

Blackboard Ally Quick Start Guide



Your Accessibility Partner in Blackboard Ultra

Blackboard Ally is built into every Blackboard Ultra course and helps you identify opportunities to make your course materials more accessible.

Rather than expecting you to know every accessibility standard, Ally highlights potential issues, explains why they matter, and provides step-by-step guidance for improving your files.

Most importantly, Ally helps you focus on meaningful improvements — one file at a time.

WHY BLACKBOARD ALLY MATTERS

Accessible course materials benefit many students — not just those with documented disabilities.

When course content is easier to access, students can spend less time figuring out how to use your materials and more time learning from them.

Blackboard Ally helps you:

- ✓ Identify common accessibility issues.
- ✓ Prioritize improvements.
- ✓ Learn accessibility best practices as you work.
- ✓ Create course materials that are easier for everyone to use.
- ✓ Support continuous improvement throughout the semester.

UNDERSTANDING ALLY INDICATORS

Use the indicators to help prioritize your work — not to judge your course.

Indicator		
 High	The file has few accessibility concerns.	Continue using these good practices in future materials.
 Medium	The file can be improved.	Address issues as time allows.
 Low	The file contains barriers that may affect students.	Review when preparing or updating the material.
 Very Low	The file may present significant accessibility barriers.	Prioritize these files, especially if students use them frequently.

WHERE SHOULD I BEGIN?

If your course contains many files, focus on the materials students use first.

Recommended Priority

1. Syllabus
2. First-week materials
3. Assignment instructions
4. Frequently used course documents
5. New materials you create this semester
6. Older materials, over time

Progress over perfection.

Every accessible document you create today is one less document you'll need to revisit later.

YOUR FIRST FIVE MINUTES WITH ALLY

Step 1 — Open Your Blackboard Ultra Course

Navigate to the course you want to review.

Step 2 — Open the Course Accessibility Report

The Course Accessibility Report provides an overview of your course files and highlights accessibility issues across your course.

Rather than reviewing every document individually, the report helps you quickly identify where to begin.

Step 3 — Start with One Important File

Don't try to fix everything before classes begin. Instead, choose one file students will use immediately, such as:

- Your syllabus
- First-week lecture slides
- Assignment instructions
- A frequently used handout
- Course schedule

Improving one high-impact document often provides more value than making small changes across many files.

Step 4 — Review Ally's Feedback

Select the accessibility indicator beside a file. Ally will explain:

- What the issue is
- Why it matters
- How it may affect students
- Steps you can take to improve the document

You don't need to memorize accessibility standards — Ally provides guidance as you work.

Step 5 — Make the Improvement

- Update the original file in Word, PowerPoint, or another editing program.
- Replace the file in Blackboard.
- Ally will automatically review the updated version and refresh your feedback.

Faculty Tip

Don't wait until your entire course is built before checking accessibility.

Run Ally and the Microsoft Accessibility Checker as you create new materials.

Building accessibility into your workflow is much easier than revisiting dozens of files later.

ALLY WORKS BEST ALONGSIDE OTHER TOOLS

Blackboard Ally is one part of your accessibility toolkit. For best results:

- ✓ Run the Microsoft Accessibility Checker before uploading Word, PowerPoint, or Excel files.
- ✓ Use built-in heading styles and list tools.
- ✓ Add alternative text to meaningful images.
- ✓ Caption instructional videos.
- ✓ Organize your Blackboard course using a clear, consistent structure.

COMMON QUESTIONS

Do I need a perfect Ally score before classes begin?

No. Focus on improving the materials students need first. Continue improving your course throughout the semester.

Should I fix every file at once?

No. Begin with high-use, student-facing materials and build accessibility into all new content moving forward.

Is Ally replacing my judgment?

No. Ally identifies many common accessibility issues, but you remain the expert on your course. Use Ally's feedback as guidance while considering how students interact with your materials.

NEED HELP?

Whether you're building your first Blackboard course or improving an existing one, support is available.

Faculty Accessibility Resources

Templates, instructions, examples, and accessibility guidance.



Help Sessions & Consultations

Current drop-in sessions, workshops, and individual support.



Blackboard Ally Microlearning Videos

Short demonstrations for common accessibility tasks.



Accessibility Website

Campus information, updates, FAQs, and additional resources.



Remember

Blackboard Ally is more than an accessibility checker — it's a teaching tool that helps you build courses that are clearer, more usable, and more inclusive for all students.

Start now. Work a little at a time. Get help when you need it.