CHAPTER 13.

ACCESSIBLE MULTIMODAL SOCIAL MEDIA PROJECTS

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In this chapter, the authors describe **accessibility activities** *used across modalities: in-person, real-time learning; online, any time learning; and online, real-time learning. The activities were designed for and first utilized in an online, any time classroom. They were then adapted for in–person real-time learning and online, real-time learning. Specifically, the authors offer guidance for teaching students to learn and practice accessibility in digital multimodal writing assignments. In describing their "better practice," this chapter addresses the themes of accessibility and inclusivity and multimodal learning.*

FRAMEWORKS AND PRINCIPLES IN THIS CHAPTER

- **GSOLE Principle 1:** Online literacy instruction should be universally accessible and inclusive.
  - **1.1:** All stakeholders and students should be aware of and be able to engage the unique literacy features of communicating, teaching, and learning in a primarily digital environment.
  - **1.3:** Multimodal composition and alphabetic writing may require different technologies; therefore, those involved should be appropriately prepared to use them.
- **PARS Online Writing Instruction, Accessible:** Thinking beyond ADA compliance.
- **CCCC Principles for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing, 2:** Considers the needs of real audiences.

GUIDING QUESTIONS BEFORE YOU BEGIN READING

- What do your students already know about accessibility, both in terms of ADA compliance and broader conceptions about why accessibility is important?

- What kinds of texts could your students design and create that would be accessible?
- What strategies can students use to make a project or text accessible?
- What can your students gain from creating a project or text that is accessible?
- Why is it important for students to learn about accessibility?

INTRODUCTION

"I do all my posts so that my friend who doesn't see well can read them. Is it ok if I caption everything?"

As soon as our student said those words, we should have realized that the social media project we were assigning our students needed to be designed with the creation of accessible content at the forefront of the project. We wish that had been our reaction.

Instead, we said something like, "Of course! Sure! That sounds great!" and it was another year before we realized that we were missing out on an opportunity to teach the importance of accessibility to our students.

While our initial "Sure!" was about answering a specific student question in a specific moment, the one-year delay speaks to a lack in our own professional development and our own thinking about access and accessibility. At this point, the educational lens we used for thinking about accessibility was focused on providing materials to our students. In their introduction to their 2013 special issue of *Kairos*, "Multimodality in Motion: Disability and Kairotic Spaces," Cynthia L. Selfe and Franny Howes point to the "need to pay attention to the teaching of composition through the lens of disability studies to remind ourselves of just how much our profession has to learn, and just how much we have been content to ignore" (para. 2).

We have a lot to learn, but we believe the changes we have made to our social media assignment have helped our program ignore less and think more about the difference between accessibility as something we produce for students and accessibility as "expression and engagement," to use Jay Dolmage's phrasing from *Academic Ableism: Disability and Higher Education* (2017, p. 145). Dolmage is looking to capture the need to see access as an action, and an ongoing one at that. To overly emphasize accessibility as a product, or a "checklist" according to Tara Wood, Dolmage, Margaret Price, and Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson in "Moving Beyond Disability 2.0" (2014), risks turning accessibility into accommodation "we" make to "others" rather than an understanding that "disability is us" (p. 148). Instead, the authors "emphasize a dynamic, recursive, and continual approach to inclusion" (2014, p. 148).

Without such an approach, we were missing an obvious chance to show our students the importance of access, both from a legal and technical perspective that was codified in the Americans with Disabilities Act as well as an imperative for multimodal authors who are aiming to reach a wide audience. We were also missing out on the ways that having students create work that was inaccessible to some of their classmates undercut the other accessibility efforts we had been making such as using proper heading structures in our student-facing documents and adding alt text to images that we build into the course materials. We were thinking of our courses as content to be made accessible, rather than opportunities to engage our students in a broader understanding of the need for accessibility to be created, produced, distributed, and engaged with on a consistent basis. We were making accessibility a checklist rather than a receptiveness to access. In short, we had not done enough in terms of critically reflecting on the choices we were giving to our students.

We have come to believe that it is not enough to create course materials that are accessible or have environments that are accessible. Instructors in higher education need to design opportunities for students to create work that is accessible to and for each other. One of our major takeaways in committing our entire program to just this task is that our students are ready. Sometimes good pedagogy means leading students away from where they have been and what they are comfortable with. At the same time, the three of us are also familiar with having our students lead us into new pedagogical directions. This is one of those times. Our students are ready, and we need to be as well.

We certainly support the need to educate instructors on accessibility. There is work to be done in that vein, and we know we need to be vigilant there as well. At the same time, it is important that our students learn to produce accessible texts. Real-world, multimodal genres are an excellent place to do this. It can be difficult for students to see or value the rules behind APA formatting, for instance. We can help them by showing how those rules can be used to support access. For example, students might see rules about headers as overbearing or overly complicated, but we can show students how consistent heading structures can help with accessibility.

Once we realized that we needed to make a change, we got to work designing and planning implementation. Christina and Alex worked together to design the course and project updates while Cecilia piloted the first iteration of the project with her students. We knew we wanted to pilot the materials outside the designers' classrooms before we launched the changes to this assignment as a program. Because a majority of our courses are offered exclusively as online, any time learning (and because the level of technical design required can be so much higher for online courses), the pilot would be in an online, any time learning course. We

wanted to make sure that our pilot met our highest design standards. Technical design elements in the online, any time learning courses include not only disability awareness, but also instructional videos, images, and integration of support services. From there, we exported the design elements to our in-person real-time course shells and into our online real-time learning course shells as well.

With our desire to impact as broad an audience as possible, we share our better practice for teaching students accessible design through a social media project from our online course, ENGL 104: Writing Across Disciplines. In this chapter, we outline our experiences with implementing a better practice for teaching students features of accessible design. We have tried to balance the need for students to have a "checklist" of sorts, without overly emphasizing accessibility as a mere product that one generates. We used considerations about audience to drive discussions and opportunities to think about accessibility as an ongoing act of engagement and inclusion.

For instance, we point out to students that even if some members of their audience consider themselves "able" rather than "disabled," they are only so temporarily. "Disability" is far closer to a norm than an exception once we consider the full life cycle of a human being. This is not a new idea in scholarship (Selfe & Howes, 2013), but it is a meaningful example for getting students to think about accessibility and their audience. While our better practice was designed for an asynchronous online course, we built the materials so that they could be used in our face-to-face and hybrid courses as well. Our initial test of the materials was in the online environment, but we are using them, with adaptations, in face-to-face and hybrid courses with great success.

It is our hope that our better practice helps students learn why accessibility matters in social media posts and how to create accessible social media posts in their online projects. We believe this practice is a way to expand and emphasize the "accessible" in Jessie Borgman and Casey McArdle's (2019) Personal, Accessible, Responsive, Strategic framework for online writing instruction. Students learn strategies for increasing accessibility, yes, and, in so doing, we hope to instill an ethos of awareness and responsibility. We want our students to see the value of creating accessible content in their future coursework and beyond. Our final accessibility goal with the social media project is to help students envision themselves as responsible for, and capable of, meeting their own accessibility needs, the needs of their peers, and the needs of individuals in their future communities.

INSTITUTIONAL AND PROGRAMMATIC CONTEXT

Access had been considered programmatically when the course, ENGL 104: Writing Across Disciplines, was redesigned by Christina and Alex to have a focus on

multimodal composition. Most of our courses are taught in an online eight-week format, and the course shells are vigorously maintained and reviewed at the program level so that individual instructors do not have to retrofit materials on the fly. The institution we teach at has seen steady and consistent growth, specifically among online enrollment. Currently, the student population is 11,000 students, of which 4,000 are traditional undergraduates and over 7,000 are online, non-traditional students. Our online composition program consists of a two-course sequence: an introductory ENGL 101 course and a research-driven ENGL 104 course. Although the majority of students enrolled in these courses are adult-nontraditional learners, no parameters prevent traditional students from enrolling in online courses. This is a major consideration in the development and evolution of both courses. We believe it also means that the materials and practices we describe here can be utilized across a wide variety of institutional contexts. For 104, the cornerstone project is the research-based multimodal social media project. This project is an opportunity for students to learn and practice information and media literacy skills. Additionally, there is a focus on writing for a real and specific audience.

As a program without a firewall between our in-person real-time students and online any time student populations, all of our student populations can take our online courses. Because of this we had long ago created shells in our LMS for all instructors who taught in our composition program that meet Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG)[1] for our online and in-person students. These courses were carefully curated and audited to meet internal and external accessibility standards (like WCAG). Learning designers and faculty alike were involved in auditing the content in these courses. Our program has focused on this understanding of accessibility for a number of years, with our course shells designed to be accessible for students.

For example, we ensure that all Word documents are created with accessible heading structure and styles. We also create our materials to have color contrast and build in alternative text for images. When our university introduced *Blackboard Ally* as an automated means of scoring the accessibility of course shells, we were able to see that our shells were 95 percent accessible. We were able to hunt down the remaining 5 percent of problems and confirm that it was caused by documents being offered in multiple forms, with some options being deemed less accessible by *Blackboard Ally*.

In fact, one of the reasons we began to provide pre-made shells for all instructors was to impact the design of the content provided. It was simply too much to expect individual adjunct instructors to design the kind of robust environment we wanted students to experience in our LMS, while simultaneously creating

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1   Learn more about WCAG guidelines at https://www.w3.org/standards/

and maintaining content that was accessible to all students. When instructors did add new content, we encouraged them to keep accessibility at the forefront of their planning and design.

In previous versions of the course, the social media project in ENGL 104 was an opportunity for students to publish their research findings in a multimodal format. In thinking about accessibility, we realized that the project had the potential to do more. We were already selecting and researching a relevant audience, but with the updated project, we could now focus on ensuring students were considering inclusion issues. For instance, we want them to consider that some members of their audience cannot see images.

In the first week of ENGL 104, students are introduced to the social media project and decide on a research topic. The role of the instructor at this stage is to guide students through the process of constructing an open-ended question that is a viable research topic so that they can explore and present it through the entirety of the course. A common challenge for students at this stage is taking a topic of interest, formulating a question that lends itself well to the project, and identifying a target audience. When providing feedback to students on potential research questions, we advise them to consider the importance of identifying a target audience. When generating ideas for research questions, we guide students in drafting both open and closed questions. Through this process, students are guided to consider the audience they will want to reach. For instance, a student might be thinking about addressing PTSD research. What segment of the population with PTSD does that student want to examine? What type of research might that population be interested in? What does the audience already know? Answering these kinds of questions can help a student direct their research.

One other benefit of focusing on a real audience so early in the course is that students are asked to think about who they want to talk to before they completely nail down what they want to talk about. The "Who" in this construction is more important than the "What." We want them to know that content always depends on the audience. We are making this for people, and those people have needs, wants, desires, goals, and habits.

Because students are asked to consider who they want to address, we have a chance to get students to see the importance of accessibility. If a student selects college students in the United States as their audience, we ask, "Do you want to reach college students or only college students who can easily access information in certain formats?" We found that students understand the overt implications of this kind of ableism. They want their project to reach all college students. Instructors can even use this opportunity to show students information about disability in an audience. For example, 19.4 percent of

post-secondary students report having a disability (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018).

In week two, students begin working on their audience analysis assignment. The importance of this assignment to the scaffolding process of the social media project cannot be overstated. Students identify and analyze the strengths, weaknesses, threats, and opportunities of their target audience, which is crucial to formulating a plan for their research and the social media platform they choose. For instance, someone looking at college students as an audience might focus on how many hours the average college student works. Then, they would have to decide if this kind of information is a strength or weakness of their audience. Later in the project, they could use this information to craft an appeal to their audience.

Students' ability to craft a good research question and comprehension of the audience analysis is predictive of their successful completion of the project, and thus the course. The accessible and targeted version of these learning outcomes helps students better understand the importance of all abilities in their target audience. Considering the needs of an audience is a foundational element in this project where students can more clearly imagine an audience beyond their instructor. Writing for a real audience lines up with *Principles for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing* (2015) outlined by CCCC: "Sound writing instruction considers the needs of real audiences." This also has implications for instructors who need their students to produce more accessible texts.

Our experience teaching this project—with a focus on accessibility—proved mostly positive for students. Students invested themselves into the idea of creating accessible documents quite quickly. There was no resistance in student communication, discussion boards, or conferences. When Alex taught the project with this focus for the first time, he openly lamented that it had taken him this long to figure out that this was, indeed, the way the project needed to be taught, and his students simply agreed. In all of our classes, many students produced documents that provided only passing evidence of having considered that making documents accessible involves rhetorical choices. Yet, each of us had experience with students asking wonderful questions about accessibility.

Of course, students always have questions navigating assignments, especially when those assignments are scaffolded (too many directions, perhaps, yields even more questions) and high stakes (as a summative assessment worth a good deal of points in the course). The students in Cecilia's section had never designed texts with accessibility in mind prior to this experience. However, the questions received during this term were more targeted and focused than those that speak simply to a student's lack of understanding of the assignment

and thus missed previous module learning outcomes (i.e., weeks one through five). For example, a student using Facebook to address the importance of mental health services for children during the COVID-19 pandemic regularly attended office hours to work through drafting various posts and discussing how to make them accessible.

OUR FIELD'S COMPLICATED RELATIONSHIP WITH MULTIMODAL PEDAGOGY

Outside of our own institution, the word "multimodal" is not without its controversies. While all textual interactions are multimodal (Norris, 2004), multimodal pedagogy is a flash point in composition studies. Because no discipline can lay claim to fully understanding something like Facebook, and because the pace of multimodal growth seems to move faster than any single discipline is up for the chase, the place of multimodal pedagogy within our own discipline has been fraught with conflict.

We acknowledge this conflict. Multimodal pedagogy is not a solution so much as a challenging field experiencing growth. This is why we focus on the OLI principle that "Online literacy instruction should be universally accessible and inclusive" to the point where we extend this to students' writing, let alone our own course materials (*Online Literacy Instruction Principles and Tenets*, 2019). We want students to focus on preparing accessible, multimodal texts. We believe this helps emphasize the importance of audience, and of writing clearly, writing inclusively, and making intelligent rhetorical choices writ large.

For some scholars, composition scholarship about multimodal communication is valuable, but pedagogical approaches to helping students understand how to compose multimodal projects may actually get in the way of scholarly pursuits (Dobrin, 1997). In defiance of this position, Jonathan Alexander and Jacqueline Rhodes (2014) argue that we must embrace the multimodal writing tools our students already use by reasserting the place of the student in our formulations of what we teach. We echo Alexander and Rhodes and hope that multimodal pedagogy can amplify the relevance of what we teach for students.

We think multimodal pedagogical advancements are all the more important because our students are reading and compositing in rich, multimodal environments, whether we feel ready as a discipline for them to do so or not. As Ryan Shephard (2018) has argued, "Students may not perceive their digital and multimodal writing as connected to classroom practice. Because of this, they may have a challenging time using writing knowledge learned in digital spaces to help with their academic writing" (p. 103). We want to help our students make this type of transfer.

Accessibility is usually introduced as a concern for instructors only: and, indeed, instructors' courses should be accessible. In fact, as stated, the first OLI principle outlined by GSOLE in their *Online Literacy Instruction Principles and Tenets* (2019) is that "online literacy instruction should be universally accessible and inclusive." Furthermore, the NCTE's "Definition of Literacy in a Digital Age" (2019) states that our students should be able to "explore and engage critically, thoughtfully, and across a wide variety of inclusive texts and tools/modalities" (para.2). . This is an important first step, as we have argued above, yet it is not enough.

As Douglas Eyman and colleagues point out in "Access/ibility: Access and Usability for Digital Publishing" (2016):

> As creators of content, students need to be aware of access/ ibility concerns. With this knowledge, students can make better rhetorical decisions and create texts that increase the potential for all readers to make meaning from those texts (Teaching Access/ibility section, para. 2).

Having students create accessible documents—like those using images or videos that require captioning in order to be accessible—is a chance to emphasize to our students that captioning, like all writing, involves choices.

As Sean Zdenek has pointed out in *Reading Sounds: Closed-Captioned Media and Popular Culture* (2015), captions are interpretive acts. They are never the same as the sounds they turn into text. Student projects vary and the importance of choice in captioning can vary with those choices. Sometimes students include images in their projects more as an aftereffect rather than something integral to the project. The use of a picture that appears more "decorative" than integral can make it difficult for the student to see the choice involved in captioning. When captioning an image, students are indicating the purpose or the intent behind the choice of image. If an image is purely decorative, the caption may reflect the limitations of the student's choice. Our instructors can use this as an opportunity for discussion, but we also know that we are introducing the concepts. We are not expecting mastery.

In sum, having students share work where choice is more apparent can help students see the importance of choice, even as their own work may not point in this direction. It may be that in a context outside of an introductory course, instructors would want to grade students on the creating context that makes choice more apparent. For us, we are more concerned that a student's introduction to accessibility is not punitive and, instead, opens generative conversations about how to design for all users.

COURSE CONTEXT AND LESSON

ENGL 104: Writing Across Disciplines is the second of our university's two-course composition sequence. In ENGL 104, students commit to a research question and identify the needs of an audience early in the course. They then invest heavily in finding and evaluating multiple sources. Students use those sources to analyze their audience, develop a proposal for completing a social media project to address their research question, and then work towards publishing the social media project. The research and writing projects that students have completed up to the midpoint in the semester build to the social media project described below.

TEACHING OUTLINE FOR THE ACCESSIBLE SOCIAL MEDIA PROJECT

Purpose

The social media multimodal project is a culmination of the research completed for the previous writing assignments in the course (audience analysis and proposal). Students use the research they have completed in addressing the research question through a social media platform.

For the social media posts, students summarize, analyze, and synthesize the information from their research to demonstrate a conversation with the sources. We emphasize that students should be aware of their chosen audience, making decisions about their writing based on this group they have in mind as an intended audience. This conversation teaches students how to also build accessibility features into their social media posts to be more inclusive.

Skills

Students' work on the accessible social media project connects with various skills:

- Write an engaging—that is, an informative, argumentative, evaluative, and coherent—research project based on finding, reading, interpreting, analyzing, critiquing, and synthesizing sources.
- Produce research-based writings using library sources and evaluate additional sources from outside the library.
- Use quotations, paraphrases, and summaries correctly and appropriately.
- Build accessibility features into social media posts.

Knowledge

This project will also help students to become familiar with content knowledge related to composition:

- Understand that writing is a social process.
- Read, and be prepared to read, texts in diverse genres and disciplines in order to prepare them for a world increasingly complex, digital, and elusory in its textual representations.
- Develop skills in academic literacy, including critical reading, writing, summary, audience analysis, textual analysis, synthesis, and argument.
- Develop skills in digital literacy, including gathering and vetting sources, the evaluation of visual media and data, and the creation of digital arguments.
- Apply knowledge of rhetorical concepts and situations by tailoring writing to audiences and genres that are academic, professional, and public.
- Take a project-based-learning approach to learning and use key rhetorical concepts for addressing a specific, public audience.

TEACHING AND LEARNING TASKS

Introduction to Project

For the social media multimodal project, students summarize, analyze, and synthesize sources to create an informed argument that addresses their research question.

Posts will be customized to appeal to students' chosen audience. Discussing the needs of an audience leads to teaching students how to build accessibility features into their social media posts to be more inclusive with audience connections.

Using Images

Each post that students publish on their social media project is accompanied by an image. We direct students to use Pexels (https://www.pexels.com/) and/or Unsplash (https://unsplash.com/) for relevant images.

Example Instagram Project

Before getting too far into the project, we guide students in examples of posts that we have created on a model Instagram project. This video walks through sample posts from our Instagram.

Project Recipe

The social media project should consist of at least 16 social media posts:

- Eight summary posts – posts should include a summary of the source in your own words,
- Four analysis threads – posts should include your original evaluation of one source,

- Three synthesis threads – posts should create a dialogue between multiple sources, and
- One accessible infographic (with the option to create a second infographic in the place of the third synthesis post).

SOCIAL MEDIA PREWRITING – PART 1

The first step of the social media project that students complete is the Social Media Prewriting – Part 1 assignment. This prewriting assignment is a chart that students use to make a plan for using the sources they have gathered throughout the course. The chart is an organizational tool to provide structure and direction for the project.

Social Media Multimodal Project Prewriting Chart

Directions: Complete the prewriting chart for your social media project (shown below). You will be using the chart to organize your sources. Add the names of your sources in the boxes. Each numbered box represents one post in your social media project.

Infographic	Synthesis	Analysis	Summary
What sources can you use for your infographic? You will want multiple sources because the infographic is a visual synthesis. Write the names of your sources below.	What sources can you use for your synthesis posts? You need at least two sources for each. Write the names of the sources.	What sources can you use for your analysis posts? Write the names of the sources in the boxes below.	What sources can you use for your summary posts? Write the names of the sources in the boxes below.
Infographic 1	Synthesis 1	Analysis 1	Summary 1
			Summary 2
		Analysis 2	Summary 3
	Synthesis 2		Summary 4
		Analysis 3	Summary 5
			Summary 6

Social Media Multimodal Project Prewriting Chart: Model

Directions: Complete the prewriting chart for your social media project. You will be using the chart to organize your sources. Add the names of your sources in the boxes. Each numbered box represents one post in your social media project.

Infographic	Synthesis	Analysis	Summary
What sources can you use for your infographic?	What sources can you use for your synthesis posts?	What sources can you use for your analysis posts?	What sources can you use for your summary posts?
You will want multiple sources because the infographic is a visual synthesis.	You need at least two sources for each.	Write the names of the sources in the boxes below.	Write the names of the sources in the boxes below.
Write the names of your sources below.	Write the names of the sources.		
Infographic 1	Synthesis 1	Analysis 1	Summary 1
"Women and Girls in STEM"	"How to Get More Girls Involved in STEM"	"Girls Now Outnumber Boys in High School STEM"	"How to Get More Girls Involved in STEM"
"Closing the Gender Gap through STEM"	"Girls Now Outnumber Boys in High School STEM"		Summary 2
	"Best Science Jobs"		"The Next Generation of Girls in STEM"
	"Best Engineering Jobs"		

Social Media Prewriting—Part 2

Next, students move into the Social Media Prewriting—Part 2, which is a discussion board in the course LMS. In this discussion, students create their first post for their social media project, which is a synthesis post using two or more sources. In their responses, they provide feedback to two classmates. The purpose of this prewriting discussion is to get started on the writing for this project and get feedback before completing all of the posts.

Information on Accessibility in Writing Posts

We then present instructions on how to build accessibility features into the social media project along with a rationale for why this is important. As noted above, millions of people have a visual impairment. To increase inclusiveness and to reach more members of their audience, they need their social media posts to be accessible. While this better practice in developing alternative text has been tailored to a series of social media posts, asking students to develop accessible descriptions is a meaningful practice across all aspects of multimodal composition. Readers could easily pair this practice with other multimodal chapters, such as Wimberly and colleagues' Monument/Memorial (Re)Design Project (Chapter 4) or Wood and Stewart's TED Talk or Cajita video (Chapter 11). It can also be

transferred to other social media driven instructional practices, like Eagle, Falter, and Donovan's #TeachWriteChat practice (Chapter 7).

Students watch a YouTube video showing a person with a visual impairment using Instagram (Rath, 2018). The video also walks through the steps to add alt text.

Accessibility Features for the Social Media Project.

1. Students can consider using hashtags at the end of each post to build engagement. Capitalizing each word in a hashtag instead of having all lower-case letters is better for accessibility. Example: #AccessibilityInSocialMedia
   a. Why? When people are using a screen reader, the reader will be able to distinguish between separate words. If words are all lower case, they can be jumbled.
2. Students can use emojis in their posts, but they should be strategic and use no more than two per post. Emojis should be placed at the end of posts.
   a. Why? Screen readers will read the emojis, which can be time-consuming and may interfere with your message. Example: "smiling face with sunglasses, winking face, thinking face" can, eventually, become distracting.
3. Each post should have an image. Students should add alternative text for image descriptions to describe the content of the image.

Why? Alt (alternative) text can be read by screen readers.

> Ok: Ice cream
>
> Good: Two chocolate ice cream cones
>
> Better: Image of two chocolate ice cream cones in waffle cones upside down in stainless steel metal tray of chocolate ice cream with a plain, white background

Adding alt text to images gives students training in adding accessibility features to their writing. Additional work in building accessibility features could contain opportunities to develop more nuanced work for alt text and captioning. For example, if students were to include an interview in their social media project, more detailed captioning would be appropriate. Our assignment scaffold is meant to start a dialogue that individual instructors can tailor to their courses and the projects students create within them.

Figure 13.1 provides an example that we offer to students.

Figure 13.1. Example of alternative text generation (Unsplash, 2023).

Our instruction also includes a table for instructions for how to add alt text for their choice of social media platform. Please note that these instructions are a heuristic and were accurate as of early 2023; the interfaces of these platforms have changed in the past—and will change again in the future

Instagram:

1. Upload image
2. Choose Filter or Edit, if desired
3. Click Next
4. Click Advanced Settings
5. Click Write Alt Text
6. Write a description of the image. How would you describe it to someone who is visually impaired? Do not say "image of" or "photo of"
7. Click Done/Save

Facebook:

1. Choose image
2. Click Edit
3. Write a description of the image in the alt text box. How would you describe it to someone who is visually impaired? Do not say "image of" or "photo of"
4. Write a caption in the caption box. You can use the caption to add context.
5. Click Save

Note: Your caption will appear with the photo in your post. The alt text will not appear and will only be read by the screen reader.

Twitter/X:

1. Write your tweet
2. Click on Photo
3. Attach photo
4. Click Add Description (there might be a button on the photo with an +ALT)
5. Write a description of the image. How would you describe it to someone who is visually impaired? Do not say "image of" or "photo of"
6. Click Done

CREATING THE INFOGRAPHIC

As part of the social media project, students also create an infographic. The infographic also presents an opportunity to build accessibility features into the project.

To make the infographic more accessible, we encourage students to include a transcript or summary of their infographic in the caption/text of their post that can be read by a screen reader.

We also present an infographic from WebAIM (an organization that works to make web content more accessible) that captures features of accessible design (WebAIM, 2022; https://webaim.org/resources/designers/). Key elements from this infographic include:

- Students should plan for and use headings in their infographics.
- Students should be intentional with choosing colors that have higher levels of contrast.
- Students should use a font size that makes the text easier to read.

PROJECT GRADING CATEGORIES

To present students with a clear idea of how they will be assessed on the social media project, we include grading categories for the project.

- **Infographic (1):** The infographic is a visual way to present research and information. The infographic should be aesthetically appealing and easy to read. It should be easy for the reader to digest the information presented. The infographic should show evidence of careful and thoughtful planning in what information to present and how. The infographic should also show evidence of careful design choices. The caption for the infographic should include a detailed description of the information as well as images.

- **Summary (5):** The summary posts should clearly and accurately capture the main ideas from the original source. The summary should be written completely in the student's own words and be written in a way to encourage the reader to pursue the linked source.
- **Analysis (3):** Analysis posts/threads should include the student's original evaluation of one source, offering his/her summary and critique of the source. The analysis should be crafted in a way that would encourage a reader to click on the link of the analyzed source.
- **Synthesis (3):** A synthesis requires students to combine multiple sources, creating something new, with a clear argumentative purpose. The synthesis should encourage the reader to follow up on the linked sources.
- **Audience Awareness and Style Choices:** Audience awareness is a significant component of this project. Did you use the research and analysis of your audience to make choices when presenting your argument? Keep in mind the expectations of your audience, including their specific needs for accessibility. Your project should be accessible per WCAG standards. Did you build in accessibility features for each type of post and your infographic?
- **Habits of Mind, Process Management, Peer Review(s), and Revisions:** Habits of mind are patterns of behavior or attitudes and develop over time. Habits of mind include openness to interactive revision. Writing is a recursive process; therefore, it is expected that you engage in this process. You will participate in peer reviews, giving and receiving feedback to make updates.
- Creating multimodal products also includes **larger project management skills**, such as time management, as well as the ability to collaborate with others in diverse and interactive situations. How has your social media project improved consistently over time?

REFLECTION ON PRACTICE

While students creating accessible social media projects has been a recent development for our program (other than the instances where students were already doing this by themselves), it has largely been a welcome addition from students' perspectives. In part, in relation to all the assignments for the course, we accounted for the additional labor that it takes to make posts accessible and reduced the overall number of posts required for the project.

Many of our learning experiences within this project have come over a long period of time. The project has been a successful part of our program for four years. Still, students raise concerns, especially when using social media. For

instance, some students express privacy concerns. This is an easy fix, as we can encourage students to make their accounts private. They are still fulfilling the outcomes of learning while maintaining their online privacy.

When teaching this practice for the first time, educators may see that students need help creating social media accounts. To support these students, we have found that providing links to online help guides and tutorial videos, as well as supporting students one-on-one have been the most successful strategies.

Some students remain wedded to more traditional research genres, and struggle to translate the findings of their research into social media posts. We have supported students in this challenge through multiple strategies. First, they get some experience with writing about their sources through a previous project in the course, the annotated bibliography. For the annotated bibliography project, they have already searched for, evaluated, and written about several of their sources. We encourage students to recycle (or, perhaps more accurately, "upcycle" and improve their use of) these sources, as well as to revisit their original notes, all as they prepare for their social media posts. We also break the "types" of posts into summary, analysis, and synthesis so that students can see a direct relationship between social media and some of their more traditional academic assignments.

Another strategy that has proven valuable is the use of templates. We have crafted a set of templates for the summary, analysis, and synthesis posts. Students rely on these templates to help them get started on some of their posts and build confidence. We want students to move away from these templates as they progress through the assignment, but taking away the blank page can help students get started. We have also had some success with having students generate their own templates as a prewriting exercise after initially using instructor generated templates. For example, after writing one synthesis post, we have asked students to collaborate to brainstorm templates for another synthesis post. Composite student sample:

> One article, _____, provides an overview of _____. At the same time, it discusses _____ and _____.

> In fact, in another source, ____, the author presents ____. These points are meaningful because ____. Finally, ____ this leads to ____.

> For takeaways, both sources approach _____, which tells us _____. Based on the reading of these two sources, _____. Overall, I would suggest that _____.

There may be some topic choices that become problematic. For instance, a student researching middle eastern peace accords found it difficult to educate

his audience without receiving hateful responses. To address these issues, we sometimes encourage students to select a topic that connects to their program or professional goals. Students can also make accounts private.

We have found what this assignment does well, and we have addressed many of the challenges outlined above. As an added benefit, we have found that students are able to transfer their research and writing skills directly into future coursework in their disciplines.

When students give feedback on the social media project, we hear about its relevance and meaning for them. Publishing their message through social media allows students the opportunity to communicate and connect with a real audience. We also believe that the project works well for teaching responsibility in publishing research and information.

CONCLUSION

The first principle outlined by GSOLE in their *Online Literacy Instruction Principles and Tenets* (2019) is that "online literacy instruction should be universally accessible and inclusive" and to leave students' own work out of that principle means we will always fall short of universal accessibility. That said, we do understand that universal accessibility is not an achievable goal. Accessibility needs are always shifting. Introducing students to creating accessible documents and content for their peers and specific audiences is a means of introducing them to accessibility concerns and sets them on the path of addressing it in their further academic work and careers. It is a start, but one we think is a best practice that is taking shape. Students are ready to do this kind of work. They are receptive to it. We already have the language we need in our guiding documents and principles.

Our own assignment is an example of a project that seemed to be waiting for this change. We know that other assignments may be more challenging to adapt. Yet, in many of those cases the adaptations may be quite small. If students are producing excel spreadsheets rather than social media posts, there are ways to make Excel spreadsheets more accessible. We have work to do as educators to keep educating ourselves on accessibility. We can help future educators by educating them as students.

MOVING BETTER PRACTICES ACROSS MODALITIES

- Hybrid Learning: While this practice began in our online, any time classes, we have now taken the practice into our in-person, real-time and online, real-time courses. The adaptations we make in both

modalities could also be used in the hybrid learning environment. We take the opportunity of in-person class meetings to work collaboratively on accessibility features with real-time feedback from the instructor. Students can give peer feedback on accessibility in these environments, which can reinforce the practice. We believe similar engagement strategies would work in a hybrid environment.

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