A guide to accessibility

Southern Cross University

All students must be able to access core learning experiences that are located in online environments.

SCU's Flexible Learning Policy specifies that all university learning sites will employ the principle of 'maximum ease of use'.

SCU's Computing Conditions of Use Policy outlines some expectations in relation to accessibility that you should be familiar with.

The Digital Resource Centre makes every effort to ensure that online learning materials comply with international standards associated with accessibility (W3C guidelines).

The Student Equity & Disability Services provides assistance and support to staff in developing accessible materials for students. This assistance can include sourcing electronic text books, conversion of printed or electronic study materials, and advice on assistive technology software.

At-a-glance

Ensuring accessibility involves thinking about choice of content, presentation, organisation, structure and navigation, as well as of technologies and software.

Barriers to equivalent participation online

Accessibility barriers can occur through vision or hearing differences, cognitive abilities, mobility barriers, or when English is an additional language. Further, barriers can also be raised through technical choices, for example, when core learning materials can only be accessed through fast, reliable, high speed internet connections.

SCU's Student Equity & Disability Services offers a range for services that support student access to learning opportunities.

Designing for accessibility

The principles of accessibility are really just good learning design principles. Ensuring accessibility involves thinking about choice of content, presentation, organisation, structure and navigation, as well as of technologies and software. Provision of alternative formats for core learning experiences can be important for some students. When a unit demands a specific requirement because of accreditation or professional needs (e.g. nurses cannot be blind, electrical engineers cannot be colour blind) students must be notified in the unit outline.

Presenting and organising content

Headings and styles are used to signpost importance and to organise content (is it clear what is a **heading**, **sub heading**, normal content)? Font size should be at least 12 point italics as well as capitals should be avoided where possible as they are harder to read.

Give hyperlinks precise names based on the content they lead to (not 'click here').

Use colour with caution. Use tone and contrast to enhance readability (high contrast tones, like black on a white canvas with plenty of blank space) and to reinforce meaning (stop!).

Provide text alternatives to all non-text content such as images or diagrams so that it is available for conversion into braille, LARGE TEXT, or text to speech conversion as required.

Software

Any software required to participate in a learning site should be available to students through university supported systems or, at least be free and easy for students to download. You might also consider the vast array of free software available for use in learning sites to aid, for example, audio-visual accessibility. A great resource for this is Spectronics Australia.

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The W3C guidelines	
The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) suggests the following:	
Images and animations	Use the alt attribute to describe the function of visual aids. The alt attribute is used in HTML and XHTML to specify alternative text if the element to which it is applied cannot be rendered, and by screen reader software.
Multimedia	Provide captioning and transcripts of audio, and descriptions of video.
Hypertext links	Use labeling for link text that makes sense when read out of context.
Page organization	Use headings, lists, and consistent structure.
Graphs and charts	Summarise using text
Scripts, applets, and plug-ins	Provide alternative content in case active features are inaccessible or unsupported.
Tables	Make line-by-line reading sensible. Summarise using text

Sources

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Open Courseware Consortium (2012). The Power of OER to Support Diverse Learners. [Online]. Available from http://www.slideshare.net/UnaDaly/power-of-oer