must cultivate strategies for analyzing the texts of other – that is, they must grow adept at situating the texts of others in a context, looking at them through the lens of some other body of thought, to see how such a move heightens the significance of certain elements of the text under analysis. And they must learn strategies for active, critical reading, strategies for deciphering why a text might be arranged a certain way and what that arrangement might mean, as well as strategies for summarizing and paraphrasing and quoting. Also, they must learn to conduct research in the library, evaluating sources, incorporating the work of others into their texts and doing so while following the proper conventions of citation endorsed by the Modern Language Association. Finally, in order to maximize the students' potential for developing these abilities, the method of instruction in English 101, week by week, will be organized as a hybrid that combines four different instructional modes: 1) discussions as appropriate to a seminar; 2) hands-on, productive work as appropriate to a studio or lab; 3) brief lectures; 4) regular one-on-one conferencing with the teacher. Through all of these means, students in English 1010 will learn to produce clear, complex, coherent writing with meaningful academic content.

English 1010 is designed to help you write clearly and organize complex arguments that engage in a scholarly way with expert knowledge. Toward that end, you will learn to conduct independent bibliographic research and to incorporate that material appropriately into the sort of clear, complex, coherent arguments that characterize academic discourse. Specifically, you'll learn that:

- To **write clearly** means that you must take a piece of writing through multiple drafts in order to eliminate any grammatical errors or stylistic flaws that might undermine the author/audience relationship;
- To **write with meaningful complexity**, you must learn to practice a variety of invention strategies (e.g., classical appeals, freewriting, reading and analysis, and library research) and to revise continuously the materials generated by these methods.
- To **make coherent arguments** without sacrificing complexity, your practice of revision must be guided by principles of style and arrangement, and you must grow adept in the genre of argument itself through work with models and templates established by standard persuasive rhetorics;
- To **create effective arguments**, you must cultivate strategies for positioning texts against each other to familiarize yourself with the arguments of others before developing your own claims, and grow adept at using warrants, evidence, counter-claims, and other rhetorical tropes to craft your own arguments. You will learn strategies for active, critical reading, strategies for deciphering why a text might be arranged a certain way and what that arrangement might mean;
- To **conduct effective research** means utilizing the library, evaluating sources, and incorporating the work of others into your texts using the proper conventions of citation endorsed by the Modern Language Association (MLA). You will also learn strategies and conventions for summarizing, paraphrasing, and quoting others' work to support and develop original claims.

To develop the skills mentioned above, English 1010 balances seminar-style discussions with heavy student participation; brief lectures; hands-on productive work in writing workshops and guided "lab" exercises; and regular one-on-one conferencing with your professor.

By the end of the semester, you will have completed a **minimum of 30 pages of graded prose** as well as a minimum of 5 short low-stakes writing assignments. This page count is standardized across 1010 courses, but not to worry, I will guide you through each stage to make sure you're ready.

When making text more accessible, a strategic place to start is by thinking about learning disabilities that affect reading, such as dyslexia. The images above show before and after versions of a course description. The before text shows one dense paragraph in Times New Roman font and single spacing that takes up 2/3 of the page. The after text breaks up the print into a list of manageable bullet points and follows recommendations from the British Dyslexia Association:

- Use a 12-14 point sans serif font (e.g. Helvetica, Arial, Verdana, Tahoma). Serif fonts, which have tails on the characters, can blend text together.
- Divide the page into two columns so that each line contains between 6-9 words.
- Use 1.5 line spacing.
- Break up text into smaller paragraphs consisting of 2-4 sentences.
- Avoid black text on a white background, which can produce glare. Instead, use another dark font color on a light colored background, such as navy on light gray. (Readers with low vision may prefer the stark contrast of black on white, so we strive to format text in an accessible way that still allows users to make individual changes.)
- Opt for bold over italics to emphasize text–the jagged lines can wash out text.
- Align text to the left. Centering makes it difficult to find the next line, and justified text looks like one overwhelming block ("Text").

These guidelines improve readability, but they are not a set list of rules. Writers need to consider the rhetorical context and content of a document. The revised version, for example, uses 1.25 spacing instead of 1.5 to keep the course description to one page, another factor affecting readability.

Hierarchical Document Design

Students need a syllabus that is organized for quick information retrieval. Word processor features can dynamically simplify document use. For instance:

- Table of Contents provide a snapshot of content for navigation. Headings differentiate sections and create hierarchy.
- Bulleting and numbering organize points into lists.
- Tables compactly show multiple dimensions of data.
- Text boxes group together related information.
- **Bolded** or underlined text emphasizes key points.

Within Microsoft Word, use the available styles to format headings rather than simply making text larger and bold on your own. The styles provide structural tags that make content navigable for screen readers. For example, use “heading 1” for the title, “heading 2” for major sections, and “heading 3” for subsections.

Writers must consider the rhetorical context of these strategies to achieve an inclusive message. For example, overusing special type like bold and underlining might look like “the teacher yelling at the student” as Singham laments in “Death to the Syllabus.”

Digital Reader Supports

Certain font systems might increase text legibility for people with disabilities. Both Dyslexie and Beeline Reader have wide testimonial support, so students might find them useful.

Dyslexie Font: Dyslexie font manipulates letter openings, slants, and tails so that each character has a unique form to create greater letter recognition. A master's thesis by Renske de Leeuw found that several reading errors decreased with Dyslexie font and that it created a pleasant or very pleasant reading experience for more than half of the dyslexic readers questioned. The font is free for personal use, and a similar open access font is available called Opendyslexic.

Beeline Reader: Another experimental program claims to enable readers with dyslexia, ADD, and vision disabilities to read more quickly. The Beeline Reader, a web browser add-on and PDF viewer, uses colors to match the end of one line to the beginning of the next, making it easier for the eye to find its place.

RHETORIC

Emphasize Positive Over Punishing Language

Syllabus policies are often written as a response to problems in the classroom and can promote an antagonistic tone. As a result, recent scholars have criticized syllabi for being too authoritarian and too contractual. Overly punitive rules never actually guarantee that unwanted behavior disappears, and they might even create resistance in students.

Instead, instructors can change the tone of the syllabus by focusing on accessibility for learners. Instructors can demonstrate approachability and empathy, key factors in universal instructional design (Orr and Hammig). Students with disabilities must feel comfortable approaching a professor to request accommodations, so approachability constitutes more than a concern about popularity.

Some scholarship on syllabi studies how students react to the rhetoric of instructors. Richard Harnish and Robert Bridges conducted an experiment in which 172 students read syllabi containing either warm or cold language and rated professors. Unsurprisingly, students rated the "cold" professor more unfriendly and less approachable than the "warm" professor. Similarly, they rate the "cold" course more difficult even though the requirements were the same as the "warm" course. The chart below shows examples of the differing language from the study.

CLASSROOM CLIMATE

Students learn best when they feel respected, included, and that instructors are invested in their development. Students with disabilities can experience stigma, marginalization, and negative stereotypes from their peers and instructors. In Barbara Davis's Tools for Teaching, she explains that it is important for instructors to "become aware of any biases and stereotypes [they] may have absorbed...Your attitudes and values not only influence the attitudes and values of your students, but they can affect the way you teach, particularly your assumptions about students...which can lead to unequal learning outcomes for those in your classes" (2010, p. 58).

"When I received my autism diagnosis I was excited, thinking I could disclose to my teachers, and we could better communicate as a result. Some teachers were not receptive. 'You don't seem like you have autism'; 'don't use that as an excuse'; etc. Other teachers, however, were more receptive: they were curious to learn more, willing to accommodate. For them, our communication did improve, and I could focus on what mattered most: learning the material."

- David Caudel, Executive Director, Initiative for Autism Innovation and the Workplace, Vanderbilt University

POLICY

Examine Traditional Policies

Deadlines, grade distributions, and other classroom policies are often seen as classroom management issues rather than course content issues. Disability studies shows us that all classroom choices affect and possibly exclude students.

Disability scholar Linda Feldmeier White argues that traditional academic accommodations often arise from limitations in standard methods of teaching. For example, students with disabilities may need extended test time, so educators could question the concept of timed testing. Requests for accommodations, official or not, signal spaces for stronger pedagogical design and require us to create multiple ways of completing an assignment.

Instructors can go further and build multiple options into all assignments for all students. This kind of flexibility is central to learning motivation as well. Nira Hativa explains in Teaching for Effective Learning in Higher Education, "The more students believe they operate under their own control, the greater is their learning motivation." Countless researchers in self-determination theory agree that providing choice for learners is essential to creating autonomy. Likewise, Ken Bain and Robert Boice suggest in two extensively researched books that too much teacher control leads to problems in the classroom. Strict policies create counterproductive effects like resistant students.

Examine Traditional Policies

Students depend on faculty to provide inclusive pedagogies, and the flexibility of inclusive pedagogy creates greater independence in students. The options proposed below take into account common course accommodations that strengthen learning environments.

Beginning the syllabus with an inclusive learning statement emphasizes cooperation and flexibility for disabled and nondisabled students. Tara Wood and Shannon Madden provide an excellent resource called “Suggested Practices for Syllabus Accessibility Statements,” which gives examples of inclusive language. Here is one example that borrows liberally from their suggestions.

Expand Deadlines

Extended deadlines are a common disability accommodation because learners perform at different speeds and college students juggle multiple time commitments. Ken Bain, in his fifteen year study of nearly a hundred college teachers, found that the most effective college professors didn't deduct points to ensure timeliness. These threats could be counterproductive to motivating students to learn.

Several studies across disciplines report positive outcomes when students have some control over deadlines.

Time Banks: In computer science, John Aycock and Jim Uhl use "time banks." In this model, students have a two-day grace period for one assignment or two one-day extensions for two different assignments. They report that students are "overwhelmingly in favor of the time bank" and that it created little work for them to track.

Self-Set Deadlines: In psychology, Susan Roberts, Myke Fulton, and George Semb compare the pacing of students who worked with instructor-set deadlines against self-set deadlines. They found that "Students in the self-scheduling condition attempted [the last exam] significantly earlier, distributed pacing more evenly, and complied with their schedules to a significantly greater degree than did students in comparison conditions. Accelerated pacing rates were obtained without detriment to academic performance."

Week-Long Paper Deadlines: In English, Anne-Marie Womack reports favorably on her use of student-set deadlines within instructor-set ranges. Students usually have 4 days to a week within which to submit major papers online. Papers are graded in the order they are submitted–often within hours for the first round of submissions–to encourage early papers. Because it spreads out her grading, it helps Womack handle her workload, too.

Ways to Build Flexibility into Grading Distributions

Many innovative grading approaches build in some degree of flexibility and choice.

- **Grading Contracts:** Critical pedagogy advocate Ira Shor negotiates grade criteria with his students to form a contract. For example, students in one class negotiated standards for an A, which included: A quality work, 3 absences, one late assignment, two group projects, etc. Lower grades required less for each of these standards.
- **Everyone Gets a B:** Composition scholars Jane Danielewicz and Peter Elbow detail their version
- of contract grading in writing courses—everyone gets a B for completing a set of requirements without taking into account writing quality. Students who want to score higher than a B must demonstrate higher-quality prose.
- **Contract Weighting:** Computer scientists John Aycock and Jim Uhl developed a system called "contract weighting." They allow students to allocate weighted percentages to assignments within an instructor-mandated range. So, a student could assign 10-15% to project 1 and 15-25% to project 2.
- **Grade Includes Daily Work or Not:** Composition scholar Anne-Marie Womack describes a summer course in which she taught nontraditional working students. She created two possible grading distributions that students chose from: in the first, the grade was made up of low-stakes work and major essays. In the second, only major paper grades were averaged.
- **Later Exam Grades Replace Earlier:** Some professors who give exams allow the grade on the cumulative final to replace lower earlier exam grades.

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