

# A Guide to Accessibility in eLearning

What You Can Do to Make Sure  
No One is Left Out



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# Introduction

With each passing year, remote learning and working becomes more common. Technology is at a point where we can interact and participate with each other from opposite sides of the globe, but it doesn't quite work perfectly for everyone.

As the eLearning field continues to evolve, we should be asking ourselves:

“Is my material beneficial to and usable by everyone?”

In this free eBook, you'll find various ways to improve the accessibility of your material. You'll also find plenty of resources to help you understand the many benefits of doing so.




# What is Accessibility?

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Accessibility is the metric by which we measure a product or service's ability to accommodate **all** possible users in **all** possible circumstances. Accessibility laws exist mostly to aid those with disabilities, but designers should always go beyond that to make their work usable by every potential user.

A design philosophy that prioritizes accessibility and usability tends to foster strong graphic design as well, making it a win-win situation.



# Chapter 1: Different Types of Accessibility

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Diversity

Inclusion

Equity and Equality

There are a handful of words that tend to be thrown around that all fall under the same umbrella of accessibility. At first glance they may seem to all mean the same thing.

Read on to find out the differences between them and why you should understand each one.



# Diversity

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Diversity on a basic level is the variety of experiences all humans have, built on their unique ethnic backgrounds, personalities, beliefs, sexual orientations, and more. In a social or workplace context, it can also refer to the practice of valuing and recognizing our differences by prioritizing a varied spectrum of members.

# Inclusion

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Inclusion occurs when everyone on a team feels valued and respected. It may seem like a diverse and equal workplace would foster this automatically, but that is not always the case. An inclusive environment is one where everyone has a voice and authority, regardless of their differences.

Remember, there are always more boxes we can add!

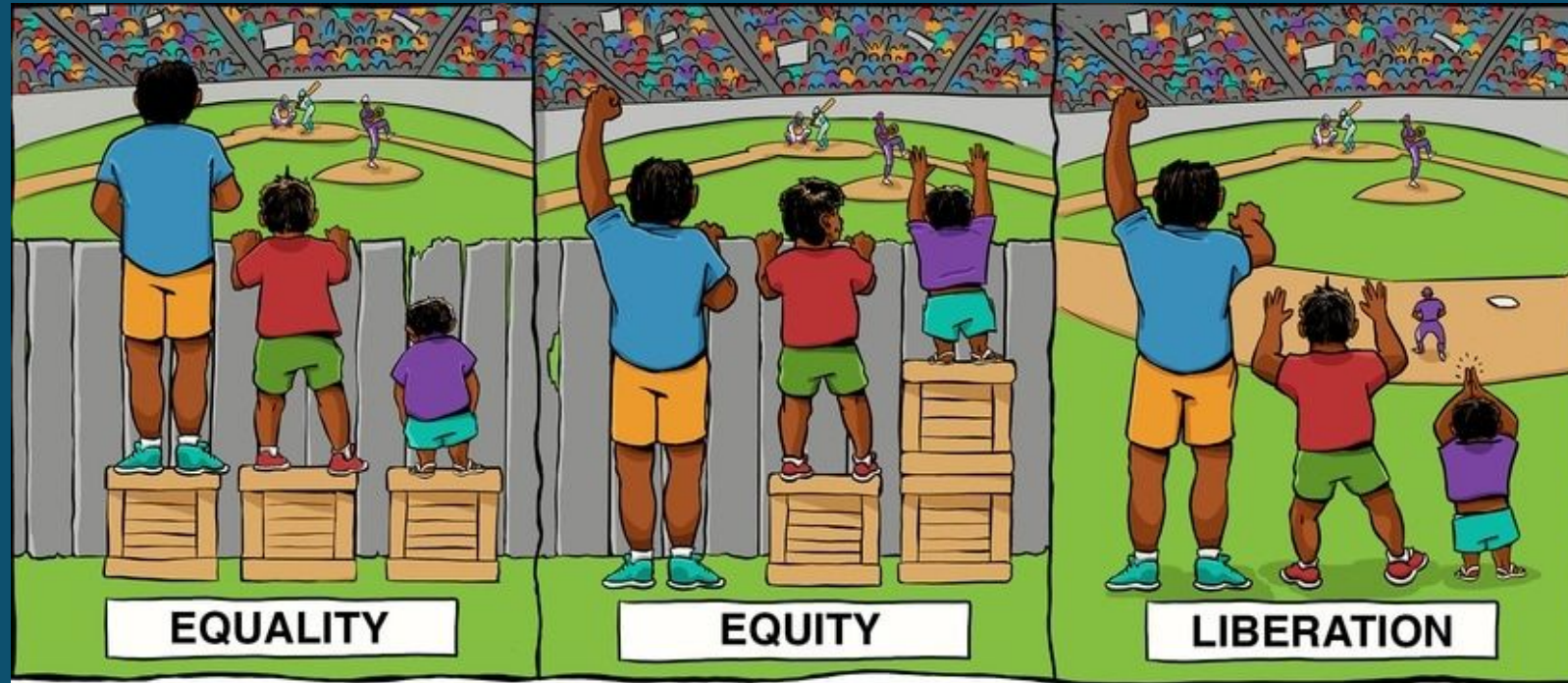


Image Credit: A collaboration between [Center for Story-based Strategy](#) & [Interaction Institute for Social Change](#).

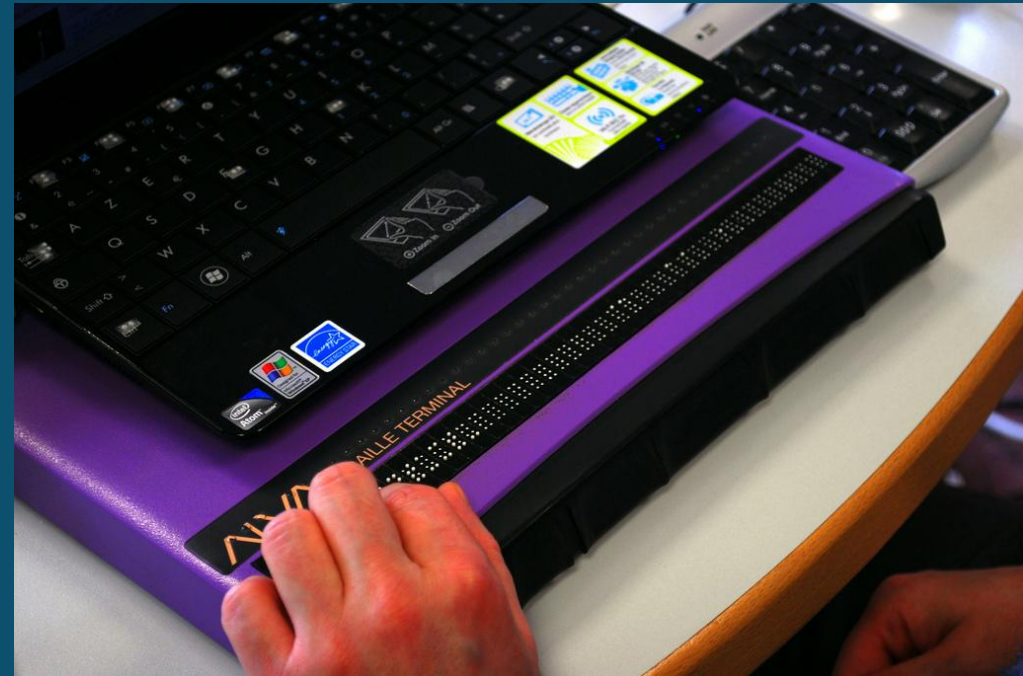
# Chapter 2: Causes and Effects of Inaccessibility

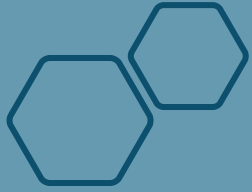
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Those with disabilities are not merely limited in their capacity to benefit from in-person education. In most cases, those same issues will translate to eLearning as well; if not directly, then in a different form.

Failure to provide widely accessible course material has numerous negative effects on those who need help the most. It can impact a learner's self-perception and limit their ability to learn.





# Statistics

- Disability is more common than you might assume – it's estimated that **one in five** learners have at least one form of disability.
- In 2017, the percentage of people aged 15 and over with disabilities in Canada was over 22% (roughly 6 million people).
- The World Health Organization estimates that over one billion people live with some type of disability; that's roughly 15% of the world's population.
- Dyslexia is estimated to affect around 10% of the population, a near guarantee that at least one learner with a disability will be present in every group.

# IDEA:


## The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

Under IDEA public schools are required to provide special education and resources to students falling into one of these 13 categories:

- Specific Learning Disability
- Other health impairment
- Autism spectrum disorder
- Emotional disturbance
- Speech or language impairment
- Visual impairment
- Deafness
- Hearing impairment
- Deaf-blindness
- Orthopedic impairment
- Intellectual disability
- Traumatic brain injury
- Multiple disabilities

Creating accessible content goes beyond accommodating disabilities – material should also aim to be diverse and inclusive.

Courses that depict stereotypes and fail to consider the wide range of possible students are at an immediate disadvantage and risk negatively impacting users.



# Chapter 3: Ideas for Improvement

# Alternative Text

Learners may have visual, auditory, physical, or cognitive disabilities and/or any combination of the above. Cover all bases when designing eLearning content by providing alternate formatting for the material.

For example:

- Audio and video files need a text equivalent, whether that be closed captions or a transcript (or both), for screen readers
- Include descriptive text/alt text in course materials for relevant graphics or images (exclude “decorative images”)

# Readability

- Ensure language is clear, concise and appropriate to the language level of your learners; use a readability score checker to test the readability levels (e.g., [Readability Test](#))
- Keep your font size on the bigger side – between 12 and 18 points is generally the sweet spot, depending on which font you're using.
- Balance out white space, images and text on the screen and use clear formatting (e.g., H1, H2 for headers)

# Colour & Contrast

- Consider your use of colours to account for visually impaired or colourblind users; avoid using colour as the singular characteristic that distinguishes a piece of content. For example, using Stoplight colours (red, amber, green) can be helpful to symbolize stop, go, stall/wait, but if the shapes are all circles, someone who is colour blind may have a hard time differentiating
- Think about contrast – visually pleasant colour pairings and sufficient dark-light balance goes a long way towards improving the look of your material.

# Navigation

- Consider your word choice and try to keep assistive technology in mind; replacing “click” with “select” is the more accommodating choice in most cases.
- Always make it clear when a learner has to progress through the content themselves; a “Next” button in the corner should be announced via narration for those with visual impairments and should be accessible via keyboard for those without mouse capability.

# Interaction

- Simplicity is key – it may be tempting to make use of complex animations and stimulating interactive sequences, but these can easily make things unnecessarily difficult for learners using assistive technology.
- Interaction with elements in a course may seem like a good way to keep users engaged, but even the simplest drag and drop process can be a barrier to accessibility – interactive elements are a great thing to include but their scope should be reduced as necessary or alternative exercises should be provided

# WCAG

- According to Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), a course should meet four key criteria at its most basic level: it should be **perceivable, operable, understandable, and robust**. These apply to visual design as well as functionality.
- WCAG 2.2 is expected to be released in 2022, but existing versions are a great tool to help you improve your material's accessibility.

# Diversity and Inclusion

- Consider your client as well as your demographic. Does the company have a diverse workforce? Where are they located? Who is the target audience?
- Try to represent diversity visually and identify harmful stereotypes to avoid. Is every manager a man? Are manual laborers always minorities and office staff always women? What disabilities can you represent beyond wheelchair users as the default?
- Source applicable talent for audio and video content – it's immediately obvious if someone is using their natural accent/dialect or just doing an impression.

**“We need to make every single thing accessible to every single person with a disability.”  
— Stevie Wonder**

With a little effort and creativity, you can vastly improve the levels of accessibility of your content, ensuring that no learner is left behind.

# Additional Resources

[Pathwise Solutions Blog](#)

[Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\) 2.2](#)

[WAVE Web Accessibility Evaluation Tool](#)

# About PathWise Solutions Inc.

PathWise Solutions designs, develops, and delivers full-service custom eLearning, training, and web solutions to help you reach more of your audience and achieve your goals.

Our purpose is to enhance your capacity to serve our communities.



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