Blackboard Ally Quick Information Sheet

What Is Blackboard Ally?

Ally is a tool integrated with Blackboard Learn to assist with making attached content more accessible for students with various disabilities. The usual process consists of the following steps:

➢ An Instructor or TA uploads one or more files into a content item.
➢ Ally identifies the type of file and scans its contents. (This happens remotely and may take a while, depending on file size.)
➢ Ally rates the file on a 0 to 100% scale and produces a rating indicator in the content area and the course's Content Collection.

➢ The Instructor or TA clicks the indicator to learn more about accessibility issues within the file and suggestions for fixing them. (This may require uploading a replacement.)
➢ Students may use Ally to download attached files (especially documents) in their choice of several accessible formats.

What Types of Files Does Ally Evaluate?

➢ word processing documents (e.g., MS Word, OpenOffice)
➢ presentations
➢ PDF's
➢ image files
➢ HTML files (uploaded, not external Web pages)

What Does Ally NOT Evaluate?

➢ externally linked content or Mashups, such as videos on YouTube
➢ files that are uploaded to Blackboard Learn but not currently in content areas visible to students
➢ data-intensive files such as spreadsheets and databases
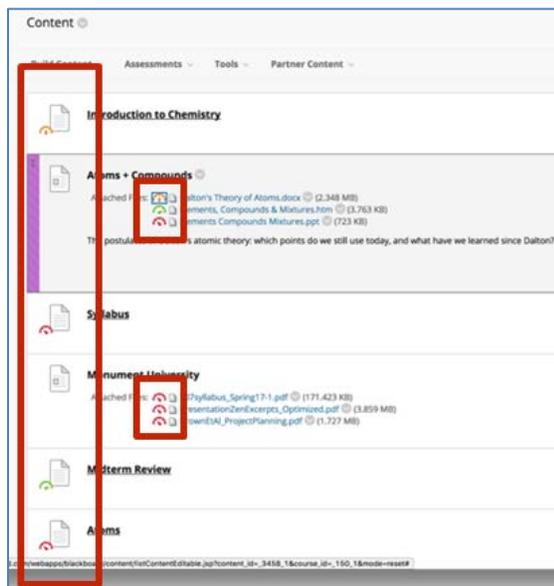➢ media files (audio or video)

Common Accessibility Problems

The following issues pertain mostly to students with visual impairments, but also to those with cognitive disabilities such as dyslexia—or to any student who processes information better by hearing it.

➢ *Complex documents lack identifiable headings—i.e., regular font formatting is used instead of Heading styles.* These styles make it easier for a screen-reader program to identify where new sections or subsections of the content begin. Edit the document if possible and apply Heading styles where appropriate.
➢ *Tables in documents and presentations do not have header rows designated.* MS Word's **Repeat Header Rows** command (on the Table Layout ribbon) allows you to designate the top row or rows of a table as headers that repeat at the top of each page in a multi-page table.
➢ *Image files lack alternative descriptions (Alt text).* Blackboard Learn and Ally both make it easy to add Alt text so a screen-reader can describe the image aloud.
➢ *Documents and presentations contain images that lack alternative descriptions.* To facilitate screen-readers, edit the document if possible and format the pictures to include Alt text.
➢ *PDF documents lack tags.* Tags help screen-readers determine the order in which text should flow in a document. Most documents converted from work processors have tags built in.
➢ *PDF documents are scanned from printed pages.* Scanned documents may present text readable to human eyes, but computer programs see that text as an image, and screen-readers cannot really read it. Adobe Acrobat uses Optical Character Recognition to convert scanned documents to readable text (somewhat reliably).

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Rating Indicators in a Content Area and the Content Collection

Instructor Feedback