Blackboard Help

Instructor FAQs for Ally

General

What languages are supported in Blackboard Ally?

Blackboard Ally is available in many different languages. Availability includes the Ally interface, as well as the alternative formats, including the audio format.

The audio alternative format is made available in a voice that reflects the language of the source document. It uses the most appropriate accent based on the location of the Ally deployment. For example, a user in North America would receive a North American English accent, a user in Europe would receive a British English accent and a user in Australia would receive an Australian English accent for an English document.

Blackboard Ally is available in these languages.

- Catalan
- Danish
- Dutch
- English, US
- English, UK
- Finnish
- French
- French, Canadian
- German
- Italian
- Norwegian Bokmål
- Norwegian Nynorsk
- Polish
- Portuguese
- Portuguese, Brazilian
- Spanish
- Swedish
- Turkish
- Welsh

What Learning Management Systems is Ally available for?

Ally is currently available for these Learning Management Systems:

- Blackboard Learn 9.1 (Q2 2017 CU3 release and above)

- Blackboard Learn SaaS Original and Ultra Course View
- Blackboard Open LMS
- Instructure Canvas
- Self-hosted Moodle (version 3.2 and above)

What browsers are supported?

Ally is supported on the same browser as the Learning Management System (LMS) it is accessed from.

- Google Chrome™
- Mozilla Firefox®
- Microsoft Edge®
- Internet Explorer®
- Safari®

What happens when a course is copied? Does Ally go with the course copy?

Yes. When you copy a course, all alternative formats and instructor feedback will also be available in the new course.

⚑   *There can be a delay before everything is moved over to the new course.*

When you archive a course, only references to file accessibility are available. Ally is a cloud service and will store the alternative formats on the Ally servers, which means that these are not pushed back to the LMS. The alternative formats will not be stored inside of the course archive, but the reference from the course archive will continue to be available.

What are some examples of how accessibility can benefit all students?

In many cases, improving the accessibility of course content benefits all students, including those without a disability. Accessibility is often closely connected to the quality and usability of the course materials.

Example 1: Having a proper digital copy of a document instead of a scan makes the document more usable for all students. It might make the document easier to read, especially for low-quality scans, and it also allows students to search through the document and find specific content, copy and paste sections of the document, and so on.

Example 2: The Semantic HTML alternative format is fully responsive and mobile-friendly and makes it easier for all students to consume to content on their mobile device. The ePub alternative format makes it easy to change the visual display of a document and allows for annotations and highlighting to be added. The audio alternative format can be used during a commute, on a run, etc. The translated version alternative format can help second language students.

Example 3: Having a video with captioning or a transcript will make the video more usable for all students. It allows the student to search through the video and find specific parts, the video can still be watched in high-noise environment (for example, commuting), and so on.

Example 4: Having an image with a quality description can make the image more usable for all students. It can help clarify the content of the image and how it connects to the surrounding context, it makes the image searchable, and so on.

Example 5: Providing a good heading structure for a long document makes the document more usable for all students. It provides additional structure, which makes it easier to work through and process the content. It also allows for a Table of Contents to be generated, which can improve the navigability of the document.

Will Ally change my course appearance?

The only difference you'll see within your course is that Ally provides an accessibility score for your files. The score is shown by a gauge icon next to your course files. Select the gauge to view and improve your file accessibility.

What do students see?

Students see a menu to the left or right of each document. From this menu, they can select Alternative formats to access available versions they can download. Although they can download alternative formats of your files, it is best to improve the documents through the instructor feedback.

⊖ More on Ally for student

What happens to my original files?

The original file stays in your LMS. Ally doesn't store a copy of the original, move the original, or delete it.

Accessibility checklist   👍   👎

What content does Ally check?

Currently, Ally checks files in these formats:

- PDF files
- Microsoft® Word files
- Microsoft® PowerPoint® files
- OpenOffice/LibreOffice files
- Uploaded HTML files
- Image files (JPG, JPEG, GIF, PNG, BPM, TIFF)
- YouTube™ Videos
- WYSIWYG/VTBE content

> 🚩 *The results for WYSIWYG content only appear in the Institutional Report and Course accessibility report.*

What accessibility issues does Ally check for?

Ally's accessibility checklist is based on WCAG 2.1 AA (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines). This is an international accessibility standard, and most of the legislation and legal requirements worldwide aligns with this standard.

Additionally, Ally also adds a number of additional checks on top of this that start to target the usability and quality of the course materials a bit more.

What does Ally do with content it can't check?

Ally includes content it can't check for accessibility issues, such as ZIP archive and XML file, under "Other" in the institutional report. This content does not receive an accessibility score, does not contribute to the institution's accessibility score and does not have an indicator or option to download alternative formats in the User Interface.

⊖ More on the institution report for admins

What is a contrast check?

Contrast checks verify whether there is sufficient contrast between the text color and its background color. Text with poor contrast can be difficult to read for everyone, but especially for students with visual impairments such as color blindness.

Ally uses the contrast requirements specified as part of the WCAG 2.1 AA guidelines.

💡 *Use the Colour Contrast Analyser from The Paciello Group any time to check your content.*

Alternative formats   👍 👎

What alternative formats does Ally generate?

Ally provides alternative formats for these file types:

- PDF files
- Microsoft® Word files
- Microsoft® Powerpoint® files
- OpenOffice/LibreOffice files
- Uploaded HTML files

These alternative formats can be generated:

- OCR'd version (for scanned documents)
- Tagged PDF (currently for Word, Powerpoint and OpenOffice/LibreOffice files)
- Mobile-friendly HTML
- Audio
- ePub
- Electronic Braille
- Translated Version

⚑ *Translated Version is disabled by default. Administrators can submit a support case to have it enabled. To learn more, see Translated Version alternative format.*

⊖ More on alternative formats

Are alternate formats generated when a request to download is made?

When a particular alternative format for a particular content item is requested for the first time, Ally generates this on demand. In most cases, this completes within 1-2 minutes.

As soon as it has been generated, the alternative format is downloaded. Ally then also caches the result, so any additional requests for the same alternative format can be served and downloaded from cache immediately.

Does Ally generate alternative formats for student content?

Ally currently only processes instructional content. For example, content added by someone with edit permissions in the course, such as the instructor or instructional designer. Ally currently does not process student content or student submissions.

What format is the OCR'd alternative format?

The OCR'd version is made available as a tagged PDF.

What format is the Audio alternative format?

The audio alternative format is made available as a downloadable MP3 file. We also add some of the extracted semantic information into the speech, which adds additional structure to the audio and makes it easier to follow.

Which Braille code does Ally use for the Electronic Braille Format?

Ally uses Braille Ready File (.brf) as the electronic Braille format. The braille code used depends on the language the document is in. For English documents, Ally uses Grade 2 Unified English Braille (contracted).

⊖ More on Unified English Braille on the UKAAF website

Can the Ally Electronic Braille Format be printed using a Braille printer?

The Braille Ready File (.brf) format can be used for both electronic braille displays and braille embossers (printers).

⚑   *You still need to check whether a specific Braille embosser/printer supports the .brf format.*

⊖ More on BRF on the Accessible Instructional Materials website

Why do I see "The alternative formats for this file have been disabled"?

Instructor and administrators can turn off alternative formats for an individual content item within a course. For example, on a file uploaded to the course.

What does the instructor need to do to generate alternative formats for a content item?

Nothing. Ally automatically picks up on any existing or new materials, runs it through the accessibility checklist, and makes the alternative formats available to both the student and the instructor.

Is there a file size limit?

No, there is no file size limit. There may be cases where the algorithm fails to generate alternative formats for certain large files, but Ally doesn't enforce a maximum file size.

How does Ally handle password protected content?

Ally detects password-protected content, gives them a 0% accessibility score and provides guidance to help remove the password through the instructor feedback. Ally does not generate any alternative formats for password protected content, as we can't get access to the actual content.

Can I disable alternative formats?

Yes. You can turn off alternative formats for individual content items, if you want. If you change your mind, you can enable it again later.

Translated Version alternative format

This alternative format provides a machine-translated version of the instructor's original into a total of 50 different languages and supports PDF, Word, Powerpoint and HTML documents.

In what languages is the Translated Version alternative format available?

The Translated Version is currently available in the following languages:

- Afrikaans
- Arabic
- Bosnian - Cyrillic
- Bosnian - Latin
- Bulgarian
- Catalan
- Chinese - Simplified
- Chinese - Traditional
- Croatian
- Czech
- Danish
- Dutch
- English
- Estonian
- Finnish
- French
- German
- Greek, Modern
- Haitian
- Hebrew

- Hindi
- Hungarian
- Indonesian
- Italian
- Japanese
- Korean
- Latvian
- Lithuanian
- Malay
- Maltese
- Norwegian Bokmål
- Persian (Farsi)
- Polish
- Portuguese
- Romanian
- Russian
- Serbian - Cyrillic
- Serbian - Latin
- Slovak
- Slovenian

- Spanish
- Swahili
- Swedish
- Thai
- Turkish
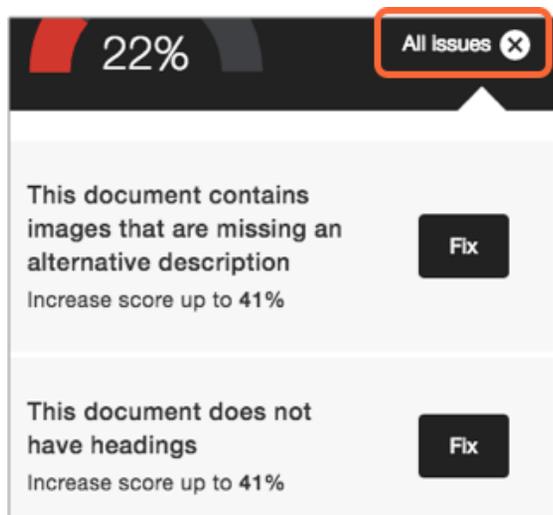- Ukrainian
- Urdu
- Vietnamese
- Welsh

Instructor feedback

How do I see all issues?

Select *All issues* to see every issue in the file. This view shows you by how much the score can improve by fixing each issue. Find the issue you want to start fixing and select *Fix*.

What threshold is used for the color of the accessibility indicator?

We provide every document with an accessibility score, which is a percentage score that is supposed to reflect how accessible an item is, how many students it can affect, how severely it affects them, etc. To calculate the accessibility score for a document, we take a weighted average of the different accessibility rules/checks, as some rules are more important/impactful than others.

Within the User Interface, we use thresholds for determining the color of the indicator.

Accessibility is very much a spectrum where further improvements are always possible, so it's hard to provide a point at which the item becomes "accessible". However, as a rule of thumb, once an item is in the green zone it should be doing reasonably well.

What content types are in-browser previews available for?

In-browser previews are currently available for these files:

- Images
- PDF Documents
- Word Documents
- PowerPoint presentations
- OpenOffice/LibreOffice files (Writer and Impress)

These previews are then used to identify where in the document specific accessibility issues can be found. Highlights are currently provided for these issues:

- Images without an appropriate alternative description
- Text fragments with insufficient contrast
- Tables without table headings

The instructor feedback for other accessibility issues will just show the content preview without highlights.

⊖ More on previews

YouTube videos

What does Ally do with YouTube videos?

Ally checks YouTube videos for captions and presents this information in the institutional reports. Auto-generated YouTube captions are not considered to be valid captions and are not included.

Ally checks for both embedded YouTube videos and links to YouTube videos.

Within the Institutional Report, the "*HTML: The HTML content contains videos without captions*" column highlights the number of HTML content and files that have YouTubeTM videos without captions. In the export of the Institutional Report, the column name is *HtmlCaption:3*.

There isn't any instructor feedback or alternative formats available at this time for videos.