3Play Webinars | 10 Tips for Building an Accessible Online Course

JACLYN LEDUC: This webinar is entitled "10 Tips for Building an Accessible Online Course." I'm Jaclyn Leduc from 3Play Media, and I'll be moderating today. I'm joined by Janet Sylvia, who is an accessibility consultant that has provided web accessibility consultation and training for the past 20 years.

Her areas of expertise include accessibility in higher education, Section 508, and the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines, also known as WCAG. And with that, I'll hand it off to Janet, who has a wonderful presentation prepared for you all.

JANET SYLVIA: Thank you. Well, hello everyone. So happy you could join us today for the session. This is our agenda. We will first answer the question why accessibility, and then discuss accessibility challenges for online courses. And then we'll review 10 tips for building an accessible online course.

So first, why accessibility? We'll begin with the definition. And I will read all of the text on this slide. It says, "Accessible means a person with a disability is afforded the opportunity to acquire the same information, engage in the same interactions, and enjoy the same services as a person without a disability in an equally effective and equally integrated manner, with substantially equivalent ease of use. The person with a disability must be able to obtain the information as fully, equally, and independently as a person without a disability."

This definition is used by the US Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights. And it provides a standard by which we can measure the accessibility of our online courses.

Regarding disability statistics, the World Health Organization provides a report, the "World Report on Disability." And this report indicates there are over 1 billion people worldwide who have a disability. In the United States, the acronym US, a group, Disabled World, has collected data in a publication called the "US Disability Statistics by Type and Age." And in that document, it indicates there are 30 million people in the United States between the ages of 5 and 64 who have a disability.

People with disabilities are protected by accessibility laws and guidelines. If your organization has international locations and you deliver online courses to a worldwide audience, it's important to know that over 40 countries have disability and digital rights laws. We also have the United Nations treaty, the "Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities," the acronym CRPD. There are 168

signatories worldwide. And the purpose is to promote and protect the rights of people with disabilities.

And then we have the W3C Web Accessibility Initiative. And they have published the "Web Content Accessibility Guidelines." The acronym, WCAG, is pronounced "wi-cag." And I'll be mentioning WCAG throughout the presentation. These are guidelines that provide how-to instructions and also resources for helping us make our web content accessible for people with disabilities.

In the US, there are several laws and guidelines to follow. First, we have the Americans with Disabilities Act. This covers access to places of public accommodation for people with disabilities, with the intent of the law including the internet. The Assistive Technology Act, which provides federal and state funding for programs addressing the technology needs of people with disabilities.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, the acronym IDEA-- and this ensures that children with disabilities are provided the same opportunity for education as children without disabilities. And then we have the Rehabilitation Act, as Amended. Section 503 says, if you hire a contractor to build your online course or develop a web environment where your course is housed, the contracting agency must abide by accessibility laws and requirements.

Section 504 requires that reasonable accommodations must be made for individuals with disabilities to participate in educational programs and activities. And then Section 508 provides the how-to standards for making web content accessible. The Section 508 incorporates by reference WCAG. In the US, we are required to comply with us federal law Section 508. And when we review the documentation, it tells us to follow or conform with WCAG.

We also have the 21st Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act, the acronym CVAA. And this requires that television programming that was captioned at the time it was broadcast on TV also be captioned if the programs are delivered over the internet. When you write an accessibility statement, which I'll describe shortly, or your company accessibility policy, you may need to reference the appropriate laws and guidelines that are provided here.

So what happens if we don't comply? Well, first and foremost, there will be a

negative impact on people with disabilities, specifically, the loss of equivalent or equally effective access to educational benefits and opportunities. Second, your organization could, as others have, face civil rights complaints or lawsuits. This can result in a loss of business and reputation in the education industry. There can also be a high cost of remediation or going back through your inaccessible content and making it accessible.

There are additional benefits of accessibility compliance. First, it makes your content accessible for more people, expands your audience overall. First, it's inclusive for people with disabilities. It helps you accommodate different learning styles. And it increases the usability for all participants. For example, the accessibility requirement to provide video captioning has been shown to increase learning comprehension for all students.

And also, it's more functional for your organization. Accessibility training, the basics are generally stable. The basic requirements that we'll cover today have not changed substantially. What does change is the adoption of new or emerging technologies. And often this results in updates or additions to the accessibility guidelines. And this may require updated training in the future.

We can apply accessibility principles to our face-to-face seminars and make them more effective and more inclusive. And also, our web content will render better on different devices, particularly mobile devices.

So next, we'll discuss some accessibility challenges of online courses. And these are three of the top challenges that come up frequently with clients I work with. And we'll also provide solutions that they have implemented to address these challenges.

So the first challenge, accessibility or accommodation? Understanding the difference between an accessibility requirement and a disability accommodation and who is responsible for each. By definition, an accessibility requirement is a general requirement for a general audience. It's provided in advance of any known need, and the responsibility is the content creator. So any time we place content in a web-based environment, it should already meet the accessibility requirements.

A disability accommodation is a specific accommodation for a specific person at a specific time. And here, the responsibility is a disability service provider. Now, people with disabilities are not required to register with a disability service provider. In fact, many don't. Instead, they rely on content providers to follow the accessibility requirements.

This slide provides a comparison between accessibility requirements and disability accommodations. So under accessibility requirements, we have alt text, color and contrast, descriptive hyperlinks, document titles, whitespace. All of these are the responsibility of the instructor or the content creator. And if any of these are not familiar terms for you, we'll be discussing them during the 10 tips.

Disability accommodations include Braille, extended time for activities or exams, an amplified listening device, a note taker in a classroom, or tactile graphics. These are the responsibility of a disability service provider.

Some solutions that others have implemented are, first, clearly communicate the difference between accessibility and accommodation for your content providers. Once people understand the difference, it becomes clear what they are and are not responsible for.

Also, provide definitions in your company accessibility policy. Then disseminate updates through faculty development groups or instructional design listserves, anything to reach all types of content creators. And last, provide accessibility training for content providers. You can announce and share links to free webinars like today's event.

The next challenge is a communication plan. And when people with disabilities encounter accessibility barriers or inaccessible content in your online course, who will they contact? And how will they receive resolution? And here, the problem is that often course instructors will receive a request and they don't know how to answer it, and they don't know who to ask. And then they panic. And for some, this has resulted in both timely and costly mistakes.

So solutions that others have implemented-- first, don't panic, but do be prepared. Have a plan in place. It should include acknowledging the receipt of the request. Typically, this is within 24 to 48 hours. And then carefully examine the request. Is it

an accessibility requirement? Or have they asked for a disability accommodation?

If it is an accessibility request, does the instructor know how to remove the barrier? If not, you can elevate the request. Ask for help from someone in your organization-- an accessibility coordinator, an ADA or Section 508 compliance officer, a disability services provider. It could be your equal opportunity office or human resource office. Someone should be available to help you navigate through the request. And then provide a timely resolution, as timely as you would respond to a non-disability related request.

And the next challenge-- the course was created without accessibility in mind. Individuals involved in the design, development, and delivery of the online course were not aware of accessibility requirements when the course was created. So solutions are, begin remediation immediately. You can use today's tips to go through and make changes, accessibility changes to your content.

Likely, you will need to prioritize your repairs. The top priority is any accessibility or accommodation request you have received. And then go through your new or most recently added content, then your most frequently accessed content, and all steps in a process. So for example, if you have reading lessons, homework assignments, and a self-test, be sure that the reading lessons are accessible, or students can't complete the homework assignment or the self-test. Any type of process in your course, be sure that all steps in the process are accessible.

And then develop a formal remediation plan if you have multiple courses that are not accessible. Now, one of the ways that you can do this is to review OCR, or Office of Civil Rights, settlement agreements with other institutes of higher education, colleges, or universities similar to your own. You can review the agreement. Their plans are reasonable. They provide timelines for completion. And then use them as a guide to implement at your own organization. So on today's handout under resource list and settlement agreements, there are links for two places where you can find settlement agreements if needed.

So now we will review 10 tips for building an accessible online course. Number one, understand how people with disabilities access the web. There are four primary categories of disability types. One, cognitive-- this includes attention deficit

disorder, brain injury, dyslexia, any language, learning, or reading disability, memory or recall impairments, et cetera. Two, hearing-- this includes deaf, hard of hearing, which may be mild, moderate, severe, or profound, and deafblind.

Three, motor or mobility impairments. This can include arthritis, cerebral palsy, loss of limb, spinal cord injury, et cetera. And four, visual. And this includes blind, colorblind, and low vision.

People with disabilities frequently use assistive technologies to access your web-based content. This could be hardware, software, or a service that allows people to use their preferred modality to access web content. So as an example, most online courses have a lot of text. Some sample modalities for accessing text include audio. Some students may use a read aloud software or a screen reader software and hear the text.

Sight, some students may use visual acuity or an eye-tracking software to navigate through your course and blink to click on links. Others may use or rely on speech using a speech-to-text translator. And here, they will speak commands to navigate through your course, complete homework assignments, and take exams. And last, touch. This could include printed Braille or refreshable real-time Braille. So some students will experience your text on their fingertips.

We never really know what types of technology people are using to access our online courses. But we do know that the accessibility guidelines allow us to design our online courses and content to work properly with different types of assistive technology.

Number two, provide an accessibility statement. This is a welcoming message to your students. And what to include-- the accessibility guidelines that you have sought to implement to be inclusive of all students. In most cases, this is WCAG. Contact information for your disability service provider. So for example, you may have a statement that says, "If you are a student with a disability and would like to register for a disability accommodation, please contact," and provide the contact information.

Just as a reminder, students are not required to register with disability service providers, and many do not. Often, they rely on the instructors to follow the

accessibility guidelines. And then provide contact information for the instructor-- the name, mailing address, email, and telephone number.

Then provide links to vendor accessibility information for any third-party products or tools required for your course. So for example, if you use the learning management system Desire2Learn, you would visit the Desire2Learn website, locate the accessibility information, and find the information for students using assistive technologies with Desire2Learn. And then you would post that link in your accessibility statement. The same would be true for a webinar technology, or any required technology.

Then, where to post. First, you should post in your course description or on your registration page. This would be outside your course for prospective students. And then post on your course home page or as a paragraph in your syllabus. This is inside your course for currently enrolled students.

Number three, provide an orientation document. This is an outline of the course and content. It's similar to a course map or a site map, or even a table of contents. It may be built into your learning management system, meaning it may already be automatically generated, and you simply add a link to the course map, for example, on your course home page. But if not, provide an orientation document. It's a high-level overview of the general course layout, the types of content in the course, and where that content can be found.

Number four, the framework. Ensure that your course framework or the environment is accessible. So where is your online course housed? Is it in a content management system? Did your organization build it in your own web environment, like ExpressionEngine or WordPress? Or are you using a learning management system? And this is the most popular way to deliver online courses. And it might be Blackboard Learn, Canvas Instructure, Desire2Learn's Brightspace, EdX, Moodle, et cetera, or on your own website.

In most cases, it is your organization's responsibility to provide an accessible online course environment or framework where your content will be housed. And then it's the course owner's responsibility to design and develop an accessible online course within that framework. We need to ensure that both groups are working together on

accessibility requirements.

Number five, the course design and layout. Provide accessible navigation. And navigation is so important we're going to cover it on the next three slides. Also, use a consistent color scheme. Don't change the color scheme by week, by season, by unit, or lesson. Instead, ensure that the color scheme is consistent and predictable. This provides ease of navigation for people who rely on color to navigate through your course.

Also, provide a simple and uncluttered home page. If possible, organize related content into folders or modules. And then within those folders and modules, use a consistent design and layout there as well. The key concepts here are consistent and predictable.

Regarding accessible navigation and course tools, first, provide easy access to the Search tool. Typically, it should be located at the top of your home page, similar to websites that you may visit. Some people with disabilities rely heavily on the search feature for ease of navigation.

Also, be sure your course tools list is up to date. Hide or remove any course tools that are not being used. Some learning management systems may provide a list of 10 or 15 tools to choose from. You want to hide any tools you're not using so students, for example, using eye-tracking software don't have to blink through an entire list to arrive at the tool that they want to use.

Also regarding accessible navigation is links. Ensure that your link names are descriptive and unique. And this refers to any links for your documents or your page titles, the document name or the page titles, folder names or module names, the sheets in a spreadsheet.

For example, by default, Excel, when you create a spreadsheet, it names the original spreadsheet Sheet 1. We need to change that to something that's descriptive of the content on that sheet. And then if you add additional sheets, you should rename those as well.

And also, website links. If you have any URLs on your home page, in a course document, et cetera, be sure that the link text is descriptive. You want to avoid

using click here, click here. We want to have descriptive and unique links.

Also, regarding navigation elements, be sure they are consistent. If you use a green Next arrow to advance to a next page, always use a green Next arrow. If you use a red Submit button, always use a red Submit button.

And the last item under accessible navigation is tab. Now, this is essential for keyboard accessibility. Many assistive technologies rely on keyboard-only access to your course. So how can you check this? Well, using the Tab key only, no mouse, log into your course and tab through the home page and through your content. The tab order should follow a logical and intuitive path.

So again, for example, you should land first on the syllabus, then on reading assignments, homework assignments, self-test, et cetera. It should be a logical path through your course. And also, you want to minimize the number of tabs that are needed to arrive at your main content. And this is helpful when you put content in folders.

Number six, documents. Today, we only have time to cover the basics that are common to all document types. This could be presentations, HTML, PDF, word processing, or spreadsheets. It is important to note that every document type has very specific accessibility requirements. And there is a link on today's handout called "Documents-- All Document Types." And you can follow that link to find additional information for each document type, as well as checklists that you can follow to ensure you're making that content accessible.

Today, we'll cover things common to all document types. And the first is alt text. Alt text is a text equivalent for your non-text content. It might be a chart or a graph, any informative image. The text should be 120 characters or less. Some assistive technologies truncate alt text at 120 characters. And the text you choose should convey the function, the meaning, or the purpose of the image.

You may also need to provide a long description-- this is in addition to the alt text-- any time that the alt text alone is insufficient to convey meaning. And here, you would provide the long description in the surrounding text or as a link to a separate document. If you are new to writing alt text, especially for more complex images, there is a link on today's handout under Documents called "alt text and long

descriptions" that can help you learn how to write the text.

Next regarding documents is color. Ensure that color is not the sole means of conveying important information. And this means to avoid color coding. So there are two images on this slide. They're the same pie chart. And the first pie chart is labeled "accessible" because it uses pattern fills for all the segments of the pie chart.

The second pie chart is labeled "not accessible" because it's color-coded. It uses different colors in the segments of the pie chart. So what happens if we remove that color? Well, this is how we can determine if color is the sole means of conveying important information. Here, the first pie chart-- that is still accessible. It used pattern fills.

But the second pie chart is not accessible. It was color-coded. And when we remove that color, which would be similar to people who are color blind or have low vision, it looks like almost all the same shades of gray. So if you had a legend with the pie chart it, would be near impossible to determine which item goes with each in the legend.

Also regarding documents is color contrast. Provide a high-contrast color scheme between your foreground color, which is your text, and your background color. And also be sure the background design does not overpower the text. And this is a biggest problem in presentation slides and webinar slides.

So we have two examples on this slide, examples of presentation slides. And the first is labeled "accessible." It provides sufficient color contrast. Here it has a dark green background with white text. And it passes accessibility checker.

The second slide is not accessible. It has insufficient contrast between the dark text and some dark elements of the background. And also, the background design overpowers the text. So we need to ensure we have a high-contrast color scheme.

Now, we can't do this with our own visual acuity. We need to use accessibility tools. So on the handout for today under resource links for documents, color checker, accessibility tools, there are two free tools that are listed that will help you check the contrast of colors you're using.

Next regarding documents is readability. And there are four primary components of readability. The first is your file properties. Always complete the file properties. Be sure to include the title. And also add the author, subject, and keywords. The image on this slide is a stack of books. There is no title on the binding and no title on the cover. And this is what it's like trying to access documents that don't have in the file properties a title.

The title is read aloud by assistive technologies. It's used to alert students to which documents are currently open by the title. And also, it appears in a search as well as in your course map. So always be sure to go to your file properties and add your title and then the other metadata.

Next, language. The primary language should always be set. When we install our software to create our content, typically we designate our language then. If you create HTML-only content, you need to set the language for every HTML document.

But also, and most important, is if you provide, say, a paragraph of text in a secondary language, you need to be sure to set the paragraph properties for that text as a secondary language-- whatever that language is. Assistive technologies can be programmed to read with a specific accent, inflection, and pronunciation based on the primary language. So any secondary language that is not designated as such will sound like garbled text.

Next, semantic structure. Provide true headings. Headings in Word or OpenOffice are called styles. And in HTML and PDF, it's called tags. It means the same thing. We need to use true headings. They're provided as heading levels one through heading six. And I'll describe them more on the next slide.

Also use true formatting. This means to use your software's built-in functionality to create lists, columns, and tables, et cetera. Avoid using space bar or tab to create a visual appearance of a list or columns, because that will not be accessible.

And finally, be sure to provide adequate whitespace around your text. One thing that's common that people forget to do in word processing is to set the Paragraph After setting. If your primary font for a document is 12 point, and after every paragraph you want two blank spaces, you should go to the Paragraph After setting.

And 12 times 2 is 24. And you would set that to 24.

The example on this slide shows correct semantic structure and what is not accessible. So the first image is an accessible word document. The title has been designated a heading one, using the Styles menu. The section titles-- there are two-- they have both been designated a heading two. The subsection title has been labeled a heading three. There is adequate whitespace, a true bulleted list, and a true numbered list. This is the structure. That underlying structure will be provided and assistive technologies will properly read these documents.

Now, what is not accessible? The second image, it appears as run-on text. This is what happens if you only use a larger font size or a different font type to designate headings. It's not accessible. Or if you use space bar or tab instead of true columns or lists.

And finally, regarding documents, use your accessibility checker. Most software has a built-in accessibility checker where you can remediate errors. Typically, it will tell you what's wrong and how to remediate or fix the error.

You also need to conduct manual checks. And typically, you would do this using an accessibility checklist. I mentioned earlier on today's handout under documents, all document types-- when you follow that resource it has links to accessibility checklists for different types of documents. And this is because some things require human or subjective reasoning.

So for example, we mentioned color. An automated checker can tell you if color is present, but it can't tell you if you've color coded. It can tell you if a chart or a graph is present, but it can't tell you if you provided a long description in the surrounding text. And then remediate any errors. And then run through your accessibility checker again any time you make changes.

Number seven, webinars. If you have any real-time-- synchronous or real-time activities in your online course, for example using webinars, then there are some things that we need to be aware of. And first, if you have any handouts, the accessible handout should be provided in advance, 24 to 48 hours.

Also avoid any timed response activities. This could be the required use of chat,

audience polls. Sometimes instructors put a reading assignment on the screen and students have to respond within a specific time frame. That activity is not accessible. So avoid any timed response activities.

Then be sure to describe all the visual information. All of the text that's on the slide should also be spoken out loud. And you should verbally describe any informative images that are on your slides. And again, if you haven't done this, you can follow the link on the handout for alt text and long descriptions and use that as a guide as to how you could speak or verbally describe images. Be sure your presentation slides themselves are accessible. And provide captions.

The second thing to consider with webinars is the interface or layout. We need to allow participants to customize and save their preferred layout. Sometimes instructors want to ensure that everyone in the audience sees the same thing. And they will fix the layout to a certain size. But that does not allow people to use their preferred modality to access the webinar.

Some students may want to enlarge the caption window. Some people may want to enlarge the video window if there's a sign language interpreter. So always allow participants to customize and save their preferred layout. And finally, be sure that the webinar technology itself is accessible.

Number eight, multimedia. This is the first accessibility requirement that we're mentioning that requires both expert training and funding. Typically, people will outsource, or in their organization they have a group that does this specifically. But I would like to go through the accessible alternative requirements today.

First, if you have audio only, like a podcast, if the content is live, provide captions. If it's prerecorded, provide captions and a descriptive text transcript. This is a text document that provides the audio narration as well as speaker identification and key ambient sounds like laughter and applause.

And then if you have video only, if it's prerecorded, you provide a descriptive text transcript. And here, the content would be a description of the key visual elements taking place in the video that are required or aid comprehension. You could also provide what's called a media alternative to text. And here, you could provide your descriptive text in audio format.

If you have audio and video combined, if it's live, provide captions. And prerecorded, provide audio description. And this is where trained experts will insert key visual information in the natural pauses of the speaker's audio. Then captions and a descriptive text transcript.

And here, the descriptive text transcript would include both the audio narration, speaker identification, key ambient sound, as well as the description of the key visual elements taking place in the video. And then, in all cases, it requires an accessible media player.

Number nine, accessibility checks for both your content and your course. Use an automated tool. Today, many learning management systems have built-in automated accessibility checkers. So you should be sure to run that and remediate any errors.

And then also conduct manual checks. Again, you'll need an accessibility checklist. You could use today's 10 tips to go through to do manual checks on your course, anything that requires human or subjective reasoning. For example, your automated tool may discover that there's multimedia present. But it can't tell you whether you have provided the correct accessible alternatives. And then remediate any errors.

And then the last item listed here is human testing. This is not accessibility checking. This is human testing, a paid service where you hire people with disabilities for their expertise. So you would give people a specific set of tasks to accomplish. For example, register for your course, log in, navigate through the course, find specific content, complete all components in lesson one, et cetera, any other tasks or functions.

And then the individual would provide you feedback with information about things that may need to be changed so that you could make changes to your course design, your navigation, or your content. When possible, it's best to hire people with different types of disabilities that are using different types of assistive technology.

And the reason for this-- well, I'd like to share a quote from the UN CRPD treaty. And it says, "nothing about us without us." And this is the reason it's so important to have

feedback from people with disabilities regarding the accessibility of your course.

And number 10, additional considerations. And the first is course tools and required activities. And the two questions to ask-- are the required course tools accessible? And if so, can they be used with accessibility in mind?

So, for example, I mentioned chat. Your chat tool in your learning management system may be accessible. But required use of real-time chat is not accessible. So be sure, for whichever tools you're using, that they are being used accessibly and with accessibility in mind.

And then, third party resources, software, or web sites. For your course, do you have library resources on reserve? If so, when you place the content on reserve, you should check with the librarian to find out what accessible alternatives are available. And libraries are fantastic about providing accessible alternatives.

What is the prerequisite to register for your course? Is that accessible? The registration and payment system for your course or any required activities. You may require a field trip or a site visit. For example, if it's an art course, you may require students to visit a local art museum. Is the facility accessible? Is the art exhibit itself accessible? We need to consider these things.

Also, textbooks and digital bundles. When you select your textbook, you should check with the publisher to find out what accessible alternatives are available for the textbooks. And then, also, any web sites that are required for your course also should be accessible.

In summary, we have just reviewed 10 tips for building an accessible online course. One, how people with disabilities access web content. Two, an accessibility statement. Three, orientation document. Four, the framework. Five, your course design, layout, and navigation. Six, documents. Seven, webinars. Eight, multimedia. Nine, accessibility checks. And 10, any additional considerations.

This is the end of the presentation. And I will turn it back to you for our Q&A.

JACLYN LEDUC: Great. Thank you so much, Janet. I'm just going to share my screen once again.

Great. OK. So that was such a great presentation. We really appreciate you being

here and sharing your knowledge. And now we're going to get ready for the Q&A. And if you're ready, Janet, I have the first question for you.

JANET SYLVIA: Yes, certainly.

JACLYN LEDUC: Great. So the first question is, interactivity is such an important aspect in webinars to keep the audience engaged. What do you suggest to use instead of things like polls?

JANET SYLVIA: So we know that audience polls with required response time is not accessible. So I'm not sure what you could use in its place. What I would do is contact your disability service provider, and tell them the types of activities you want to include in your webinar, for example. And then see if they have any suggestions for how to make them accessible or to provide something that's an accessible alternative for students.

JACLYN LEDUC: Great. Thank you so much. The next question is, would it be better to use both color and pattern? Or should color generally be avoided?

JANET SYLVIA: It's good to use both color and pattern. It's accessible to use both. And as long as the color scheme-- for example, on the pie chart I provided, it was a blue and white. As long as that combination meets the color contrast requirements, which in the pie chart in today's example it did, then it's good to use both.

Color is important for people with cognitive disabilities and for other students who may prefer the use of color. So absolutely, you can use color, but just as long as we use it accessibly.

JACLYN LEDUC: Great. Thank you. The next question is, can you have more than one H1 heading in a document?

JANET SYLVIA: Well, typically, there's only one H1 heading. And by the way, that text should be the same text that you put in your file properties for the title. But regarding the H1 headings, sometimes in longer documents, people have used two H1 headings. In my opinion, it's best to split it into two separate documents and only have one H1.

JACLYN LEDUC: Great. Thank you so much. The next question is, what are the main benefits of making handouts available in advance?

JANET SYLVIA: So some students may use closed captioning. So during a presentation, their eyes are focused on the captioning window and not as much on the presentation slides. And also people with cognitive disabilities may experience cognitive overload. Or people who use a sign language interpreter, again, their focus will be on the sign language interpreter.

So if you do have handouts to share, by providing them 24 to 48 hours in advance, it gives individuals with disabilities an opportunity to review that content so that when they're in the live session, their focus is on captions or sign language interpreter.

JACLYN LEDUC: Great. Thank you. The next question is a little bit longer. The question is, when an institution is working on creating policy for online accessibility, what do you recommend as a guideline for making content accessible? Our instructors love to have concrete expectations, but with accessibility it's difficult to provide that to them when there's a lot of gray area involved. What are your thoughts?

JANET SYLVIA: Hmm. I'm wondering if, for this particular person, if it would help to develop a document similar to the one developed by the California Community College System. And it's called "Distance Education Accessibility Guidelines." You can do an internet search and find that document. And it's a fantastic document.

And it actually originated, the first version was in 1999. And it originated out of an OCR complaint, because distance education courses were not accessible. And they have updated it twice. The most recent update that I've found is 2011. And it provides great information overall about the entire process of online learning, universal design, accessibility, et cetera. And that might be a great type of resource to either link to or provide for your own audience.

JACLYN LEDUC: And just quickly, Janet, would you mind repeating the name of that document?

JANET SYLVIA: Yes. It's published by the California Community Colleges. And it's called the "Distance Education Accessibility Guidelines."

JACLYN LEDUC: Great. Thank you so much. We have a few more questions. The next question is, alt text in HTML is an attribute. How would you recommend creating a long description in HTML?

JANET SYLVIA: I think it would depend on your chart or graph or whatever it is that you are providing. The most common way and the most beneficial way is to provide your long description in the surrounding text instead of using-- and you may be referring to what has been considered an outdated LONGDESC, I think it's called, tag.

And so instead, it's best if you can provide the long description in the surrounding text. Or provide a link to a separate document that provides a long description if it causes formatting problems or if it interrupts the flow of your primary HTML document.

JACLYN LEDUC: Thank you. The next question is, how would you use audio description in a video if there is wall-to-wall original audio, such as interview audio, in the video?

JANET SYLVIA: Yes. And this is something that experts who attend specific training for creating audio descriptions and what are called "extended audio description." And here, an extended audio description extends the length of the video itself. An audio description typically tries to keep the original video at its original time. So it sounds like, in that case, you would need extended audio description, which would extend the length of the video.

JACLYN LEDUC: Thank you. The next question is, do you have any examples or know of any examples of an orientation document?

JANET SYLVIA: I'm not sure if there are any that are publicly viewable. The ones I've used and that faculty have used that I've worked with are all in password-protected environments. In some case, again, check to see if your learning management system provides a course map or a site map. And if not, provide your separate document.

Maybe you could add a page to your syllabus with a description. But I don't have an exact description, because most of them are behind password-protected environments.

JACLYN LEDUC: Thanks, Janet. The next question is, let's see, which video conference apps are accessible or are most accessible for blind or deaf users?

JANET SYLVIA: I really can't say, because every person with a disability is different. And one product may be perfectly accessible for someone. And the same product might not work great for that person.

If you're interested in general in the accessibility of webinar technologies, the Great Lakes ADA just actually this week provided a great webinar where they had people from the US government, I believe Department of Homeland Security and another group. And they went through the pros and cons of the most popular webinar technologies for people with disabilities.

Again, some are more screen reader accessible, but it's hard to know what exact needs an individual would have. So I'm wondering-- if you visit the website, if you are interested in the recording, all you have to do is create a log in account, and you can access archives. And that event took place this week. And it was specifically covering the accessibility of webinar technologies. I hope that helps.

JACLYN LEDUC: Thank you. And then we'll do one more question before closing up the webinar. The question is, if real-time chat is not accessible, what are your recommendations for remote learning, given our current state of affairs with COVID?

JANET SYLVIA: Well, in general, with any activities in your course, you can provide an accessibly equivalent alternative experience. But you need to be really sure that you're not isolating a person with a disability or requiring them to participate or do something that others in the session are not doing. So it really could depend on if you are aware of a specific accommodation for a group in your course.

But chat is OK to use. It's just you can't put a requirement of a time limit on the chat. So, for example, some people have put reading assignments on a screen and said, students, you have five minutes to respond. Whoever responds the quickest-- you know, who gives me the first correct answer gets bonus points. That type of thing is not accessible.

So it may depend very specifically on how you are using the chat feature, because chat can be accessible. We just need to make sure-- sorry. A note popped up. We just need to be sure that we're using it accessibly for everyone in our audience. And people with disabilities are not required to tell us what their disability is. So you likely have people who may have invisible disabilities or short-term disabilities that we need to take into consideration as well.

I think it would depend, for me, on how you're using the chat functionality. What is

the real-time required use? And I think with more details that-- if you have a equal opportunity officer or a disability service provider at your organization, if you could share the specific details with them, I think they would help you come up with a good solution.

JACLYN LEDUC: Great. Thank you so much for a wonderful presentation and the Q&A, Janet.

JANET SYLVIA: Great.

JACLYN LEDUC: And thank you to everyone for joining us today. And we really hope you enjoyed this webinar too.