Getting Started: Blackboard Ally

Ally's Instructor Feedback Panel

Ally is integrated within South Carolina State's learning management system (Blackboard) and provides feedback within your course workflow. Log-in to your SCSU Blackboard course, and you will find the Ally indicators next to files or content. If you have no course files yet, upload one, and an indicator will appear next to the file name. Click the indicator to view your accessibility feedback. Follow along step-by-step to improve your original file.

Ally provides you feedback on the accessibility of your course files with the colored dials that appear next to your file names (Red, Orange, Light Green, and Dark Green). These indicators are only visible to you and other instructors with access to your course. Ally checks most file formats, but there may be some files in your course that don't have an Ally indicator next to them. Remember, Green is the Goal!

Find the Ally Indicators

Your course files and content will now have color "dials" next to them. They indicate the file's level of accessibility and are there to help you prioritize which files you want to fix first. Don't worry, your students can't see them. If you hover over the indicators, you'll see if the accessibility score is "low," "medium," or "high." Click the indicator to see the percentage score, specific issues affecting the file, and instructions for improving the file.

[Learn more on Ally's Instructor Feedback Panel](#)

View Accessibility Issues
Scenario: **You see a red indicator "dial" next to a file**

You notice the red indicator appear after adding a new file to your course. Or, your institution just added Ally, and now you see a red indicator next to your course file. You mouse over to the red dial and see the "accessibility score" when you hover over the indicator.
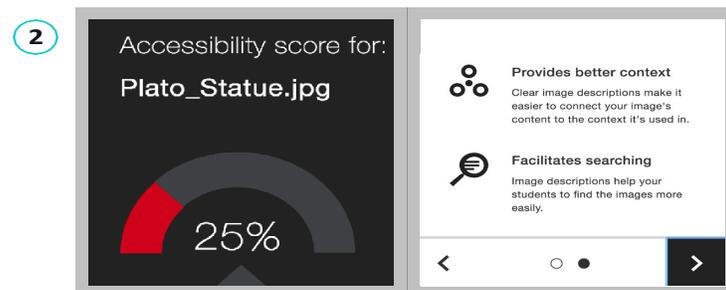
When you click the indicator, Ally walks you through a series of steps to make the file more accessible. Ally organizes this feedback in a decision tree, so all you need to do is read the directions and respond to the prompts. Learn what the issue is, why it matters, and how to correct it appropriately.
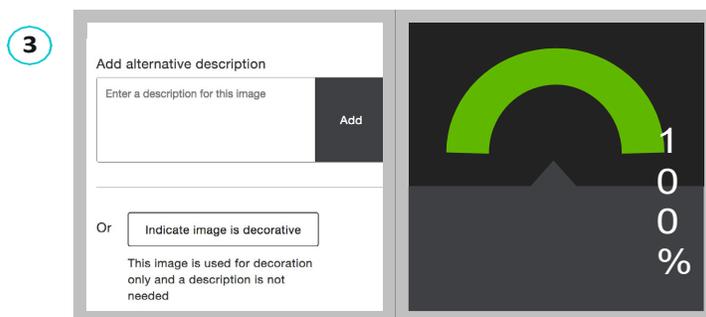

In some cases, Ally will allow you to make the fix directly, such as adding an alternative description to an image file. In other cases, Ally links you to resources to help solve the problem in the tools you're using to create content. Upload a new file directly to Ally, and watch your score improve.

Add Alt Descriptions to PowerPoint Images
Scenario: Your favorite presentation has an orange indicator

Sharing presentation slides with students can provide them useful review and study materials. Since many presentations include images, it is important that the images contain an alternative description, to help both in labeling document images as well as for students with visual impairments.
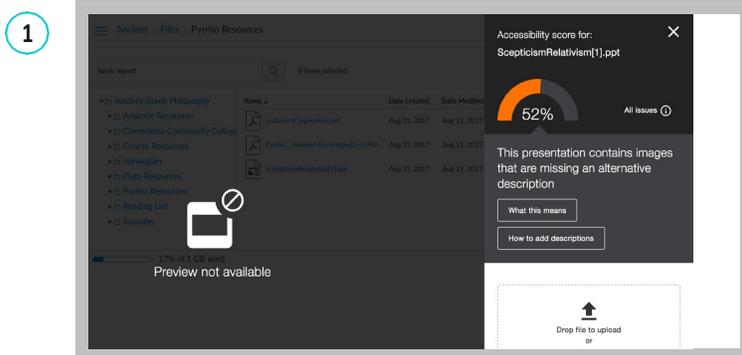

When you click the orange indicator next to your Power Point file, the Ally instructor feedback window lets you know that the presentation has images missing alternative descriptions. You'll need to fix this issue in Power Point and upload a new file to Ally when you're ready.
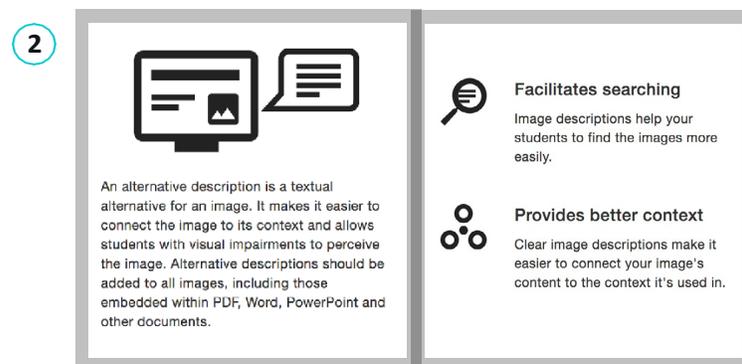
Ally will describe to you how to write effective alternative descriptions if you are unfamiliar. You can download the file from your course to work on it if you don't already have it on your computer. Open the file in Power Point to add your alt descriptions.
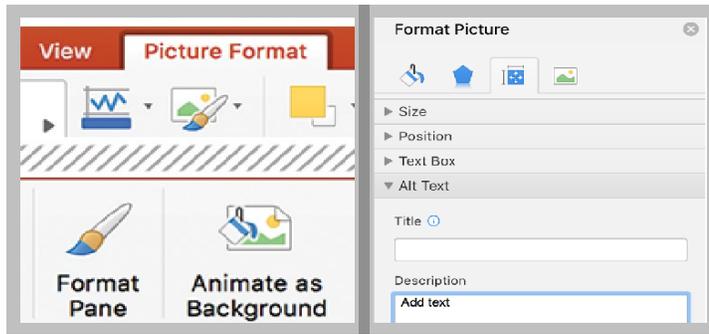
In Power Point, you can add alternative descriptions to an image by:

1. Select the Image
2. Choose the "Picture Format" tab and locate the "Format Pane" button
3. Select "Size and Properties" tab, and then alt text from the drop-down.
4. Add your text in the description field, don't worry about title. Save your file.

Add Headings to a Word Document
Scenario: **Ally tells you your Word Doc is missing headings**

Reading long, dense text documents can be a daunting task for learners. Well-structured documents help students organize and process texts. By using headings in your Word document styles, you can design sections and sub-sections for your documents. Headers can help students navigate and comprehend texts and are essential for screen readers.
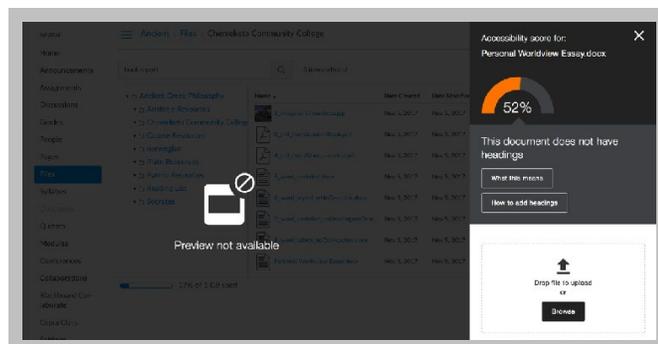
You add a MS Word document to your course site, and notice an orange Ally indicator, so you click it. Ally tells you that your document is missing headings. You'll need to edit the document offline to make the changes and upload a new version to improve the score.

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A 'heading' isn't always a heading

AaBcCc

Do not only use visual appearance such as text size, bold or underline to mimic a heading. Always use the program's native heading styles to ensure headings are properly marked as headings.

Why use headings

Facilitates searching

Headings can provide structure and clarity. This can help students better understand the content and facilitate reading.

Essential for students with visual impairments

Headings help people using a screen reader navigate a document. Imagine reading a book without any chapters or

Check out the Ally feedback to learn more about why headings are important, how to use headings effectively, and where to find tutorials to help you add headings to the document. Remember, headings establish should provide a clear, consistent structure for students to follow throughout the doc.

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AaBbCcDdEe	AaBbCcDdEe	**AaBbCcDc**	AaBbCcDdEe	AaBbCcDdEe
Normal	No Spacing	Heading 1	Heading 2	Heading 3
AaBbCcDdEe	AaBb(	AaBbCcDdE	*AaBbCcDdEe*	*AaBbCcDdEe*
Heading 4	Title	Subtitle	Subtle Emph...	Emphasis
AaBbCcDdEe	**AaBbCcDdE**	*AaBbCcDdEe*	*AaBbCcDdEe*	AABBCCDDEE

If you're using MS Word, first highlight the text you want to change into a heading. Then, find "Styles" and select the appropriate heading type. Use headings consistently and try not to exceed 6 levels. Once you've corrected the heading structure, save the Word file and upload to Ally. Add headings to all your text documents for a more inclusive learning

Blackboard Ally: Accessibility Checklist

Accessible course content makes it easier for everyone to read and access your materials and can help improve overall quality and usability. There are many low-effort adjustments you can make to start creating more accessible content. Follow the accessibility checklist below to get started.
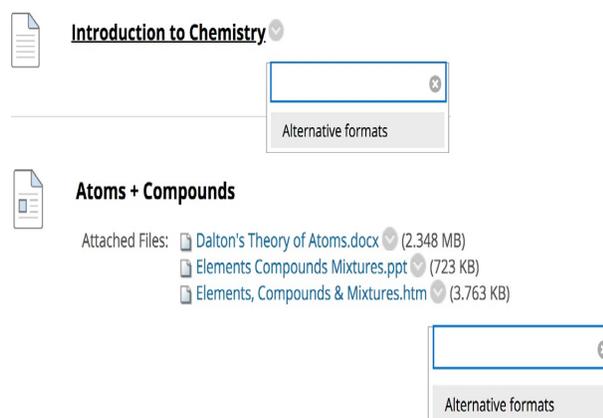
- Use a font style of at least 12px
- Ensure that there is sufficient contrast between text and background. The [Paciello Group Contrast Analyzer](#) is a great tool.
- Ensure that proper heading styles are used.
- Ensure that a logical heading structure is used.
- Ensure that images have an alternative description that can convey the full meaning of the image.
- Ensure that tables are used for tabular data only.
- Ensure that all tables have column headings.
- Ensure that all lists use built-in list functionality.
- Ensure that all links have text that describes the target.
- Ensure that built-in PowerPoint slide templates are used.
- Don't use scanned PDFs.
- Ensure that all PDFs are tagged.

Blackboard Ally: Alternative Formats

How do you prefer to engage with digital learning content? Do you read on your phone or tablet, use a screen reader, like to annotate, and highlight, or listen to an audio version? Ally automatically generates "Alternative formats" from your original course files and makes them available for download so that you can engage with course content in a way that works best for you.

Find Ally's "Alternative formats" where you access your course content.

Select the grey arrow icon next to the content items or attached files in your course and select the "Alternative formats" option from the drop down.

Introduction to Chemistry

Alternative formats

Atoms + Compounds

Attached Files: Dalton's Theory of Atoms.docx (2.348 MB)
Elements Compounds Mixtures.ppt (723 KB)
Elements, Compounds & Mixtures.htm (3.763 KB)

Alternative formats

Know your options. Choose a format that's right for you.

Format	Format Advantages
OCRed PDF Automatically extracted text	**Improved scanned documents** Better reading and text search
Tagged PDF Structured PDF for assistive technology	**Improved structure for navigation** Essential for screen readers
HTML For browser and mobile	**Customize your text** Adapts text to mobile screen sizes
ePub Reading on tablets and e-book readers	**eBooks on tablets** Annotating and highlighting
Electronic braille BRF version for electronic braille displays	**Read more quickly** Essential for visual impairments
Audio MP3 recording of text	**Listen and learn on the go** Engage different modalities

[Learn more on Alternative Formats](#)