

AI Bytes: Boost Accessibility, Not Workload

Tools for Remediating content for online
classroom instruction

Artificial Intelligence Lead Webinar Handout



Free & Built-In Tools You (Likely) Already Have

Good news: several of the most effective accessibility tools are available to you at no additional cost!

Microsoft 365 Accessibility Checker

Built into Word, PowerPoint, Excel, and Outlook at no extra cost with Office 365. Flags color contrast issues, missing alt text, poor heading structure, and table accessibility problems as you author content. Use the Accessibility Checker in Word/PowerPoint → export to a tagged PDF → refine in Acrobat → upload to Canvas.

Canvas Accessibility Checker

Built directly into the Canvas Rich Content Editor (RCE). Reviews pages, assignments, discussions, and quizzes for headings, alt text, table structure, and color contrast in real time as you build content. Available to all instructors at no additional cost — no admin access required.

Adobe Acrobat Pro Full Check

Use the Accessibility tools pane in Acrobat Pro — which your college already provides — to run a Full Check on any PDF. This scans for tags, reading order, headings, and unlabeled content, and is the right place to fix form fields and set reading order before posting PDFs to Canvas.

WAVE (WebAIM)

A free browser extension (Chrome or Firefox) that visually overlays icons on any Canvas page to show errors, alerts, contrast issues, and structural features. Use it for a second-opinion check on key pages — especially those that students interact with frequently, like the course home page, syllabus, and major assignment instructions.

Zoom AI Companion Captions

Available when your institution's Zoom plan enables it. From your perspective it is effectively free, bundled into your institutional license. Provides automatic captions and post-session transcripts for recorded class meetings and synchronous sessions.

General-Purpose AI (Free Tiers)

Gen-AI Chatbots such as Gemini, Perplexity, Claude, etc. (free tier), Microsoft Copilot (free tier), and Google Gemini (free tier) can all be used to rewrite content more accessibly — plain language revisions, better link text, image descriptions, and accessible code snippets. They are not full accessibility-check platforms, but they're powerful rewriting assistants.

Using WAVE: A Step-by-Step Guide

WAVE (Web Accessibility Evaluation Tool from WebAIM) is a user-friendly accessibility tool that is free, and gives you an immediate visual picture of what's working and what needs attention on any Canvas page or external web resource. Here's what makes it especially valuable for faculty:

→ Install the Extension

Open Chrome or Firefox, go to the browser's extension/add-on store, search for "WAVE Web Accessibility Evaluation Tool," and add it.

The WAVE icon will appear in your browser toolbar.

→ Open Your Canvas Page or OER

Log into one of your Canvas course shells and navigate to a specific page you want to check — a module overview, assignment instructions, or syllabus page.

Alternatively, you can open a website link to an OER you use for one of your courses and navigate to a specific page, chapter, or section you want to check.

Wait for the page to fully load before running WAVE.

→ Run WAVE & Read the Summary

Click the WAVE icon in your toolbar. The page reloads with a visual overlay and a panel showing Errors (red — must fix), Alerts (yellow — needs judgment), Features/Structure (good things), and Contrast issues.

Focus on Errors first.

→ Inspect Issues on the Page

Click any overlaid icon to see what the issue is, why it matters, and general guidance for fixing it.

WAVE exposes existing alt text, heading hierarchy, and ARIA usage so you can judge quality, not just presence.

→ Fix in Canvas or Source File

For Canvas pages: open in Edit mode, fix alt text, heading structure, link text, or table headers, then save.


For linked Word/PowerPoint/PDF files: fix in the source application, run its Accessibility Checker, re-save, and re-upload to Canvas.

For OER Resources: See if there is a support resource or contact information to provide them the information regarding the remediation requirements.

→ Re-Run WAVE to Verify

Once remediation aspects have been complete for Canvas pages, linked Word/PowerPoint/PDF files, refresh the page, click the WAVE icon again, and confirm previous errors are resolved.

Expand to remaining high-priority pages: home page, syllabus, key module pages, and major assessments.

 **Quick-start practice:** Begin with just one module home page and one assignment page. Fix missing alt text, heading structure, and obvious color-contrast problems. Once comfortable, expand to the rest of the course.

WAVE is safe for password-protected Canvas content because the extension analyzes pages locally in your browser — it does not send student data or course content to an external server. This makes it appropriate to use on live course shells without any privacy concerns.

Batch-Scanning PDFs: Realistic Strategies at Scale

Wouldn't it be nice to take all the PDFs in your course and be able to fix them all at once? Well, there is no single "one-click" solution to do this (yet – or for free!), but there are practical batch workflows that can dramatically reduce the per-file effort. Here's how to think about your options realistically.

Adobe Acrobat Pro Action Wizard

Acrobat's Action Wizard (Tools → Action Wizard → New Action) lets you run the Accessibility Checker on an entire folder of PDFs in one operation. You set it up once, then run it on any folder. It does not auto-fix everything, but it automates the initial pass across many files, generating reports that let you prioritize where to spend your remediation time.

PAC (PDF Accessibility Checker)

PAC is a free Windows tool widely used for validating individual PDFs against PDF/UA standards. It is excellent for repeated testing of specific documents but does not natively crawl all course files or a whole Canvas instance. Best used for spot-checking after remediation.

Enterprise / Site-Wide Services

Commercial platforms like Equidox, CommonLook, and Recite Me can crawl a website, identify all PDFs, and run automated accessibility checks across them. In higher ed, these are typically purchased at the district or campus level. Check with your DSPS or IT office – you may already have access.

Suggestions For Workflow

Start with downloading your key course PDFs into one folder, then use an Acrobat Action Wizard batch action to run the Accessibility Checker across all of them. Next, take the Acrobat Accessibility reports to prioritize the remediation work necessary for each file.

Once you have the Action Wizard set up, running it on future course folders takes only a few minutes. Ask your DSPS or IT office if they already have a preconfigured `.sequ` action file – if so, you can import it instead of building from scratch, saving significant setup time. Use Canvas's built-in checker and WAVE to handle HTML content (pages, assignments, discussions) separately, since PDF batch tools won't touch those.

Batch PDF Remediation on a Mac: Step-by-Step

Here is a complete, realistic plan for getting through a full course PDF inventory without being overwhelmed while using Acrobat PRO on macOS:

Set Up Your Course PDF Folder

In Canvas, download the PDFs you actually use — syllabus, assignment sheets, recurring readings — into one clearly named folder on your Mac, such as `ENG-101-Fall26-PDFs`. Skip one-off or low-value items so you don't drown in reports. Keeping the batch focused on high-impact documents makes the process manageable.

Create or Locate the "Make Accessible" Action

Open Adobe Acrobat Pro (not Preview — it doesn't have accessibility tools). Go to View → Tools → Action Wizard → Open. Look for a built-in "Make Accessible" action. If it exists, you can run it directly. If not, choose New Action, add steps for Accessibility → Full Check and Save As, and save the action as "Course PDF Accessibility Scan."

Run the Action on All PDFs in the Folder

In Action Wizard, select your action. Under "Files to be processed," choose Add Folder... and select your course PDF folder. Start the action and let Acrobat run through all files. Depending on your configuration, Acrobat will embed accessibility reports or run global fixes — like adding document language and basic tags — across every file automatically.

Triage Results Like a Grading Queue

Open each PDF in Acrobat Pro, view the Accessibility Check report, and look at categories like Document, Alternate Text, Tables, and Headings. Prioritize: missing alt text for instructional images, broken tag structure, missing document language, and complex multi-column layouts. Handle 5–10 PDFs at a time, starting with the syllabus and your most-used handouts.

Remediate, Rename, and Replace in Canvas

As you fix each PDF, use Save As with a clear name like Assignment1-Accessible.pdf. In Canvas, replace the old file with the accessible version. Note in your internal course checklist which PDFs are "Done," "In progress," and "Not started."

- **Realistic pacing:** Week 1–2: batch-run Make Accessible on all PDFs for baseline checks and quick wins. Week 3–4: fully remediate and replace the top 10–15 (syllabus, core assignments, recurring readings). Ongoing: fix source files in Word/PowerPoint using the Microsoft Accessibility Checker, then regenerate PDFs so future terms start from accessible "masters."

Batch PDF Remediation on Windows PC: Step-by-Step

If your college's computers run Windows, or if you work from a Windows laptop at home, this is your roadmap for getting 50 course PDFs through an initial accessibility triage efficiently.

1

Collect Your Course PDFs

In Canvas, download the PDFs you actively use (syllabus, assignments, recurring readings) into a single folder on your PC — for example, ENG-101-Fall26-PDFs. This gives Acrobat one folder to batch-process rather than requiring you to hunt inside Canvas for individual files.

2

Create the "Accessibility Batch" Action (One-Time Setup)

Open Acrobat Pro and open any PDF. Go to Tools → Action Wizard (older versions: Advanced → Document Processing → Batch Processing). Choose New Action. In the "Choose tools to add" panel, expand Accessibility and add: **Add Tags to Document** (for untagged PDFs), **Set Reading Language** (set to English, uncheck "Prompt user"), and **Full Check / Accessibility Check**. Optionally add a Save or Save As step. Name the action "Accessibility Batch" and save.

3

Run the Action on Your 50 PDFs

Go to Tools → Action Wizard, select your "Accessibility Batch" action. Click Add Folder... and select your course PDF folder. Start the action. Acrobat will run your chosen accessibility steps on each PDF in sequence. When complete, each PDF may have basic tags and language set, and an accessibility report embedded or available via the Accessibility tools panel.

4

Triage and Remediate

For each PDF, starting with the most important: open in Acrobat Pro, open the Accessibility tools, and view the Accessibility Check report. Issues are grouped by Document, Page Content, Alternate Text, Tables, Lists, and Headings. Fix using Acrobat's tagging tools, Reading Order panel, and Set Alternate Text dialog.

1

Replace Files in Canvas

Save remediated versions with clear names like Syllabus-ENG101-accessible.pdf. In Canvas, replace the existing files/links with the accessible versions. Keep a simple checklist in Excel or Word tracking which of the PDFs are "Done," "In progress," and "Not started."

Recommended Pacing for 50 PDFs

First pass (1–2 sessions): Run the Accessibility Batch action on all PDFs to set tags and language and generate baseline reports.

Second pass (over several weeks): Fully fix and replace your top 10–15 PDFs — syllabus, core assignments, recurring readings — then work down the list as time allows.

What the Batch Action Automates

- Adds basic tags to previously untagged PDFs
- Sets document reading language to English
- Runs Full Check and generates per-file reports
- Can write corrected files with a naming suffix

What Still Needs Your Attention

- Meaningful alt text for instructional images
- Complex table structures and merged cells
- Multi-column layout reading order
- Heading hierarchy and document logic

What Batch Actions Fix — and What They Don't

In practice, batch tools clear the easy, repetitive barriers — document language, initial tagging, OCR, basic checks — across all of your PDFs so you can spend your limited time on the documents and issues that most need human judgment. Think of it as automated triage: the batch action sorts your PDFs into "mostly fine," "needs minor work," and "needs significant remediation" so you know exactly where to focus. Here's a clear breakdown of what you can safely automate and what requires your attention.

✓ What Batch Actions Can Fix or Standardize

- **Missing document language and title** — Sets the primary language (e.g., English) and replaces generic filenames like "Microsoft Word – document1" with proper document titles.
- **Untagged PDFs and basic tagging** — Adds initial tags to completely untagged PDFs, giving assistive technologies a basic reading structure to work with. This is a prerequisite for all other fixes.
- **Scanned PDFs without real text** — Detects image-only pages and runs optical character recognition (OCR) to create selectable, readable text that screen readers can access.
- **Missing or incorrect tab/reading order (simple cases)** — Aligns tab order with document structure for straightforward layouts, improving keyboard navigation.
- **Accessibility permission flag** — Ensures the PDF is not locked in a way that blocks assistive technologies.
- **Basic form field tagging (simple forms)** — Tags form fields and applies simple labels so forms are detectable by screen readers.

What Batch Actions Flag But Do Not Truly Fix

- **Detailed heading hierarchy and nuanced tag structure** — Automation can add tags, but cannot determine whether your heading levels reflect the actual logical structure of the document.
- **Complex tables** — Merged cells, multi-level headers, and nested tables require manual remediation in the Tags panel.
- **High-quality, pedagogically meaningful alt text** — No AI tool can write alt text that accurately describes what a chart, diagram, or infographic means for your specific course context.
- **Sophisticated reading order in multi-column or highly designed layouts** — Newsletters, textbook-style PDFs, and complex handouts need per-page reading order review.