

Blackboard Ally Instructor Guide:

Resources and Support

Info to help you become an Ally to inclusive learning. This instructor package contains:

New to Ally: Overview Documents

Become familiar with Ally's mission, key features, and getting started.

[Ally Basics](#)[Ally Instructor Feedback](#)[Course Accessibility Report](#)[Accessibility Checklist](#)[Four Learning Benefits of Alternative Formats](#)[Download an Alternative Format](#)

Ally Micro-Learning

Learn about Ally one fix at a time. Walk through accessibility scenarios, and see how Ally feedback helps you improve inclusive learning in your course.

[Ally Accessibility Indicators](#)[In-Browser Document Preview](#)[Add Alternative Descriptions to Image Files](#)[Remove Potentially Harmful Content](#)[Scanned PDFs: An Enemy to Accessibility](#)[Add a Library Reference](#)[View All File Accessibility Issues](#)[Add Image Descriptions to Power Point Images](#)[Add Headings to a Word Document](#)[Add Headers to your Data Tables in Word](#)[Export a Word Doc as a Tagged PDF](#)

Basics:

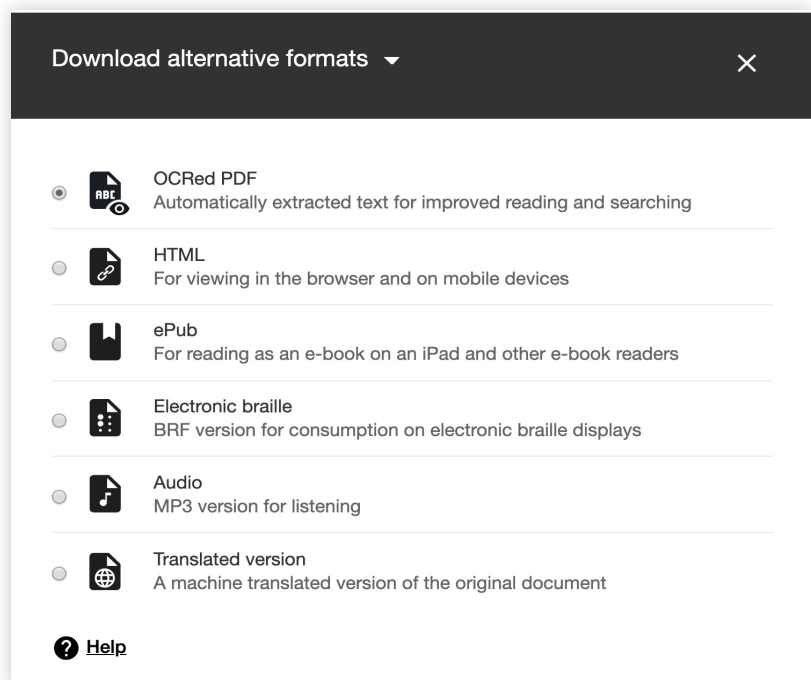
Accessible content is better content

Your class is full of diverse students with unique learning abilities. Providing them with more accessible original content means they can choose formats that work best for them: HTML for improved reading on mobile phones, Electronic Braille for the visually impaired, and Audio for learning on the go. Ally automatically scans your original content, and performs a series of steps to make them more accessible.

Alternative Formats

Ally automatically generates these “Alternative Formats” for all your course files, and makes them available for download to you and your students. Your original file will not be affected by the alternative formats.

The translated version is an opt-in format and may not be available in all courses.



Ally Indicators

Ally integrates with your institution’s learning management system, and provides feedback within your course workflow. Log-in to your course site, and you will find the Ally indicators next to files or content. If you have no course files yet, upload one, and an indicator will appear next to the file name. Click the indicator to view your accessibility feedback. Follow along step-by-step to improve your original file.



Needs help!



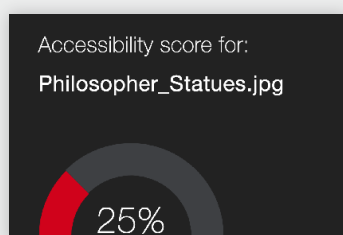
A little better



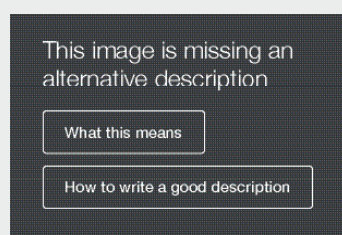
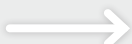
Almost there



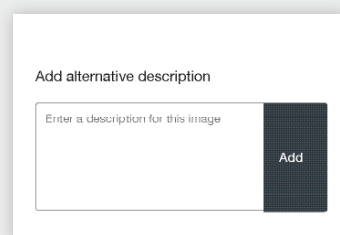
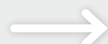
Perfect!



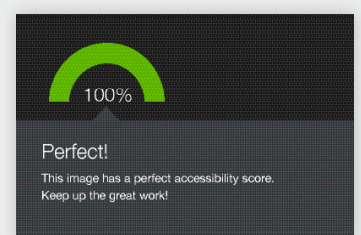
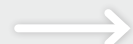
Click the Indicator



Read the Feedback



Improve your file



Increase your score

Instructor Feedback:

Learn how to fix accessibility issues with your course content

Not sure about how to identify and correct accessibility issues with your course content? Not to worry. Ally provides you detailed feedback and support to help you become an accessibility pro. Learn about accessibility issues, why they matter, and how to fix them. Green is the goal! 🟢

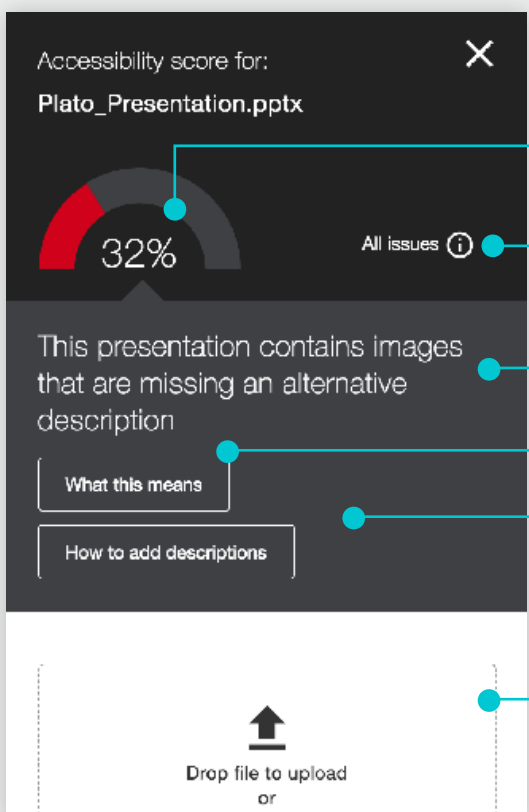
Find the Ally Indicators

Your course files and content will now have color “dials” next to them. They indicate the file’s level of accessibility, and are there to help you prioritize which files you want to fix first. Don’t worry, your students can’t see them. If you hover over the indicators, you’ll see if the accessibility score is “low,” “medium,” or “high.” Click the indicator to see the percentage score, specific issues affecting the file, and instructions for improving the file.

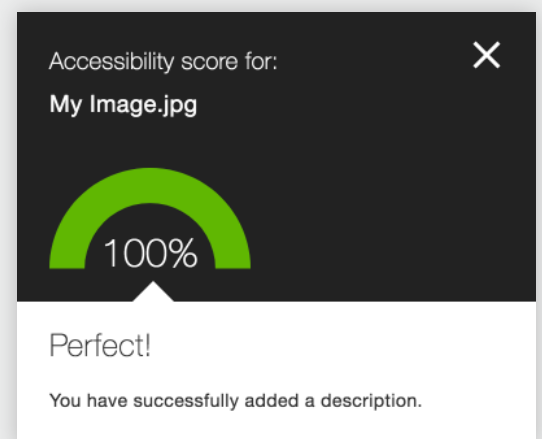


Navigating Ally Instructor Feedback

What’s the issue? → How can I fix it? → Success



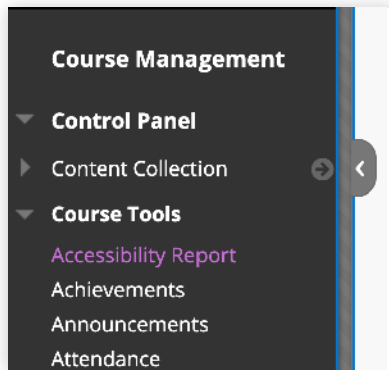
- Score shows level of accessibility
- View all the file’s accessibility issues
- Description of the most important accessibility issue
- Explains how the issue affects inclusive learning
- Detailed steps how to fix the issue
- Add your changes in the dialogue box or upload new files



100% means the file has no more issues for you to fix, and your students will have a more accessible version to download Ally alternative formats. Congratulations! You’re on your way to a more inclusive learning environment for your students.

Course Accessibility Report:

Strategize and prioritize how you fix your course content



Getting Started

Looking through your course files, you notice the Ally accessibility indicators and want to start fixing your content, but where to start? The instructor-facing course report helps you determine a pathway to more inclusive education that works for you. Use the report to tackle accessibility issues file by file, prioritize specific issues based on severity, or focus on the easiest issues first. Find your “**Accessibility Report**” under Course Tools in your course.



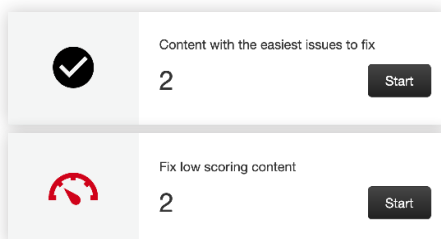
Course Score and Content Breakdown

In the top-left, find your Course Accessibility Score, which represents the average accessibility score across all your files and content. Each content item is checked against the WCAG 2.1 AA standards and scored based on the severity of issue or issues.

View a breakdown of the types of content and files in your course to analyze the diversity of your learning materials.

3 Pathways to Inclusion

Ease or impact?



If you're just getting started or trying to make some quick fixes, choose the easiest issues to fix. Or focus on your lowest scoring content and aim for impact.

Issue Severity

Severity	Issue	
!	The document is malformed	2
?	The document is missing a title	25
!	The document is scanned and OCR'd	7

Focus on specific issues or tackle the most severe issues first. Use this table to address the most severe, major, and minor issues affecting your content and files.

File Score

Plato'sRepublic.pdf	6	43%
AncientGreece.pdf	6	80%
Plato_Introduction.pdf	4	3%

View a list of your course files by accessibility score and number of issues. Launch the feedback directly from your Course Report to turn your learning content green.

Accessibility Checklist:

A quick-start reference to creating more accessible course content

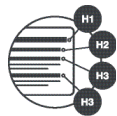
Accessible course content makes it easier for everyone to read and access your materials and can help improve overall quality and usability. There are many low-effort adjustments you can make to start creating more accessible content.



Use a font size of at least 12px.



Ensure that there is sufficient contrast between text and background. The [Paciello Group Contrast Analyzer](#) is a great tool.



Ensure that proper heading styles are used.



Ensure that a logical heading structure is used.



Ensure that images have an alternative description that can convey the full meaning of the image.



Ensure that tables are used for tabular data only.



Ensure that all tables have column headings.



Ensure that all lists use built-in list functionality.



Ensure that all links have text that describes the target.



Ensure that built-in PowerPoint slide templates are used.



Don't use scanned PDFs.



Ensure that all PDFs are tagged.

Four Learning Benefits of Alternative Formats:

Learning Content that Works for You

Looking for course content that fits your learning needs, your busy schedule, and your multiple devices? **Alternative Formats** transform your course files into different formats to help you learn better. Next to your course files, click on the down arrow and select “**alternative formats**” to see your options. The file may take a few minutes to download. Remember, the quality of the alternative formats can depend on the original, so check the original file if something doesn’t look right.



Find a Higher Quality Alternative

The readability of your course materials can affect your comprehension and study practices. If you notice the original course file is a scanned PDF that you can’t highlight, copy-paste, or keyword search, try the **OCRed PDF** for an editable, easier to read document. Or if the font of the original is hard to read, try the **ePub** format to customize the font and contrast.



Enhance your Understanding

Did you know when you engage different senses- like reading a text and listening to a text- that you activate different parts of the brain, which can enhance your understanding? Try reading the **Tagged PDF** first and then listening to the **Audio MP3** for review. Or, if you are struggling to understand the text, you might try listening and reading at the same time.



Improve your Time Management

With your busy schedule, maximizing your time on task and study opportunities can help you reach your learning goals. If you’re reading on your mobile, try the **HTML** format for a file that’s responsive to your screen size so that you can read faster and with less distractions. Or listen to the **Audio MP3** when you’re on the go for extra time reviewing your materials.



Become a Better Learner

Think about the best format for your learning context and objective, and include multiple formats in your study process. Keep a journal of the formats you use leading up to an exam or paper to discover how you learn best. For more information on the alternative formats, check out:

<https://tinyurl.com/AltFormatsStudents>



Download an Alternative Format:

Find file formats that support your learning

How do you prefer to engage with digital learning content? Do you read on your phone or tablet, use a screen reader, like to annotate and highlight, or listen to an audio version? Ally automatically generates “Alternative formats” from your original course files, and makes them available for download so that you can engage with course content in a way that works best for you.

Find Ally’s “Alternative formats” where you access your course content.

Select the grey arrow icon next to the content items or attached files in your course, and select the “Alternative formats” option from the drop down.



Vincent van Gogh A↓

Alternative formats



Brown Et Al - Project Planning A↓

Know your options. Choose a format that’s right for you.

Format

Format Advantages



OCRed PDF

Automatically extracted text

Improved scanned documents

Better reading and text search



Tagged PDF

Structured PDF for assistive technology

Improved structure for navigation

Essential for screen readers



HTML

For browser and mobile

Customize your text

Adapts text to mobile screen sizes



ePub

Reading on tablets and e-book readers

eBooks on tablets

Annotating and highlighting



Electronic braille

BRF version for electronic braille displays

Read more quickly

Essential for visual impairments



Audio

MP3 recording of text

Listen and learn on the go

Engage different modalities



Translated version (opt-in format)

A machine translated version of the doc

Experience a different language

Access 50 different translations

Click “Download.” Your file may take a few minutes to generate

For more info on alternative formats, visit: <https://tinyurl.com/AllyAlternativeFormats>

Accessibility Indicators:

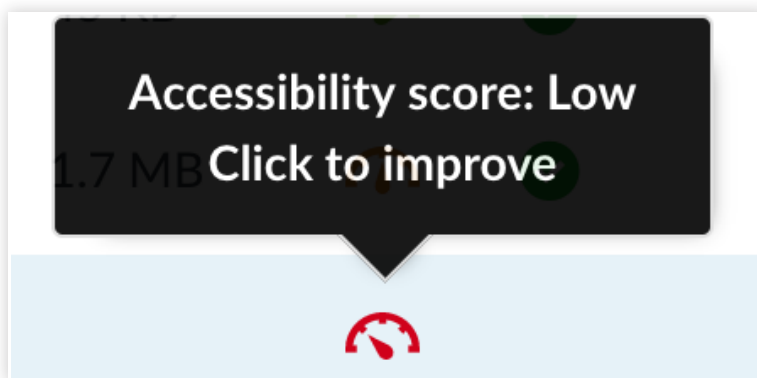
Feedback on the accessibility level of your course files

Micro-Learning

Ally provides you feedback on the accessibility of your course files with the colored dials that appear next to your file names (Red, Orange, Light Green, and Dark Green). These indicators are only visible to you and other instructors with access to your course. Ally checks most file formats, but there may be some files in your course that don't have an Ally indicator next to them. Remember, Green is the Goal!

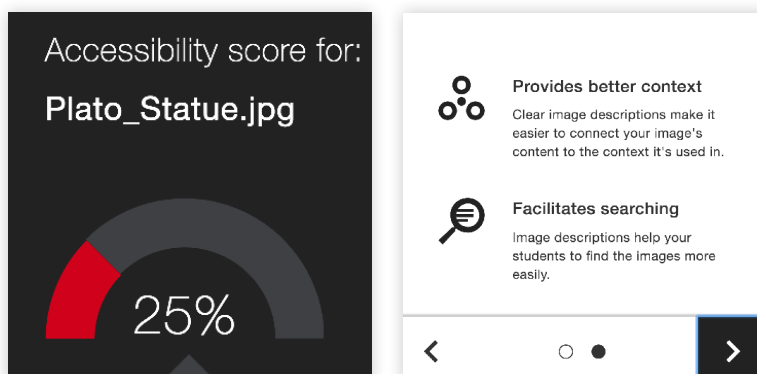
Scenario: You see a red indicator “dial” next to a file

1



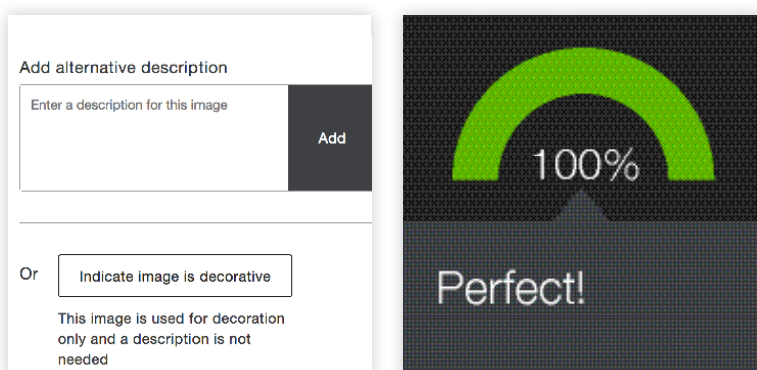
You notice the red indicator appear after adding a new file to your course. Or, your institution just added Ally, and now you see a red indicator next to your course file. You mouse over to the red dial and see the “accessibility score” when you hover over the indicator.

2



When you click the indicator, Ally walks you through a series of steps to make the file more accessible. Ally organizes this feedback in a decision tree, so all you need to do is read the directions and respond to the prompts. Learn what the issue is, why it matters, and how to correct it appropriately.

3



In some cases, Ally will allow you to make the fix directly, such as adding an alternative description to an image file. In other cases, Ally links you to resources to help solve the problem in the tools you're using to create content. Upload a new file directly to Ally, and watch your score improve.

In-Browser Document Preview:

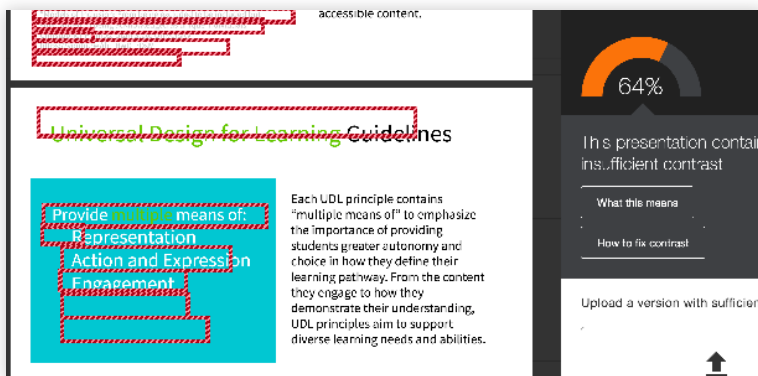
Identify where the accessibility issues appear in your files

Micro-Learning

When attempting to fix accessibility issues with course files, it can help to know exactly where certain issues appear in the document. When you launch Ally's instructor feedback by clicking an indicator next to your course file, a preview of your document will appear next to the feedback panel. For contrast issues, images missing a description, and tables missing headers, Ally will highlight where those issues appear in the document with a red box outline to help you make your fixes when returning to your authoring tool.

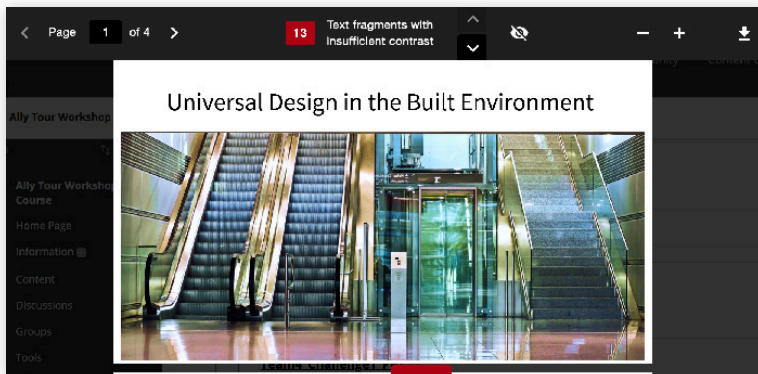
Scenario: You have a Power Point file with contrast issues

1



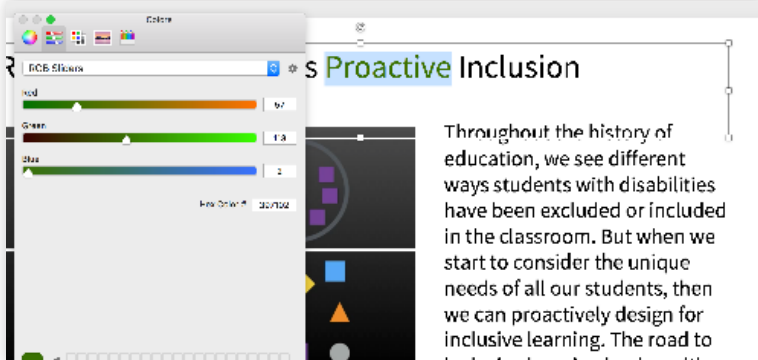
You click the orange indicator next to your PowerPoint presentation. You notice the file has multiple issues, so you click "All issues" and notice the file has "contrast issues." You click "Fix." In the document preview to the left of the feedback, you see a red box appear around part of your slide.

2



You can scroll through your document in the preview or use the navigation bar at the top of the preview. The solid red square reports the total number of times contrast issues appear in the document. You can use the up/down arrows to navigate issue by issue, or the page arrows to move page by page. You can toggle the red box outlines on/off by clicking the 'eye' icon.

3



Select the down arrow in the top-right corner of the navigation bar to download the file if you don't have access to it. Use a contrast checker like the "Colour Contrast Analyzer" from the Paciello group to ensure your color combinations meet accessibility standards. In Power Point, highlight the text and set the RGB values or hex code to select the desired color. Then upload your fixed file.

Add Alternative Description for Image Files:

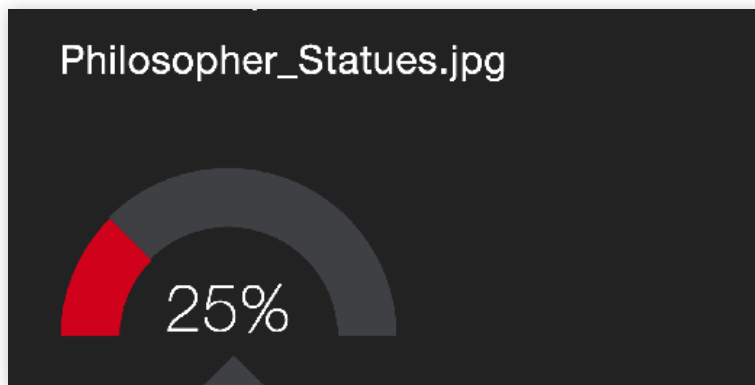
Add a rich description to images and graphs to improve comprehension

Micro-Learning

Images can be a great way to engage your learners with different modes of learning, and can help communicate complex ideas to students. For students with visual impairments, “alternative descriptions” that explain the content of an image are crucial for their learning. For all students, text descriptions can provide deeper context to aid their comprehension.

Scenario: **You add an image file to your course for students**

1



If your image lacks a text description, the Ally indicator will appear “red.” Clicking the indicator will reveal that the file is only 25% accessible because it lacks an alternative description. Click the “What this means” button for an explanation, and “How to write a good description” for some quick tips.

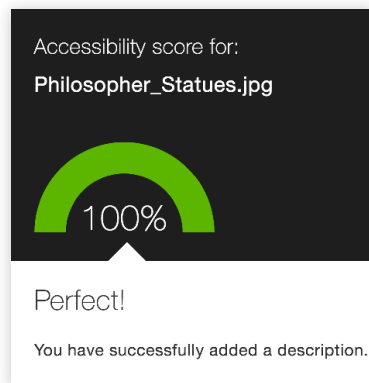
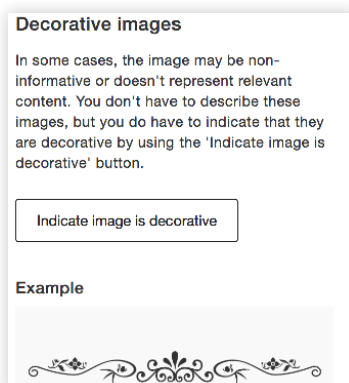
2



The screenshot shows a form titled 'Add alternative description'. It has a text input field with the placeholder text 'Enter a description for this image' and a dark grey 'Add' button to the right.

When you’re ready, simply add your alternative description to the text field in the Ally feedback window. When you’re done, click “Add.” Make sure your description is more than just the title of the file, or Ally will report an accessibility error. Describe the image and what’s important, and mention any text in the image to improve your score.

3



If your image is only for visual effects, and does not contain info relevant to the learning content, you can also mark the image as “decorative.” This means no alternative description is necessary, and your accessibility score will improve. This helps assure students of the purpose of those files.

Remove Potentially Harmful Content:

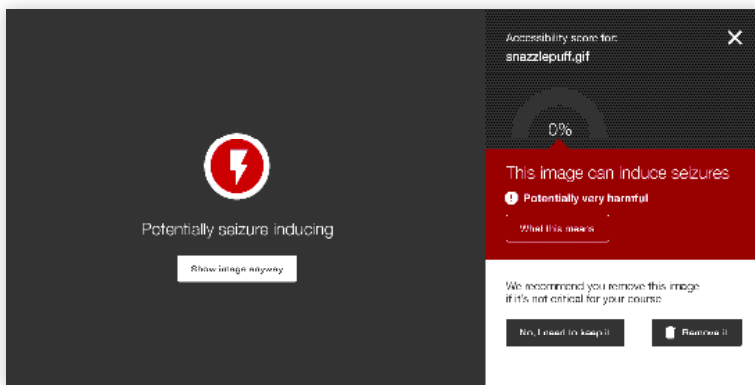
Digital media can trigger unexpected responses from students

Micro-Learning

The Internet is full of fun content, and adding creative media elements to your course can boost student engagement. However, GIFs and other rapid-movement or flickering media- even overly complex still images- have the potential to trigger seizures or other harmful responses in students. Ally identifies these files, and scores them as “Red, 0% accessible.” Follow the instructions to help ensure all students can safely interact with your course content.

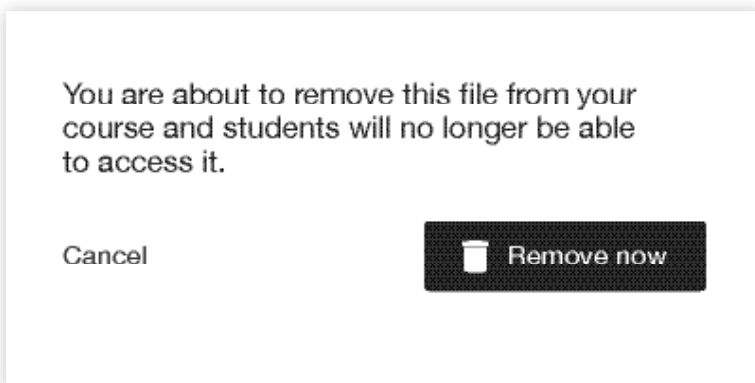
Scenario: **You click a red indicator, its “potentially harmful”**

1



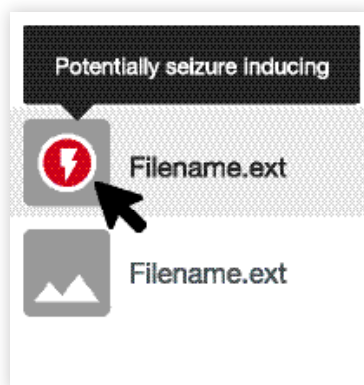
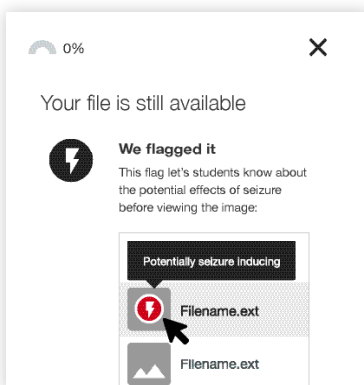
You’re adding some visual media to your course to embed later in a discussion, and you notice a red Ally indicator next to the file. You click the indicator, and see that Ally has marked the file as “potentially harmful.” You have two choices:

2



The recommended choice from an inclusion perspective is to remove the file, and replace it with something similar and less harmful. This will ensure that all your students can engage with the content safely.

3



If the content is essential to your course, Ally will flag the content and alert students before opening the file. In case the students are susceptible to seizure from flashing or visually complex images, they will receive a warning from Ally before opening.

Scanned PDFs - An Enemy to Accessibility:

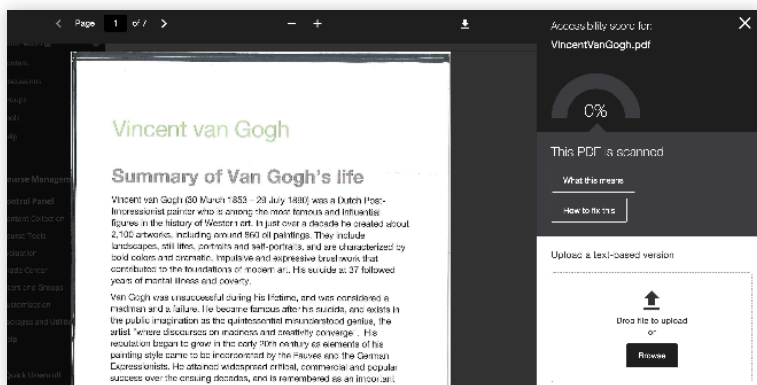
Scanning pages from old text books results in inaccessible documents

Micro-Learning

Preparing to teach a course is a lot of work, and sometimes you might be left with a scanned copy from a book in your files. Unfortunately, scanned texts are very inaccessible, and create lots of challenges for all students to read and study effectively. When you come across a scanned PDF, do your best to replace it with a proper digital text document.

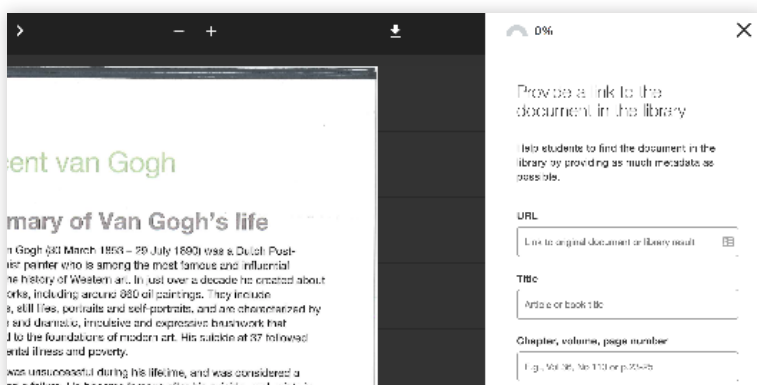
Scenario: A red indicator informs you of a scan. What now?

1



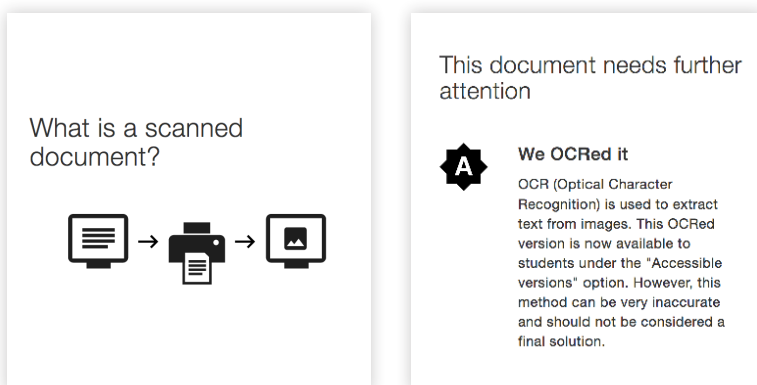
Uh oh. You see a red indicator and its a poor score. You click the indicator for the Ally feedback, and realize it is a scan with 0% accessibility. Yikes! First thing: Can you find a text version online through search? Upload a digital text to Ally to improve your score.

2



It might still be difficult for you to find a digital text version. Reaching out to your library or accessibility services before the start of the term can help make sure students who need those formats don't fall behind. You can also add a "Library Reference" to Ally to help your students.

3



As a last result, Ally will perform "Optical Character Recognition" (OCR) to try to better identify text elements. Unfortunately, this is not a final solution so it won't improve the score, and you will still want to replace the scanned version when possible. Hint: You might try downloading the OCR'd PDF or HTML from the alternative formats as a way to add a more accessible version.

Add a Library Reference:

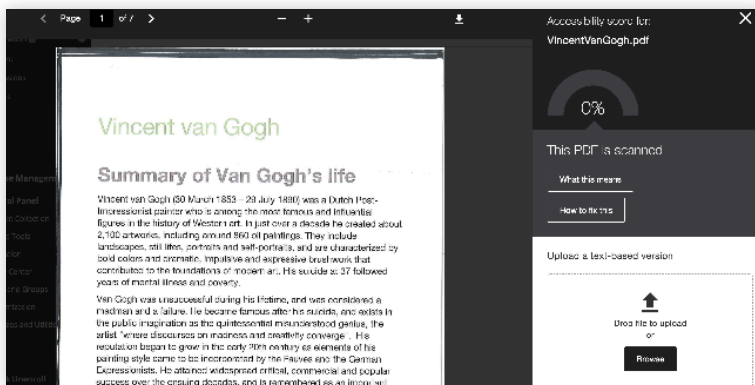
When all else fails, add bibliographic info to help students

Micro-Learning

There may be times when you simply cannot find a fully accessible version of your course file. As a last best effort, Ally will allow you to add some more bibliographic information to the file. Adding this info will help students work with your campus office to find or create an accessible version of the file.

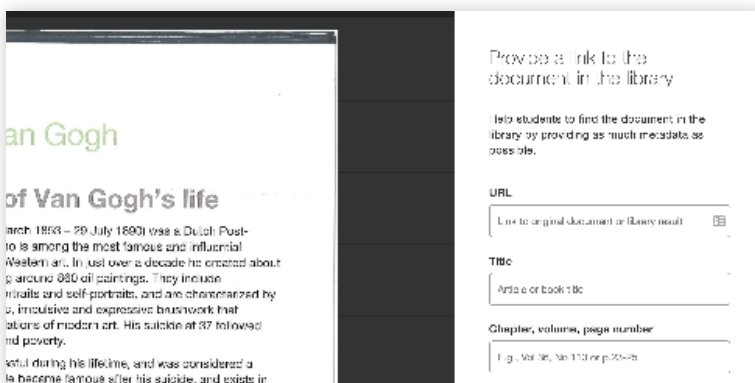
Scenario: About to launch your course and Ally flags a file

1



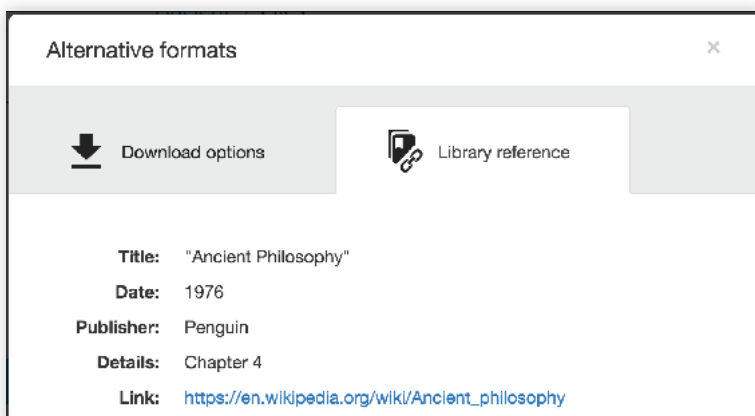
While embedding a PDF link in your course Discussion, a red Ally indicator appears. You click the indicator, and realize the PDF is scanned. You see the option to upload a digital text version, but you do not know where to access a digital text version.

2



Ally will ask you if the document can be found in the library. If you think it can be, click “Yes” and add whatever info you have about the document in the form, including a link to the document in your library catalogue. This will help students work with the accessibility office to find a suitable version.

3



Once you add the Library Reference, students can access the document info by going to the file, and selecting “alternative formats” from the drop-down next to the file name. This will open the Ally alternative formats window, where students can access the library reference info from the “Library Reference” tab.

View All File Accessibility Issues:

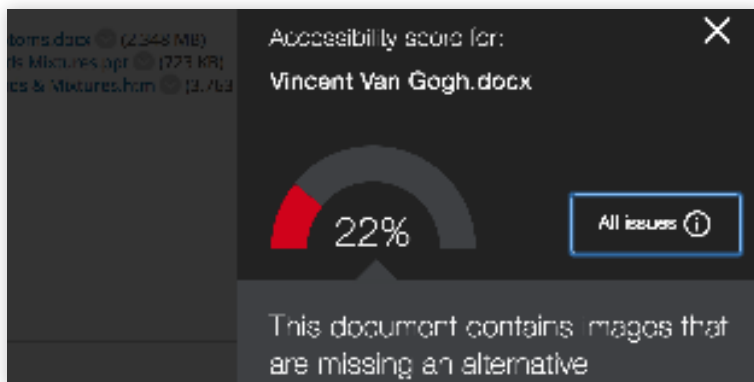
Choose which issues to address first with “All Issues” tab

Micro-Learning

Creating accessible digital learning content can be a challenge, and a single course file may contain multiple issues impacting its accessibility for students. Ally gives you options for fixing those issues, allowing you to craft an accessibility strategy suitable to your course needs. Prioritize high-impact issues, or focus on quick fixes first with Ally “All Issues.”

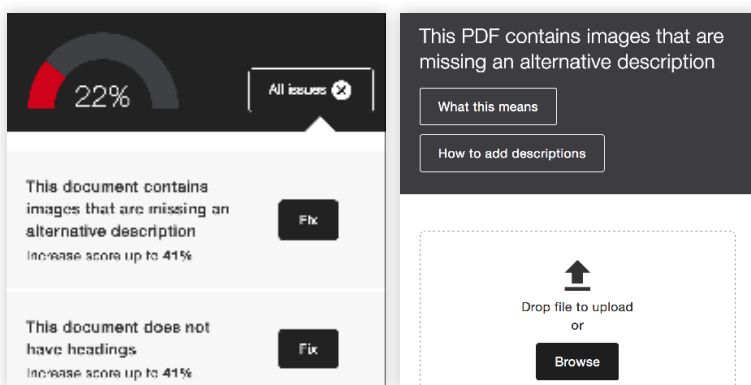
Scenario: **A course file has multiple issues to address**

1



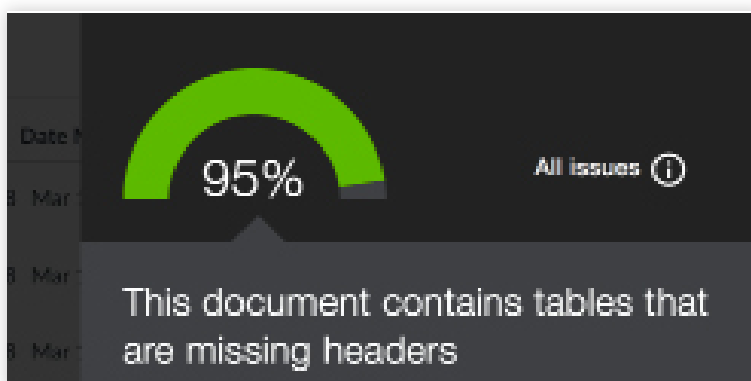
When you click an Ally indicator, the instructor feedback window will let you know the most pressing accessibility issue to correct. It also provides an option to view “All Issues” when the file has multiple accessibility issues to address.

2



From the “All Issues” tab, you can see a list of all the accessibility issues Ally has identified in the file. Ally lets you know how much each issue fix will improve your accessibility score.

3



Choose how you want to proceed in addressing each issue. Click “Fix” to view step-by-step details on how to correct each issue. Upload or add your changes with each issue, or address them all at once. The closer to 100% means a more inclusive learning environment for your students.

Add Descriptions to Power Point Images:

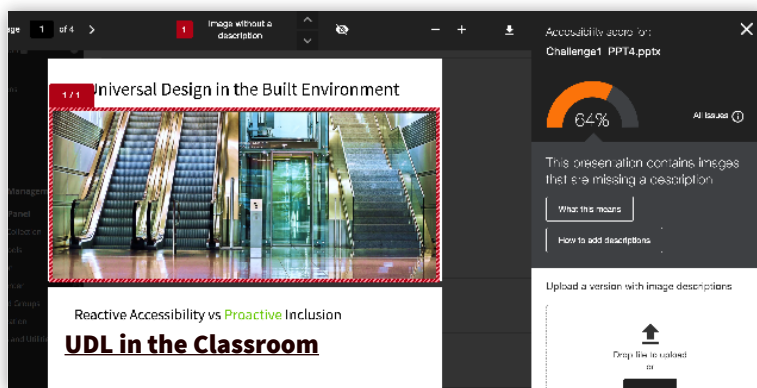
Images in presentation documents need alt text

Micro-Learning

Sharing presentation slides with students can provide them useful review and study materials. Since many presentations include images, it is important that the images contain an alternative description, to help both in labeling document images as well as for students with visual impairments.

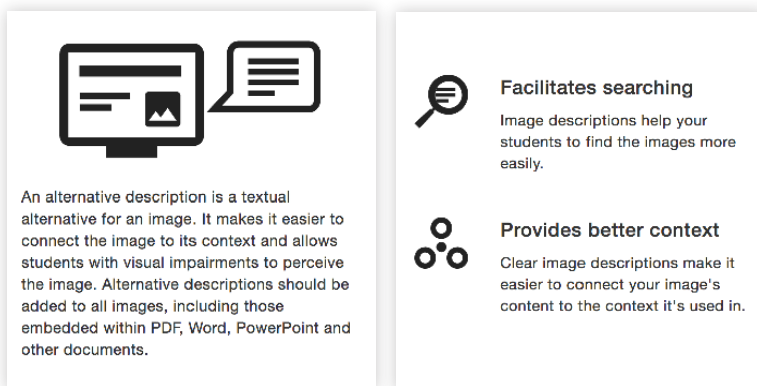
Scenario: **Your favorite presentation has an orange indicator**

1



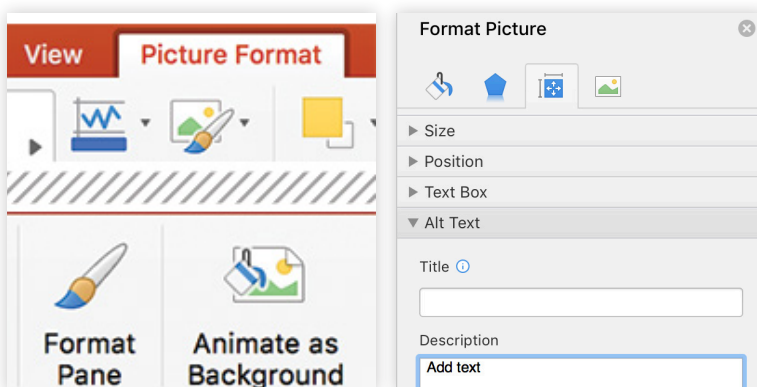
When you click the orange indicator next to your Power Point file, the Ally instructor feedback informs you that the presentation has images missing descriptions. You'll need to fix this issue in Power Point, and upload a new file to Ally when you're ready. Use the in-browser document preview to the left of the feedback to see which images are missing descriptions.

2



Ally will describe to you how to write effective alternative descriptions if you are unfamiliar. You can download the file from your course to work on it if you don't already have it on your computer. Open the file in Power Point to add your alt descriptions.

3



In Power Point, you can add alternative descriptions to an image by:

1. Select the Image
2. Choose the "Picture Format" tab and locate the "Format Pane" button
3. Select "Size and Properties" tab, and then alt text from the drop-down.
4. Add your text in the description field, don't worry about title. Save your file.

Add Headings to a Word Document:

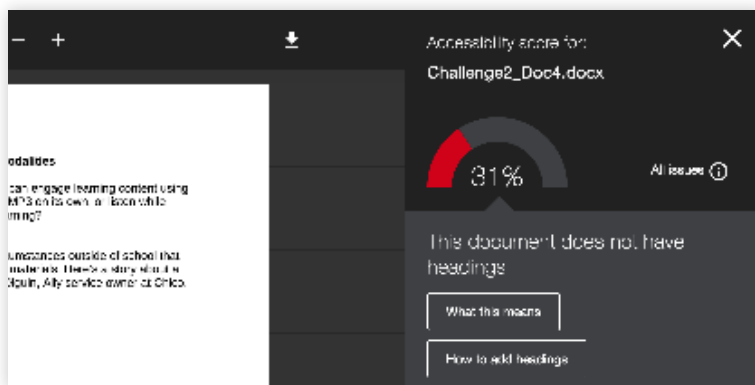
Headings make navigating documents easier for all

Micro-Learning

Reading long, dense text documents can be a daunting task for learners. Well-structured documents help students organize and process texts. By using headings in your Word document styles, you can design sections and sub-sections for your documents. Headers can help students navigate and comprehend texts, and are essential for screen readers.

Scenario: Ally tells you your Word Doc is missing headings


1



You add a MS Word document to your course site, and notice a red Ally indicator, so you click it. Ally tells you that your document is missing headings. You'll need to edit the document offline to make the changes, and upload a new version to improve the score.

2

A 'heading' isn't always a heading



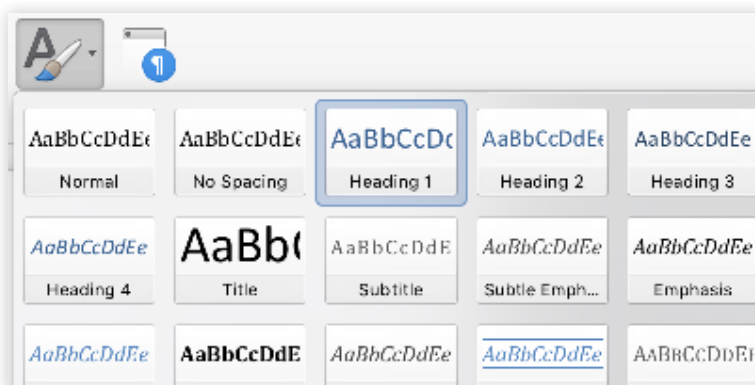
Do not only use visual appearance such as text size, bold or underline to mimic a heading. Always use the program's native heading styles to ensure headings are properly marked as headings.

Why use headings

- Facilitates searching**
Headings can provide structure and clarity. This can help students better understand the content and facilitate reading.
- Essential for students with visual impairments**
Headings help people using a screen reader navigate a document. Imagine reading a book without any chapters or

Check out the Ally feedback to learn more about why headings are important, how to use headings effectively, and where to find tutorials to help you add headings to the document. Remember, headings establish should provide a clear, consistent structure for students to follow throughout the doc.

3



If you're using MS Word, first highlight the text you want to change into a heading. Then, find "Styles" and select the appropriate heading type. Use headings consistently, and try not to exceed 6 levels. Once you've corrected the heading structure, save the Word file and upload to Ally. Add headings to all your text documents for a more inclusive learning environment!

Add Headers to your Data Tables in Word:

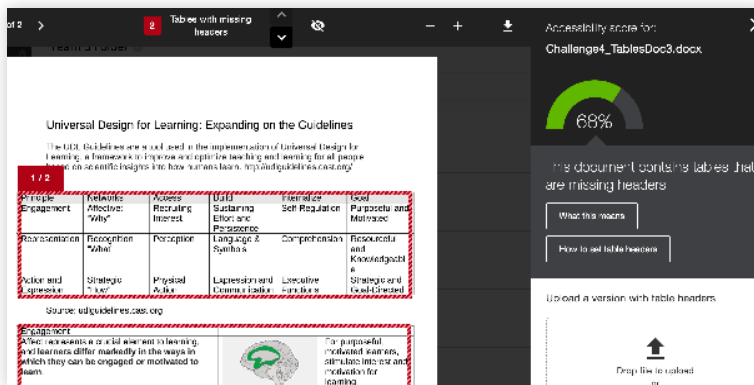
Headers make navigating tables easier

Micro-Learning

Using tables in your documents can be a great way to help organize complex information for students. To make sure your tables are effective and accessible, however, you should only use them for data, and not for visual layouts. By adding headers to your tables, you will improve how your students navigate tables, especially if they use a screen reader.

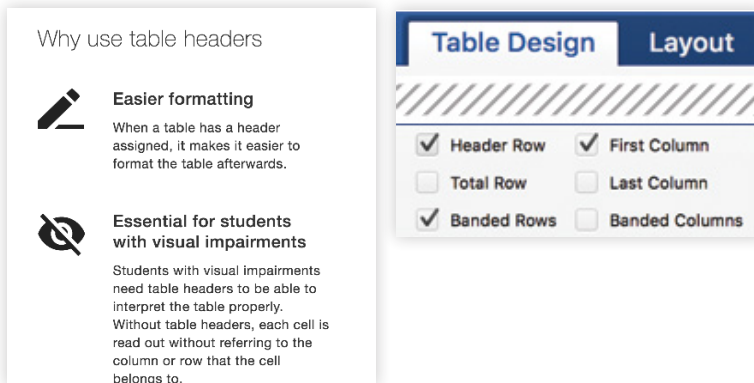
Scenario: You upload a Word Doc with tables

1



When uploading a Word document to your course, you notice a light green indicator. You click the indicator and discover that Ally reports tables in your document are missing headers. In the preview to the right, you see red outlines around your tables indicating where the errors appear. You will need to add the headers to the original Word document if you can access it.

2



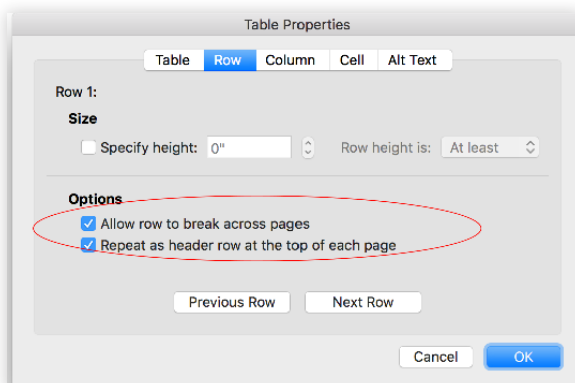
Before you go to Word or another authoring tool to make your corrections, check out Ally's tips and tutorials.

Add headers in Word by:

Highlight the first row in your table that explains what's in each column

From the "Table Design" tab at the top, check the box for "Header Row".

3



Next, right click your highlighted row, select "Table Properties", and check "Repeat as header row"

Save your file, and upload it to Ally for more accessible and easier to navigate tables.

Export a Word Doc as a Tagged PDF:

Ensure that your Word Doc stays accessible when converting to PDF

Micro-Learning


Although keeping your documents as a .doc or .docx file is the best way to ensure the document remains accessible, many instructors prefer to export their Word docs as PDF. When exporting as PDF, it is important that you check your export settings to make sure that the PDF will be tagged, as this will make sure the document is easy to navigate.

Scenario: **You upload an untagged PDF of your syllabus**

1

Accessibility score for:
307syllabus Spring17-1.pdf

6%



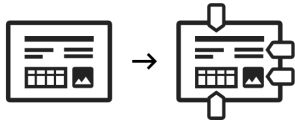
This PDF is untagged

[What this means](#)

You created your syllabus in a Word doc, exported it as PDF, and added it to your course. A red Ally indicator appears next to your file, and informs you that your PDF is untagged.

2

What is a tagged PDF?



Easier navigation

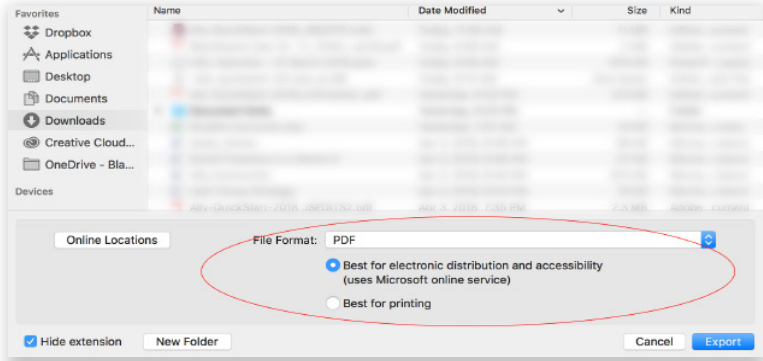
The structural information in a tagged PDF allows for automatic generation of a table of contents. This facilitates navigation for all students, especially for long documents.

Adapts to screen size

A tagged PDF will reflow the content to best fit your device. Without tags, students will be required to do more zooming and scrolling.

A tagged document provides readers with improved navigation, helps keep texts organized, and is essential for students who use a screen reader. You can upload the Word file to maintain accessibility, or your Word doc as a PDF with the correct settings.

3



To export a Word document as a tagged PDF, go to “File,” select “Save As” then select PDF from the drop-down. You will notice a dialogue box, check “Best for electronic distribution and accessibility.” Then upload your newly tagged PDF to Ally.

For additional support, please contact Digital Learning Innovations

Email: dli@kennesaw.edu - Website: <http://dli.kennesaw.edu/>