



# **DISTANCE EDUCATION ACCESSIBILITY GUIDELINES**

For Students with Disabilities

*Distance Education Accessibility Guidelines  
Task Force*

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# Distance Education Accessibility Guidelines Task Force

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education delivered in the California Community College system is accessible to all students. That communication eventually led to a competitive Request for Proposals (RFP) process for a statewide needs assessment study. One of the outcomes from the resulting study, completed by MPR Associates, Inc., was a recommendation to update the 1999 Distance Education: Access Guidelines for Students with Disabilities, so that they will be more aligned to current technological access issues that colleges face in the delivery of distance education courses and, thus, more useful to the 112 California Community Colleges.

On July 9, 2007, regulations regarding the standards and criteria for distance education

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accomplish this goal. The following guidelines are the result of the work of the Distance Education Accessibility Task Force.

Highlights of the changes to the original guidelines include the addition of a Conceptual Framework section that includes a discussion of the relevance of Universal Design, a Frequently Asked Questions section, a new vision of the guidelines with a focus on newly defined categories of delivery and references to new and emerging technologies that were not in existence in 1999, and the release of the document in an accessible, easily searchable, user-friendly, electronic online format.

### **Conceptual Framework**

In updating these guidelines, it was essential to communicate them in the context of standards that exist in the public arena. As with the 1999 Distance Education: Access Guidelines for Students with Disabilities, the Task Force followed the principles developed by the



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WCAG 2.0 only includes those Guidelines that address issues that significantly block access or interfere with access to the Web for people with disabilities.

**Principles** - There are four principles that provide the foundation for Web accessibility: perceivable, operable, understandable, and robust. The Guidelines and Success Criteria are organized around the following four principles, which lay the foundation necessary for anyone to access and use Web content. Anyone who wants to use the Web must have content that is:

1. ***Perceivable:***



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In the 2008 revision of the system-wide Distance Education Guidelines, (Guideline section 55202) it states that “course quality depends upon the full involvement of the faculty in the design and application of DE courses.” Full engagement begins when faculty present their DE addenda to campus curriculum committees, stating which methods of instruction they will use to teach a course. This is an opportunity for full inclusion, redesign, change and commitment to all students.

### **Legal Requirements**

Both state and federal law require community colleges to operate all programs and activities in a manner which is accessible to qualified individuals with disabilities (also referred to in federal law as “qualified handicapped persons”). (29 U.S.C. § 794, 20 U.S.C. § 1405, 42 U.S.C. § 12101, Gov. Code § 11135.) The operative federal laws referenced above are commonly referred to as Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. (29 U.S.C. § 794, 42 U.S.C. § 12101.) As the system develops its capacity for creation of technology-based instructional resources and the delivery of distance learning, it must proceed with the needs of all students in mind, including the unique needs of students with disabilities. Title II recognizes the special importance of communication, which includes access to information, in its implementing regulation at 28 C.F.R. 35.160 (a). The regulation requires that a public entity, such as a community college, take appropriate steps to ensure that communications with persons with disabilities are as effective as communications with others.

The United States Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights (OCR) is responsible for ensuring that all educational institutions comply with the requirements of all federal civil rights laws, including Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and Title II of the ADA. As a result, the opinions of OCR are generally afforded considerable weight by the courts in interpreting the requirements of these laws. OCR has had occasion to issue several opinions a Td [ible

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aid by which communication is made effective for persons with disabilities.”

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mental or physical disability, by entities receiving funding from the State of California. The Board of Governors has adopted regulations in Title 5, California Code of Regulations, section 59300 et seq. to implement these requirements with respect to funds received by community college districts from the Board of Governors or Chancellor.

**Title 5, California Code of Regulations on Distance Education**

## **Basic Requirements for**

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received funding to assist them in providing access to distance education. In the event that a student files a discrimination complaint, a district relying on the use of readers or interpreters to make a distance education course accessible will bear the burden of demonstrating that it was not possible to build in access







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The new exemptions will allow professors in all fields and “film and media studies students” to hack encrypted DVD content and clip ‘short portions’ into documentary films and “non-commercial videos.” The agency has not defined short portions. This means that any pro(-)Tnt









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**Summary of Access Strategies for Digital Media**

Access strategies for the various media categories focus on ensuring that text is properly formatted, proper textual equivalents are provided for non-textual content, and that all interactive controls are available to the end user.

The following table represents the basic access strategies for the primary categories of digital media: text, images, audio, video, and complex information. Depending on the specific type of media within these categories, different capabilities for enhancing access will exist, as shown in the table.



**Access Strategy Examples**

The following table includes some examples of access strategies for specific disability categories, in order to illustrate how multiple access strategies are required to ensure ultimate access. While the individual access strategies for a given type of media may be simple, the complete access strategies can be extensive when multiple types of media are combined. Likewise, when an individual has multiple disabilities, the access strategies can also grow more complex.

***Examples of Access Strategies by Disability & Electronic Media Type***

Media Type	Blind	Low Vision	Deaf or Hard of Hearing	Mobility Impairment
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### Assistive Technology by Disability

Assistive Technology (AT)	Blind	Low Vision	Mobility	Learning Disability	Deaf	Hard of Hearing	Speech
Screen Magnifier		X		X			
Screen Reader	X						
E-text Reader	X	X	X	X		X	X
Assistive Listening Device						X	
Closed Captioning (CC)				X	X	X	
Speech Recognition			X	X			
Augmentative Alternative Communication (AAC)							X
Custom Display/System Theme	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Custom Switch/Input System			X				X
Text To Speech							

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and the video can only be used for a single term. Other exclusions to captioning include student work and raw footage that will never be archived after the current use, as well as video with foreign language subtitles.

Quite simply, if you're keeping the video and more than a very limited audience might view it, then you must caption it.

### **3. *How much time will it take to make my course accessible?***

There are several variables that affect this question. The quantity of multimedia you incorporate into your course can impact the amount of time required. In addition, the more complex the multimedia, the greater the time that can be expected to address accessibility.





It is recommended that each college work closely with their legal counsel, ADA Coordinator, supervisor of DSPS, College Administration and other experts on their campus before considering pursuing a claim of “undue burden.”

**7. *How do I bridge the students’ capabilities with the required learning objectives when there are perceived accessibility challenges?***

In answering this question, there are variables at play, including: 1) What is the learning objective of the course? 2) What is the user’s skill level with regard to using assistive technology?

What is the learning objective? It is important to factor in how the course is taught and the nature of the assignment, when determining how to accommodate an individual with a disability. For example, in an astronomy course being taken by a blind student, assignments could be made accessible by providing tactile graphics of star systems or other materials pertinent to the lesson/course.

What is the user’s skill level with regard to using assistive technology? Sometimes a user’s skill level with a given assistive technology tool is not adequate to access a course, no matter how accessible the course is. Refer the student to the DSPS office on your campus to help determine the user’s level of expertise and to acquire training, if necessary.

***Every California community college has someone whose duties include training faculty to design accessible courses. This person’s title and department affiliation may vary from campus to campus.***

**8. *To whom do I go for help?***

It is important to know your campus. Every California community college has someone whose duties include training faculty to design accessible courses. This person’s title and department affiliation may vary from campus to campus. A common title is Alternate Media Technology Specialist. This position often resides in DSPS. A good place to start is with the supervisor of DSPS. Other resources may be the Distance Education Coordinator or Dean. The Vice President of Instruction or Student Services is also a possible resource to identify appropriate assistance. Again, know your campus!

**9. *What are our college's responsibilities regarding the accessibility of e-packs?***

Ultimately, it is the responsibility of each college to ensure that the electronic information they procure is accessible. It is important to get assurance from the e-pack's publisher representative about its accessibility before making a purchase. Insist that the publisher representative send files to you in an accessible format. Putting pressure on publishers to make content accessible will help to motivate them to provide content that is accessible. Find out about the possibility of being able to use some parts of the e-pack and not others. An e-pack can be mostly text with a few graphics, a full Flash-based site with comprehensive graphics, and everything else in between.

Alternatively, you can modify the publisher files to make them accessible yourself (you may need permission first), create your own files, or not use an e-pack at all. You might also consider switching to a different textbook that uses an accessible e-pack.

***If third-party websites are used as required course materials and you cannot guarantee accessibility of the content, you must be prepared to provide accessible equivalent versions of the content for students with disabilities.***

**10. *When I select a delivery method, how do I determine the accessibility of the tools I choose to teach the course?***

One thing is certain: new exciting ways to present information electronically become available every day. It is our responsibility as educators to consider the ramifications for all students when making new technology purchases. However, as the instructor, you have many resources at your disposal. A good place to start in selecting those tools is with your supervisor of DSPS, Alternate Media Specialist, Faculty Resource Center, technology trainer, etc.

They often have answers or can provide resources based on your specific concerns (i.e., contact information for determining the accessibility of your learning management system, e-book, e-pack, etc.). There is no comprehensive solution for determining the accessibility of all electronic and information technology that is available.



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continue using them – you or the creator will have to retrofit the files. Information about Flash accessibility can be found at <http://www.adobe.com/accessibility>, and at the High Tech Center Training Unit website: <http://www.htctu.net>

- 16. I don't have time to caption or transcribe all of my videos and podcasts.***





# Appendices

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## **Resources Funded by the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office**

### **High Tech Center Training Unit**

<http://www.htctu.net>

Funded by the California Community College's Chancellor's Office, the High Tech Center Training Unit (HTCTU) is a state-of-the-art training and support facility for community college faculty and staff wishing to acquire or improve teaching skills, methodologies, and pedagogy in Assistive Computer Technology, Alternate Media and Web Accessibility. The HTCTU supports High Tech Center programs at 112 community colleges and satellite centers.

### **Distance Education Captioning Grant**

<http://www.canyons.edu/captioning>

The Distance Education Captioning and Transcription grant (DECT) provides CCCs with funding for live and asynchronous captioning and transcription as a means of enhancing the access of all students to distance education courses. The DECT also promotes and supports awareness of available funding as a means to support faculty efforts to develop high-quality, media-rich distance learning courses.

### **@ONE**

<http://www.onefortraining.org>

The @ONE Project goal is the provision of training, online resources and research for

California Community College Faculty and staff to learn about technology that will improve the

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## **Other Resources**

### **Access and Equity in Online Classes and Virtual Schools**

[http://www.inacol.org/research/docs/NACOL\\_EquityAccess.pdf](http://www.inacol.org/research/docs/NACOL_EquityAccess.pdf)

Report: This issues brief references to civil rights legislation in the United States, but the issues covered that relate to access and equity are relevant to all online programs.

### **AccessDL**

<http://www.washington.edu/doit/Resources/accessdl.html>

The Center on Accessible Distance Learning (AccessDL) is funded by the U.S. Department of

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### **Glossary**

**Audio description** – Narration that is added to a soundtrack to describe important visual details that cannot be understood from the main soundtrack alone. Audio description of video provides information about actions, characters, scene changes, on-screen text, and other visual content. In standard audio description, narration is added during existing pauses in dialogue. Where all of the video information is already provided in existing audio, no additional audio description is necessary. Also called ‘video description’ and ‘descriptive narration.’

**Alt Tag** – A HTML tag that provides alternative text when non-textual elements, typically images, cannot be displayed.

**Assistive Technology** – As defined by the Assistive Technology Act of 1998, the term refers to “any item, piece of equipment, or product system, whether acquired commercially, modified, or customized, that is used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities.” Assistive technologies include: screen readers and magnifiers, closed captioning, alternative keyboards, and other special software and equipment that makes information devices more accessible. Also referred to as ‘Adaptive Technology.’

**Built-in accessibility tools** – Hardware and software on the computer, such as: a screen reader, magnifier, or on-screen keyboard. These tools are designed primarily for people who have difficulty interacting with their computer using a typical display, keyboard, and/or mouse.

**Caption** – A text transcript of the audio portion of a video file that synchronizes the text to the action contained in the video.

**Captions** – Words shown on a movie, television or computer monitor showing what is being said in the program. Captions may be ‘open’ (visible whenever the program is shown) or ‘closed.’ Closed captions (when shown) may be visible to all people viewing the show, or with some technology, they may be visible only to people who wish to see them. Even though the terms caption and subtitle have similar definitions, captions commonly refer to on-screen text specifically designed for deaf or hard of hearing viewers, while subtitles are straight transcriptions or translations of the dialogue. Captions are usually positioned below the person who is speaking, and they include descriptions of sounds (i.e., gunshots or closing doors) and music. Closed captions are not visible until the viewer activates them. Open captions are always visible, such as subtitles on foreign videotapes.

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**E-pack** – An e-pack is a publisher created digital content package which can be used by faculty with technology such as Blackboard and customized to meet their unique needs. It can contain text, graphics, images, interactive Flash files, PDFs, etc.

**Fundamental alteration** – The ADA states a “fundamental alteration” is a change to such a degree that the original program, service, or activity is no longer the same.

**Interface design/content layout** – The intent of Web design to create a website which is a collection of electronic documents and applications that reside on a Web server(s) and

sites, Myspace, Facebook and Twitter, are the social media most commonly used for socialization and connecting friends, relatives, and employees.

**Style Sheet** – Style sheets are the way that standards-compliant Web designers define the layout, look-and-feel, and design of their pages. They are called Cascading Style Sheets or CSS. With style sheets, a designer can define many aspects of a Web page, such as: fonts, colors, layout, positioning, imagery, and accessibility.

**Subtitles** – Textual versions of the dialog in films and television programs, usually displayed at the bottom of the screen. They can either be a form of written translation of a dialog in a foreign language or a written rendering of the dialog in the same language.

**Synchronous** – Communication in which interaction between participants is simultaneous.

**Technology based instruction** – Education or training delivered via web-based media, computer, or other technologies.

**Textual description** – Written descriptions of images that can be rendered into an accessible format via assistive technology for non-sighted viewers.

**Universal Design** – Universal Design is the design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design.

**User interface components** – Hardware and/or software that allow individuals to interact with technology. User interfaces exist for various systems and provide a means of input, allowing the users to manipulate a system, and/or output, allowing the system to indicate the effects of the users' manipulation.

**WAI** – Web Accessibility Initiative is affiliated with the World Wide Web Consortium. It coordinates with organizations around the world to increase the accessibility of the Web through five primary areas of work: technology, guidelines, tools, education and outreach, and research and development. They are the developer of web content accessibility guidelines.