

# What's in a measure? Considerations on Anthology Ally

Let me take a moment to share my thoughts around one of our newer services with Learning, Teaching and Web: Anthology Ally. Accessibility is fast becoming one of my favourite topics working within DLAM. A Humanities graduate myself, maybe the link between Hermeneutics (Interpretation theory) and digital transformations in accessible design play a part. Whilst I used to be primarily concerned about the meaning behind the words, I now find myself deeply fascinated by the (digital) transactions that take place to transmit and present information, and the tools it takes to make this happen!

Digital accessibility refers to digital content that has been reviewed and tested to be accessible to the widest possible audience and be free from any avoidable access restrictions when using assistive technologies. In the broad landscape of software, programmes and platforms, readability and interoperability are crucial if we are to enable our users to interact with our content in an output format suited to their needs. Thus, for accessibility to translate to digital media educational design (content focussed), interoperability, and user navigation and software availability all play a part. To achieve this, the ability to review and revise core information – such as file properties, logical input and design elements – this data must be clearly readable to a variety of software before the output can be guaranteed. Who else remembers the wonders of opening a foreign file extension with Word and being faced with code rendered in Webdings?

Our ability to alter and edit our content and render it accessible at all levels, is critical. Anthology Ally offers us a window into the system level dialogue of our digital

learning environment and the digital media we populate our classrooms with. Ally is a software integration on our primary VLE that scans contents for digital accessibility, its meta text, settings and requirements hidden behind the on-the-face output. It allows the users to identify accessibility issues at software level and supports some measures of fixing these; as well as enabling the conversion of files into alternative formats. Alternative formats can make teaching resources more adaptable to the diverse needs and wants of our students. Changing file type may help in presenting a file more adaptive to screen size; opting for a different display modus can support reading; access to audio can allow you to listen back on materials whilst working out, running chores or on the commute... with a diverse student body, we have the opportunity to fit all our teaching courses into a more flexible learning style. An improved digital experience supports all our learners, and having a chance to gauge better what poses a hindrance to assistive technology will make an impact to our users!

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

Format	Format Advantages
 <b>OCR'd PDF</b> Automatically extracted text	<b>Improved scanned documents</b> Better reading and text search
 <b>Tagged PDF</b> Structured PDF for assistive technology	<b>Improved structure for navigation</b> Essential for screen readers
 <b>HTML</b> For browser and mobile	<b>Customize your text</b> Adapts text to mobile screen sizes
 <b>ePub</b> Reading on tablets and e-book readers	<b>eBooks on tablets</b> Annotating and highlighting
 <b>Electronic braille</b> BWF file for electronic braille displays	<b>Tactile Reading</b> Relief from screenreaders
 <b>Audio</b> MP3 recording of text	<b>Listen and learn on the go</b> Engage different modalities
 <b>Beeline Reader</b> A machine translated version of the doc	<b>Improved on-screen reading</b> Read faster and with greater focus
 <b>Translated version (opt-in format)</b> A machine translated version of the doc	<b>Translate text to a different language</b> Access 50 different translations

## Table of available alternative formats

Here at DLAM testing out our service solutions to assure that they work as intended and integrate seamlessly (we can but try!) into our existing service environment is a wonderful part of the job. The [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\) 2.1](#) (version 2.2 has been launched in October) offer a detailed list of criteria when reviewing all our websites and

applications for legal compliance under the Equality Act (2010) and The Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) (Scotland) Regulations 2012


(<https://www.ed.ac.uk/about/website/accessibility/guidelines-policy-legislation>). One of the core efforts in the standard is that organisations have to lay bare how they identified and thought about accessibility for their products and services, and where possible, mitigated any avoidable shortcomings. In broad terms, our applications are challenged on three aspects: audio, visual and navigation / workflow; the touch points of our digital environment. It is a “dimension of interoperability” to assess whether “assistive technologies [are] working predictably with different combinations of browsers, mobile operating systems, and devices” ([The Next Frontier – Expanding the Definition of Accessibility | SpringerLink](#)). When testing for Ally, a core challenge for me was using assistive technology, often for the first time, and to interpret the behaviour. Whilst I was reasonably familiar with Ease of Access settings for my PC and browser, other more specialist tools I found hard to judge. What if my lack of familiarity with assistive technology in the test makes for a poor result due to difficulties with the assistive tool rather than the target interface? It is the hard to judge places that lead us to use tools to scan and evaluate what meets compliance criteria and helps us to correlate our own experience with the data we interact with.


To guide instructors about digital accessibility, Ally produces a score. It is meant as a guide to how clean a file is in digital terms, i.e. how successful it will be in converting to an alternative file format or being negotiated by any common assistive technology tool. So taking a moment to demystify the scoring for a moment should clear our view to how Ally supports our wider mission to produce accessible learning and teaching materials.




**Low (0-33%):** Needs help! There are severe accessibility

issues.

 **Medium** (34-66%): A little better. The file is somewhat accessible and needs improvement.

 **High** (67-99%): Almost there. The file is accessible but more improvements are possible.

 **Perfect** (100%): Perfect! Ally didn't identify any accessibility issues but further improvements may still be possible.

Now, a scan for alternative text, in spite of the potential for AI to play a part here in future, cannot infer the context for the teaching resource and the focus the image might have in the lesson plan in the assessment of the appropriateness of ALT text. Ally is first and foremost an editing tool for the instructor, and a convenient conversion tool for the students. Accessibility needs remain to be assessed at the human level. So what do we do to assure we keep the service on track?

- Training; we must foster a keen awareness of what constitute accessible design in our digital service landscape
- Testing; we must test out applications and websites to identify and mitigate challenges in accessibility
- Research; we must continue to learn about digital trends, possible new solutions and developments in assistive technology, and accessible design
- Feedback; we must actively listen to user feedback to satisfy ourselves that we are not merely offering a legally compliant but a practical and usable service solution and that users understand the benefits and limits of the tools we provide; evaluating our service data can support this conversation (and I hope to go into more detail about this in my next blog).

What I have found in the course of the launch of Ally is that

users, academics and technologists alike, need to know not only what the barriers of student users may be, and what assistive technologies might be employed, but how to make the leap between the informational content, the educational experience or activities, and the digital needs of the programmes to make it operate for other software. Whilst it is important to point out that accessibility needs are as diverse as the subjects we offer in teaching, focused on honing different skills and abilities, the same goes for assistive technologies. There will never be a one-size-fits-all. And that is a positive thing. It curtails our tendency to reduce accessibility to a tick box exercise. Checking for accessibility remains at all times an iterative process. With Ally, we have one more tool to help us orientate ourselves amidst this ever evolving digital landscape.

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## **Accessible by design**

For many years I have worked as a proof-reader and editor on an assignment basis. It seemed a suitable outlet to my fastidious nature and relentless drive for detail (attributes that I have only marginally been able to tamper for polite society since). What it has given me, however, is a deep appreciation of the intricacies of good type setting, clean style guides and accurate referencing.

Fast forward to the present day, I am starting to learn more about the digital footprint all these choices and settings create and which of them support interoperability with assistive technologies. What used to be, to my untrained eye, just a flat surface, a 2-dimensional choice of matching the

style to the words for the benefit of the reader, suddenly had 3 dimensions: making the text comprehensible to technology to assist in its easy transformation across media by means of tags and codes and alt text... and with it opening up to a more agile interaction with that all-important source material that was being communicated.

So I have set myself two goals: to collate reference material in support of accessibility that may help in designing documents at the outset with accessibility in mind; and to work on some style sheets that can meaningfully integrate what characteristics might be required for different materials to make them meaningfully accessible in their own context and user groups.

What does it take to annotate an art textbook in digital print? What software best integrates disciplinary challenges like specialist symbols and characters? What etiquette rules should be followed in the landscape of gifs and emoji? How can good editing eliminate additional workflows and processes to create differently accessible materials? Is there really ever going to be a “golden copy”?

Let the journey begin 😊

## **Accessibility Resources**

Government Digital Service – [An accessibility reading list – Accessibility in government \(blog.gov.uk\)](#)

TextBox Digital – Designing Accessibly – [University of Kent \(textboxdigital.com\)](#)

Universal Design for Learning Guidelines [UDL: The UDL Guidelines \(cast.org\)](#)

Ally Accessibility Formats [Blackboard Ally: Getting started with alternative accessible formats – Blackboard Help for Students – University of Reading](#)

Guidelines for Assessment Descriptions [NWEA Image Description Guidelines for Assessments](#)

Guide to writing ALT text [What is alternative text? How do I write it for images, charts, and graphs? \(matthewdeeproise.github.io\)](#)

Accessibility Resources Portfolio [Favorite Resources – Inclusive Instructional Design](#)

## **Visuals and Graphics around Accessibility**

Designing for Accessibility Dos and Dont's – <https://accessibility.blog.gov.uk/2016/09/02/dos-and-donts-on-designing-for-accessibility/>

## **Accessibility standards, compliance legislation and tools**

[The Public Sector Bodies \(Websites and Mobile Applications\) \(No. 2\) Accessibility Regulations 2018 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

[ADA Accessibility Compliance for College and University Websites | Aha! :: Elliance Blog](#)

[Website Accessibility Conformance Evaluation Methodology \(WCAG-EM\) 1.0 \(w3.org\)](#)

[Evaluating Web Accessibility Overview | Web Accessibility Initiative \(WAI\) | W3C](#)

Maintaining Accessibility [Sustain | Web Accessibility Initiative \(WAI\) | W3C](#)

Contrast Checker [WebAIM: Contrast Checker](#)

MS Office Accessibility Inspector [Accessibility Inspector for Everyone \(matthewdeeproise.github.io\)](#)

Nvda Screen Reader [NV Access | Download NVDA](#)

## Reporting around Accessibility

University of Edinburgh – [Monitoring and Data | The University of Edinburgh](#)

## Community

Anthology Accessibility Discussion Board [Accessibility – The Anthology Community](#)

Anthology Ally User Group [Dashboard – Ally User Group](#)

Digital Accessibility at the University of Reading [User stories \(reading.ac.uk\)](#)

AbilityNet [What is Digital Accessibility? | AbilityNet](#)

Champions of Accessibility Network [Introducing the Champions of Accessibility Network | Skyscanner's Travel Blog](#)

UoE Intern view of LaTeX [Lewis Forbes – LaTeX and Accessibility – Information Services Group: Student Employee Blog \(ed.ac.uk\)](#)

## Self-help and training materials

Discovering Learning styles [Enter The Learning – Liberated Learners \(pressbooks.pub\)](#)

ABC Teaching toolkit [Toolkit for facilitators | The University of Edinburgh](#)

[Make your PowerPoint presentations accessible to people with disabilities – Microsoft Support](#)

## University of Edinburgh Resources

[Playlist Details – Global Accessibility Awareness Day – 18 May 2023 – Media Hopper Create](#)

[Creating accessible materials | The University of Edinburgh](#)



# Welcome!

## Welcome to Digital Sojourns!

Thanks for stopping by.

I hope you will find my content interesting, and if, like me, you get excited over IT drop me a comment if you think there are things out there I haven't seen and maybe should! Together we can make this into a diverting and educational space.

I'm leaving the little guidance notes underneath for reference until I made a bit of progress on the content for this blog... hopefully you will see development along the way.

*For help and advice on getting started with a WordPress blog, see the [Academic Blogging help pages](#).*

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*You can open your blog up to as many or as few people as you like in **Dashboard > Settings > Reading > Site Visibility**:*

- *You can open your blog up to specific University members by adding them as users to your blog.*
- *You can open your blog up to all University members who have an EASE login.*

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