Introduction to Digital Accessibility

Digital accessibility ensures that all users—regardless of ability—can perceive, understand, navigate, and interact with digital content. As a university community, it is our responsibility to make sure that our websites, documents, and learning platforms are inclusive for everyone. This includes individuals with disabilities who may use assistive technologies like screen readers, voice input, or keyboard navigation.

When digital resources are not accessible, we unintentionally create barriers to learning, communication, and participation. Making content accessible benefits everyone—not just those with disabilities—by improving usability, structure, and clarity for all users.

Why Digital Accessibility Matters

Accessibility is a legal and ethical obligation. Federal laws such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act require that digital content be accessible to people with disabilities. But more than compliance, accessibility is about equity—ensuring all students, staff, and faculty have equal access to information and opportunities.



Diverse Needs of Users

People with disabilities interact with content in different ways. For example:

* A blind student may rely on a screen reader to hear content read aloud.
* A student with a motor disability may navigate using only a keyboard.
* A person with a cognitive disability may benefit from clear structure and simple layouts.
* A person with a temporary disability (like a broken arm) may also benefit from accessible content.

By designing with these needs in mind, we create content that is more flexible and usable for everyone.

Accessibility Enhances Learning for Everyone

Designing for accessibility doesn’t just support individuals with disabilities—it improves the learning experience for all students. For example, using clear headings helps all readers scan and organize content quickly. Captions on videos aid not only those who are deaf or hard of hearing but also students in noisy environments or those who prefer to read along. Accessible documents are often more structured, readable, and user-friendly, which supports better comprehension and retention for everyone. When we build with accessibility in mind, we create inclusive spaces where all learners can succeed.

The Role of Headings in Accessibility

Headings are more than just a way to make text look bold or big. When properly applied using built-in heading styles (like Heading 1, Heading 2, etc.), they create a navigational structure for documents and webpages. Screen readers use headings to allow users to skip from section to section, much like sighted users visually scan a page. Without properly tagged headings, users who are blind or have low vision may have to listen to an entire document to find the information they need.



Using the correct heading levels also creates consistency and clarity in your content. This helps all readers—regardless of ability—quickly understand the organization of your ideas. During today’s activity, you’ll use Microsoft Word’s built-in styles to apply heading levels to a sample document and see how screen readers interact with that structure.