

Identifying Accessibility Gaps in Your Online Learning

Accessibility gaps in online courses rarely result from intentional design; nonetheless, they remain widespread. As federal compliance deadlines approach, institutions are discovering that even well-designed courses can contain hidden barriers that prevent learners from fully engaging with content.

The most current industry benchmark is [WCAG 2.2 Level AA](#), which addresses additional barriers related to mobile accessibility, cognitive disabilities, and low vision. Meeting [WCAG 2.2 Level AA](#) compliance requires attention to detail across every course element.

Accessibility is not just about avoiding legal risk. Applying Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles, which provide multiple ways to represent, engage with, and express content, creates flexible and effective courses for all students while improving overall usability.



The 10 Most Commonly Overlooked Accessibility Issues



UNLABELED IMAGES

Images without alt text are invisible to screen readers. Decorative images should be marked as such, and informational images need descriptive text.



UNSEARCHABLE OR UNTAGGED PDFS

Scanned documents without OCR cannot be read by assistive technology. Even digital PDFs often lack proper tagging for navigation and comprehension.



MISSING VIDEO CAPTIONS AND TRANSCRIPTS

Videos without captions exclude deaf and hard-of-hearing students. Transcripts provide an alternative for students who cannot access audio or video.



NON-DESCRIPTIVE LINK TEXT

Links labeled "click here" or "read more" provide no context. Screen reader users navigate by links and need descriptive text to understand destinations.



BROKEN OR MISSING HEADING HIERARCHY

Skipping heading levels—for example, H1 to H3 without an intervening H2—disrupts navigation. Students using assistive technology rely on proper heading structure to move through content.



INACCESSIBLE TABLES

Tables that lack proper headers or use merged cells inconsistently are confusing or unusable for screen readers. Data becomes meaningless without structure.



LOW COLOR CONTRAST

Light gray text on white backgrounds, or colored text with insufficient contrast, can be difficult for students with low vision to read.



KEYBOARD NAVIGATION BARRIERS

Interactive elements such as buttons, dropdowns, and quizzes that cannot be accessed via keyboard alone exclude students who cannot use a mouse.



AUTO-PLAYING MEDIA

Videos or audio that play automatically interfere with screen readers and create confusion. Students should control when the media starts.



UNLABELED FORM FIELDS

Forms without clear labels or instructions are unusable for students relying on assistive technology. Every field must have an associated label and purpose.



The Bottom Line

These issues detailed above appear in nearly every course audit. Faculty edits and new content can reintroduce barriers within weeks of launch. Compliance is not a one-time fix; it requires ongoing maintenance and institutional commitment.

Next Steps for Institutions

- ✓ Conduct regular audits of existing courses.
- ✓ Ensure new content meets WCAG 2.2 standards before publishing.
- ✓ Provide faculty with training and resources to maintain accessibility.
- ✓ Implement workflows that make ongoing monitoring manageable.

Ready to make your courses accessible and compliant?

Let's Connect

