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How to create an accessible online course?

Accessibility is a fundamental requirement to meet the needs of all online learners. But how to make a course accessible?

Although it is often thought of in relation to people with disabilities, the accessibility of online content can actually benefit all users by making it easier for them to perceive, understand, navigate, and interact with online content and information.

As you can easily guess, accessibility is especially important when it comes to eLearning, because it allows you to create learning programs that are much more effective and responsive to the needs of any type of learner.

In this article, we will see what are the main challenges that people with disabilities face when enjoying online content and what to do to **improve the accessibility of an eLearning course**.

What does it mean to make an online course accessible

Making an **online course accessible** means enabling all users, regardless of any disabilities, to use the course materials and tools as effectively as other learners.

Creating an accessible online course therefore requires making it:

- **Intuitive**: the course layout must be simple, consistent, and predictable;
- **Perceivable**: the content must be designed so that it is perceived by a wide range of users, regardless of disability;
- **Navigable**: course navigation should not assume that the student is using a specific device, such as a mouse. Thus, a user can navigate through the course using only a keyboard or other assistive technology.

What challenges do people with disabilities face in eLearning?

When designing an online course, you need to consider four main categories of disabilities.

Visual Disabilities

People with visual disabilities may:

- not be able to use a mouse;
- need a screen reader and keyboard to access content;
- need to magnify text and illustrations to see them correctly;
- not be able to distinguish one color from another.

Hearing disabilities

Hearing disabilities include partial or complete deafness. People with hearing loss may not be able to hear the audio of a podcast, video and other online media.

Motor disabilities

Motor disabilities include paralysis and limited motor control. People with motor disabilities may:

- need assistive technology (such as speech recognition software) to access a course;
- not be able to use a mouse properly;
- tire easily from movements that would not be strenuous for most people;

- have slow response times.

Cognitive disabilities

Cognitive disabilities include learning disabilities and other impairments that make individuals particularly distracted or unable to concentrate, process, or remember information. People with cognitive disabilities may:

- be confused by complex layouts;
- have trouble reading text or interpreting illustrations;
- need a screen reader to help them understand text;
- have trouble concentrating or understanding long sections of text, audio, or video.

What to do to improve the accessibility of an online course?

The accessibility of an online course touches every part of the course design and requires additional planning and work. However, it is good to remember that efforts to make a course accessible are beneficial to the entire audience.

Here, then, are some helpful **guidelines for creating an accessible online cours**e.

Use accessible templates

For students with visual impairments, navigating within online courses can be difficult if the content is not compatible with screen readers. So make sure your platform layout and the content therein is organized in a format that is optimized for **assistive technologies**. Effectively use headers, lists, and other markup styles to make it easier to understand page structure and content.

In particular, **headers** help recognize ordinal and coordinate relationships between topics and allow those using screen-reading utilities to scroll down the page and find what they need.

DynDevice LMS, for example, is an eLearning platform that allows you to create fully accessible learning objects and has templates that are in line with WCAG guidelines.

Add subtitles

Subtitles are very useful not only for hearing impaired users, but also for everyone else. For example, a course with subtitles is very effective for non-native speakers who may be able to understand the written language better than the spoken one. Also, a course with subtitles can be taken even when you don't have the option to turn on the audio (for example, when you are in a very quiet environment and don't want to disturb those around you).

Format links clearly

When you want to direct a student to other pages or content via **hyperlinks and URLs**, use a descriptive title that allows students to clearly understand the destination of the link. If the link text is too long or meaningless, students using screen readers will have difficulty understanding where that link will take them. Avoid using URLs as link text, for example, and use concise, meaningful phrases such as "Contact the teacher" instead of a generic "Click here.

Insert a textual alternative to images

Alternative text is invisible text attached to images that is read aloud by screen readers, allowing those who cannot see the image to understand its meaning. This is especially useful with informational images, such as charts and tables.

Use easy-to-read fonts

The **choice of font** also plays a crucial role in eLearning. Favor san-serif fonts on plain backgrounds, avoid italics, and use fixed-width spacing to promote readability for all your learners, including those with dyslexia or color blindness.

Choose colors and contrasts carefully

Use high-contrast color combinations to make your text accessible to all students, including those with color blindness or low contrast sensitivity.

Create accessible video

Video is a great medium for teaching, but it can present accessibility issues for some students, such as those with blindness or low vision. In this case, we recommend that you provide a narrative track, separate from the main audio script, that describes the visual content of the video.

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