

# EIU Thesis Accessibility Resources — Checklist Handout

*Keep this handy while you write.*

## What "WCAG 2.1 AA" Actually Means

You'll see this term everywhere in this handout, so here's the one-paragraph version: **WCAG (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines) 2.1 Level AA** is the technical standard the ADA's Title II rule requires public universities to meet for digital content, including documents like your thesis. In plain terms, it means your document must be usable by someone who **can't see it** (screen reader users — needs real structure, alt text, correct reading order), **can't hear it** (captions/transcripts for audio and video), **can't use a mouse** (keyboard-navigable structure), and **has trouble perceiving color or fine visual detail** (sufficient contrast, not color-only meaning). Everything in this handout is really just the practical, tool-by-tool version of those four ideas.

## Before You Submit — Quick Checklist

- ☐ Headings built with Word Styles (Heading 1, 2, 3...), not manual bold/font size
- ☐ Alt text on every image, chart, and screenshot (decorative images marked as decorative)
- ☐ Alt text describes actual content/meaning — not a filename, not just "chart" or "image" (spot-check a sample by reading it aloud without looking at the image)
- ☐ Color contrast checked with real values: **4.5:1 minimum** for normal text, **3:1 minimum** for large text (18pt+/14pt bold) and for meaningful chart/graph elements — verified with [WebAIM Contrast Checker](#), not by eye
- ☐ Tables built with Word's table tool, header rows/columns marked, captions included — never a screenshot of a table
- ☐ Descriptive hyperlink text (never "click here")
- ☐ Color is never the only way information is conveyed
- ☐ Text is not underlined unless it's a link
- ☐ Video that conveys meaningful visual-only information (e.g., a software walkthrough, an on-screen data animation) has audio description, not just captions
- ☐ Word Accessibility Checker run and cleared before exporting to PDF
- ☐ PDF exported with "**Document structure tags for accessibility**" checked (not print-to-PDF)
- ☐ Document title and language set in Acrobat's Document Properties
- ☐ Acrobat Full Check run; Reading Order verified for multi-column/figure pages
- ☐ All PDF text is selectable/searchable — no scanned image pages (OCR any that are)
- ☐ Video linked from Kaltura is captioned; audio has a transcript
- ☐ Multimedia uploaded to The Keep as a **separate supplementary file**, not embedded in the thesis PDF
- ☐ Equations built with Word's Equation Editor (not pasted as images); any equation images have full alt text
- ☐ Heading hierarchy checked manually — no skipped levels (H1 → H3), no heading used purely for visual size
- ☐ PDF bookmark panel mirrors the actual chapter/section structure, not just top-level chapters
- ☐ Document title set in Acrobat's Document Properties is distinct from — but matches — the styled title on the cover page
- ☐ Front matter (title page, committee/signature page, abstract, table of contents, copyright page) checked separately — these are often built differently than body chapters and commonly break accessibility

- ☐ Footnotes/endnotes inserted with Word's built-in footnote tool (not manually typed superscript + bottom-of-page text)
- ☐ Non-English quoted passages tagged with their own language, not just the document-level language setting
- ☐ Final pass run through [PAC 2024](#) for PDF/UA-level structure verification before submitting to The Keep

*This checklist covers every document-level requirement a student authoring a thesis can control. Completing it maximizes your document's WCAG 2.1 AA conformance, but no static checklist can certify "100% compliant" on its own — a small number of WCAG success criteria require case-by-case judgment on unusual content. Treat this as the complete author-side checklist, not a substitute for an accessibility audit.*

## Verification — What Automated Checkers Miss

Passing Word's Accessibility Checker and Acrobat's Full Check is a strong start, but **it is not the same as WCAG 2.1 AA compliance**. Both tools mainly catch structural/programmatic issues (missing alt text, missing headings, untagged tables) — they don't verify quality, and neither checks color contrast. To actually verify compliance, add these manual and tool-based checks:

| Gap                                           | What Automated Checkers Miss                                                                                       | How to Actually Verify                                                                                                                                        |
|-----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Color contrast (WCAG 1.4.3, 1.4.11)</b>    | Neither Word's checker nor Acrobat's Full Check measures contrast ratios at all                                    | Check real hex values with WebAIM Contrast Checker. Minimums: 4.5:1 normal text, 3:1 large text (18pt+/14pt bold) and meaningful chart/graph parts            |
| <b>Alt text quality (1.1.1)</b>               | Confirms alt text exists, not that it's accurate or useful — “chart1.png” or “image” passes                        | Manual read-through: does the alt text convey the same information a sighted reader gets? For a chart, does it state the trend/finding, not just “bar chart”? |
| <b>Heading hierarchy logic (1.3.1, 2.4.6)</b> | Flags missing headings, not skipped levels (H1 → H3) or headings used only for visual size                         | Manual pass through the Styles pane / PDF bookmarks panel: does the outline make logical sense on its own?                                                    |
| <b>Language of parts (3.1.2)</b>              | Only checks that a document-level language is set                                                                  | If quoting non-English sources, tag those specific spans with their own language in Word/Acrobat, not just the whole document                                 |
| <b>Images of text (1.4.5)</b>                 | Catches fully-scanned image pages, but not a table or figure that is itself a picture of text (partial-page image) | Try to select/copy the text inside a table or figure — if you can't, it's an image of text and needs to be rebuilt as real text or given full alt text        |
| <b>PDF/UA-level structure tagging</b>         | Word/Acrobat checkers test a subset of WCAG; they don't test full ISO 14289 (PDF/UA) tag structure                 | Run the file through PAC 2024 (PDF Accessibility Checker) — free, and closer to what an institutional/legal audit would use                                   |
| <b>The Keep item page itself</b>              | N/A — this is outside the PDF entirely                                                                             | Title II covers the full digital experience, not just the file. The Keep's page template (title,                                                              |

| Gap | What Automated Checkers Miss | How to Actually Verify                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|-----|------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|     |                              | abstract, download link text) is Booth Library's responsibility, not yours — but know that your PDF's internal title (set in Acrobat's Document Properties) is what populates that page, so get it right |

**Practical order of operations:** Word Accessibility Checker (while writing) → Acrobat Full Check (after export) → manual contrast + alt-text + heading review → PAC 2024 as a final pass before submitting to The Keep.

## EIU-Specific Resources by Topic

### Digital Accessibility Guidance (Faculty Development & Innovation Center — FDIC)

| Resource                                                                            | Link                                                                                                                                                             |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Digital Accessibility Compliance overview (WCAG 2.1 AA, ADA Title II)               | <a href="http://eiu.edu/fdic/wcag_ada.php">eiu.edu/fdic/wcag_ada.php</a>                                                                                         |
| Accessibility Resources for Digital Materials (Word, PPT, Excel, PDF, HTML how-tos) | <a href="http://eiu.edu/fdic/accessibility.php">eiu.edu/fdic/accessibility.php</a>                                                                               |
| Digital Accessibility Toolkit                                                       | <a href="http://eiu.edu/fdic/Digital%20Accessibility_Toolkit.php">eiu.edu/fdic/Digital%20Accessibility_Toolkit.php</a>                                           |
| Document Remediation Request (get an inaccessible file fixed)                       | <a href="http://eiu.edu/fdic/remediation_request.php">eiu.edu/fdic/remediation_request.php</a>                                                                   |
| Course/Document Review Request                                                      | <a href="http://eiu.edu/fdic/course_review_request.php">eiu.edu/fdic/course_review_request.php</a>                                                               |
| Accessibility Statements for Instructional Technologies @ EIU                       | <a href="http://eiu.edu/fdic/it_accessibility.php">eiu.edu/fdic/it_accessibility.php</a>                                                                         |
| FDIC Learning Material Accessibility Checklist (PDF)                                | <a href="http://eiu.edu/fdic/Digital_Accessibility_Checklist_for_Faculty_SEPT2024.pdf">eiu.edu/fdic/Digital_Accessibility_Checklist_for_Faculty_SEPT2024.pdf</a> |
| Scanning Documents to PDF with OCR (guidance doc)                                   | <a href="http://eiu.edu/fdic/HowToScanPDFWithOCR-3.pdf">eiu.edu/fdic/HowToScanPDFWithOCR-3.pdf</a>                                                               |
| FDIC contact (general questions, consultations)                                     | <a href="mailto:fdic@eiu.edu">fdic@eiu.edu</a>   217-581-7051                                                                                                    |
| ISTS Team (accessibility-specific training/help)                                    | <a href="mailto:fdic_help@eiu.edu">fdic_help@eiu.edu</a>                                                                                                         |

### Tool-Specific EIU Pages

| Tool             | Link                                                     |
|------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| Office 365 @ EIU | <a href="http://eiu.edu/office365">eiu.edu/office365</a> |

| Tool                                                                     | Link                                                                                                                                      |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Adobe Creative Cloud @ EIU                                               | <a href="http://eiu.edu/fdic/adobecc.php">eiu.edu/fdic/adobecc.php</a>                                                                    |
| Kaltura @ EIU                                                            | <a href="http://eiu.edu/kalturasolutions">eiu.edu/kalturasolutions</a>                                                                    |
| How to Request & Edit Captions in Kaltura                                | <a href="http://eiu.edu/kalturasolutions/caption.php">eiu.edu/kalturasolutions/caption.php</a>                                            |
| Zoom @ EIU                                                               | <a href="http://eiu.edu/zoom">eiu.edu/zoom</a>                                                                                            |
| Zoom: Enable Automatic Audio Transcription/Captions (cloud recordings)   | <a href="https://support.zoom.us/enabling-audio-transcription">support.zoom.us — Enabling audio transcription</a>                         |
| Zoom: View or Edit Audio Transcription                                   | <a href="https://support.zoom.us/audio-transcription-for-cloud-recordings">support.zoom.us — Audio transcription for cloud recordings</a> |
| Turnitin @ EIU (used for the required originality review before defense) | <a href="http://eiu.edu/turnitin">eiu.edu/turnitin</a>                                                                                    |

### Alternate-Format & Remediation Support

| Resource                                                                                                                       | Link                                                                                                                                                   |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| SensusAccess (auto-converts documents to audio, e-book, Braille, large print; can remediate image-only PDFs, JPGs, PPT, LaTeX) | <a href="http://eiu.edu/accommodations/sensusaccess.php">eiu.edu/accommodations/sensusaccess.php</a>                                                   |
| Office of Accessibility & Accommodations (OAA)                                                                                 | <a href="http://eiu.edu/accommodations">eiu.edu/accommodations</a>   <a href="mailto:accommodations@eiu.edu">accommodations@eiu.edu</a>   217-581-6583 |
| PAC 2024 (PDF Accessibility Checker — free tool for a final PDF/UA-level compliance check)                                     | <a href="http://pac.pdf-accessibility.org">pac.pdf-accessibility.org</a>                                                                               |

### Thesis Submission (Graduate School & The Keep / Booth Library)

| Resource                                                                                                          | Link                                                                                                       |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Graduate School — Manual for the Master's and Specialist's Thesis (format rules: fonts, margins, spacing)         | <a href="http://eiu.edu/graduate">eiu.edu/graduate</a> — <a href="#">Thesis Manual PDF</a>                 |
| The Keep — Institutional Repository (where the final thesis is deposited)                                         | <a href="http://thekeep.eiu.edu">thekeep.eiu.edu</a>                                                       |
| The Keep — Submission Guidelines                                                                                  | <a href="http://thekeep.eiu.edu/submission_guidelines.html">thekeep.eiu.edu/submission_guidelines.html</a> |
| The Keep — Deposit Your Thesis / Submit Your Research portal                                                      | <a href="http://thekeep.eiu.edu/submit_research.html">thekeep.eiu.edu/submit_research.html</a>             |
| The Keep — Submission Guidelines for Master's Theses (upload as Word or PDF; supplementary files for audio/video) | <a href="http://thekeep.eiu.edu/theses/guidelines.html">thekeep.eiu.edu/theses/guidelines.html</a>         |
| The Keep contact (questions on deposit, fees, embargo)                                                            | <a href="mailto:thekeep@eiu.edu">thekeep@eiu.edu</a>                                                       |

## External Reference Guides (linked from FDIC's page — good for deeper how-tos)

- WebAIM — Word, PDF, Table, Heading, and Image accessibility techniques: [webaim.org](https://webaim.org)
  - Microsoft — [Improve Accessibility with the Accessibility Checker](#) / [Create Accessible PDFs in Word](#)
  - Adobe — [Create and Verify PDF Accessibility \(Acrobat Pro\)](#)
  - CITL, University of Illinois — Word/Excel/PDF Accessibility Best Practice cheat sheets: [citl.illinois.edu](https://citl.illinois.edu)
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*Questions on accessibility tools or remediation:* **FDIC** — [fdic@eiu.edu](mailto:fdic@eiu.edu) / 217-581-7051

*Questions on thesis formatting, fees, or deposit:* **The Keep / Booth Library** — [thekeep@eiu.edu](mailto:thekeep@eiu.edu)

*Questions on accommodations for your own disability:* **Office of Accessibility & Accommodations** — [accommodations@eiu.edu](mailto:accommodations@eiu.edu) / 217-581-6583