HUMBOLDT STATE UNIVERSITY

HSU Document Converter
Frequently Asked Questions – FAQ's

What is the HSU Document Converter?

The HSU Document Converter is a web-based service that will convert documents into a range of accessible formats. The service can be used to convert inaccessible documents such as image-only PDF files and JPG pictures into accessible (text-based) formats. The quality of the conversion is dependent upon the quality of the original document.

The HSU Document Converter is being provided as a do-it-yourself solution for faculty and staff who prefer to independently prepare or convert their instructional or departmental materials in an accessible manner. If you are a faculty member and have inaccessible (image-based files) that need converting and are not interested in a do-it-yourself approach, the ONCORES[1] office in the Library is available to assist faculty in converting paper-based handouts and supplemental readings into an electronic and accessible format.

Students who need image-based (inaccessible) documents converted quickly may also use the HSU Document Converter. It is intended to complement, not replace, the alternate media services that are provided by the Student Disability Resource Center (SDRC). If you are (1) a student registered with the SDRC, (2) eligible to receive e-text services, and (3) having difficulty effectively reading a document after using the HSU Document Converter, please contact the Student Disability Resource Center for assistance.

Why do I need to create accessible documents?

The California State University goal, as stated in The Accessible Technology Initiative (ATI) Coded Memo AA-2013-03[2], is to move away from the medical model (accommodation after the fact) and move toward a social justice model (accessibility from the beginning). This means that all documents created, posted (uploaded), and distributed must be accessible and usable for everyone, including individuals with print disabilities, at the time of distribution. Not only is it the right thing to do (social justice model), but because of the laws that are in place, individuals with print disabilities have an expectation that all documents (whether posted to Moodle, uploaded to a departmental or instruction-related website, or required for a classroom assignment) will be accessible at the time the document is posted, uploaded, or required. Individuals who have print disabilities are not required to identify themselves as having a print disability because the expectation is that all documents will be accessible from the beginning. It is no longer acceptable to accommodate the individual by correcting document accessibility issues after the fact.

Why is a scanned PDF file not accessible or acceptable?

Image-only files are not accessible because they are not text-based files and screen reading or text-to-speech software cannot read the contents of the file. It appears as though text is on the screen when viewing the scanned (image-only) PDF file. However, it is simply a picture of text, and the computer cannot translate the image into text. For the text-to-speech software to read the text, the documents need to be accessible (text-based) PDF files.

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[1] ONCORES: http://library.humboldt.edu/search/reserves/index.html
[2] The Accessible Technology Initiative (ATI) Coded Memo AA-2013-03: http://www.calstate.edu/AcadAff/codedmemos/AA-2013-03.html

How do I know if a document is accessible (text-based)?

At the most basic level, a document will be minimally usable by text-to-speech software if: (1) it is text-based (not an image), (2) the underlying text of the document is 100 percent accurate, and (3) the underlying text is read in a logical reading order. If the text of a PDF document can be highlighted, copied, and pasted into a Word document, the text is 100 percent accurate and in the correct order (i.e., columns are read top to bottom, left column first then right column), then you have the basics of a text-based document.

While a document that is text-based at the most basic level is important, there are additional steps one needs to take to make the document accessible and as usable as possible. These additional steps will improve the accessibility and navigability of the document making the document more efficient to use for the individual with the disability. For example, adding document headings can provide an organizational and navigational framework for a document's content, and adding alternate text descriptions for images will communicate the purpose and/or content of the image.

Several resources are available that can assist you in improving the accessibility and usability of your text-based documents including:

- Standards and Techniques Guide for Creating Accessible Word Documents[3]
- SensusAccess: Accessible Microsoft Word Documents[4]

Why is it my responsibility to ensure my instructional or departmental materials are accessible? Isn't this something the Student Disability Resource Center handles?

The responsibility of providing and/or converting an individual's standard print materials into an accessible electronic format is a shared responsibility between the Student Disability Resource Center (SDRC) and the document authors across campus (i.e., faculty, staff, and administrators).

The SDRC is responsible for providing accommodations to students with disabilities which includes converting the following materials into an accessible electronic format:

- Textbooks (required or recommended) identified to the HSU Bookstore by the faculty member
- Documents or books students encounter while conducting research (database articles, ILL articles, library books, etc.)

Faculty, staff, and administrators (the content experts for their documents) are responsible for the accessibility of the materials they create, post, or require including:

- Documents created and authored (e.g., syllabus, exams, departmental policies, departmental forms, etc.)
- Documents posted to instruction-related or departmental websites
- Documents uploaded to Moodle
- Paper-based documents (handouts, articles, fliers, etc.) distributed in class or from a departmental office

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[3] Standards and Techniques Guide for Creating Accessible Microsoft Word Documents:
http://teachingcommons.cdl.edu/access/docs_multi/wordf2f.shtml
[4] SensusAccess: Accessible Microsoft Word Documents: http://www.sensusaccess.com/resources/guides-and-best-practices

How do I scan for best results with the HSU Document Converter?

The HSU Document Converter uses optical character recognition (OCR) to convert scanned images into a text-based version of the document. The quality of the conversion is dependent upon the quality of the original document as well as upon the quality of the scan itself. Following are some tips to get the best scanned image possible:

- Ensure the pages you are scanning do not contain highlighted text, underlining, writing in the margins, smudges, dark marks, or other objects on the page. These will affect the accuracy of the OCR process.
- Minimize the effects from skewing. If the image is presented at an "off-angle", the accuracy of the OCR process will be lower resulting in a lower quality text conversion.
- If scanning from a book, scan each page separately rather than scanning facing pages from a book or dual pages. Also, ensure the pages are oriented correctly when you scan them.
- Scan using either 300 dpi or 400 dpi. Low image resolutions (below 150 dpi) may have a negative impact on OCR quality while excessively high image resolutions (over 600 dpi) do not yield any significant improvements in OCR quality and take a long time to process.

Who do I contact if I have a problem with the HSU Document Converter?

If you have a questions about or problems with the HSU Document Converter, please contact the Student Disability Resource Center[5]. Humboldt State University is very interested in your feedback regarding how this service works for you.

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[5] Student Disability Resource Center email: sdrc@humboldt.edu