S.I.P

STANDARDS IN PRACTICE

JULY 2022 • ISSUE 10

STANDARD HIGHLIGHT

National Standards for Quality Online Programs Standard G: Equity and Access

A quality online program's policies and practices support students' ability to access the program. Accommodations are available to meet a variety of student needs

G2: Program faculty and staff work with students and families to personalize programs and adhere to accommodations as dictated by local policies and laws.

G3: All learners are ensured equitable access to the program.

STANDARD OVERVIEW

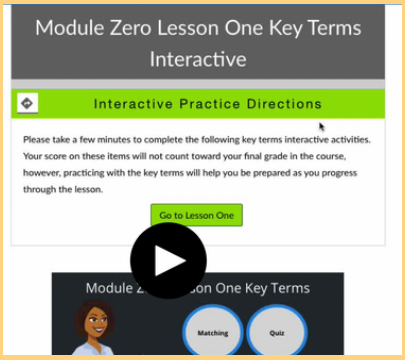
BY DR. CHRIS SMITH, NC VIRTUAL

Imagine you enrolled in a course that you were very excited about, but then when you attempted to access the course contents, you were not able to do so due to barriers that were created by the technology. How would this make you feel?

The 21st century learning environment provides educators, designers, and students with myriad opportunities for cyclical teaching and learning due to the Internet and its perceived never-ending connectivity in the digital world. Technological innovations in how digital information is developed and presented through the Internet should have brought good news to individuals with different perceptual, motor, or cognitive abilities. Too often,digital technologies have been implemented without regards to individual student needs which has led to societal discrimination and a widening of education and equity in the digital age. Standard G, which focuses on personalized learning opportunities and equitable access is essential to ensure all students are given the opportunity to enjoy a positive learning experience.

Designing Accessible Articulate Storyline

Individuals with visual impairments rely on screen reading technology to interact with digital content. Screen reading technology relies primarily on the use of keyboard controls for navigation. So, when designing presentations and interactive learning objects, it is important to configure the content so that keyboard controls can be used to navigate forward and backward through the instructional materials. Please view the Designing Accessible Articulate Storyline content video for an example of how screen reading technology is able to read properly configured content.



The mission of NC Virtual is to provide learners with high quality blended and online courses and expanded options in education. To accomplish this mission, to ensure our teachers and staff work with students and their support systems to provide personalized learning opportunities (G2), and to ensure equitable access to course content (G3), NC Virtual provides ongoing professional development for current and all new teachers. Every new potential NC Virtual teacher is required to successfully complete the Teacher in Training (TNT) Program. All teachers hired to write and review course content are put through additional training on Quality Matters, Revised Bloom's Taxonomy, Understanding by Design (UbD)m, and Universal Design for Learning (UDL).

HELPFUL HINTS for putting standard into practice

- Instructional or decorative images: Evaluate each image that is used to determine if the purpose for the image is instructional or decorative. Decorative images can be used to add some visual appeal to text content, but their use should be limited. Images with instructional content must have meaningful descriptions in the form of alternative text provided. Did you know that adding alt text for images also helps to increase search engine optimization and can be useful when images fail to load in digital content.
- Embedded text: Any text that is embedded in digital content (e.g. infographics, screenshots, page banners, etc.) can not be read by screen reading or text-to-speech technologies. Charts, graphs, and other similar instructional content should be added to digital content in plain text format. When content is embedded on images, detailed alternative text must be provided. More detailed images with embedded text might need a long description which can be linked on a separate document.
- When to and when not to use tables: Tables should only be used to organize tabular content where information in the columns and rows corresponds to each other when read from top to bottom and left to right. To create accessible tables, a table header or caption should be provided along with headers for the top row and left column. Tables should not be used simply to organize content for better visual appeal.
- Captions, Transcripts, and Audio Descriptions: Captions, transcripts, and audio descriptions are required for students who may be deaf or hard of hearing or may have a visual impairment, but are also helpful for English Language Learners, individuals with cognitive impairments, and in situations where audio can not be used. Audio content must be accompanied by text-based transcripts while video content requires accurately timed captions. Text-based transcripts are also helpful for videos. Videos that contain instructional content but do not have any speaking parts require the addition of audio descriptions.

RESOURCES to support standard use (mostly practical)

- CAST- National Center on Accessible Educational Materials- The AEM Center provides a variety of resources and materials aimed at growing the availability of accessible educational materials for learners with disabilities. A video titled Accessible Learning Across the Lifespan on the AEM Center's homepage provides a great example of what audio descriptions should sound like when integrated into video content. North Carolina has been selected as one of seven states that make up the current National AEM State Cohort which is designed to develop a statewide system for providing AEM and accessible technologies.

- Course Development Training- Accessibility- We (NC Virtual) have developed an internal training module related to accessible course design where we discuss accessibility guidelines, the personal impact digital accessibility provides for student learners and how to apply accessibility guidelines while authoring and furnishing online content.

- Creating Accessible Content Checklist- Originally designed to help teachers provide accessible course announcements, the Digital Content Checklist is a one page document that highlights some of the main steps content creators can take to create accessible digital content.

- Digital Transition Webinars for Educators- We (NC Virtual) developed a webinar series in 2020 where we continue to provide a variety of live and archived professional development sessions on best practices for supporting online students. The webinars are presented by past NC Teacher of the Year award recipients, NC Virtual Teachers and Instructional Leaders, and full-time NC Virtual staff members. Access to the archives of previously presented webinars is available through the searchable database on the Digital Transitions webpage.

Author/Organization Bio

Dr. Chris Smith is one of two Instructional Designers with NC Virtual. Chris has been an educator in North Carolina for the past 21 years where he has served as an elementary teacher, district-level Instructional Technology Facilitator, Director of Distance Education, and an Instructional Designer. Dr. Smith works with accessibility on a state and national level including serving on the NC Accessible Educational Materials Leadership Team, co-chairing the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee for the NC Technology in Education Society Board of Directors, and is a member of the Accessibility Committee for the Association for Educational Communications & Technology. Chris is also the moderator for the Quality Matters Accessibility and Usability Site (AURS) and served as the Team Leader for General Standard 8: Accessibility and Usability on the K-12 Quality Matters Rubric 5th Edition Revision Team.