

Purchasing Accessible Instructional Materials (AIM) Quick Reference Guide

"As the use of emerging technologies in the classroom increases, schools at all levels must ensure equal access to the educational benefits and opportunities afforded by the technology and equal treatment in the use of the technology for all students, including students with disabilities."

Russlyn Ali, Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, May 26, 2011

Why Purchase Accessible Instructional Materials?

All students have the right to access and participate in the general education curriculum and use the instructional materials delivering the educational content. As referenced above, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) specifies that if a student with a print disability needs accessible instructional materials, that the educational agency provide those materials in a timely manner. Civil rights legislation, including Section 504 and the Americans with Disabilities Act, guarantee students' rights to an equally effective education. Students such as those who struggle with learning, those with dyslexia, and English language learners also can benefit from the use of accessible learning materials resulting in increased participation and academic achievement. Furthermore, accessible instructional materials are of benefit to all students as they allow all students to interact with and use the materials according to their needs and preferences.

What are Accessible Instructional Materials?

Accessible instructional materials, or AIM, are materials that are designed or converted in ways that make them usable across the widest range of student variability regardless of format (print, digital, graphic, audio, and video). The IDEA specifically mandates that specialized formats of print instructional materials (braille, large print, audio and digital text) are provided to students with disabilities when needed. What's more, the rapid emergence of digital materials in educational settings makes it critical to address accessibility and usability when considering the purchase and use of these materials. It is vital that digital content is made accessible from the start as it is difficult or impossible to retrofit accessibility. Both the digital content and the technology used to deliver the content must be accessible and meet the students' needs.

Specialized Formats of Print Instructional Materials

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) provides several methods for acquiring free versions of state adopted print instructional materials in specialized formats (braille, large print, audio and digital text) for qualifying students. For braille and large print textbooks, see the TEA, [Instructional Materials and Educational Technology](http://www.tea.state.tx.us/IMET) (<http://www.tea.state.tx.us/IMET>) webpage for information.

For digital text and audio books, TEA has funded two accessible media producers, Bookshare and Learning Ally, to provide services in Texas including training and support.

For more information about eligibility, refer to the [Texas Roadmap for Accessible Instructional Materials](http://bit.ly/AIMRoadmap) (<http://bit.ly/AIMRoadmap>) on the TATN website.

What is the Instructional Materials Allotment?

Texas Legislation (Senate Bill 6) created an instructional materials allotment (IMA) for districts and open-enrollment charter schools for the purchase of either state-adopted or non-state adopted instructional materials, technological equipment, and technology-related services. Instructional materials are defined as content addressing the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills to include: books; supplementary materials; workbooks; computer software; digital media; digital courseware; and online services. Funds for braille and large print versions of state-adopted instructional materials are not deducted from a district's IMA. These materials remain the property of the state and are to be returned to the redistribution center when no longer needed by the student.

As districts move forward with the increased responsibilities for purchasing materials, it is critical that accessibility is included in purchasing criteria and that accessibility language is included in purchasing contracts.

Accessibility Standards

The [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(http://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG/\)](http://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG/) 2.0 (WCAG) is an international set of guidelines that provide a wide range of recommendations related to developing accessible web content. There are four principles which provide the foundation for accessibility.

Principle 1: Perceivable - Information and user interface components must be presentable to users in ways they can perceive.

Principle 2: Operable - User interface components and navigation must be operable.

Principle 3: Understandable - Information and the operation of user interface must be understandable.

Principle 4: Robust - Content must be robust enough that it can be interpreted reliably by a wide variety of user agents, including assistive technologies.

To further understand the four principles, refer to the Web Accessibility Initiative's (WAI's) document "[How People with Disabilities Use the Web](#)," the [WebAIM](#) website, and the [WebAIM's WCAG 2.0 Checklist \(http://www.w3.org\)](#).

District Action Steps for Purchasing Accessible Learning Materials

1. Review your purchasing criteria & policies to ensure that accessibility standards are included.
2. Include accessibility criteria in contract language.
3. Ask publishers about accessibility. Ask if they have a [Voluntary Product Accessibility Template \(VPAT\) \(http://bit.ly/vpat1\)](#) on file. The VPAT is voluntary but provides baseline information on compliance with [Section 508 Functional Performance Criteria \(http://1.usa.gov/191mlfB\)](#). If they do not have a VPAT on file, ask if they have published other information on accessibility of their products.
4. Ask publishers about the Accessibility Questions listed below and ask them to show you how their products meet the criteria.

Accessibility Questions for Publishers

With reference to print textbooks and core-related printed materials:

1. Are accessible versions of your materials available for purchase?
2. Have NIMAS-compliant files been deposited in the NIMAC?
3. Are electronic files that can be converted into braille, large print, audio and digital text available through other sources? If so, what sources?

With reference to digital or online learning materials:

4. Are the materials offered in a device agnostic or platform neutral format? (e.g., different types of technology can be used to deliver the content)
5. Are the materials provided in an open environment that is compatible with assistive technology? (e.g., different types of assistive technology can be used including screen readers, screen magnification, refreshable braille, text-to-speech, and supported reading software)
6. Are the materials offered in a flexible format which allows for customization according to the users' needs and preferences? (e.g., text size and color; background color; screen reading rate)
7. Is the content represented in multiple ways? (e.g., captions for videos, alternative text for graphics, live text for audio, text image descriptions that can be voiced)
8. Are the materials designed with navigation alternatives? (e.g., functionality is available through keyboard shortcuts, screen gestures)
9. Are location supports designed into the materials to let users navigate, search, and determine progress? (e.g., page numbers, progress bars, headings, table of contents)
10. Are mathematical, scientific, and music symbols, formulas, and notations represented in multiple ways? (e.g., explained with text alternatives, MathML)
11. Is the timing or pace flexible or customizable when needed by the student? (e.g., software automatic log-out, extended time limits, frequent breaks)
12. If writing is required, is text entry supported by alternatives? (e.g., on-screen keyboards, voice-to-text)
13. Is content structured in a predictable, coherent, and logical way?

Adapted from the National Center on Accessible Instructional Materials, the [PALM Initiative](#), "What are Accessible Learning Materials?" This list is not meant to be an exhaustive listing of the WCAG Guidelines, but is intended to highlight basic indicators of accessibility.

Glossary:

Accessibility: The product is usable by the widest range of student variability (e.g., students with sensory, motor, cognitive and other disabilities).

Device agnostic: Content can be used with any device.

Gestures: Motions with your fingers on a touch screen are used to interact with and control the technology (e.g., drag, swipe, pinch smaller, pinch larger).

Keyboard shortcuts: All functionality with a mouse can be operated by the keyboard.

Live text: Text which can be acted upon.

Navigation: The product is developed with the ability to move around in the content such as by pages, chapters, headings, etc.

Open environment: The digital content is compatible with the use of assistive technology (AT). The digital rights management (DRM) does not place restrictions or lock out the use of AT or other technologies with the product.

Platform neutral: The digital content is usable with many technology platforms and is not proprietary.

Text-to-speech: Text is converted into speech using a wide range of voices available on computers and other devices.

Usability: Usability is closely linked to accessibility and ease of use for all students.

Voice-to-text: Voice is used to dictate text.

For more information about accessibility:

[Bookshare & Accessible Books for Texas](http://www.accessiblebooks4tx.org) (<http://www.accessiblebooks4tx.org>)

Accessible Books for Texas is a project funded by the Texas Education Agency that provides on-the-ground training and support to Texas public K-12 educators, parents, and students on accessible educational materials. Bookshare is free for all U.S. students with qualifying print disabilities as a result of funding from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP).

[Center on Online Learning and Students with Disabilities](http://centerononlinelearning.org) (<http://centerononlinelearning.org>)

The Center is researching how online learning can be made more accessible, engaging, and effective for K-12 learners with disabilities.

[Equal Access to Learning](http://aim.cast.org/learn/policy/federal/ocr) (OCR & DOJ) (<http://aim.cast.org/learn/policy/federal/ocr>)

Visit the Equal Access to Learning webpage on the AIM Center's site to learn about and access U.S. Department of Justice and U.S. Department of Education Joint Dear Colleague Letters on Electronic Digital Readers. The letters are instructive to public school districts for the purchase of digital readers.

[Instructional Materials Allotment \(IMA\)](http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=2147501653) (<http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=2147501653>)

Search the Texas Education Agency's website on IMA to review resources and the latest information.

[Instructional Materials and Educational Technology \(IMET\)](http://www.tea.state.tx.us/IMET) (<http://www.tea.state.tx.us/IMET>)

IMET is a division of the Texas Education Agency that provides guidance, information and resources related to instructional materials in various media and educational technology.

[Learning Ally, Texas Support Site](https://www.learningally.org/state-landing-pages/texas) (<https://www.learningally.org/state-landing-pages/texas>)

Learning Ally has digitally recorded textbooks and literature titles available to individuals with print disabilities that can be delivered through internet downloads and accessed using various mainstream and assistive technology devices. Through a contract with TEA, Learning Ally offers free memberships to Texas K-12 public and charter schools with qualifying students. The Texas Support Site provides information about membership, the audiobook library, training and support, playback devices, and Texas contact information.

[National Center on Accessible Instructional Materials](http://aim.cast.org) (AIM Center) (<http://aim.cast.org>)

The AIM Center serves as a resource for stakeholders, including state- and district-level educators, parents, publishers, conversion houses, accessible media producers, and others interested in learning more about and implementing AIM.

[PALM Initiative](http://aim.cast.org/learn/practice/palm) (<http://aim.cast.org/learn/practice/palm>)

The PALM Initiative (Purchase Accessible Learning Materials), developed by the AIM Center, is focused on encouraging purchasers to buy, and publishers and developers to create, accessible learning materials.

[Section 508](http://section508.gov) (<http://section508.gov>)

This robust website provides extensive resources for understanding and implementing Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act.

[Texas Assistive Technology Network \(TATN\)](http://www.texasat.net) (<http://www.texasat.net>)

Our website contains updated information on accessible instructional materials, flowcharts and other resources to help guide you.

[WebAIM](http://webaim.org) (<http://webaim.org>)

WebAIM is working to expand the web's potential for people with disabilities. Locate resources, training opportunities, web accessibility testing and more.