Transcript for Accessibility Bites: PDF Documents
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Presenter: Dr. Ann Gagné
Host: Helena Prins

DR. ANN GAGNÉ:
Hi, everybody. Oh, I see some names and faces that I recognize as well. So it's really nice to see you. And as you were saying, this is only 30 minutes, so I will get to it.

I have access to the slide deck on the slides as well. And that will be shared with you. I have a link, which I'm sure somebody can put into the chat as well if somebody wants those slides as we're going, or if you're the type of person that wants to use a mobile device, then you can feel free to do that as well. So I have the QR code there and the link as well.

I also want to start with a land acknowledgment and a little bit of a positionality statement so that folks know where I am joining you from. So I'm joining you from St. Catharine's. This is the traditional land of the Haudenosaunee and the Anishinaabe. It's land that's covered by the Upper Canada treaties, and it's land that's protected by the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Agreement. One of the things that I like to also when I do my land acknowledgment is also acknowledge the lands where I grew up. And so I was born and raised on a traditional land of the Abitibiwini Aki, which is land that's covered by the James Bay Northern Quebec agreement. And what I particularly like about the land acknowledgment at Brock, where I am joining you from, is that it says that our great standard of living is directly related to the resources and friendship of Indigenous people. And so I'm wondering, you know, I'm here to kind of support that and to say that, you know, we're all here because of the land that we are on. And we're all here, you know, with an acknowledgment of that friendship and those histories, as well.

I also do a little bit of an access check. I know that there are captions that are running or available through Zoom, and I think Josie, thank you, Josie, put the slides in for today so you can follow along with the slides. If there is anything else that you need, please feel free to put it into the chat. I know that Paula is doing some tech support in the back and can help support that in some ways as well. So if there's anything that you need, we can help support that. All right.

The agenda for today, because again, we're at 3:04, so for the next 26 minutes. One is, how do we create more accessible PDFs from the start? Then we're going to go into how we review PDFs for accessibility mainly in Adobe. Okay? So one of the things that I really want to emphasize is a lot of the stuff that I'm going to be talking about at the beginning are things that have already been covered in some of the great Accessibility Bites that BCcampus has done previously. And I know that there will be links for that as well and have been links for that as well, so you'll be able to go back and look at some of these things to help support that. I do have the chat open. So if at any time, there are some questions that come up while I am talking, I will try to acknowledge those questions as well in the chat. So please feel free to ask as well. All right.

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How do we do more accessible PDFs? Well, one of the things that I really want to emphasize is that creating more accessible PDFs, ultimately comes from using more accessible source documents. So if you are invested in creating accessible PDFs, one of the things that you need to do is actually start, which would make it easier to actually start from accessible source documents. And the two things that I want to mention here, which are things that we talk about a fair bit or that I'm sure that you use in the spaces that we're in are Word documents and PowerPoint or slide decks, right? So, again, this is where I refer you to, and I think Josie also has those links available to the great Accessibility Bites that have already happened around Word documents and PowerPoint decks. And so for Word documents, you want to make sure that you have Word documents that are accessible, so you take into account headings, for example, and making sure that those headings are in the proper order in the order that you want folk to read the information. That those Word documents also have alt text, alternative texts, descriptions for images, right? And so we want to make sure that if we're using images, for example, that we do descriptive writing of what that image is about, and not simply what the image is, right? So we have a tendency sometimes in educational spaces to just say what the image is, say, for example, Bloom's Taxonomy. We can say something like Bloom's Taxonomy Pyramid, but we don't actually say what's in the pyramid. We need to get into the process or the habit of doing the alt text for those images as well. These are things that we want to think about even before we get to the PDF stage, right? The other thing to think about are descriptive links. So you know embedding the links in the documents that you're using. So for example, if you have a URL, how you want to embed that and make it descriptive so that it's not reading out HTTP. It's actually telling the person who's using the document where that link is going to go to. So again, there are a lot of different other things that you need to think about in terms of Word documents and making them accessible before they become PDFs. But these are the big great ones. Thanks, Josie. I knew Josie would do that.

So now, when we go to the slide decks, again, there are different things that we need to think about in terms of PowerPoint slide decks as well. So the text boxes that we use and the way that we put that information on our text boxes, the kind of text type that we use as well, right? I know that when I have conversations either with faculty or with students, one of the things that we talk about a lot is that tension between the aesthetics of a PowerPoint slide and the actual accessibility of those PowerPoint slides, somehow in the thought that they're incompatible, that you can't be aesthetically aware as well as accessibility aware. And that, of course, is not true. So we want to think about the kinds of texts that we're using, the type of texts that we're using in the sides, so that again, when you convert those slide decks to Power to PDFs, that again, we're starting with something that's very accessible, right? Colour contrast in the kinds of images and colours that we're using on the slide decks. And then, of course, the slide content order, because that slide content order will, in fact, help support what the PDF looks like when you do convert it to that. So thanks again for the links that are in the chat to the previous Accessibility Bites sessions on Word and PowerPoint, I strongly suggest that you go back to those and start there in terms of foundation, and then come to this one and review this one in terms of making more accessible PDFs.

How do we review a PDF for accessibility? What I'm going to be talking about is using Adobe. One of the things that I want to start off, off the top is the acknowledgment that there are barriers innate to Adobe, especially around access. We live in a time in 2025, which is very different to how it was in the olden days, if you will, where when we would buy a product, we would buy a software and the software was ours in perpetuity. Now we live in a time where we pay monthly fees to use a service. And sometimes if you're lucky and you work at an institution that has those kinds of availability, they will be able to get licenses for you to use these things. And one of the things that's really important for me to note here is that I do know because look, there's 64 people in this room right now and you are all in different institutions, in different places, in different countries. And so your institution might not be the kind of institution that can readily give everybody an Adobe Pro license. And in order to do this kind of work, you need an Adobe Pro license, or at least to do it well or inclusively. And so in some ways, I hope that the Accessibility Bites once it gets recorded and transcribed and sharable, that you send it to the powers that be in your spaces and say, Look, I went to this session that said, I need this to do my work, and you can use that as leverage for more funding for Adobe Pro funding. So there are some barriers to that. And I know that some institutions might have it set up in a way that there is one person in the office that has the Adobe Pro license, or there is one person on campus that has the Adobe Pro license. And then they become the kind of PDF unicorn, if you will, because they are the ones that maintain that license. If you are one of those people, if you are the Adobe unicorn in this room, you know, you can put in the chat. I just want to say that I see you and I understand where you're coming from, and so there are training and cost barriers, and I want to make sure that we note that as well. With that being said, one of the things that you can do to use Adobe is making sure that you have the Adobe Pro and then we'll go through the Accessibility Check. The Adobe Read Out Loud function somebody we're going to get there is poor quality, absolutely. And I agree, Luke, thank you so much. That there are other tools that are out there that can totally do that kind of read out loud for the PDF. So one of the things that I wanted to do because it was only half an hour, I wanted to make sure that we're sticking to one tool. But I absolutely agree with you that there are definitely other screen reader tools that can help support that as well. With that, you'll notice that the two things that I want to talk about are Accessibility Check that's in the Tools menu, and I'll get back to my other slide, and then the Read Out Loud function, which again, has already been noted there.

So I have a document here in a PDF, which you should be able to see, and it's kind of a PDF rendering of the Power Flower Power in terms of intersectional awareness. This is something that I worked on with a colleague here at Brock, and so I used this as an example because this is something that we worked on closely to make more accessible, right?

And so before I go that, I just want to read and I just want to read in the chat. One of the issues that I've run into in the past is how I convert my Word doc to a PDF. My understanding is Save as PDF from the print option doesn't... That's exactly right. It's like when you go to save from

your Word doc to a PDF, one of the things that you should do is you go to Save as PDF, not the Save as PDF menu because it's not that you need Adobe Pro for that to do correctly, it's, like to say that the cake is a lie. Sometimes it reads it differently, and so the proper way to do that is go to Save and then Find PDF and do that. So thank you so much for that question as well. Emily, that's a really great question.

Here, if you go to the Tools menu in Adobe Pro, find my tools here. You will see that there are many tools and amazing things that you can do. One of the things is a little Vitruvian man, which is the accessibility feature. You will see that in the accessibility feature, there are many things that you can do and one of them is Accessibility Check. If you go to Accessibility Check, one of the things that I'll ask you is, hey, do you want to do an Accessibility Check of this document? You say, yes, absolutely, and you say, start checking. Then what happens is that on the menu, it'll provide the many things that may be array on the access in the PDF document. You'll notice here that this, of course, is a PDF that I have not fixed. You'll notice that there are many things here. There are tag errors, different things here. There are form issues. There's alternative texts that are missing, just many things that are not great at the moment in this document. Now I'm going to go back to what Luke was noting there about the Read Out Loud. One of the things that I do when I get a PDF. Again, there are many tools that you can use that are not just the Read Out Loud, is to actually read it out loud to myself and to see what it sounds like, knowing that already that this has a lot of issues to it. If you go to the view menu and you select the view menu and then the Read Out Loud function, you can activate the Read Out Loud . I have already set up in my screen sharing that you should be able to hear the audio. What I'm going to do is I'm going to activate the Read Out Loud. And then I am going to read this document to the end. I promise I'll make it stop, but I'm just going to read this just to give you a flavour of what this non-remediated PDF sounds like.

PDF VOICE: Text, text, text text, text, text, text.

ANN:
So you get the idea, right? One of the things that I talk to my friends about a lot is one time when I received a document where the table of contents was created not using a table of contents feature, but the person who had created it had used underscore as the way to create the table of contents. And so when I did the Read Out Loud and tried to see what was going on, I just received a whole bunch of "underscore underscore underscore." And this is really important information to think about. Course packages contain copies and scans from textbooks, Yes, absolutely. And more often than not, that quality is very poor, for sure. Can one export those files into Word and open them in OCR edit. Is Adobe Pro absolutely necessary? Danielle, thank you so much for that question. In the work that I do, the role that I have is half between the Centre of Teacher and Learning, and also half between accessibility services. And one of the things that we do is we really work closely with the libraries and the bookstore, of course, for those exact reasons, because the library has a workflow, oftentimes your library, or if you have a librarian. I'm lucky enough that we have an accessibility librarian in our area. And so if you have an accessibility librarian or someone who's invested in those kinds of works, then

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they absolutely can help you with those scans that are oftentimes scanned as images, as you say, very poor quality, and then they can help you to upload that. They help faculty put those documents into their learning management system in a more accessible manner, as well. So that's a great question, and oftentimes they have resources there as well.

So yeah, the Tools menu is where you find the Accessibility Check and where you find the Read Out Loud tool as well. Question is, do you know if Read Out Loud is comparable, like JAWS would be a better product. The JAWS experience would be a better product, 100% so that you could use that. It would be much better than the Read Out Loud function. But again, it depends on if the person that you're working with has access to JAWS, those kinds of things. Again, that's a really great question. That's why I tried to stick to the one tool today just because it's really hard to bring in all the other tools to show you what JAWS would do with that, but also a great question. Thank you so much. Keep them coming. These are really great.

So you have that, you know, you have that really not great flower there or that saying you know, "text, text, text," and you're just like, Oh, my gosh, what do I do with this? This is really not great. What do I do? This is my secret formula to how to remediate a PDF. First, we take a deep breath. Then we are patient because remediating PDFs, again, there's a reason why sometimes there's one person on your campus that has the Adobe license. These are not things that are necessarily things that can just easily be done. You want to be mindful, you want to make sure that you're doing the work in a way that makes it accessible and that kind of stuff. That's why I say, take a deep breath.

I'm seeing some of you in the chat that are making really great arguments for using OERs to make them more accessible as well. And so I think that's really great. You have this PDF. You want to remediate it, you take your deep breath. There's a couple of things that you can do and I'm giving you some options. Again, do the options that feel the best for you that are doable to the spaces that you're in. I see some of you in the chat are talking about how you have great support in your libraries to do that kind of work. So again, or you're teaching in learning centres or those kinds of things, right? So that's a bonus. First, you can go to the Tools menu, again, so let's go to here.

There's this place in the Tools menu here that's called Action Wizard. Some of these I'm going to walk through and some of these, I'm just going to show you where they are so that you know where they are. In Action Wizard, you'll have a series of action lists here that says Make Accessible and so on. That's one of the options that you can do is you can go to the actions list and say Make Accessible and then you see what it does. This is why oftentimes if you look at my slide deck, I'm just saying take a deep breath because sometimes it works. It depends on how complicated your system is. It goes back to some of the things that Stephan was saying in the chat about, Why do we not have these things already? Why did they not think of that ahead of time when they're getting resources and those kinds of things? I mean, sometimes we have what we have, and especially if you're in a space that uses a lot of legacy media and those kinds

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of things, I think that you're going to be stuck with some kind of, you know, these kinds of things that you're going to have to do as well.

Thank you, Kim. Kim in the chat about the screen readers, and, you know, thank you for putting that in as well. So you can use the Action Wizard if you want. Or you can auto tag the document. Say if we go back to the tools and we go to Accessibility, there's an option here where it says Autotag the Document. You notice that when I did the Accessibility Check, one of the things that it kept telling me was that there were tags, that tags weren't working and there are no tags. You can do that and you can autotag the document. Again, as my slide deck says, sometimes it may work and sometimes it may not work accurately. And then your other option is what I like to call reading order Jenga. I'll show you what that looks like and show you why that is something that requires you to take a deep breath and to make sure that, you know, that works in certain ways. If you go back to this Accessibility tool here where we did the Accessibility Check, where Autotag lives, and all of those things, you'll notice that there is a feature here that says reading order. Okay? And when you select this, you'll get a little document like so. So I'm just checking, Helena, you can see this little reading order menu on the screen? Fantastic. Amazing. Thank you so much. That's great. Oh I see people that are sharing links to NVDA as a screen reader as well, which is great. You'll notice in the reading order, basically what this does is it tells you and gives you the opportunity to identify in your document what each of these things are. Is the thing in your document an image? Is the thing in your document a header? Is the thing in your document a form field? You'll notice here that there are a ton of form fields, we're asking people to fill things in.

When I say reading order jenga if the Autotag doesn't work, and so we're going to talk about how to do this. For example, say if I want to identify that this is my title. My title is Flower Power, Power Flower. I highlight this. This gives me the option to say what it is. Is this my first heading? Is this my second heading? Of course, it's at the beginning. This could be my title, this could be my first heading. If I call this heading one, then it'll tag it as heading one. And you can again, I've purposefully picked a type of document that wasn't very straightforward, right? It has different things, it has a lot of stuff to show you the kind of stuff that people that do accessibility work have to deal with on a fairly regular basis. And then there are different ways that you can do this work as well, where you know, if this is a form field and you want to tag it as a form field because this is where people are going to fill in information, 100% you know, that would be there. And so when I say, you know, reading order jenga and having some patience and taking a deep breath, you can well imagine how labour intensive it would be to do that for a document like this, if the Autotag didn't work, if the Make Accessible didn't work, right? Because there are ways to kind of go back, right? And so we're doing those kinds of things. I've seen some things in the chat about making sure that we have accessible materials and so on, 100%. I agree, and I thank so much for that this isn't just a PDF issue, it's that we need to think about the bigger picture. It goes back to what Stephan was saying as well, which is why are we, why do we have things in our libraries that are images and not PDFs and those kinds of things. Again, this is just a snippet if you want to remediate a PDF. This is possibly the thing that you can do. Let me go back to my slide because I know I only have 4 minutes left, as

you say. Fastest 30 minutes of my life. You can go into the Tools menu and you can use the Action Wizard to try to make it accessible. You can autotag the documents. Again, we'll go back to where this is just for clarity purposes. You can autotag the document here in the Accessibility Checker, or you can do what I was doing here, which is the reading order and identifying each thing in that way as well.

What does that mean? Basically, that means that to do this kind of work, you need to have the patience to go in and do that. It means just like what's happening in the chat and it's such a great chat, that this isn't just about remediating PDFs, it's about access to information, access to documentation. Why are we not using more open educational resources that might be on websites that are readily accessible? Those kinds of things. I think that it's really important to do this work that we remember that there are a lot of things, there's no perfect thing. I think that whenever we have conversations about accessibility, one of the things that we are talking about here and making sure that we're trying to talk about here is that PDFs are not the most accessible thing, and in fact, a lot of people will say, Stop using PDFs. I think somebody's just put that in the chat. I'm not sure if this was intended on advocating for PDF, but there are different ways that we can do that. Yes, 100%. But if you happen to be in a situation where you have a PDF of something that you have to use and you want to try to remediate it to make it accessible, that's exactly the kind of conversation I wanted to have with that as well. What are some of the barriers that you see? Because I see the chat is very lively? What are some of the barriers that you're seeing to the work that you're doing? I know some of you have already mentioned the resources in the library not being scanned properly or even resources that you receive from documents that are not scanned, they're scanned as images. I see some of you in the chat talking about different screen readers and how screen readers are compatible or incompatible with PDFs that we have here. Absolutely. Just checking to see what else is In the chat. Any questions? I'm trying to make a PDF accessible that was downloaded from... This is also a thing, right? A lot of our applications that we do from an institutional point of view, a lot of those are PDFs that are inaccessible because nobody has kind of gone back to see that they are, right? And yes, we are getting to a time where people are trying to not just give PDFs of articles and those kinds of things, that they're giving Word versions. They're giving, you know, documents on the web that's easily and openly accessible. And so I think that's what we're trying to, you know, I thank the person who put in the chat about, like, is this advocating that we should do PDFs? No, it's advocating for if you have a PDF and you need to make it accessible, this is what it looks like, you know. Amazing. I know I have a minute. If there's anything that you have any questions, any comments, that was exactly 30 minutes of Quick Draw Mcgraw. But if there's anything that you want to chat about, I'm happy to do so. These are including the people that have very strong feelings about different kinds of screen readers. I want to chat with you if you are one of those people. Hopefully this was helpful. Yeah, I know. Thanks, Luke. It's not the easiest thing to do in 30 minutes for sure.