



Designing Course Documents for Digital Natives

What are they?

Course documents authored in Microsoft Word that use simple formatting tools to enhance accessibility. These documents cater to Digital Natives in that they are available on demand in a variety of digital mediums (Blackboard, e-mail, websites). This process allows a diverse group of potential users to interact with material visually and auditorily, thus increasing the accessibility for people of various abilities and learning styles.

Why are they important?

Course content provided in digital formats (i.e. Microsoft Word documents) allow the user to interact with the information in a variety of locations. For example, a visual learner is able to change the font size, text color, and background color to meet their needs. An auditory learner can hear the information using text to speech software. Users can also take advantage of the highlighting and sticky note tools to enhance the processing and retention of information. Overall, digital documents allow flexibility and customization that Digital Natives have come to expect.

It is important to realize that not all digital content is accessible. For example, an article that is scanned into the computer and saved as a PDF is not accessible because it is a picture of the text as opposed to the actual text and it can not be manipulated by the user. A paper-based handout is not accessible because it is provided in the fixed medium of paper. However, this information can be made accessible by authoring them in Microsoft Word and sharing digitally with students through Blackboard or e-mail.

Pros...

- Users are able to access information in a variety of locations.
- Students are able to customize information to suit their learning style.
- Reduces the need for special accommodations, such as note-takers, readers, and audio recordings of lectures
- Reduces preparation time (copies, sorting, etc)
- Students are less likely to lose/misplace important course information because it is saved digitally

Cons...

- Faculty and students may require an adjustment period when learning to use the digital materials effectively

How to Use them...

When authoring course documents, pick one to make accessible and provide digitally for students via Blackboard or e-mail. The course syllabus is a great place to start because it has a clear format and contains crucial information that is relevant to all students registered for the course. Once the process becomes more comfortable, gradually convert lecture notes and other course materials to accessible documents. The goal is to create an accessible library of course materials that can be adapted and updated each semester to ensure access for all learners.

- **Microsoft Word:** Microsoft Word is a familiar and readily available word processing program.
- **Adobe Acrobat:** Adobe Acrobat allows word documents to be saved in a Portable Document Format (PDF). Benefits of PDF's include:
 - Security-documents can be password protected and saved as "read only" files
 - Formatting-documents retain all formatting from Microsoft word
 - Dual Platform-PDF's can be accessed by both Mac and PC users
 - Interactive Tools-PDF's allow users to highlight and place digital "sticky notes" throughout the document

For further reading...

Help Guide: a step-by-step guide of the accessible digital document authoring process-
<http://www.wit.edu/td/resources/helpguidesdocumentation.html>

Website: The High Tech Center Training Unit of the California State Community Colleges-
<http://www.htctu.net/index.htm>

Website: Using Technology to Support Diverse Learners-
<http://www.wested.org/cs/tdl/print/docs/tdl/home.htm>

Video: Michael Wesch, A Vision of Students Today ,
Kansas State University-
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dGCJ46vyR9o>