

## Ep. 029: Get Your Accessibility On(line)

By embracing a few best practices, you can make sure your online content is enhanced for use by all students. This week, we sit down with Jen Bethmann, Illinois State's new Web Accessibility Coordinator, to explore some simple techniques to format our online media with maximum accessibility. Find out what you should be doing to your web pages and online documents to make them readable by those using screen readers and other types of accessibility software. We also discuss why you may want to reexamine how you lay out web pages, and we uncover how even the choice of words on a web page can make a difference between confusion and clarity.

Podcast: <https://prodev.illinoisstate.edu/podcast/2017/ep029.shtml>

### Transcript

JIM: Hi there, I'm Jim.

JEN: I'm Jen.

JIM: Let's Talk Teaching.

JIM: Welcome to Let's Talk Teaching, a podcast from the Center for Teaching, Learning and Technology here at Illinois State University. I'm Jim Gee. Joining me today is Jen Bethmann. She is web accessibility coordinator here at Illinois State University, a new position that's been brought on board. Welcome to the show.

JEN: Thank you very much.

JIM: Today, we're kind of going to we're gonna focus on how we as instructors can help our students who who have needs or, or just in general, have a better experience when they're dealing with assets and stuff online. So, tell me a little bit about what are some of the challenges that you found, that students have when they're using stuff online.

JEN: A lot of the times when people look at web accessibility, we are focused on individuals with disabilities, whether it's auditory, visual, motor, or cognitive. But a lot of the things with our department, we're actually also looking for the full user experience, and making sure that the online environment is inclusive and doesn't have barriers. So not locking anybody out of information and functionality. What we're looking at in terms of a better experience as a user, is some logical order and how things are put together, if you're putting your syllabus at the top for a teaching, being able to order your classroom modules, by weeks, and if you're ordering them by weeks, make sure they are in their weeks, week one, week two, week three, instead of jumping from week one to week six, or whenever they get made.

JIM: You're talking about when when you would put them in like ReggieNet...

JEN: Correct!

JIM: Or learning management system or whatever, just having that logical order not having it so people have to do extraordinary things to to hunt down that information.

JEN: Absolutely. And that's going to help all your users, not just anybody who's looking for anyone with all types of abilities.

JIM: And so, you mentioned your department, you're with, technically with web and interactive communications, which is part of the Office of Academic Technology, which deals with technology for learning here on campus. But of course, we're your office actually branches out and covers a lot of different things. And you are also kind of consulting a little bit as we look at improving accessibility and readiness.

JEN: Absolutely. With my title. It's like web accessibility coordinator. Just about everything in our world now is going online. Yeah. brochures, you're talking websites, we're talking documents, we're talking PDFs, PowerPoints, anything that can be put online, I kind of have an eye on, or at least trying to have an eye on,

JIM: Right, right. And of course, you come from a background where, as you were a graduate assistant here at ISU, you work with another department on campus, right?

JEN: Yes, I worked with student access and accommodation services formerly known as disability concerns. I worked with the text conversion lab, Sarah Metivier. I was her grad assistant. And my focus was actually on video captioning, I would caption videos for students who needed the accommodation who had were deaf or hard of hearing. And so, it's a bit of a Baby of mine of reminding people that to add their transcripts, send them to University Marketing, and allow them to add that to our YouTube channel. Anytime you have a video for a class, it'd be really good to add a transcript. And you can always contact me, I have some tips and tricks on how to do that as well.

JIM: And we'll link your contact information to the Show page for today's

JEN: Correct. Thank you so much. What- I'm open as a resource. I would like to be a resource for faculty, staff, students who have an eye who would like to have their content be as accessible as possible. video captions can be really tricky, because everyone's like I have an hour-long classroom. And how do I get this transcribed where I don't have to transcribe it myself. There are dictation software's out there, I can point you in the right direction, they'll get you most of the way adding some of your own punctuation will be on you. And double checking that maybe grounded theory isn't replaced by grandiose theory. So, making sure all your your language is in the correct place.

JIM: So, let's take a step back and talk a little bit more about the student experience. Maybe I'm not teaching online courses here, but of course, I am going to have some assets online like you said, everything is online. Maybe I'm not producing videos, myself, but I may link to a video or something on YouTube. What are some things as an instructor that I'm looking for I should be looking for? Even if I don't have a student

that semester, who's gone to student accommodations and gotten the card or the electronic version of it. Now I think they use even if I don't have a student who's in that situation, what are some of the things that I everyday as I'm preparing to teach in the fall?

JEN: One of the main things if you're using YouTube in particular, if you add your subject when you're doing a search and add comma "CC" Everything that pops up should be closed captioned already, and should be a personally provided transcript or closed captioning, not auto-generated, because the auto generated for YouTube, they're getting better. But it's still not something you can trust, right to provide the correct information for your student.

JIM: Right. So, what we do and so for example, here at CTLT, when we're producing videos, and we put them on YouTube, we may rely on the auto-generation closed captioning to do the first round to take a first pass, and then we that's we at least have somebody to go in and edit and sometimes the editing is rather significant. But we go through and try to try to do that.

JEN: Yes, I did the same thing at student access and accommodation services when we just needed to download and go, okay, we can fix things, add some periods, it takes most of the hard work away, where you're able to devote some other time to other aspects of your class. But if you want to start off, kind of searching for your next subject, if you're looking for something that's relevant, like that happened the day before, and information gets out there. If you do the comma CC in YouTube, that usually will pop up with a more robust information for you that is already closed captioned.

JIM: Okay? And what about documents that I'm putting online? What do I need to do with that?

JEN: Documents? If you start off in Word, Google Docs, any of these types of things, if you look up at your editor at the top of the page, and you see either the drop down or the button that says header? Using headers is really important, because that's actually the basis of the program, telling other entities such as a screen reader. For people with low vision, they will use typically a screen reader or there's also text to speech software out there that can read documents. If the headers are there, it's able to be a lot easier to be searchable. Not even just for people disabilities, but for the whole world, if your page is going to be able to have a lot easier to search because people look at headings first. So, using headings, instead of raising and lowering the font on your own, use the heading settings, also using bullets and numbers. So instead of adding your own numbers, use the programmed Bullets and Numbering. This in a screen reader will tell you there is a bulleted list of five items and the items are ABCD and E and it's able for a person who is using a screen reader is able to navigate your page a lot easier. It also helps for organization for an able-bodied student who is looking at your document, it helps you organize, and oh keep a lot of information and all users are going to benefit from it.

JIM: You mentioned a screen reader. And I know that there are a couple of different ones out there that students might use including Jaws, I think it's probably the most

common one. And when we had a conversation last week, because I assumed students used it one way, but they actually tend to especially in web pages, they tend to search through links and stuff like that, can you talk a little bit more about how someone with low vision is using a screen reader and how that may be different than how someone with who's who's full sighted, maybe maybe reading a page.

JEN: If we're if someone who has full sight is looking at a page, you're able to make judgments, you can look at a picture you can look at a heading and determine whether the information is necessary. If you're looking at a webpage, you're not necessarily going to be reading the entire word page from the first word all the way to the end. I'm not sure at this point, a lot of people you kind of do a skim a person with low vision or who is fully blind doesn't have that ability. They are restricted by the computer controls. What screen readers allow them to do though, is they can have their own keyboard control to bring up a list of the heading. So, you have say a CTLT web page or a classroom page. And you have your lecture notes, you have syllabus and all this the information they can pull up a heading. And if you use the heading functions, it's going to say heading one, syllabus information. And then they can choose whether or not I need to read more about the syllabus information. And then they can scroll down through. Same thing with links or hyperlinks. If you're going to another document or to another web page. Having very descriptive link language is very important. Because the use of click here is not very helpful in terms of telling people where the target is going. And it we're in this world of we're using smartphones and tablets, even now the language is changing to select view because not everybody is using a mouse.

JIM: So, not everyone is clicking another...

JEN: Correct. Clicking is kind of the old way and it's a language. It's a language barrier. It's very mouse-centric. Instead of somebody may be using a keyboard, somebody might be using a tablet or a smartphone, and they're touching so but not everybody's touching. So the word select or the word view might be a better use of then the word click and instead of linking the word here, you might say I need to go to this form, and then I have a form for the test to have the link be instead of click here and the the link being here for the test, you say the chapter 1.1 test is the link and using active language.

JIM: Or you may say 'view the chapter, or the view, the study guide'; guide would be the hyperlink.

JEN: And study guide is the hyperlink. But make sure it says study guide for what I see, um, what ends up happening is a person or a person using a screen reader can bring up a list of links, and you might have 54 links. 49 of them could be here could be study guide. So, making sure there's a descriptive link of telling you where they're supposed to go. So, as they're able to skim through the link, they're like, Yep, I need to go there. Nope, I don't need to go there.

JIM: It's a little against what I'm used to, from my background in broadcast journalism and stuff where we don't like to repeat words. But here, we want to be a little bit more

explicit. And even if we have a heading that says chapter one, you would still have down below.

JEN: I would say Chapter One study guide, view this chapter one study guide, and have Chapter One study guide, be your link.

JIM: So, it's just I think, for a lot of us, who do a lot on the web all the time, but even for instructors, who maybe only update their website once in a while. It's just a matter of building your habit.

JEN: Yes, it's being more proactive in terms of the idea and using for best practice. And the best practice is actually going to give everybody a cleaner experience. Because even if you have somebody saying Chapter One study guide, and as an able-bodied person, I know myself as a student would have really loved to have that sometimes, because then you can't remember where you clicked, or you're halfway through the page. But then your chapter heading was up and hidden up higher in the screen, you kind of then know where you are on the page. And it gives him another indication.

JIM: That's great. By the way, so I don't want to get too deep into the into the technological weeds. today. First of all, it's an audio podcast. So, there's we can't show people how to how to do some of the stuff. But some of the just challenging some of the other old habits that I know I have from building websites from way back when I'm guessing it's probably not necessary or even desirable to have links open up in a new window. Now you just want to go from one to another or is there not is that not a, an accessibility issue necessarily.

JEN: And that in in cases, not necessarily an accessibility issue, there are keyboard commands that are able to send you back into certain areas. Being consistent is more of the accessibility issue, I see if you're going to have something open in a new window. And I I'm going to say this probably best practice, on top of things that I have been researching. Consistency is very important. If you're going to have it open a new window, have everything open in a new window. That way, an individual is able to expect that to happen. If you're setting up classroom styles for your modules. Third is your classroom module, have the module be set up the same way, every day. So, that way, you a person knows that your introduction is always going to be at the top under the first heading. And then we're going to go into the lessons of the point, there might be a video. And that's if you can set it up in a consistent manner. People who are navigating through your module will have a lot easier way of whether you're able-bodied, blind have a cognitive disability, you're able to kind of follow along and anticipate what's coming.

JIM: So, one final question. As we kind of wrap things up here. I work with a lot of faculty members who still- who are in love, still with Google Docs, and rightfully so, I guess. I never really used Google Docs that much. We, of course, as a campus are kind of moving towards Microsoft and office 365. What are some things that I need to be aware of using either of those platforms or something similar? If I'm doing a collaboration online, or whatever, is there anything that you've encountered from an

accessibility standpoint, that's particularly a problem to avoid? Or that's particularly helpful?

JEN: I'm going back to how you set up your Google Doc, how you set up your Word document? I know with Office 365, you're able to share documents through the SharePoint, I believe it's called SharePoint.

JIM: Or OneDrive.

JEN: OneDrive. Yes. And if you're looking at that type of thing, it's making sure you set up it your formatting for an accessible document, right? That's really important in this area. As we're looking through the functionality I can tell you at this moment, being able to share is a great asset. But make sure you have set everything up in your documents where people are able to get to. If you're setting up folders, yeah, I was gonna ask about that. Actually, as you're getting through setting up folders, make sure your folders aren't listed as New Folder one new folder to Folder three. Having very descriptive folder title as well is helpful. And again, as we talk about the in logical order in logical place, most of the time they're going to be alphabetical. My suggestion to that is making sure that if you have a one class, and then all your documents or folders go into that class folder. And that way, if you're sharing that folder with another person, they're able to logically understand where the folders are going.

JIM: Jen, thank you so much.

JEN: Well, thank you for having me.

JIM: And that's all the time we have for this week's episode of Let's Talk Teaching. You can find out more about our podcast, including some of the stuff that Jen and I talked about today on our website, go to [CTLT.IllinoisState.edu](http://CTLT.IllinoisState.edu). You can also find us on iTunes. For Jen, and for all of my colleagues here at the Center for Teaching, Learning and Technology, until we talk again, Happy Teaching