



Blackboard Accessibility FAQ

Blackboard is committed to the accessibility of our learning platform. We are working with leaders in the accessibility field to bring our software into compliance with industry standards and federal guidelines for accessibility. Here are some frequently asked questions about Blackboard's accessibility efforts.

Is Blackboard 5 ADA Compliant?

Some people refer to accessibility compliance as "ADA compliance." However, there are no ADA guidelines or regulations for accessible content on the Internet, and the courts are still deciding the applicability of the ADA to the Internet. This means that the term "ADA Compliance" isn't very meaningful when talking about web applications such as Blackboard 5. Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act provides the first federal regulations for Internet content, and they are expected to apply to federal websites only (not public universities or corporations). The Department of Education is examining Section 508 to determine if and how it will affect public universities. Section 508 was published in December 2000, and will go into effect in June 2001. Blackboard is working to bring our software into compliance with industry standards for accessibility, the World Wide Web Consortium's Web Accessibility Initiative Standards (W3C WAIS), and the newly released Section 508 guidelines.

What accessibility features are available in the Blackboard platform?

In spring 2001, Blackboard will release Blackboard 5.5. Accessibility enhancements for this version include the following items.

- ?? All system images will have alt tags, and instructors will be able to add alt tags to uploaded images in the content creation areas of the software (with the exception of optional assessment images, which should be described in the question or answer text).
- ?? Framesets will be appropriately titled and will have meaningful <noframes> content, describing the functionality of the frames layout.
- ?? Data tables will be optimized for use with screen readers by adding attributes to associate column headings with table content.
- ?? One of the largest challenges for non-visual users of Internet applications is understanding the layout and context of a web page. Blackboard provides online Help documentation in both HTML and PDF format, which describes in detail the layout, context, and functionality of each Blackboard feature, as well as giving instructions on using these features.

Much of this functionality is already available in Blackboard 5; Blackboard 5.5 is intended to bring these features up to 100% compliance throughout the system.

How do Screen Readers (such as JAWS) work with Blackboard 5?

Current versions of JAWS for Windows work with many of the advanced HTML features that Blackboard uses. Newer versions of Jaws support frames, forms, JavaScript alert boxes, graphics (via alt tags), and multi-columned tables. Versions of JAWS 3.5 and up are optimized to take advantage of newer accessibility features in IE 5.5. (More information about Jaws for Windows can be found at <http://www.hj.com>)

As we are moving toward making our software fully accessible, we are writing assistive technology guidelines to serve as an interim solution. These guidelines will help users find assistive technology that will work with our software, and will help them optimize the assistive tools to work with web applications such as the Blackboard platform.

What are Blackboard's long term plans for enhancing the accessibility of our products?

Blackboard is continuing to research and evaluate additional assistive technology optimization, including alternate interfaces and user-level accessibility customization. We are committed to building our software towards the World Wide Web Consortium's Web Accessibility Initiative Standards (W3C WAIS).

How can I learn more about using the accessibility features in Blackboard's products?

All users participating in a Blackboard Learning Services training session are instructed on the accessibility features of the software.

How can I learn more about Internet accessibility issues?

Through our participation in WebAIM, Blackboard hosts an in-depth instructor led course on accessibility on the Internet (see <http://coursesites.blackboard.com> for course [Universal Web Design and Disability Access](#) with Course ID INST5320).

What is Blackboard doing in the field of accessibility?

WebAIM:

We're collaborating with Utah State University, The TLT Group, PBS, and Western Governors University in a Learning Anywhere Anytime Project (LAAP) federal grant, Web Accessibility In Mind (WebAIM). WebAIM focuses on educating instructors, administrators, and course designers on how to build accessible online learning environments. Blackboard is participating as the online learning platform for this project, and we will be working with experts in the WebAIM team to build out the accessibility features and accessibility standards compliance of Blackboard software during this four-year project. (Information on WebAIM can be found at <http://www.webaim.org>.)

SALT:

Standards For Accessible Learning Technologies, or the SALT Partnership, is a four-year initiative to develop and promote open access specifications and effective models that enable people with disabilities to have equal access to the growing wealth of online learning resources. Blackboard is collaborating with the National Center for Accessible Media and the IMS Global Learning Consortium in this LAAP project, and the Department of Education will provide a \$1.8 million four year grant as funding for this endeavor. Other industry partners include Educational Testing Service, Pearson Education, Sun Microsystems, PeopleSoft, and Saba Software. The project will impact the accessibility of online resources in all learning environments, including K-12 education, post-secondary education, and workplace training.

Additional Information:

For additional information about the Blackboard Accessibility Initiative, contact Reidy Brown (Blackboard Accessibility Coordinator) at rbrown@blackboard.com or by phone at (202) 463-4860 x236.