Online SUNY Broome

Blackboard Ally is a tool that integrates into our Blackboard Learn courses to assist faculty in making their courses more accessible to all learners. There are three main components of Blackboard Ally: Accessibility Score, Accessibility Feedback Panel, and Alternative Formats. This Faculty Guide will explain each of these components and show you how they can be used to improve the accessibility of your course content.

Ally Accessibility Score

Ally currently checks content that has been uploaded to your course and assigns each file an "Accessibility Score" based on WCAG (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines) 2.1 AA standards. These guidelines are an international accessibility standard, and aligns with most of the legislation and legal requirements worldwide. Files types that are checked for accessibility include:

- PDFs
- Microsoft® Word
- Microsoft® PowerPoint®
- HTML that has been uploaded as a file *
- Images (JPG, JPEG, GIF, PNG, BPM, TIFF)

* Content created within Blackboard using the rich text (WYSIWYG) editor is currently not given a score, but will be in a future release. This will include content contained within exams, discussions and drop-box assignments.

What is the Accessibility Score?

When Ally checks a file against the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines mentioned above, it determines a score for the file based on the severity of the issues it found. A low score indicates that the file has severe or multiple accessibility issues; a high score means that there are minor or no accessibility issues. For files with accessibility scores of less than 100%, Ally will provide suggestions for improving the accessibility of the file. Scores range from Low to Perfect. The higher the score, the fewer the issues in the file. Ally presents the Accessibility Score Indicator (depicted as a gauge graphic) next to the file name on the course page. The gauges range in color from red to green. Red indicates a low accessibility score while green indicates a high score or perfect. The image below illustrates the various score indicators and what they mean.

- **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.

It is important to note that ONLY INSTRUCTORS in the course can see the accessibility score indicator.

It is hidden from students!

Accessibility Feedback Panel

Once you know the accessibility score of a file in your course, you can find out why it received the score it did and take action to remediate the issue. Ally provides an instructor access to the Accessibility Feedback Panel which will list the issues that are affecting the accessibility score. The feedback panel is designed to teach instructors about the key components of accessibility to help improve their current and future documents posted to Blackboard. Ally automatically brings up the most significant issue impacting the score first, but gives the option to list all issues it found in the file.

To bring up the Accessibility Feedback Panel:

1. Click on the **Accessibility Score Indicator** next to the file.
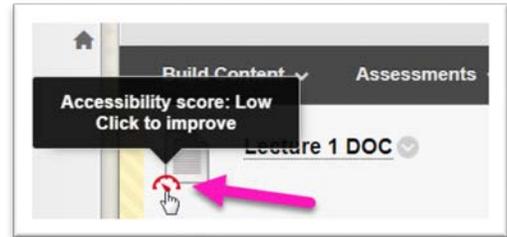
2. The feedback panel will appear. You will see your document in the left pane and the issues found to the right. To see a list of all issues found, click the "**All issues**" button. The screen will look like the one below.

3. The Accessibility Feedback Panel will list all issues found in the file. Clicking the "**Fix**" button next to an issue will allow you to get additional information on the issue that was found ("What this means") as well as instructions for fixing the problem (ex: "How to add descriptions"). There is also an area in which you would upload a new file after the item is corrected. (see next page)

Please Note: You will not actually be fixing your content within Ally's Accessibility Feedback Panel, it is simply there to provide feedback and give you the location to re-upload the corrected document to improve your Accessibility Score. You must make your changes within the program that you used to create the original file (example: Microsoft Word, PowerPoint, Adobe Acrobat).

Detail instructions for remediating issues found in content can be found on the Online@ SUNYBroome website (www.sunybroome.edu/online.)

Alternative Formats

The students that enter your classroom have a diverse set of needs and offering them the greatest selection of options will allow them to better engage with your course. Ally has the ability to automatically take your uploaded content and present it in alternative formats to make them more accessible for everyone, not just those with a disability. Here are a few examples:

- A student might prefer to listen to an audio file of a posted PDF at the gym, during their commute, or while they make dinner if these are the best moments to consume the course's content. In addition, they might be better auditory learners. They would use the .mp3 format.

- Another student may have difficulty reading text on a computer screen and would prefer to read course content on their Kindle or other eReader device to reduce eye strain. The ePub format would be ideal for them.

- Other students will need to use screen readers or electronic braille alternatives if they have visual impairments.
- HTML formats will be easier for students to read on their mobile devices.

As you can see, alternative formats provide greater opportunity for everyone to access the information they need in the way they need or want it, regardless of whether they self-identify a disability.

Locating the Available Alternative Formats

With Ally, faculty members do not need to do anything to generate alternative formats. They are generated by Ally and no additional steps need to be taken. The quality of these new formats are limited to the accessibility of the original files. In addition, only certain files can be transformed into certain formats. If you do not see an option to download alternative formats, the file type is not a supported content type. Ally will create alternative formats only for content that has been uploaded. It does not create them for content created within the Blackboard Learning Management System using the rich text (WYSIWYG) editor.

To access and download the alternative formats as an instructor:

1. Click on the chevron to the right of the file and select the "*Alternative formats*" option.
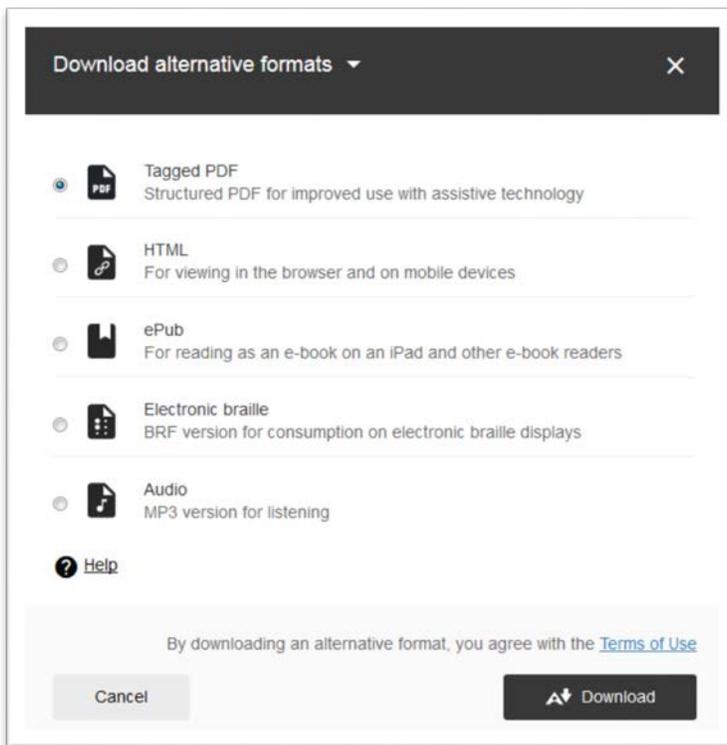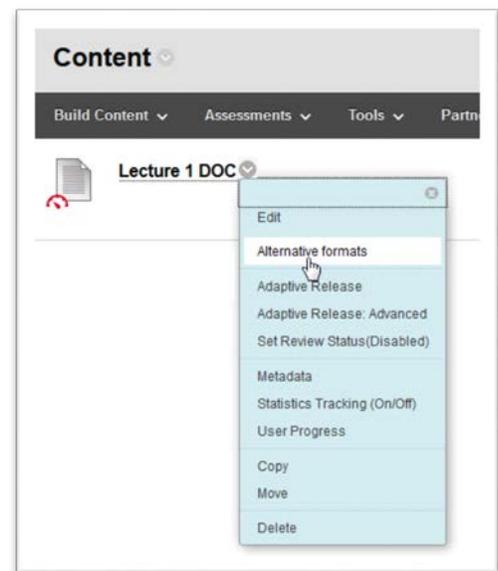
2. This will bring up a listing of all alternative formats that were created for your content. Students will also see the chevron next to the file name, but their only option from the shortcut menu will be for the alternative formats.

Disabling Alternative Formats

You do have the option to disable alternative formats for individual files. Unfortunately, there is no way to blanket disable alternative formats for multiple files at the same time. You would need to follow the instructions below for each file that you would like to disable. To disable student access to alternative formats for a file simply click on the chevron next to the file name and select "Alternative formats" as you did before to bring up the listing of alternative formats available. This time, however, click the chevron next to the "Download alternative formats" text at the top of the window and select the "Disable alternative formats for this file" option. To test that it worked, go through the process again and you should see a message that the alternative formats have been disabled.
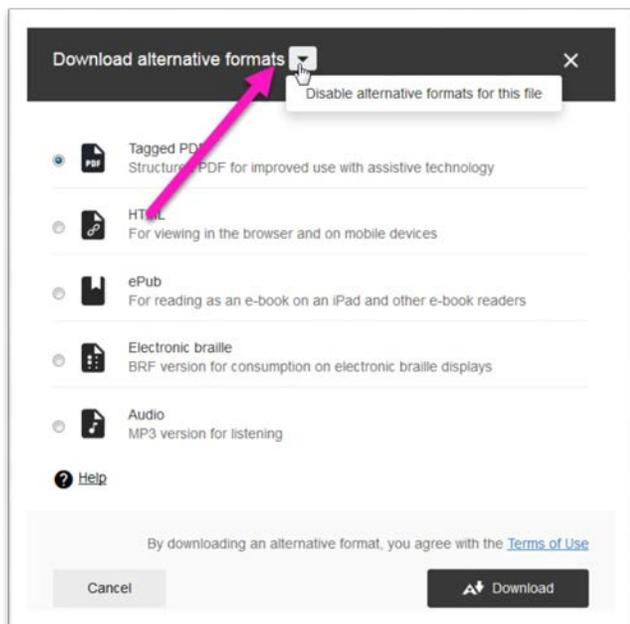
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Please visit the Online@SUNYBroome website (www.sunybroome.edu/online) for additional information pertaining to distance education. The site contains information for Students, Faculty and Chairs. A repository of informational/instructional documentation is included on the site as well as a listing of training opportunities and frequently asked questions.