

ADA Compliance (Sections 508 & 504)

INTRODUCTION

When planning the learning resources you will recommend to students, it is important to keep in mind that some students may have difficulty accessing electronic resources due to motor limitations or a vision or hearing disability. The law states that resources must be accessible quickly and easily for all students, including those with permanent or temporary disabilities.

A CLOSER LOOK

Section 508

Section 508 is a 1998 amendment to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. It lays out electronic- and IT-related accessibility requirements for federal agencies. These requirements have become the standard for how individuals with disabilities interact with commercial, educational, and federal government websites.

The requirements detailed in Section 508 do not specify what colors to use or how large your font size should be, but they do offer a general framework to be followed. For example, the colors you use need to have a high contrast to each other (e.g., red text on a green background is not a good idea), and any video must provide transcripts or captioning for all spoken text.

While the law does not address educational websites specifically (in fact, it only addresses federal agencies' use of technology), it provides the foundation for tools to be developed to aid those with disabilities. Screen readers, for instance, allow those with visual impairments to traverse websites by reading the text on the page to the user. This requires that websites be structured in a manner consistent with the 508 requirements.

Section 504

Section 504 is also part of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. It addresses the broader topic of accommodating those who have a disability, including higher-ed students with disabilities. It requires the educational institution to provide "auxiliary aids" to the student when requested. The interesting part of this law is that it does not directly define what the auxiliary aids are or how they should be produced. Instead, the law simply refers to the need to address student needs in such a way as to circumvent the limitations of the student's disability.



Remember:

Ensure that all learning resources you choose are ADA compliant.

PROCESS

Some examples of electronic content that must be compliant with Section 508 include:

- **Multimedia:** All multimedia (e.g., videos, simulations, animations) must contain a transcript or closed captioning.
- **Images:** A description of any image that is considered essential content must be accessible to screen-reading software.
- **Electronic file attachments:** All electronic uploaded content must be formatted properly and accessible by screen-reading technology (e.g., Word documents, PDFs, PowerPoint presentations, Excel spreadsheets, etc.).
- **Curated content:** All third-party resources you use within your learning resources must be compliant (e.g., YouTube, MIT OpenCourseWare, MOOC, Khan Academy).

One of the roles of an instructional designer is to help apply these requirements to your courses. Your instructional designer can help you ensure your course contains the components necessary for maximizing the usability of the online course content.

If you would like to check the compliance of some of your content, the checklists found on the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services website (see the “Additional Resources” section below) may be helpful to you.

When students need assistance with obtaining auxiliary aids, they can contact their local university’s Disability Resource Center (DRC). The DRC can help identify a plan for addressing the identified need of the individual student.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [Section 508](#) by the U.S. General Services Administration
- [Section 508 Checklist](#) by Web Accessibility in Mind
- [Accessibility Compliance Checklists](#) by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
- [The ADA, Section 504 & Postsecondary Education](#) by the PACER Center, Inc.
- [Auxiliary Aids and Services for Postsecondary Students With Disabilities](#) by the U.S. Department of Education