

# Accessibility in Library Publishing: A Seat at the Table

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**abstract:** This paper explores the importance of creating inclusive environments in libraries for users of all abilities. Drawing on the principles of universal design, the authors emphasize the need for libraries to move beyond compliance with accessibility laws and regulations, such as the Marrakesh Treaty and the European Accessibility Act, and toward advocacy and innovation. The authors highlight the challenges librarians face when implementing accessibility in library publishing, including limited budgets and a lack of expertise, but also identify opportunities for collaboration, emerging technologies, and online resources.

## Introduction

Accessibility in libraries goes far beyond checking legal boxes—it is about intentionally creating spaces that strive to meet the myriad needs of users, as fully and thoughtfully as resources will allow. At its core, accessibility ensures that individuals of all abilities can fully engage with library services, spaces, and resources. Grounded in the principles of Universal Design, accessibility work beyond physical accommodations to include digital access, sensory considerations, and adaptive programming. Universal Design is about creating the greatest possible usability for as many people as possible, while allowing for easy adaptation to meet specific needs.<sup>1</sup>

The philosophy of Universal Design was coined by Ronald L. Mace, an American architect, designer, and educator. His pioneering work helped shape national legislation, including the Fair Housing Amendments Act of 1988 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.<sup>2</sup> Mace believed that all products and environments should be designed to be aesthetically pleasing and usable by everyone, regardless of age, ability, or life status. His legacy underscores the importance of moving beyond compliance and toward advocacy in accessibility efforts.

Historically, libraries focused on physical access—wider doorways, elevators, accessible restrooms, quiet spaces, and adjustable furniture. In recent years, these efforts have expanded to include digital access through the development of accessible websites, screen readers, sensory-friendly environments, and staff training in accessibility. More than one billion people globally live with disabilities and ensuring accessibility is not just a legal

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or logistical concern, it is an ethical one.<sup>3</sup> Excluding individuals from physical or digital spaces can be isolating and discriminatory. For additional context and a deeper exploration of accessibility efforts in libraries, see Appendix B.

In addition to offering spaces, libraries have long been information publishers and disseminators, and they face significant challenges in meeting accessibility requirements for their digital content. The University of Florida Libraries' LibraryPress@UF is an imprint of the University Press of Florida

and is dedicated to accessible publishing. LibraryPress@UF prioritizes open access through its support of OER (open educational resources) textbooks and open journal publishing, ensuring barrier-free dissemination of educational and scholarly materials, which is further extended through its commitment to accessibility standards and Universal Design principles. LibraryPress@UF aims to remove barriers and create an inclusive environment for authors, editors, and readers alike. One major hurdle is the need to ensure that digital publications, such as e-books, websites, and online resources, are compatible with assistive technologies like screen readers, magnifiers, and alternative input devices.<sup>4</sup> Doing so requires adherence to web accessibility standards and guidelines, which can be complex and time-consuming to implement.

Another challenge lies in the creation of accessible formats for print materials, such as braille, large print, and audio versions. This process can be resource-intensive, requiring specialized equipment, software, and expertise. Small publishers may face additional constraints due to limited budgets and staff resources. Implementing accessibility measures can be costly, and many small publishers may lack the technical expertise or dedicated personnel to tackle these issues effectively.

Recent legislation, such as the Marrakesh Treaty and the European Accessibility Act, has brought accessibility concerns to the forefront, prompting publishers to prioritize

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these efforts. However, achieving comprehensive accessibility remains an ongoing challenge, requiring collaboration, education, and dedicated resources across the publishing industry.

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one; it improves quality, usability, and reach while reducing long-term costs. Retrofitting existing resources or processes, after the initial creation, can often be more costly and time-consuming than building accessibility from the start. It is also important to note

that a proactive accessibility approach aligns with the principles of equity by removing potential barriers faced by users with disabilities upfront. Ultimately, embracing accessibility is about building a welcoming, sustainable future in which everyone belongs and not requiring users to ask for accommodations.

As libraries continue to strive for a more inclusive and accessible environment, it is essential to acknowledge the significant role that legislation plays in driving change. Building on the principles of Universal Design, recent laws and regulations have been enacted to further promote accessibility and equality. The Marrakesh Treaty, the European Accessibility Act, and the Title II regulations of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 are three notable examples of this effort. These pieces of legislation not only protect the rights of individuals with disabilities but also push the boundaries of what is possible in terms of accessibility, fostering a culture of inclusion and innovation.

### Legislation

The Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works for Persons Who Are Blind, Visually Impaired, or Otherwise Print Disabled is an international copyright treaty administered by World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) that was signed in 2013 and ratified in 2016. The goal of the Treaty is to “introduce a standard set of limitations and exceptions to copyright rules in order to permit reproduction, distribution and making available published works in formats designed to be accessible.”<sup>5</sup> The Marrakesh Treaty has a few primary requirements:

- Publishers and creators must make accessible versions available (through audiobooks, accessible e-book formats, or braille).
- Countries must limit copyright restrictions to allow for the distribution of accessible versions.
- Countries must facilitate the distribution of accessible versions through organizations that specialize in providing accessible materials.

Whereas the Marrakesh Treaty is focused on requirements related to visual disabilities, the European Accessibility Act (EAA) was passed in 2019 with an implementation date of June 2025 to promote accessibility for people with a wide range of disabilities. The EAA extends to health and safety, equipment and machinery, disaster preparedness, and—especially important to European libraries—e-book accessibility requirements. The EAA requirements, generally outlined, include:

- E-book digital files must not prevent assistive technology from operating properly.
- The content, navigation, and layout of e-book files must be accessible, including allowing for dynamic layout.
- E-books must provide synchronized text and audio and allow alternative renditions of content.
- E-books must provide flexibility and choice in the presentation of content.
- E-book files must provide information through metadata about their accessibility features.
- Publishers (or libraries as content developers) must not implement digital rights management (DRM) measures that block accessibility features and must ensure interoperability with assistive technologies.<sup>6</sup>



By implementing these accessibility requirements, the EAA aims to create a more inclusive and barrier-free environment for people with disabilities in the European Union. While this legislation does not technically impact US institutions, this legislation demonstrates strong efforts to achieve accessibility progress, and US libraries should work to meet the requirements.<sup>7</sup>

Like the EAA, the Title II regulations of the ADA of 1990 are also broad in the scope of who they serve (all people regardless of abilities) and in the larger scope of coverage (physical spaces, programs such as author talks or workshops, services, and website accessibility). While the Title II regulations do not specifically address the accessibility of digital or print materials, they do require that individuals with visual impairments be able to access library resources.<sup>8</sup> The Title II regulation requirements outline that libraries:

- Provide a text equivalent for non-text content, such as images and graphics.
- Provide a clear and consistent navigation system.
- Ensure that all interactive elements are operable with a keyboard or other assistive device.
- Provide alternative (alt) text for images and graphics.
- Ensure that all multimedia content, such as videos and audio files, is accompanied by a transcript or other accessible format.
- Provide synchronized text and audio for multimedia content.
- Ensure that all digital materials are compatible with assistive technologies, such as screen readers and braille displays.
- Follow the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C)'s Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.1) that recommend digital materials.
- May exclude archived web content, preexisting electronic documents, content posted by third parties, password-protected items, and so on.<sup>9</sup>

Given the importance of the WCAG 2.1 guidelines to the legislation, it is important to outline the components of the four core principles that comprise the guidelines: perceivable, operable, understandable, and robust.<sup>10</sup>

### Perceivable

- **Text Equivalents:** Provide a text equivalent for non-text content, such as images and graphics, to ensure that individuals with visual impairments can understand the content.
- **Color Contrast:** Ensure that the color contrast between text and background is sufficient for individuals with visual impairments.
- **Images of Text:** Avoid using images of text and instead use real text, to ensure that individuals with visual impairments can read the content.
- **Multimedia:** Provide a transcript or other accessible format for multimedia content, such as videos and audio files, to ensure that individuals with visual or hearing impairments can access the content.



## Operable

- Keyboard Navigation: Ensure that all interactive elements can be navigated using a keyboard or other assistive device.
- Focus: Ensure that interactive elements receive focus when navigated using a keyboard or other assistive device.
- Time Limits: Avoid using time limits for interactive elements and instead provide an option to extend the time limit or provide additional time.
- Seizure Risk: Avoid using content that can trigger seizures, such as flashing or flickering lights.

## Understandable

- Language: Ensure that the content employs concise language while clearly indicating the language used.
- Punctuation: Ensure that punctuation is used correctly and consistently.
- Reading Order: Ensure that the content is presented in a logical reading order.

## Robust

- Compatibility: Ensure that the content is compatible with assistive technologies, such as screen readers and braille displays.
- Error Prevention: Avoid using content that can cause errors or confusion and instead provide clear instructions and warnings.
- Error Recovery: Ensure that the content provides a clear indication of what to do when an error occurs and provides a clear opportunity to recover from errors.
- Data Integrity: Ensure that the data used in the content is accurate and consistent.

## Additional Guidelines

- Accessibility Features: Provide information about the accessibility features of the content, such as the ability to zoom and change color schemes.
- Accessibility Services: Provide information about the accessibility services available, such as audio descriptions and sign language interpretation.
- Information about the Content: Provide information about the content, such as the language used and the purpose of the content.

Overall, the WCAG 2.1 guidelines provide a comprehensive set of requirements for making web content accessible to individuals with disabilities. By following these guidelines, web developers and content creators can ensure that their content is accessible and usable for everyone.

## Accessible Library Publishing

Accessibility in library publishing involves community, collaboration, creativity, and compassion to address challenges so that everyone has a seat at the table. Over the past

decade, library publishing has grown significantly, with a marked shift toward open access and open educational resources (OER) in recent years.<sup>11</sup> As library presses expand open access initiatives by adopting Creative Commons licensing (CC), open-source software, and digital publishing platforms such as Open Journal Systems (OJS), Pressbooks, and Manifold, it has become essential to develop accessibility policies and workflows. A library press's accessibility responsibilities include the development of accessible books, journals, and digital resources for individuals with visual, auditory, motor, or cognitive impairments. With over 90 percent of all published materials inaccessible to blind or low-vision folks, libraries and library presses can serve those communities more equitably by implementing accessibility policies and practices, employing accessibility-compliant tools, and collaborating with publishers and organizations to offer content in multiple formats.<sup>12</sup>

### The “Shift Left” Approach: Accessibility from the Start

When it comes to accessibility in publishing, there is a simple, yet powerful concept called “shift left.” To shift left is to start from the very beginning of the design stage of

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a publication to ensure that accessibility is at the forefront of the process. By shifting left, publishers can avoid the common pitfall of treating accessibility as an afterthought or something to fix at the end. Authors can be encouraged to implement workflows that prioritize accessibility from the start. Doing so

not only enhances the overall reader experience but also saves time and resources in the long run.

It is as simple as asking authors these essential questions:

- What is the purpose of this publication?
- Who is the target audience?
- What barriers might exist for different readers?

Addressing these questions from the outset enables publishers to shape the content and enhance accessibility and “do it right the first time.”

When accessibility is considered upfront, it is possible to:

- Identify and address potential barriers early on, before content and features are finalized.
- Incorporate accessible design principles and best practices from the start.
- Ensure the final publication is truly inclusive and works for users of all abilities and learning styles.

Compared to a reactive, “fix-it-later” approach, this “shift left” methodology saves time, resources, and frustration down the line. Rather than racing to meet compliance checklists at the end, content and digital experiences can be thoughtfully created to be accessible by design.<sup>13</sup>



## Accessibility as Creativity

Creating something that works for everyone can seem overwhelming, but accessibility is not just about following a perfect checklist. It is more about understanding how content is organized and experienced by all users. Adding accessibility to a library press publishing process should not be viewed as a creative limitation. Instead, doing so can inspire innovative ways to design and structure content.

How do you balance visual design with accessibility needs? And what creative approaches have *you* discovered? Creating a publication that works for everyone can feel like a big lift, but accessibility is not about checking every box on a perfect list. It is about *how* content is organized and experienced by all users. With a mental shift to viewing accessibility as a chance to rethink and innovate rather than as a limitation, book designers can use their creativity to achieve a fresh approach to effective book layout and accessibility for all.

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Think of your favorite book or research article. Now, imagine not being able to read it at all. Or picture being able to read it but missing important connections because there is no alt text provided, the color contrast is insufficient, or the structure is disorganized and confusing. These might seem like small issues, but they create real barriers.

Book design has experienced numerous technical advancements over the years, presenting new challenges to the publishing industry. One of the latest significant developments for library publishing is accessible publishing. Designers need to ensure that a book is visually appealing not only to human readers but also to screen readers. This new set of tasks can be complex and time-consuming. For many experienced graphic designers, who take pride in their layout skills, this can be challenging and almost disheartening. However, as book designers have adapted to new software applications and their frequent updates, overcoming these challenges will, too, become more manageable over time. Plus, this progress will bring a new sense of accomplishment, knowing they are making a positive impact in reaching more readers than ever before. For example, LibraryPress@UF specializes in visual storytelling using complex illustrated imagery and text overlays. Design in publishing is an opportunity to create visually rich layouts; however, this does not need to be sacrificed in the name of accessibility. Approaching accessibility needs as a creative challenge is essential in “shifting left,” reiterating that accessibility initiatives are not a burden.

A great benefit of prioritizing accessibility is that it often leads to better design, clearer writing, and more engaging digital experiences for everyone—not just for individuals with disabilities. Rather than viewing accessibility as an obligation, authors and publishers can consider it an opportunity to explore new avenues for creativity. The good news is authors do not have to be experts to start. Here are three accessibility strategies one can easily initiate:



- Write clear alt text descriptors for all visual elements.
- Reorganize headings to ensure the headings are logically ordered and correctly nested.
- Test documents with a screen reader, such as NVDA (NonVisual Desktop Access; free, open-source for Windows).

### An “Accessible” Accessibility Checklist

The LibraryPress@UF understands that achieving accessibility involves finding a balance between structured guidelines and flexible, creative solutions. Our strategy combines checklists with user-friendly tools that are accessible to everyone, making it possible to ensure accessibility regardless of platform, publication type, or scale. Since every book is unique, each one requires individual assessment and planning. A straightforward checklist can empower anyone, from students to faculty, to create more accessible digital publications. For various useful accessibility checklists, see Appendix B.

### Book Formats

When beginning a project, consider which accessible book format will work best for your publication. You may even choose to release your book in several of these formats, but keep in mind your editorial team’s capacity to develop multiple formats.

#### *EPUB*

EPUB is quickly becoming the standard e-book format for digital publishing. EPUB’s responsive design capabilities offer an optimal reading experience on all devices because users can adjust text size and page layouts according to their preferences.<sup>14</sup> This reflowable feature allows for a more personalized reading experience. Additionally, EPUB files support linked navigation, multimedia content, and videos. They are also up to 90 percent smaller than PDF files, which results in faster download times and more efficient data usage for mobile users.<sup>15</sup>

The primary advantage of EPUB files over HTML is that they can be downloaded, shared, and accessed offline on various devices, including smartphones, tablets, e-readers, and desktop computers. Additionally, EPUB files preserve important book or journal elements such as page numbers, headings, and columns, which are typically absent from most HTML pages.<sup>16</sup>

When compared to PDFs, EPUB files have the advantage of using structured markup for titles, headings, links, notes, tables, and more. This structured format enables digital text-to-speech and screen-reading software to function effectively.

#### *HTML*

Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) is a markup language that allows documents to be displayed in a web browser. These files can be opened on any web browser and do not require an internet connection once downloaded. Users have the flexibility to adjust the size of the text through their web browser. While HTML is technically the most accessible format due to its structure, semantics, tagging, and keyboard-only user-friendliness, it may be difficult to produce effectively.<sup>17</sup>



## PDF/UA

Portable Document Formats (PDF) are widely used in open access publications as the default file format. They are generally easy to produce and are cost-effective. They also provide greater graphic capabilities than EPUBs. PDF/UA (Universal Accessibility) allows for accessibility features, such as alt text, heading structures, tagging, and compatibility with screen readers.<sup>18</sup> While PDFs cannot be “fully” accessible the way EPUBs are, since they are not reflowable, the PDF/UA format showcases that PDFs still have a place in digital publishing.

## Print-On-Demand (POD)

Print-on-demand (POD) may be an option for users who need or prefer physical copies to digital copies.<sup>19</sup> Keep in mind your budget when considering POD options, as this may incur additional costs if you do not have an existing relationship with a press that can handle this. For example, the LibraryPress@UF partners with the University Press of Florida to provide these services at no cost to our authors, but this may not be your reality. When considering POD, consider larger font sizes, the type of fonts you choose, and color contrast to make it as accessible as possible.

## Structure and Readability

Once you have determined the book formats you would like to use for your project, you need to ensure the format has the appropriate structure for optimal readability.

- Declare the document’s language.
- Left-align text for easier readability.
- Ensure text is readable. Main body text is typically 12-point font (16px), with large text, like headings, at a minimum of 18-point font (24px) with high contrast, and no text over images. Avoid using text smaller than 9-point (12px), as it can be difficult to read, especially for users with visual impairments.
- Use system-friendly sans-serif fonts for readability, such as Arial, Verdana, Roboto, or Lato. Readable serif fonts include Times New Roman, Garamond, and Georgia. Try to avoid script or decorative fonts.
- Break up large text blocks with bullet points, shorter paragraphs, and clear section dividers.
- OTF (OpenType) fonts are recommended over TTF (TrueType) fonts, offering more advanced typographic features and better cross-platform support.
- Use bold instead of color to emphasize words.
- Use emphasis like bold, italic, or all caps sparingly. In Adobe InDesign, create such styles in the Paragraph and Character Styles panels.
- Provide clear, simple language and avoid unnecessary jargon.
- Organize content with clear headings and styles. This allows human and screen readers, and various assistive technologies, to provide ways to navigate quickly around the document. Start with H1 for titles, H2 for sections, H3 for subsections, and so on. There should only be one H1 per document; the book title will be set in the file properties. Use heading styles instead of manually bolding a header or changing its font size so that screen readers will understand. Ensure that headings are orderly and there is proper hierarchical tagging.<sup>20</sup>

- Whenever possible, based on the chosen markup grammar, include semantic tagging. This technique helps websites and digital publications explain their structure so that readers have a better browsing or reading experience. Consider integrating tags from the following frameworks:
  - ARIA— Accessible Rich Internet Applications
  - WAI-ARIA—Web Accessibility Initiative-Accessible Rich Internet Applications
  - DPUB-ARIA—Digital Publishing-Accessible Rich Internet Applications
- Provide descriptive alt text for images. For every image, ask: What would I need to know if I could not see this? Describe the mood, colors, and details to enrich the experience for screen reader users. Write one to two sentences of alt text that describes the image's purpose, not just what is in it. All icons should have a purpose and not be decorative. Decorative images need to be indicated as decorative or tagged as artifacts, so screen readers can skip them. Check out the alt text generators options available in the resources section of this article.
- Avoid relying solely on color to convey meaning (use labels, patterns, or icons).
- Touch up and confirm the correct reading order. In Adobe InDesign, use the articles panel.<sup>21</sup>
- Ensure you have sufficient color contrast between text and background for readability. WCAG recommends a contrast ratio of at least 4.5:1 for normal text and 3:1 for large-scale text.<sup>22</sup>
  - [Color Contrast Analyzer](#) from the Paciello Group is a free program for Windows and Mac that includes an eyedropper tool that allows testing what you are seeing on your screen instead of just relying on color codes.
  - The [WebAIM Color Contrast Checker](#) is a simple web page that allows you to enter color codes (hex values).
- For multimedia such as images, audio, and video:
  - Include closed captions for videos.
  - Provide transcripts for audio content so users can read along or search for keywords.
  - Use audio descriptions for important visual elements in videos.
  - All images must be anchored to relevant content to ensure correct placement and that it moves with that text in a reflowable EPUB.
- For tables, make sure that their purpose is not simply to sort information. If you are working with a list, a paragraph, or something that resembles a worksheet but is just formatted as a table in Microsoft Word, it may be better to remove the table or recreate it. The ["Convert to Text" option in Word](#) can be very helpful in this situation.
- Create alternative text for math equations using a free-to-use online tool, such as this one from [WIRIS](#).<sup>23</sup>
- Metadata makes the book more discoverable before it is opened, both in retail systems and in the personal library on a reader's device, utilizing the accessible product codes provided in the [ONIX for Books codelists](#).
- Simplify layouts and remove unnecessary distractions to help neurodivergent users engage with content smoothly.
- Use footnotes and references where appropriate.
- Running heads and page numbers allow print-impaired readers to compare their position in the document with conventional book readers.



- Ensure the index and contents have active hyperlinks.
- Indicate Language Shifts. Whenever there is a language switch (for example, a passage in another language), it needs to be individually tagged using the LANG attribute to read in the correct language.

### *Navigation and Structure*

- Include a textual table of contents.<sup>24</sup>
- Use meaningful link text (for example, “Read more about accessibility” instead of “Click here”).
- Ensure documents are keyboard-navigable, and keyboard shortcuts and screen readers work seamlessly without using a mouse.
- Interactive elements (buttons, forms, and so on) are labeled properly and are easy to use.

### *Testing and Feedback*

- Check for screen reader compatibility (test with [NVDA](#) and [JAWS](#) for Windows, [TalkBack](#) for Android, or [VoiceOver](#) for MacOS).
- Test EPUB with free reader applications, such as [Thorium](#), [Calibre](#), [Apple Books](#), and [Kindle](#).
- Test accessible PDFs with built-in tools like [Adobe Acrobat’s Accessibility Checker](#) and save them as a PDF/UA.
- Test websites with an accessibility checker like [WAVE](#) or [Axe](#).
- Get feedback from real users, including those who use screen readers and other assistive technologies.

Remember not to strive for perfection—just start.<sup>25</sup> Small improvements today can significantly impact someone tomorrow.

## **Community and Collaboration**

Library publishers, commercial publishers, and experts in accessibility are collaborating to share ideas, resources, platforms, and tools—many of which are open-source and freely available. This spirit of collaboration is expanding the concept of open access beyond simply providing free publications to create a shared vision of truly inclusive storytelling.

Teaching coworkers and friends how to use heading structures and alternative text in shared Google and Word Docs may seem like a small task. Sharing this specialized knowledge with your community contributes to a broader culture of inclusive and accessible design. This effort plays a crucial role in fostering a more equitable digital world.

Regarding correcting accessibility deficiencies in EPUB creation, various vendors and free platforms can help, depending on your needs. Whether you want to create “born-accessible” EPUBs, validate existing ones, or address accessibility issues, options are available. Free tools often require manual effort and a certain level of technical knowledge, while vendors can provide expertise at a cost. If you are new to this process, start with a free workflow to identify the deficiencies in your EPUB before investing in paid assistance.

Well-known library publishing platforms within the accessibility community include:

- [PressBooks](#): An open-source platform that generates EPUBs and other accessible formats.
- [Open Journal Systems \(OJS\)](#): A widely used academic publishing platform that is improving accessibility features.
- [Adobe InDesign](#): Can generate accessible PDFs and EPUBs when used with proper tagging and metadata.

Free and Hybrid Solutions include:

- [WordToEPUB](#) for creating new EPUBs from Word.
- [Ace by DAISY](#) and [EPUBCheck](#) to validate accessibility.
- [Calibre](#) and [Sigil EPUB Editor](#) to fix any issues.

This combination covers creation, validation, and correction at no cost.

That said, if you need professional digital accessible content support from a vendor, consider [Benetech](#)-certified vendors like [Amnet](#) or [DPS](#), especially for large-scale or complex projects. They are trusted for compliance with accessibility standards. You can also use [Bookshare](#), an initiative of [Benetech](#), which is an online library of accessible e-books for people with [print disabilities](#). For a complete list of recommended free resources and tools that support accessibility, see Appendix A.

### Improving Journal Accessibility in OJS

As of 2025, LP@UF, in collaboration with the Florida Virtual Campus (FLVC), hosts 21 active journals on the Open Journals System platform developed by the Public Knowledge Project (PKP). The OJS platform and default theme have been audited and remediated for accessibility, but journal editors also need to ensure accessibility of their individual websites and journals, especially if using other themes or adding substantive customization. LP@UF is currently compiling instructions and templates for developing accessible PDFs and other file galleys to share with editors and planning a training series for editors to better understand how they can make their files more accessible. It is important to note that our current approach to day-to-day journal management is relatively hands-off. LP@UF develops a range of policies and guidelines in line with current best practices for journals to incorporate as they see fit, but it is the journal's discretion to implement these. Since accessibility is a core value, LP@UF is exploring ways to encourage journal editors to adopt accessibility workflows in line with our values as publishers as well as university-wide efforts.

### Overview of the LP@UF workflow

LP@UF's general workflow includes initial steps in making library publishing accessible between publishers and authors:

- All parties need to define their responsibilities regarding accessibility in the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and /or publishing agreement. Key points should cover author rights, publisher obligations, and accessibility standards. Sample contract clauses include:
  - o The Author shall provide the necessary source files in an accessible format.
  - o The Publisher shall create accessible versions of the work in digital screen reader-compatible e-book formats.
- LP@UF created and added an accessibility statement and an AI metadata statement to its website, demonstrating transparency about its accessibility efforts and use of AI tools.
  - o PDXScholar's [Accessibility Statement Template](#) is a helpful tool for developing your own accessibility statement.<sup>26</sup>
- Microsoft Word is an excellent starting point to begin accessibility workflows because Pressbooks allows direct import of Word documents. LP@UF is in the process of developing a basic template for authors to use when submitting their manuscripts. It is recommended that authors use Word's built-in accessibility checker (File > Info > Check for Issues > Check Accessibility). Keeping this checker running in the background while they work will streamline the process.
- The press keeps track of accessibility issues and documents any remaining problems in the "Known Issues/Potential Barriers to Accessibility" section of our accessibility statement.<sup>27</sup>

### Keep the Accessibility Conversation Going!

The future of digital accessibility in library publishing depends on all—publishers, authors, librarians—being responsible for continuous improvement, collaboration, and innovation. Emerging technologies like AI-driven literacy accessibility tools and voice-based interfaces will further enhance access. Library publishing must remain proactive, prioritize transparency, and empower staff and authors by offering training and advocating for accessibility policies for an inclusive reading experience for all.

### LP@UF's Future in Accessibility Practices

As LP@UF continues to enhance its accessible publishing efforts, the team is prioritizing several key initiatives:

- **Remediation:** To ensure transparency in our remediation efforts, LP@UF will focus on the titles from our backlist that are most likely to be used and are of the utmost importance. They will also be responsive to remediation requests. After April 2026, they will document and categorize all titles published before that date as archival content, with materials made accessible upon request.
- **VPAT** (Voluntary Products Accessibility Template) and **ACR** (Accessibility Conformance Reports): A high-level overview that documents compliance with Section 508 requirements. A VPAT is a standardized report based on an audit, not the audit itself. VPAT is used to create an ACR, a more detailed document that summarizes the info in the VPAT. VPATs should always include a name, the

product they are reviewing, platform, description, report date, contact information, evaluation methods used, and notes on what was tested for evaluating the platform and products used.<sup>28</sup> The following options and examples illustrate tools and supporting resources available to create comprehensive, machine-readable accessibility documentation:

- o [Create machine-readable OpenACR documents.](#)
- o [Sample of a VPAT](#) to create it internally (external VPAT is recommended, if possible)
- o [Ace by DAISY](#) – As an open source EPUB accessibility checking tool, it can assist with the creation of a VPAT, yet it may not capture all aspects of a VPAT, including testing and user interaction.

Accessibility is an ongoing collaborative journey that involves engagement, learning, experimentation, and occasionally making mistakes. Each challenge we face presents an opportunity to rethink how we create and share insights and knowledge. It is important

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to remember that it is okay not to get everything right on the first attempt. Accessibility is not about achieving perfection; it is about making progress. The more publishers integrate these practices into publishing workflows, the more inclusive our work will become.

### Challenges and Opportunities

Ensuring equitable access for all users is a core goal for libraries, but implementing essential accessibility measures is often hindered by budgetary constraints. A primary obstacle is the limited library budget, which is often stretched thin. The implementation of best-practice accessibility principles can require additional training, workflows, and ongoing research, which may increase staff workload and lead to resistance from staff. The time-consuming process of tagging EPUBs is a prime example: the expense and time involved in processing a single document can multiply exponentially when considering a large collection. This highlights the need for specialized knowledge and expertise in metadata, tagging, and tools to implement and sustain accessibility features. However, this expertise may not be readily available within the current library staff, creating a significant barrier to progress.

Furthermore, integrating accessibility features into existing systems and infrastructure can be a daunting task. Outdated catalog systems, inaccessible digital collections, and legacy metadata can create barriers. Moreover, developing and implementing policies that promote accessibility can be challenging, mainly when competing priorities and limited resources come into play. In such situations, libraries may struggle to balance the need for accessibility with other pressing demands.

Despite the challenges, libraries can leverage various opportunities to drive accessibility forward. Collaborations with other libraries, organizations, and stakeholders can foster knowledge-sharing, best practices, and a sense of community. Emerging technologies, like artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning, can enhance accessibility features and streamline workflow. Online forums, blogs, and professional organizations, such as the American Library Association's (ALA) Accessibility Committee, offer a wealth of knowledge and expertise. By embracing these opportunities, libraries can accelerate their accessibility work, stay at the forefront of emerging trends, and ultimately provide better services to their diverse user communities.

As information professionals, we have a unique opportunity to create inclusive environments that empower users of all abilities. To achieve this vision, we must prioritize accessibility education and training within our workforce. We invite everyone in the library community to take the first step toward making our spaces and services more accessible. Start by exploring accessibility best practices, learning about new technologies, and envisioning how they could be applied to your area of work. Join online conversations, attend conferences and workshops, and connect with accessibility professionals—we can learn so much from each other.

Above all, we must work together to break down barriers and deliver services that truly serve every library user, wherever they are and however they interact with library materials. Instead of expecting users to adapt to our systems, meet them where they are. When we make accessibility a core part of what we do, we help create a library where everyone feels welcome and supported.

### Accessibility as Advocacy

In 1931, S. R. Ranganathan articulated the *Five Laws of Library Science*, emphasizing that:

- Books Are For Use.
- Every Reader His/Her Book.
- Every Book Its Reader.
- Save The Time Of The Reader.
- The Library Is A Growing Organism.

These foundational principles underscore the dynamic nature of libraries—not merely as repositories of books but as evolving ecosystems that provide users with access to a diverse array of materials and services. As libraries have expanded their offerings to include computers, proxy borrowing, scanners, floor plans, tools, interlibrary loans, and so on—their fundamental mission remains unchanged: every user has their item, and every item has its user. Access, and by extension accessibility, is a core tenet of Library Science—without it, a library is merely a warehouse; with it, a library becomes an epicenter of curiosity, learning, and belonging.

Accessibility advocacy within academic libraries extends beyond regulatory compliance, positioning libraries as key facilitators of inclusive education and community engagement. Libraries are uniquely situated to champion accessibility policies, foster outreach efforts, and support belonging for everyone. Establishing a strong community of practice—such as the University of Florida's (UF) campus-wide Accessibility Com-

munity of Practice Committee and department-specific initiatives/committees—ensures that accessibility efforts are not isolated but instead benefit from interdisciplinary col-

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laboration. Partnerships with organizations like the UF Disability Resource Center (DRC), which serves over 7,500 students with disabilities, and student-led initiatives like Generational Relief in Prosthetics (GRiP), which designs 3D-printed assistive devices, highlight the transformative impact of campus-wide accessibility efforts.

Libraries do more than provide physical and technological access; they actively build inclusive environments using the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL). UDL involves integrating varied teaching methods—like case studies, role-

playing and experiential learning—with flexible assessment strategies to meet the needs of diverse learners. With all the recent developments in accessibility, it is important to remember that advancement is not a zero-sum game, and accessibility advocacy is not about achieving a fixed state of perfection; rather, it is an ongoing process of learning, engagement, and responsiveness to evolving community needs. Grounded in lived experience, effective accessibility requires open dialogue, adaptability, and a shared commitment to actively challenging and removing barriers. Libraries are dynamic, ever-evolving institutions that must continuously adapt to meet the changing needs of our users, guided by a steadfast commitment to user advocacy.

Even when not mandated by law, making accessibility changes is crucial and driven by a combination of different factors. The ethical and human impact of accessibility efforts stems from the fact that over one billion individuals globally experience disabilities. Exclusion from digital spaces because of disability can lead to feelings of isolation and discrimination, and we should do all we can to prevent individuals from being marginalized or excluded from the spaces and institutional services we oversee.

The library (and business) advantages are clear: accessible design creates a better user experience for everyone, not just those with disabilities, which in turn reaches a wider range of users. It is also more efficient and cost-effective to build in accessibility from the start of design, rather than retroactively addressing issues as they arise.

Accessible design enhances quality and usability, with features like captions benefiting all users and making our services, products, and libraries more versatile and adaptable. As library workers, ensuring that all users can access information is paramount. Additionally, keeping up to date and implementing new advancements in accessibility helps with future-proofing information while also creating solutions that improve overall user experiences. Libraries and publications that embrace digital accessibility open doors for everyone to participate more meaningfully and feel included in our increasingly digital society.



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## Appendix A

### Free Resources and Tools:

- UC San Diego's Document Accessibility Checklist, <https://accessibility.ucsd.edu/checklists/documents.html>.
- AccessiblePublishing.ca's Accessibility Features Checklist, <https://www.accessiblepublishing.ca/accessibility-features-checklist/>.
- HTML Codesniffer, [https://squizlabs.github.io/HTML\\_CodeSniffer/](https://squizlabs.github.io/HTML_CodeSniffer/), is a script that checks HTML source code and detects violations of a defined coding standard WCAG 2.1.
- Total1y, <https://github.com/jdan/total1y>, is a simpler and more user-friendly tool for checking a page's accessibility.
- RGBInd is a web browser extension that evaluates a URL for the most common types of color blindness.
- Coblis, <https://www.color-blindness.com/coblis-color-blindness-simulator/>, is a color blindness simulator.
- Silktide, <https://silktide.com/toolbar/>, is a screen reader simulator that includes voice narration and navigation simulation. Users can view the keyboard shortcuts to see how users interact with their screen reader to navigate a webpage.
- ASU Image Accessibility Generator, <https://teachonline.asu.edu/image-accessibility-generator/>.
- Font Accessibility Checker, <https://www.accessibilitychecking.com/>.
- Diagram Center's Top Tips for Creating Accessible EPUB 3 Files, <http://diagramcenter.org/54-9-tips-for-creating-accessible-epub-3-files.html>.



- Michigan State University's Basic Accessibility Checklist, <https://webaccess.msu.edu/tutorials/basics/checklist>.
- AudioEye's Essential WCAG Checklist, <https://www.audioeye.com/post/wcag-checklist/>.
- WebAIM's WCAG 2 Checklist, <https://webaim.org/standards/wcag/checklist/>.
- Intopia's Accessibility Not-Checklist, <https://not-checklist.intopia.digital/>.
- Library Accessibility Alliance's Accessibility Audits, <https://www.libraryaccessibility.org/resources/onboarding/accessibility-audits>.
- Inclusive Publishing in Practice courses, <https://www.inclusivepublishinginpractice.org/>.
- Poet Training Tool's Introduction to Accessible Images, <https://poet.diagramcenter.org/>.
- The A11y Project's Resources on Accessibility, <https://www.a11yproject.com/resources/>.
- The A11y Project's Checklist for WCAG Compliance, <https://www.a11yproject.com/checklist/>.

## Appendix B

### Suggested Resources

- Stanford's Student Project on the History of Accessible Technology explores how accessibility solutions have evolved over time.
- BCcampus Open Publishing provides a Checklist for Accessibility designed to help educators and content developers ensure their materials meet standards.
- Leadership IQ's piece Accessibility In Literature Matters. Here's Why delves into the significance of accessible literary content in fostering diverse learning environments.
- The WC3 guide How to Meet WCAG (Quick Reference) distills complex guidelines into practical steps for improving web accessibility.
- Impactio Academic Impact Analytics' discussion Which is Better: Digital Or Print Journal? assesses the strengths of both digital and print formats from an accessibility standpoint in academic publishing.
- Wikipedia's entry on Print on Demand examines how on-demand printing technology can make printed materials more accessible and cost-effective.
- Circular Software's Green Light Accessibility Checklists offer actionable tips for creating digital content accessible to all users.
- The University of Oregon's supplemental materials on Digital Content Accessibility focus on headings and document/page structure, clarifying how well-organized content promotes better accessibility.

- Draft 2 Digital's POD Production and Printing Services illustrate the potential of on-demand solutions to provide accessible and efficient print publication options.
- Accessible Publishing.ca's Accessibility Features Checklist serves as a practical tool for publishers to evaluate the inclusivity of their content.
- The UK's Publishing Accessibility Action Group unites industry stakeholders to advance inclusive practices within the publishing realm.
- Taylor and Francis' initiative, Making digital journals and books more accessible with EPUB, highlights how flexible digital formats can significantly improve accessibility of content.
- York University's Principles of Print Accessible Design outline essential strategies for creating printed materials that accommodate the needs of all readers.
- Falmouth University's guide on Designing for Digital Accessibility offers strategies to help content creators develop accessible digital resources.
- Westchester Publishing Services' Digitally Accessible Content Guidelines compiles accessibility best practices to help publishers.
- NEFLIN's Accessibility 101 webinar from October 2024 provides an informative introduction to accessibility fundamentals.

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