Patrick Henry Community College
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disAbility Resources
Learning Resource Center #109D
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Alternate Text Formats

Textbooks

Students with print disabilities (blind, low vision, or a learning disability such as dyslexia) may require textbooks in an alternate text format. These alternative text formats may include:

- Large print - formatting a book or text to a font size that is larger than usual (ex: font size 18 points or higher)
- Audio book - an audio recording of a book. Could be available on a CD, digital book reader, or downloaded from the internet.
- PDF version – the textbook publisher may send a PDF version of its book, or the book may be scanned and saved as a PDF by disAbility Resources. The PDF documents can then be read by screen readers, such as JAWS, ZoomText, or NaturalReader. Screen readers are types of software that read documents aloud to students.
- E-book – an e-book can be read by the software listed above, eliminating the need for a PDF format.
- Braille (Braille is available for students who require it; however, the other formats are much more common.)

There are a number of ways for students to obtain their textbooks in alternate formats:

- Provide their class schedules and list of textbooks to disAbility Resources which will assist in finding their books in their preferred format. disAbility Resources may have to confirm to the publisher that the student has purchased his or her own copy of the textbook before they will send an alternate format. Finding accessible text books can take some time – this is why it is important for students to know what their textbooks will be well before their classes begin. Professors can help by making this information available as early as possible.

- Check directly with resources that provide alternate text formats, such as:
  Learning Ally (www.learningally.org) - provides audiobooks to students through a paid membership with unlimited access.
  VitalSource (www.vitalsource.com) - provides audiobooks and e-books for students to purchase or rent. Books can be downloaded to a phone, tablet or laptop; books may come with text, but also includes audio information.

- Obtain an e-book from the publisher.

Documents and Handouts

- Documents should be saved as PDFs.
- A scan of a PDF creates an image, which cannot be read by a screen reader or text-to-speech software.
- A scanned PDF can be run through OCR (optical character recognition) and converted to a readable format – disAbility Resources can assist with that.
- Power Point presentations should be saved as a PDF.

Formats that do NOT work with screen readers are:
- JPEG (picture) files.
- Scanned documents that are saved as PDFs.
- Prezi presentations.

Pictures or Graphics

Pictures and graphics included in a document cannot be read by screen readers. These pictures require Alternative Text (Alt Text or Tags). ALT tags are captions that describe the picture and which are read by the screen reader software. Captions within a picture will not be recognized by screen reader software. Therefore, ALT tags must be added.