Blackboard Ally

Improving access to course materials for all students

Blackboard Ally is a tool that helps enhance the usability and accessibility of course documents. Ally’s two main functions are to:

1. Evaluate all documents that are uploaded to Blackboard and, for those documents which do not comply with accessibility guidelines, lead the instructor through the steps needed to improve the accessibility of the document.
2. Provide students with multiple formats of the original document so they can select the one that best fits their unique needs.

While Ally was designed to improve access to course materials for students with disabilities, our testing has demonstrated that many other students benefit. Non-disabled students have indicated a preference for the audio format (MP3) for longer documents so they can listen to them while doing other things like driving or when their eyes are tired.

What students will see:

Students will see a small Ally logo button to the right of each document in Blackboard when they hover the mouse over the button the Alternative formats call-out box appears. For keyboard users, the button will appear when the keyboard focus moves to the button when tabbing past the document name.

Activating this button will produce a list of Accessible Versions of the source document as shown in the example below.
The accessible versions available will depend on the original document. The student may select the format that best meets their needs and select the Download button to obtain a copy of the original document in the selected format.

What instructors will see:

The goal of Ally is to assist instructors with learning techniques for enhancing the accessibility of course documents. There are no REQUIRED actions. However, it is intended that the Ally tutorials will provide enough information to improve the accessibility of current documents and apply these same techniques when creating future documents so they are accessible from the start.

After a document is uploaded into Blackboard, an automated accessibility evaluation is performed and a small accessibility indicator will appear next to the document name indicating the overall accessibility of the document. This process can take a few minutes to several hours depending on the traffic on the Ally server.
The indicator is color-coded and uses a visual pointer to indicate the accessibility score.

- Red indicator with a left-pointing arrow = low accessibility score
- Yellow indicator with an upward-pointing arrow = medium accessibility score
- Green indicator with a right-pointing arrow = high accessibility score

Clicking on or selecting the accessibility indicator will pop-up a series of steps designed to lead the instructor through the process of retrofitting the document to improve the accessibility.

Accessibility score for:

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet.docx

100%

Perfect!

This document has a perfect accessibility score, although further improvements may still be possible. Keep up the good work!
Once the steps are complete, the final version can be uploaded to Blackboard to replace the original document giving students a more usable, accessible document. The new, revised document would then display a green indicator representing a high accessibility score.

Blackboard does not discard the original version of the document. It is retained within the Blackboard system and can be retrieved if necessary.

For more information

- Blackboard Ally website