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Guidelines for Accessible Online Teaching to Faculty Members

in the framework of measures against coronavirus (COVID-19) spreading

The transition to online teaching, especially in the middle of the semester, brings new challenges for both members of the teaching staff and students. A matter of substantial importance resulting from this transition is that the changes in programs, teaching methods as well as in the technology you use for online teaching may introduce new barriers and make online teaching inaccessible for students with disabilities (SwD). Despite that, it can become perfectly accessible for SwD by implementing the proper guidelines.

The [Accessibility Unit of the NKUA](#) collaborates with the [Speech and Accessibility Laboratory](#) in order to identify the accessibility needs of SwD in periods like this, in which the conventional flow of the educational process has been interrupted, and provide suitable solutions. In the three chapters below, faculty members, teaching assistants and members of the NKUA's teaching staff in general can find guidelines regarding the way in which they can improve the accessibility of their online teaching.

[Accessibility planning in online teaching](#)

[Guidelines for accessible online teaching](#)

[Guidelines for creating accessible educational content in online teaching](#)

1. Accessibility planning in online teaching

□ **Communicate with your students**

Inform your students about any modifications you made as soon as possible. Also, inform them about the technologies you are going to use, any special online teaching methods you are going to implement and any change in the educational material. You are advised to communicate with your students regularly and ask them if the educational material is accessible and if they face any obstacles regarding their participation in the online courses.

If any accessibility issue occurs, contact the Accessibility Unit (access@uoa.gr) and ask for alternative solutions.

□ **Preserve your educational goals but integrate them in your planning in a flexible way.**

Students with disabilities should neither be excused from deliverables nor be excluded from online teaching due to accessibility issues. You should expect that the low-familiarity of SwD with the technologies used for online teaching, their access to these technologies, their disabilities and several individual stress factors during this period may have an impact on their ability to use some technological applications, to complete certain activities under time pressure and gain access to new types and sources of information. Therefore, you should preserve your educational goals, but be flexible and create alternative ways, in which students will be able to accomplish them.

□ **Use platforms and material accessible for SwD in an optimal way**

The Accessibility Unit has published [Guidelines for accessible online teaching](#), that give answers to some questions concerning support and accessibility issues, which are common to all [online teaching platforms](#) used by our University, as well as [Guidelines for creating accessible educational content in online teaching](#). Digital text and presentation files (e.g. Word, PowerPoint, PDF, LibreOffice) are generally not accessible at first. Images, photographed handwritten notes and scanned files are usually not accessible for persons with disabilities using Assistive Devices (e.g. screen reader software).

□ **You don't need to be perfect**

The current period is very stressing for all members of the academic community. Your online teaching may not be flawless. Kindness, flexibility and patience from everyone involved can contribute a lot in the current period.

□ **Ask for help**

Any member of the teaching staff who has questions about the support provided to SwD can contact the [Accessibility Unit](#) per e-mail at access@uoa.gr.

2. Guidelines for accessible online teaching

The following instructions will help you make your online teaching as accessible as possible for all students including students with disabilities (SwD). Most services of the [online teaching platforms](#) supported by our University are user-friendly and more or less accessible for SwD using Assistive Devices. However, there are some exceptions and good practices you should be aware of.

□ **Audio quality**

The audio quality is important for every user and crucial for persons with low hearing.

- ✓ **Eliminate background noise:** It is important to use a headset or to connect microphone/mobile phone headphones to your computer. When speaking, make sure that you are in a quiet environment and stay close to the microphone.
- ✓ **Mute the microphones of every participant who does not speak:** Apart from the instructor, all participants must have their microphones muted. In some online teaching platforms, such as Zoom, there are the following possibilities: the instructor can mute the microphones of every participant from the participants control panel and unmute them when a student wants to make a question. Furthermore, the instructor can use the

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"Mute participants on entry" option when programming his/her online teaching session. You should inform the participants that their microphones have been muted upon entering the online teaching session and explain to them how and when they can participate and talk.

□ **Screen sharing**

Screen sharing is a good solution if you want to share a presentation (e.g. PowerPoint) or share other kind of content or demonstrate a procedure step by step to the participants.

- ✓ **Describe in words what is being presented on the screen.** It is possible that participants with slow internet connections are unable to see what is being shared on the screen. Also, blind students or students with low vision may not be able to see the shared screen or have access to its content using Assistive Devices.
- ✓ **Share the educational material beforehand.** Upload all the material you are going to use during the online teaching session to eclass beforehand. That will allow everyone to have access to the material even if they cannot see the shared screen during the session. As you create the material you are going to use, it is important that you implement the [Guidelines for creating accessible educational content in online teaching](#).

□ **Chat**

Activating the chat is very useful for online teaching sessions.

- ✓ **Share the content in the chat in multiple ways.** Some participants may not have access to the chat or be able to use it adequately. Users of Assistive Devices may have access, so that they can read what is written in the chat and participate in the conversation, but they may have problems opening the links shared in the chat.
- ✓ **Further recommendations:** If you use chat, read its content out loud as part of the online teaching procedure. Send any link shared in the chat to all participants before or after the session per e-mail. In some online teaching platforms, such as Zoom, you can save the chat to your PC or the cloud, so that you can refer to it or share it with your students.

□ **Record the online teaching session**

If you wish, you can record the session especially for students who cannot join the live session and those who have a slow internet connection. You can also choose to audio-record the session.

- ✓ **Choosing where to save the recording:** You are advised to save the recorded session to your computer and not the cloud.
- ✓ In order to share the recordings with your students, you can use free file-sharing platforms like Dropbox, Google Drive, WeT or other platforms for sharing large files.

□ **Caption and transcribe the online teaching session**

Creating accessible files with video or audio-recorded online teaching sessions or accessible video files as part of the educational material (including files from YouTube) can be useful for

students without disabilities and necessary for SwD. You can follow the [Guidelines for creating accessible video and audio files](#) by the Accessibility Unit.

3. Guidelines for creating accessible educational content in online teaching

The [Accessibility Unit](#) of the NKUA in collaboration with the [Speech and Accessibility Laboratory](#) has issued the following short and detailed guidelines for creating accessible educational content.

- **Creating accessible presentations and improving their legibility for every student**
 - ✓ Use strong color contrast, such as white or yellow text on black background.
 - ✓ Avoid inserting text boxes in empty slides. You should choose instead a built-in slide layout that suits best the design of your slides.
 - ✓ Use "sans serif" fonts (it contains basic fonts without "calligraphic" elements – Arial is highly recommended); the text should be at least 24pt large.
 - ✓ Avoid the "Design Ideas" available at MS-PowerPoint, because many of them are not accessible.
 - ✓ Describe images, charts, graphs etc. by adding alternative text.
 - ✓ Use the accessibility check tools available at MS-PowerPoint (2010 edition or newer) or at LibreOffice Impress.
 - ✓ If you use MS-PowerPoint or LibreOffice Impress read the [Short Guidelines for creating accessible presentations](#)
 - ✓ For further information you can use the [Detailed Guidelines for creating accessible presentations](#) for MS-PowerPoint or LibreOffice Impress.
 - ✓ If your presentations contain symbols (such as mathematical symbols), audio or video files, tables or charts presenting complex data, greek polytonic texts or a combination of texts in multiple languages, you can consult the relevant [guidelines](#).
- **Creating accessible text files**
 - ✓ Use headings in order to structure your text file.
 - ✓ Describe images, charts, graphs etc. by adding alternative text.
 - ✓ Create links using meaningful descriptions.
 - ✓ Use "sans serif" fonts (it contains basic fonts without "calligraphic" elements – Arial is highly recommended); the text should be at least 12pt large.
 - ✓ Use the accessibility check tools available at MS-Word (2010 edition or newer) or at LibreOffice Writer.

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- ✓ If you use MS-Word or LibreOffice Writer please consult the [Short Guidelines for creating accessible documents](#).
 - ✓ For more information you can consult the [Detailed Guidelines for creating accessible documents](#) for MS-Word or LibreOffice Writer.
 - ✓ If your documents contain symbols (such as mathematical symbols), tables or charts presenting complex data, greek polytonic texts or a combination of texts in multiple languages, you can consult the relevant [guidelines](#).
- **Creating accessible PDF files**
- ✓ If the PDF was not created by you, copy its content in a new MS-Word or LibreOffice Writer file and then follow the steps described above to ensure that the file becomes accessible.
 - ✓ Otherwise, create a new accessible file or presentation using a program for text or presentations processing following the guidelines mentioned above, and then save it as PDF file.
 - ✓ Consult the [Short Guidelines for creating accessible PDF documents and presentations](#).
 - ✓ For further information you can consult the [Detailed Guidelines for creating accessible PDF documents and presentations](#).