**Transcript for Accessibility Bites: Social Media**
**BCcampus event hosted January 25, 2024**
**Facilitator: Josie Gray**

JOSIE GRAY:
Okay, let's get started. Hello, everyone. Thank you so much for joining us for the fourth topic in the Accessibility Bites series. Before I get started, I want to highlight that you can download the slides for this session from bit.ly/accessbites and my colleague will put the link directly into the chat as well. These slides are accessible and they include my full speaking notes, so you can use them to follow along as we go or refer back to them at any time and adapt them for your own purposes as well. In this folder, you will also see slides from the previous Accessibility Bites sessions, so you can go back and view those as well.

I am joining you today from Lac La Biche, which is located in the very northern part of Treaty 6. The county of Lac La Biche is part of Treaty 8 and Treaty 10 as well. But I'm personally on Treaty 6 today, as well as Region 1 of the Métis Nation of Alberta. Treaty 6 was signed in 1876 as one of the 11 numbered treaties signed between First Nations and the British Crown in what is now called Canada. One of the provisions of this treaty was that Indigenous Peoples had the right to continue their hunting and fishing practices. For those of you familiar with Alberta, there's a lot of industry in Northern Alberta, especially around oil and gas. In 2008, the Beaver Lake Cree Nation, who are currently based just south of Lac La Biche, filed a statement of claim against the Alberta provincial and Canadian federal governments, arguing that those governments fail to manage the overall cumulative environmental effects of development on their traditional territory and have, as such, violated the provision in Treaty 6 that guaranteed those hunting, fishing, and trapping rights. Just on their website, I wanted to share what they say about it. They say, "Our land used to be home to large herds of moose, caribou, and elk. Hundreds of freshwater lakes and rivers provided clean water and abundance of healthy fish. But now, cumulative impacts from industry and development have poisoned water, eliminated whole forests, decimated traditional food sources for the Beaver lake Cree Nation people. We had to act. Beaver Lake Cree Nation is the first ever challenge, and to be granted a trial on the cumulative impacts of industrial development. Not one project, not one mine, but all of them, all at once." I wanted to share that as part of my land acknowledgment today. From what I can find online, this case has still yet to be tried, but it is moving forward. I wanted to highlight the work the Beaver Lake Cree Nation is doing to hold governments accountable to treaty promises. And it's something that I will be keeping an eye out for myself.

My name is Josie Gray and I use she/her pronouns. For those who can't see me, I am a white woman in my late '20s with shoulder length blond hair, glasses ,and septum piercing. I work at BCcampus and I've been working in digital accessibility in education for seven years. And I have a Masters of Design and Inclusive Design. The things I'll be sharing throughout this series come from my experience in making educational materials more accessible to disabled students. However, it's important to recognize that I'm not a disabled person. And disability is a huge category and there's a huge amount of diversity even among people with similar disabilities. I

say this because I do not know everything of what it is to make something accessible to all people and what may work for one person, may not work for another. I really want to encourage everyone to dig into all of the topics we're covering through this series and then seek out further learning, especially from people with lived experiences. Welcome to the fourth session of the Accessibility Bites series, a series that looks at different accessibility topics related to teaching and learning in post-secondary For today's topic, we will be exploring social media. Since people use a range of social media sites, I'm going to focus on practices that apply across social media platforms, rather than going into details on specific sites just to give you that bit of context.

Okay, here's what you can expect from the session today. For the first 15 minutes, I will present some core practices that are needed to make social media content accessible. And then we'll use any time we have left at the end for additional discussion and questions. As well as I have some activities that people are welcome to try out.

Before we get further into the topic, we need to come back to accessibility and make sure we understand what we're talking about when we say "accessibility." For this series, we are specifically talking about what is needed to ensure people with disabilities can have equitable access to education. To make education accessible, we must design and create resources, experiences, tools, and spaces that allow for and support the diversity of our bodies and minds. Rather than focusing on what we think is normal or average, we're going to start from a place where we expect and plan for the presence of diversity. We work to build in flexibility and choice so people can access their education in ways that work for them. Although accessibility can benefit everyone, the needs of disabled people are the priority and the focus of accessibility work.

Since we're talking about social media, we're going to start with hashtags, especially multi-word hashtags. Hashtags are used across multiple social media platforms, including things like Twitter or X, Instagram, TikTok, etc. On the screen, I have examples of hashtags written in two different ways. On the left, the hashtags use lower case. I've got #accessibilitybites, #goopen, and #openeducationweek or just some hashtags. Then on the right, it's the same hashtags but they use something called PascalCase. PascalCase is when there's no spaces between the words, the first letter of each word is capitalized. There's a number of reasons to use PascalCase. For those of you who can see the screen, for you, which option is easier to read? For myself, I find the PascalCase much easier to read. You can identify where a new word starts much easier. Also, setting up hashtags in this way is really important for people who are using screen readers. Because with the screen reader, that will ensure the screen reader pronounces each word individually rather than trying to pronounce the whole thing as one word. The example of the #goopen hashtag might be pronounced like "upen," in which case you're not really sure what that was supposed to be.

Next thing, which is very important when creating social media posts, is around emojis. Emojis are accessible when used in moderation. When a screen reader encounters an emoji, it'll read

2

out the label that the emoji is associated with. They'll know what that emoji is. However, when people overuse emojis, it can become a problem. In this example, there is a screenshot of a social media post that reads, "Why are my toes so cold, even when I have my slippers on?" And then in between each word, there is that hands clapping emoji. For those of you that can see this post, I think the effect is clear. It's imitating the effect of clapping between each word to give emphasis. However, if you're using a screen reader, you would hear something like, why clapping hands emoji, are clapping hands, my clapping hands emoji, etc. etc. etc. It's much harder to understand the post and it takes a lot longer to get through all of the emojis, which can be frustrating, and make understanding it much more difficult. If using emojis, use them in moderation.

Here is another example of a trend that was going around on Twitter a few years ago, where people would use backslashes and underscores and parentheses to create the shape of a tea cup. And then they would write some statement inside the tea cup, which they call Today's tea. In the screenshot here, the tea is

"Grad students should be paid livable wages for their hard work."

For anyone who can see the tweet, the point is clear. However, I wanted to show you an example of what that same tweet sounded like when read with a screen reader. This is an example using a voice over screen reader.

…VOICE OVER]
"Jay Shelat on Twitter. Today's tea underscore, underscore, underscore underscore, underscore, underscore underscore, underscore, underscore underscore, underscore, underscore underscore, underscore, underscore backlash. Grad student slash underscore backslash should be slash vertical line backslash paid livable slash under underscore, underscore, vertical line backlash wages for slash backlash their slash slash underscore work underscore slash Google Chrome window blank.
[VOICEOVER ENDS]

JOSIE:
That gives you an example of, first of all, how annoying it is to hear all of those backslashes and underscores read out, but also how much it obscures the meaning and the point of the actual post. For people using screen readers, this trend was largely inaccessible. This also applies to the use of fancy fonts and characters that people sometimes use or copy into their posts to give it a fancy font that's usually not available in the platform. Often, screen readers will read out the character names of each of those characters and not the whole word itself. The meaning would be lost and they are left to listen to just the names of characters. J slid on Twitter.

Okay, let's say there's a social media trend going around that relies on visual layout, and lots of emojis or symbols, and you have a great idea for a post. Is there an accessible way to participate? And I'm wondering if anyone here has any ideas of how they might be able to still

participate in one of these trends or use emojis in this way, but still make it accessible to people using screen readers. Anyone have any thoughts? Ohh. Look at all you smart people. Yeah. Creating an image instead and using alt text. Absolutely. If you wanted to use one of these posts and share it in accessible, in an accessible way, you could do all the editing and formatting and emoji use within whatever platform you want to post with to create your post, take a screenshot and post that screenshot instead with alt text. That way people using screen readers can get the alt text, which will give them a much more understandable version of the post. Then people who can see the post can still engage with the very visual mode that's being used. Yes, absolutely.

Okay. In one of the past webinars in the series, we talked about images and alt text. I'm not going to go into too much information, but I do want to make the point that images being posted to social media platforms need alternative texts to be accessible to anyone who can't see that image. All social media platforms should allow you to add alternative text to the image. When you're uploading your picture, look for something that says like "Alt" or "Describe" or you might have to go into settings like in Instagram you have to search for it a little bit. But if you don't see a place to add a description, your other option is to add a description to the post itself, so in the caption. If you can't find how to add a description in whatever platform you're using, try googling the name of that platform and how to add alt text. You should be able to find specific instructions for that platform. If you're not sure how to describe an image, as I mentioned, we covered that topic in a previous session. You can go back and find those slides and also that recording to get that information. On this slide, I just have an example of alt text being added to an image on the Bluesky social media platform. Here the alt text reads, "An empty, snow-covered highway with tire tracks running down each lane. The trees on either side are bare and coated with frost. The sky is clear and blue." Someone has a question. "What is the best practice for alt text in the caption? Before or after the caption?" I am not sure about best practice. I've seen it done both ways. I would generally say before the caption, because the picture is generally what you would expect people to engage with first. But it might also depend on the context of what you're posting in your picture. Whether the caption is more important or the image itself is more important. If anyone else has thoughts on that topic, please do put them into the chat.

You can also generally add alternative texts to GIFS. The alt text reads, "A white blond woman takes an exaggerated bow in front of a bright pink background. The words, 'thank you' appear above her." Similar approach to describing images, but just wanted to note that GIFs need alt text too.

Over the last few years, video has grown in popularity across multiple social media platforms, especially Instagram and TikTok, so I wanted to make sure we talked about those here too.

When making videos accessible, the first thing to do is to create captions for the video. Captions are a written version of what you can hear in the video that is synched with the audio of the video, so people can read while they watch and hear everything at the same time.

Captions are primarily for people who are deaf or hard of hearing, but captions are widely used by people without hearing-related disabilities as well, especially on social media where people often watch with volume off. When adding captions, you have two different options. There is something called open captions or there's something called closed captions. For social media, one isn't necessarily better than the other. Just use whichever one is easier or makes the most sense for the platform. But just to give you a bit more information about the difference between the two. Open captions are part of the video itself, like they can't be turned on and off by the viewer. They are generally inserted in a video editing tool like Adobe Premier. However, Instagram and TikTok, for example, also have automatic caption options directly in the apps. They will generate captions based on the audio, which you can then edit for accuracy, and these captions become part of the video when the video gets published. Open captions allow you to customize the display of captions and will allow you to ensure that they display the same across multiple platforms. When you're setting up the display of these types of captions, make sure you set them up so they're easy to read. And I'll talk a little bit more about what that means in a second. The other option is closed captions. Closed captions are uploaded to a video as a separate file. A popular caption file type is SRT, but there's other ones as well. These captions can be turned on and off by a viewer. And some video players allow the viewer to adjust the display of captions. Closed captions are what you see on movie and TV streaming sites like Netflix and YouTube. Some social media sites allow you to upload SRT files to your videos before you post them, including Twitter aka X and LinkedIn. I've got a screenshot on the slide showing where you can upload a caption file to a video you're trying to post on Twitter if you're using the web browser. Some of those platforms will support that as well. As I mentioned, it doesn't really matter too much which caption method you use. Just select the one that makes the most sense for the platform you're posting on and your video creation workflow.

Another thing to consider with videos is how to convey what is visually going on in a video to people who can't see it. There's no alt text equivalent for videos like there is for images. Which means you need to include the description some other way. If you're creating videos, the easiest way to do that is to build a description into the audio of the video, so it's just part of the video. Another option that can work with shorter videos shared on social media, especially videos that are primarily for sharing text or audio where the visual is just extra, is to include a visual description in the caption. I've got an example on the slide that is a tweet by Witch, Please, which are a podcast production company. They posted a video that has audio captions and then a static image as the background. In the tweet, they include a description of the image in the video that reads, "photo ID. An illustration by Zoe of a purple snail leaving a trail of goo with the words 'Purple velvet is Gay' written in it." Just an example of how some creators have addressed that.

Okay, when you are posting visuals to social media, whether that be images, GIFs, videos, make sure that any text you are sharing with as part of those visuals is easy to read. That means ensure the text is large enough to read. I can't give you a minimum font size since platforms can be so different. But I would generally recommend as big as you can. Also make sure the fonts

you are using are simple. Avoid italics and decorative fonts, you know, lots of cursive fonts that can be hard to read. Also ensure that the font colour that you are using is a high contrast with the background colour so that it's super clear to read. If you're doing captions, make sure they're on the screen long enough for people to be able to read. Those are just some considerations to take into mind.

Okay, that is the content I wanted to cover. I wanted to pause here for questions or thoughts or anything that people wanted to bring to the group or to ask me. And then once we get through questions, I have some activities that people can do if they have time. If you have a question, feel free to put it into the chat. You can also raise your hand if you'd like to unmute and speak as well. A question about adding GIFs, where the description goes. In Twitter/X, for example, there is the option to add alt text similar to an image. For that, you would add a description to an alt text field. That alt text wouldn't display visually, but it would be accessible to screen readers. I believe alt text is supported for GIFs in other platforms, but I'm not 100% sure about that. But if alt text isn't supported for the GIF, you would just include the description after the image, likely in the post that you're sharing it from. Someone has shared a colour contrast-checking tool. Thank you very much. Absolutely. Those tools can help you check your colours and make sure they meet accessibility guidelines. Okay, feel free to keep putting questions in the chat if you have them. I'm going to just move the screen over to some of the activities because we've got some time.

I've got some different ideas here. The first one is if you use a social media platform that allows you to go back and edit past posts, you can use this time to go back and try adding some text to images that you've posted. For example, Instagram, I know, allows you to do that. If you're an Instagram user, you can go back and add some alt text to your posts. I have a question. "Do you talk about a most accessible social media platform?" No, I did not talk about that, and I don't know that I have one to raise up as a most accessible platform. I know in the past, Twitter did a lot of work around making their platform accessible. They had an accessibility team. Now that Twitter has changed ownership, that team has been fired. And there's not work being done in that area anymore. If you are using a social media platform and you'd like to understand more about its commitment to accessibility, I would suggest googling that social media and see if they have some accessibility statement or accessibility commitment where they talk about the work that they're doing and how they're doing it. For example, I know LinkedIn has a page and I know Facebook has some as well. You can look to see whichever tools you're using. People are sharing additional resources and ideas in the chat. That's great. Oh yes, good question. "What might I say about movement in GIFs and flashing/animated emojis can be very hard on some readers." Yes, that's a great point, and thank you for bringing it up. When you're sharing things that have movement, be very aware of any flashing colours and things that are really quick. Often that can trigger people who are sensitive to those things. Avoid that. If you can't avoid it, make sure you have warnings so people can skip those videos and those kinds of things from the very beginning. That's a great point. Absolutely. Okay. Another option, if you don't want to go back and add alt text, is to right now, open up a social media platform that you use. And share a post about any learning you've had from this session. You could consider adding a

6

picture that you can add alt text, to use a hashtag with PascalCase. You don't even have to post the post, but just go through the process of drafting it and what you'd have to do to make it accessible. Thank you to everyone sharing resources in the chat. That's greatly appreciated.

Then the final thing that I wanted to share as an idea is some blog posts that you can explore about social media from someone who has low vision. I'm just wanting to make sure I send this to the right chat. There's lots of really interesting blog posts from various angles about specific social media sites and good practices. That's a good resource to explore as well. That's great. Okay, well, thank you so much everyone. I really appreciate your time in coming today. I have some additional resources linked on my slides. To access these slides, you can download them at bit.ly/accessbites, and we can put that link into the chat as well. My colleague has also shared a link to a form where you can share some feedback with us about this session and how you found this session and your thoughts. We would love to know. I know we are thinking about future sessions we can do. If you have ideas about topics, we would appreciate those as well. And I think that's it. Thank you very much everyone.