

Access Denied:

Addressing Digital Accessibility in Academic Libraries

Cristina Colquhoun

Instructional Design & Online Learning Librarian
OSU Libraries | Research & Learning Services
cristina.colquhoun@okstate.edu

Dani Kirsch

Research Data Services Librarian
OSU Libraries | Research & Learning Services
danielle.kirsch@okstate.edu

Objectives

- Discuss the importance and breadth of digital accessibility
- Explore how to implement relevant accessibility standards for various kinds of digital library content
- Develop institutional and individual approaches to improving digital accessibility of library resources and services

Download PDF of slides: osf.io/wsyxk

“Accessibility” Defined

The WHAT

A person with a disability should have the opportunity to:

- Acquire the same information
- Engage in the same interactions
- Enjoy the same services

..as a person without a disability

The HOW

This should happen:

- In an equally effective manner
- In an equally integrated manner
- With substantially equivalent ease of use

Paraphrased from the Office for Civil Rights (2014), [University of Cincinnati-Main Campus Resolution Agreement \(15136001\)](#).

Accommodation vs. A11y

Accommodation

- Documented disability
- Student a11y office documents the approved adjustments
- Specific to only that student
- Instructors notified & must provide the accommodation(s)

A11y

- Foundational to everything
- Universally designed
- Everyone is responsible for it

Note: A11y = "Accessibility" shorthand

Ally is more than a Legal Obligation

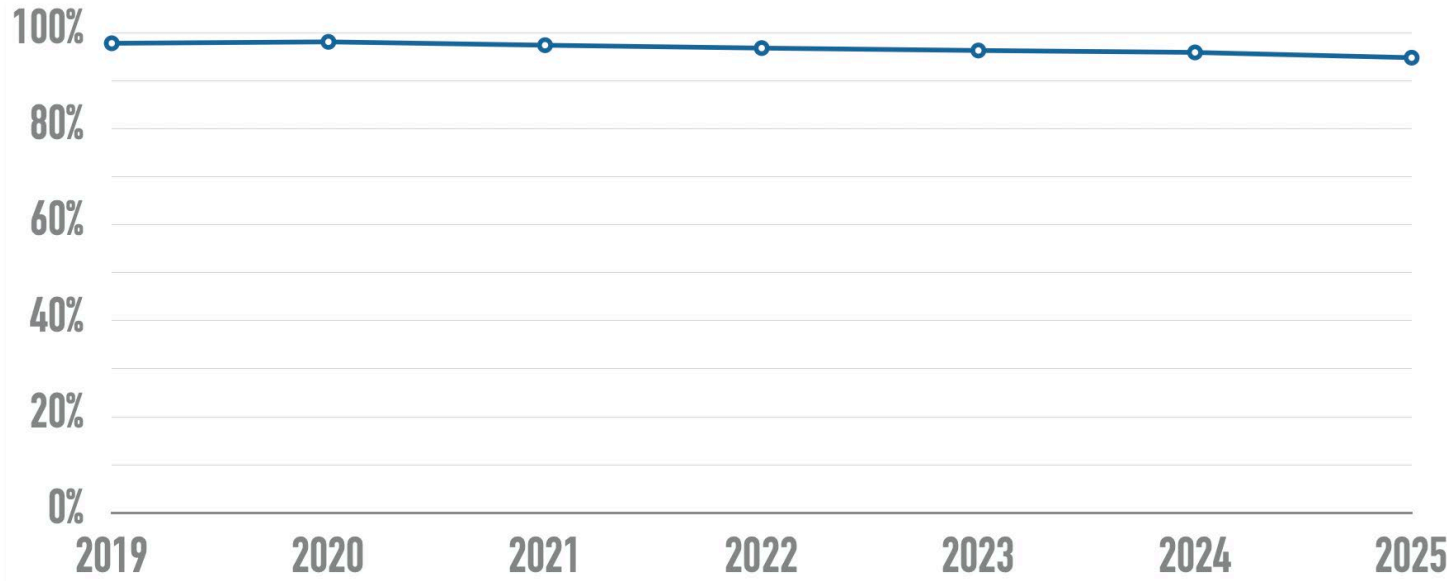
- Compliance with applicable legislation is important, but should not be the sole motivator
- Professional and moral responsibility to provide patrons with equal and equivalent access to services, programs, & activities
 - [ALA Core Values of Librarianship](#)

ALA Core Values: Access & Equity

- “opportunities for everyone in the community to obtain library resources and services with minimal disruption”
- “members of their community can freely access the information they need for learning, growth, and empowerment regardless of technology, format, or delivery methods”
- “actively working to dismantle barriers and create spaces that are accessible, welcoming, and beneficial for all”
- “recognizing and addressing systemic barriers, biases, and inequalities to create inclusive library environments where everyone can benefit from the library's offerings and services”

Accessibility Overview

Disability Statistics



Home pages with detected WCAG conformance failures over time ³

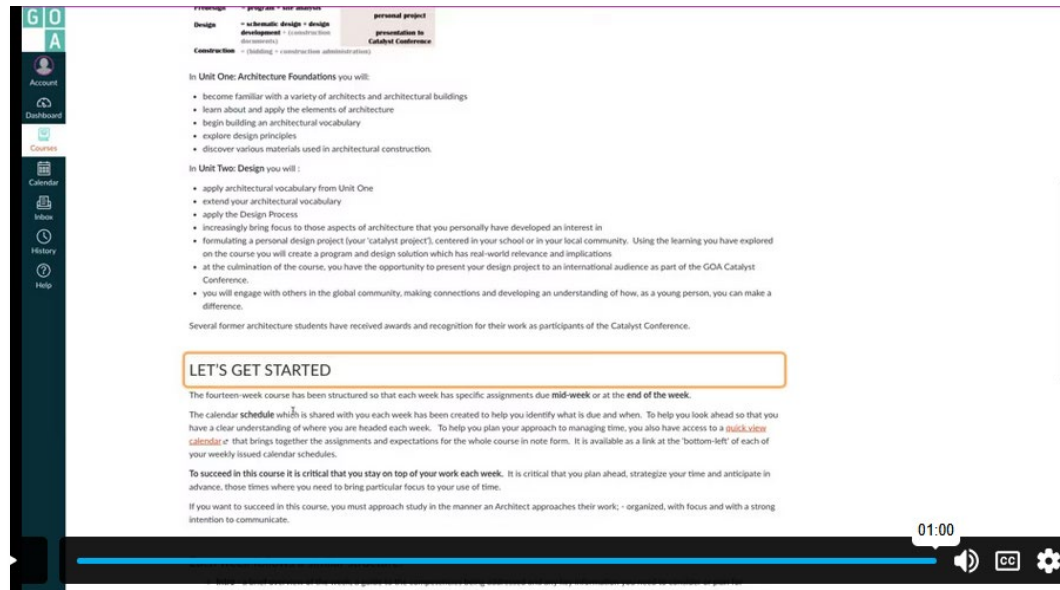
- 1 in 4 people in the U.S. ¹
- 1 in 3 Oklahomans ²
- The WebAIM Million–2025 report

1—CDC. (n.d.). [Comparison report](#). Disability and Health Data System (DHDS). Retrieved 11/19/25.

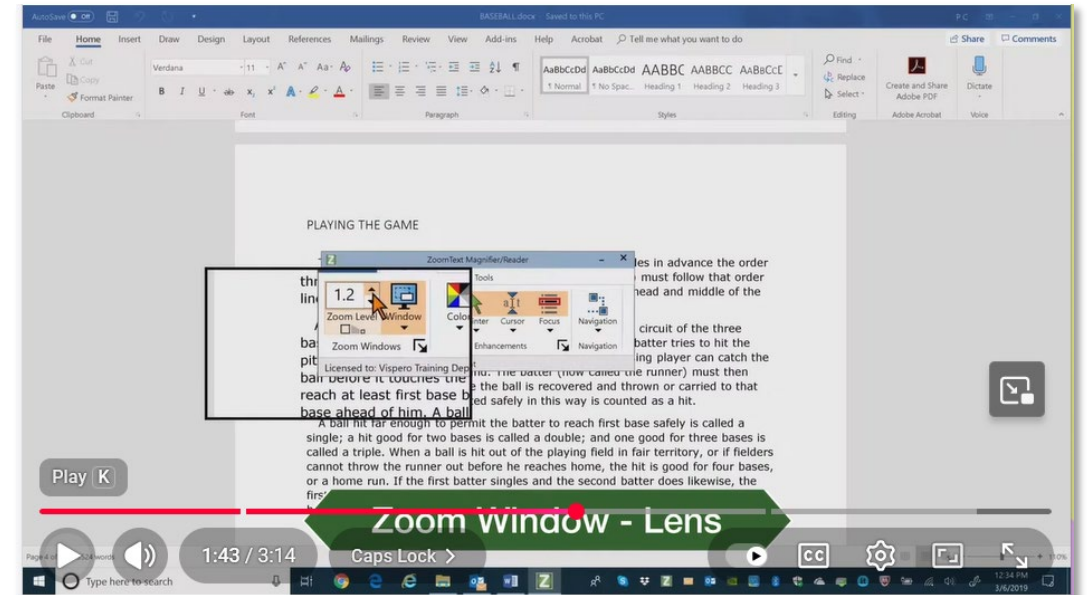
2—CDC. (2025, April 3). [U.S. State Profile Data: Adults 18+ years of age](#).

3—WebAIM. (2025, March 31). [The WebAIM million](#).

Assistive Technology



Screen Reader Example,
Global Online Academy



ZoomText Zoom Windows,
Freedom Scientific

Digital Accessibility Laws and Standards

Accessibility-Related Laws

Local

- [OSU Policy 1-0136 Digital Accessibility](#)

State

- [Oklahoma Electronic Information Technology Accessibility \(EITA\) Act](#)
- [Information and Communication Technology Accessibility Standards](#)

Federal

- [Section 504](#) and [Section 508](#) of the Rehabilitation Act
- The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) [Title II](#) and [Title III](#)

International

- [The European Accessibility Act \(EAA\)](#)

ADA Title II Ruling

“Specific requirements...for making accessible the services, programs, and activities offered by State and local government entities to the public through the web and mobile applications.”

Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Disability; Accessibility of Web Information and Services of State and Local Government Entities, 28 CFR Part 35 (2024). [“Summary”](#)

"Web & Mobile Applications"

- Digital content in digital environments

Viewed On

Desktop computers, laptops, smartphones, or elsewhere ¹

Communicated Via

web browsers, media players, plug-ins, & other programs...that help in retrieving, rendering, and interacting with web content ²

Examples

Text, images, sounds, videos, controls, animations, and conventional electronic documents ²

1)28 CFR Part 35 (2024). "[Web Content](#)," para. 1

2)28 CFR Part 35 (2024). "[SubpartA—General](#)," para. 15

Technical Compliance Requirements

§ Success Criterion 1.2.3 Audio Description or Media Alternative (Prerecorded)

(Level A)

An [alternative for time-based media](#) or [audio description](#) of the [prerecorded video](#) content is provided for [synchronized media](#), except when the media is a [media alternative for text](#) and is clearly labeled as such.

[Understanding Audio Description or Media Alternative \(Prerecorded\)](#)
[How to Meet Audio Description or Media Alternative \(Prerecorded\)](#)

§ Success Criterion 1.2.4 Captions (Live)

(Level AA)

[Captions](#) are provided for all [live audio](#) content in [synchronized media](#).

[Understanding Captions \(Live\)](#)
[How to Meet Captions \(Live\)](#)

§ Success Criterion 1.2.6 Sign Language (Prerecorded)

(Level AAA)

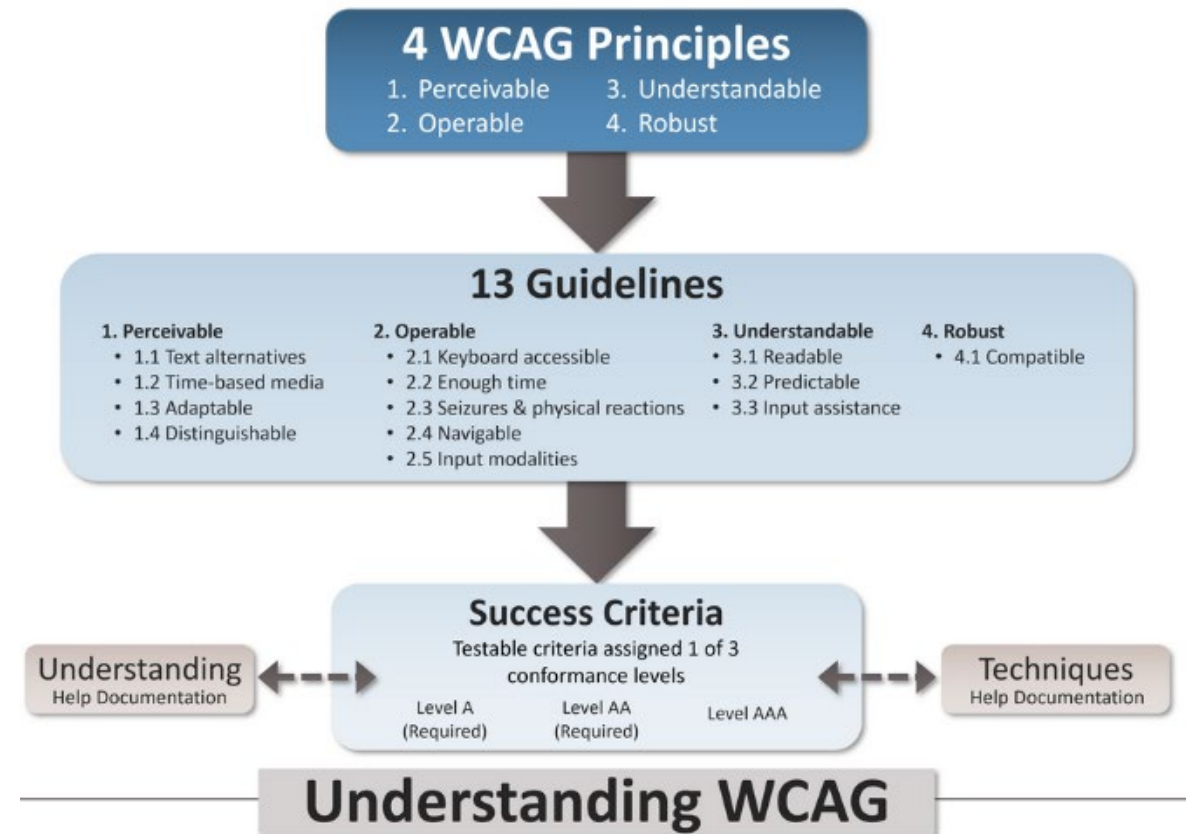
[Sign language interpretation](#) is provided for all [prerecorded audio](#) content in [synchronized media](#).

[Understanding Sign Language \(Prerecorded\)](#)
[How to Meet Sign Language \(Prerecorded\)](#)

- Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1
- Web and apps must meet WCAG 2.1 Levels A and AA
 - Level AAA is good to have, but not required

WCAG Terminology

- **Principles** – foundation
- **Guidelines** – address components of each principle
- **Success Criteria** – testable and objective statements about what must be achieved to conform to guidelines
- **Techniques** – guidance on how to meet success criteria



POUR Principles

- **Perceivable** - information and UI components must be presentable to users in ways they can perceive
- **Operable** – UI components and navigation must be operable
- **Understandable** – information and the operation of the UI must be understandable
- **Robust** – content must be robust enough that it can be interpreted by a wide variety of user agents, including assistive technologies

Example: Perceivable (Principle 1)

- [Text Alternatives](#) (Guideline 1.1)
 - “Provide text alternatives for any non-text content so that it can be changed into other forms people need, such as large print, braille, speech, symbols or simpler language.”
- [Non-text Content](#) (Success Criterion 1.1.1)
 - “All non-text content that is presented to the user has a text alternative that serves the equivalent purpose, except for the situations listed below.”
 - Controls, Input
 - Time-Based Media
 - Test
 - Sensory
 - CAPTCHA
 - Decoration, Formatting, Invisible



Implications for Libraries

Examples of Patron-Facing Web Content

- Websites
- Library catalog
- Interlibrary loan
- Instructional materials
- Vendor-provided content
 - Including databases, journals, e-Books, streaming content, articles, etc.
- Virtual consultations (e.g., online chat)
- LibGuides
- Social media posts
- Multimedia content
- Digital special collections & archives
- Digital signage
- Conventional electronic documents
 - Word docs, spreadsheets, PDFs, PPTs, etc.
- Promotional materials
- Repositories and electronic documents uploaded after compliance date
- Emails
- Virtual meeting and workshops
- All electronic document files
- Digital forms
- Any additional services, events, and resources

Content Exceptions

- 5 exceptions with qualifying criteria
- Still need to provide equal/equivalent materials on case-by-case basis
- Best practice: If you're requiring its use or it contains necessary info for users, provide accessible version!

Refer to "[Summary of the Exceptions](#)" on ADA.gov's *Fact Sheet* (2024)

Exception	Question(s)	Analysis of your library's content
archived web content exception	1. Was your content created before the compliance date for your library, or does the content reproduce paper documents created before the compliance date? AND	*
	2. Is your content retained exclusively for reference, research, or recordkeeping? AND	*
	3. Is your content unaltered or has not been updated after the date of archiving? AND	*
	4. Is your content organized and stored in a dedicated area(s) clearly identified as being archived?	*
pre-existing conventional electronic documents exception	Is your content currently used to apply for, gain access to, or participate in the public entity's services, programs, or activities?	*
individualized, password-protected or otherwise secured conventional electronic documents exception	Is your content a conventional electronic document that is about a specific individual, their property, or their account, and is password-protected or otherwise secured?	*
content posted by a third party	Is your content posted by a third party, where the third party is not posting due to contractual, licensing, or other arrangements with your library?	*
preexisting social media posts exception	Is your content a social media post that was posted before the compliance date?	*

ADA Title II Exceptions Chart

- ALA Resource: [Chart for analyzing the applicability of ADA Title II exceptions to your library's resources](#)
- In action: [Applying ADA Title II exceptions to electronic resources](#)

Exception #1: Archived Web Content

Criteria

- Content created before compliance date or reproduces physical media created before compliance date **AND**
- Used only for reference, research, recordkeeping **AND**
- Kept in special archival area **AND**
- Hasn't changed since archived

Exception #2: Pre-existing Conventional Electronic Documents

Criteria

- Documents are word processing, presentation, PDF, or spreadsheet files **AND**
- Were available before the compliance date

If doc is updated after compliance date, exception **no longer** applies

Exception #3: Non-Contractual 3rd Party Content

Criteria

- Content posted by 3rd parties who are NOT posting due to contractual, licensing, or other arrangements with a public entity

Does NOT include vendor-provided content!

Exception #4: Individualized, Password-Protected Documents

Criteria

- Docs are word processing, presentation, PDF, or spreadsheet files, **AND**
- Are about a specific person, property, or account, **AND**
- Are password-protected or otherwise secured

Exception #5: Preexisting Social Media Posts

Criteria

- Social media posts must have been made/posted before compliance date

Exceptions to the Exceptions

- **All content created after your compliance date** must be created accessible to begin with!
- **Anything people are currently using** to “apply for, access, or participate in services, programs, or activities” must be accessible.
- **If anyone asks you to make a specific piece of content accessible**, you must do it even if it qualifies for an exception!

What can you do?

Start with a shift in mindset

- Don't panic about meeting legal requirements
- Recognize that **inaccessibility is a major shortcoming** in our work
- Commit to helping improve accessibility in daily work and services
- Add a11y knowledge/skills to your processes
- Exact process(es) will vary by role, department, library, etc.

Institutional Approach

- Set accessibility as an institutional priority (from the top)
 - Allocate time/resources toward this work
 - Communicate the value of the work and recognize contributions
- Plan and document the process
 - Accessibility change management plan
 - Documentation of effort and accomplishments
- Scope and prioritize efforts
 - High-barrier, high-traffic, required, and/or containing necessary info
 - Remediation needs and timeline for remaining content
- Employee training
 - Direct to existing trainings (e.g., OK ABLE Tech)
 - Conduct local training (e.g., Accessible LibGuides Hack-A-Thon)



Resources for Institutions

- Roadmaps
 - [ADA Title II Accessibility Roadmap](#) (Oklahoma ABLE Tech)
 - [Remediation roadmap template](#) (Government of Canada)
 - [DLF's Digital Library Accessibility Policy and Practice Guidelines](#)
- Accessibility statements and language
 - [Generate an Accessibility Statement](#)
 - [Standardized License Language for Library E-Resource Accessibility](#) (BTAA)
- [ARL's ADA Title II Regulations: Implications for Libraries \(PDF\)](#)
- RDAP [Digitally Accessible Data and Data Repositories Working Group](#) final report (expected March 2026)
- Student Accessibility Services (and similar campus offices)
- [Oklahoma ABLE Tech](#)

Individual Approach

- Goal is for accessibility to be a natural part of your workflows; creation of **born-accessible content** rather than constant remediation
- Implement better accessibility practices a little at a time
 - Prioritize **big and common barriers** (e.g., alt text, color contrast, descriptive link text, document structure) relevant for your work
 - **Document** new and improved workflows so accessibility knowledge lives on independent of individuals
- Do not rely exclusively on automatic accessibility checkers to determine the accessibility of your content
 - Manual checks are necessary too

Resources for Individuals

- **Trainings**
 - [Oklahoma ABLE Tech Self-Paced Accessibility Courses](#)
 - [Minnesota IT Services Free Training Opportunities](#)
 - [Office for Civil Rights \(OCR\) Video Series](#)
- **Tools**
 - [Web Accessibility Evaluation Tools List](#) (W3C)
 - [WAVE Browser Extension](#) (Chrome, Firefox, Edge)
 - [WebAIM Color Contrast Checker](#)
 - [TPGi Colour Contrast Analyser](#) (Windows and Mac)
- **Screen Readers**
 - [Windows Narrator](#) (PC), [Voiceover](#) (Mac), [NVDA](#) (PC)

A11y takes a village, and that's good!

- No single person or small group can make an entire institution's content accessible
- Accessibility is a group effort – each person's individual efforts contribute to the overall accessibility of content
- “Many hands make light work”

Questions?

Cristina Colquhoun, cristina.colquhoun@okstate.edu

Dani Kirsch, danielle.kirsch@okstate.edu

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UNLOCKING LIBRARIES

Expanding Access & Opportunity for All

Please share
your feedback!



bit.ly/okacrl2025ac

References & More Resources

- [WebAIM Million report](#)
- [ADA Title II Update–Final Rule](#)
- [ADA Information Line](#)
- [Fact Sheet: New Rule on the Accessibility of Web Content and Mobile Apps Provided by State and Local Governments](#)
- [Oklahoma ABLE Tech: Understanding the New ADA Title II Rule](#)

References & More Resources, con't 1

- [ALA Accessibility Resources for All Libraries](#)
- [Library Accessibility Alliance Resources](#)
- [Library Accessibility Alliance E-Resource Evaluations](#)
- [Digital Library Accessibility Policy and Practice Guidelines](#)
- [Project Enable](#)
- [Creating Accessible Learning](#)

References & More Resources, con't 2

- [Oklahoma ABLE Tech self-paced courses](#)
- [Oklahoma ABLE Tech Digital Accessibility](#)
- [Quality Matters' Accessibility & Usability Resource Site](#)
- [Office for Civil Rights \(OCR\) Video Series](#)
- [WebAIM - Training, Articles, and more](#)
- [Accessibility for teams](#)
- [CAST's Designing for Accessibility](#)

References & More Resources, con't 3

- [WebAIM's WCAG 2 Checklist](#)
- Yale University Usability & Web Accessibility [WCAG 2 A and AA Checklist](#)
- [The DEI Metadata Handbook – Chapter 6: Accessibility](#)
- [Schema.org Accessibility Properties for Discoverability Vocabulary](#)
- [MARC 21: Field 341 – Accessibility Content](#)
- [MARC 21: Field 532 – Accessibility Note](#)