

Getting Your Course Ready

A Course Accessibility Readiness Guide

Creating an accessible course does not mean rebuilding everything before the semester begins. Start with the materials students will use first, make a few high-impact improvements, and continue refining your course over time.



THREE PRIORITIES BEFORE THE FIRST WEEK

1. Make Your Blackboard Course Clear and Predictable

Accessibility begins with helping students understand where to start, what to do, and where to find important information.

BEFORE THE FIRST DAY

- ☐ Create a clearly labeled Start Here or Begin Here area.
- ☐ Make the syllabus easy to locate.
- ☐ Organize content by week, module, unit, or topic.
- ☐ Use clear, descriptive names for folders, files, assignments, and links.
- ☐ Place similar items in consistent locations throughout the course.
- ☐ Review the course from a student's perspective, when possible.

Quick Check — could a new student answer these?

- Where do I begin?
- What should I complete first?
- Where is the syllabus?
- Where are assignments submitted?
- How do I contact the instructor?

3. Open Your Blackboard Ally Course Report

Blackboard Ally helps identify accessibility issues in course files and provides guidance for improving them.

BEFORE CLASSES BEGIN

- ☐ Locate and open the Course Accessibility Report.
- ☐ Review the files identified as needing attention.
- ☐ Begin with a frequently used or high-priority file.
- ☐ Select an issue to view Ally's instructions.
- ☐ Replace the original file after making corrections.
- ☐ Recheck the report to confirm the improvement.

Remember

An Ally score is a helpful indicator, but the goal is not simply to reach a number. The real goal is to ensure students can find, understand, and use your course materials.

2. Check Your Most Important Course Materials

You do not need to review every file at once. Begin with the materials students will use during the first two weeks.

PRIORITIZE

- ☐ Syllabus
- ☐ Course schedule
- ☐ First-week readings and handouts
- ☐ Assignment instructions
- ☐ Lecture slides
- ☐ Frequently used forms or templates

WORD, POWERPOINT & EXCEL: CHECK ACCESSIBILITY

Open the document → Review → Check Accessibility → review results → correct the most significant issues first.

LOOK ESPECIALLY FOR

- Missing heading styles, unclear links, insufficient contrast
- Images without alt text; tables without clear headers
- Content that relies on color alone

Before the First Day: Final Check

- ☐ Students can identify where to begin.
- ☐ The syllabus is easy to find.
- ☐ The first module or week is organized.
- ☐ Key documents have been checked for accessibility.
- ☐ Videos used during the first weeks have accurate captions.
- ☐ Meaningful images include alternative text.
- ☐ The Ally Course Accessibility Report has been reviewed.
- ☐ Students know how to contact you and ask for help.

Your First-Month Accessibility Roadmap

Accessibility is an ongoing part of course development. Use this roadmap to make steady progress without trying to address everything at once.

Before the Semester — Build a Clear Starting Point

- ☐ Create a Start Here area.
- ☐ Organize the first two weeks of content.
- ☐ Review the syllabus and course schedule.
- ☐ Check first-week documents.
- ☐ Confirm intro videos are captioned.
- ☐ Open the Ally Course Accessibility Report.

Goal: students can enter the course, understand what's expected, and access what they need to begin.

Weeks Two & Three — Improve One Type of Content

- ☐ Add heading styles to Word documents.
- ☐ Add alt text to meaningful images.
- ☐ Replace vague links with descriptive text.
- ☐ Check color contrast in slides and documents.
- ☐ Use built-in list tools; simplify complex tables.
- ☐ Review captions; replace inaccessible scans.

Goal: improve one common content type rather than correcting the entire course at once.

Week One — Observe the Student Experience

- ☐ Confirm links and files open correctly.
- ☐ Review announcements/emails for clear formatting.
- ☐ Use descriptive links, not “click here.”
- ☐ Turn navigation questions into course-structure fixes.
- ☐ Correct urgent accessibility concerns.

Repeated student questions may reveal a course-design barrier — not a student problem.

Week Four — Review Progress, Plan Next Step

- ☐ Check whether priority files have improved.
- ☐ Identify the next frequently used file to address.
- ☐ Note issues you're unsure how to fix.
- ☐ Attend a help session or request assistance.
- ☐ Choose one accessibility goal for next month.

REFLECT

- What improvement made the greatest difference?
- What new habit can you carry forward?

A Manageable Approach — You Are Not Expected to Do It All in Month One

- Start with new materials — build accessibility in from the beginning.
- Prioritize high-use materials — focus on what students use most.
- Fix barriers as you find them — address urgent issues promptly.
- Build one habit at a time — small, repeated actions add up.
- Ask for help — you do not have to solve every problem alone.

Need Support?

USI's faculty accessibility resources offer:

- Blackboard Ally guidance
- Accessible document instructions
- Templates and checklists
- Microlearning videos
- Help-session schedules & consultations

Your Next Step — Choose One Action

- ☐ Organize your first Blackboard module.
- ☐ Run the Accessibility Checker on your syllabus.
- ☐ Open your Ally Course Accessibility Report.
- ☐ Review one video for accurate captions.
- ☐ Add alternative text to one meaningful image.
- ☐ Visit the Faculty Accessibility Resources page.



Faculty Accessibility Resources:
[USI.edu/accessibility](https://usi.edu/accessibility)

*Every improvement removes a barrier.
Every accessible choice helps a student
participate more fully.*