

Distance Learning Systems

Teaching Tips #17 — Web Accessibility Standards and You

In 1998, Congress amended the Rehabilitation Act and—for the first time—set out specific guidelines for accessible web content. In this Teaching Tip we will look at what this legislation says and what it means to you when it comes to web delivery of materials, whether you are using the UAF Blackboard system or not.

Section 508

Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act (specifically [subsection 1194.22](#)¹) sets standards for web content, specifically sixteen items including such requirements as:

- A text-equivalent for every non-text element (such as images and multimedia)
- Alternatives to information conveyed by color
- Row and column headers for tables
- Proper frame titles and markup

Blackboard

The Blackboard 5 system at UAF—with the exception of the Virtual Classroom chat and whiteboard tool—is [compliant with Section 508 guidelines](#)². So if you are using Blackboard you are already on the road to accessibility for your students! But you must also ensure that your own content fulfills the same requirements.

Your Materials

Managing accessibility for your materials means you must a) create and use materials that are accessible, and b) add those items to Blackboard in such a way that you take advantage of its accessibility features.

When creating your materials, you will need to pay attention to a fairly limited number of items you may not have thought about before (or may be unaware of), such as “alt” tags, table headers, descriptive links, etc. [Information and examples of each standard requirement](#)³ geared towards content creators is available online.

When making those materials available on Blackboard, [the system provides tools](#)⁴ for you to include text alternatives, plug-in download links, and other accessibility items.

This is Important!

If you find something confusing, contact us at Distance Learning Systems and we can help! Issues of accessibility are important not just as matters of compliance with Federal Law, but as a service to our learning community which includes many students and potential students who rely on these standards. There are few worse feelings than having a student excited to take a class only to find themselves unable to do so because we weren't prepared to follow the relatively simple guidelines established by law.

More Resources

Find more information, including a variety of links and resources, check this Tip's resource page on the Distance Learning Systems website: <http://distance.uaf.edu/dls/resources/tt/access/>

For more Teaching Tips and other Distance Education information, please visit the new and enhanced Center for Distance Education Distance Learning Systems website at:

<http://distance.uaf.edu/dls/>

¹ <http://www.section508.gov/index.cfm?FuseAction=Content&ID=12#Web>

² <http://products.blackboard.com/cp/bb5/access/bb508.cgi>

³ <http://www.access-board.gov/sec508/guide/1194.22.htm>

⁴ <http://products.blackboard.com/cp/bb5/access/508coursebuilders.cgi>