

# **Universal Accessibility and Neuroinclusion Guide for Educational Content**

**CAF** DEVELOPMENT BANK  
OF LATIN AMERICA  
AND THE CARIBBEAN



## **Universal Accessibility and Neuroinclusion Guide for Educational Content**

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## Prologue

Welcome to the *Universal Accessibility and Neuroinclusion Guide for Educational Content*. This pioneering initiative from CAF — Development Bank of Latin America and the Caribbean — reflects our unwavering commitment to inclusion and diversity. More than just a guide, this document serves as a testament to our dedication to fostering an educational environment where everyone can thrive and contribute to our region's development, regardless of their neurological differences.

At CAF, we strongly believe in inclusion as a cornerstone of our development agenda. We recognize that diversity in all its forms enriches our societies and strengthens our economies. This is why we actively promote the creation of educational content that is accessible to all, ensuring that no one is excluded due to their unique brain function or neurological profile. This commitment drives us to adopt and champion practices that not only respect neurological differences but also genuinely value and celebrate each individual's uniqueness as an essential part of human diversity.

By implementing the recommendations in this guide, we empower educators and content designers to create truly inclusive and effective learning experiences. In doing so, we are not just fulfilling an ethical imperative; we are also unlocking new avenues for innovation and creativity. These enhanced experiences not only

improve the lives of neurodivergent individuals but also enrich the entire educational community.

We invite you to use this guide to transform educational and communication spaces. With every step we take toward accessibility and neuroinclusion, we are not only improving education for people with neurodivergences but for everyone. This strengthens the very fabric of our education system with the diverse thoughts and perspectives each person brings.

Let us move forward together on this journey toward an inclusive and compassionate future, where every person is valued and every voice is heard. At CAF, we believe that inclusion is the key to realizing the true potential of Latin America and the Caribbean.

**Nathalie Gerbasi**

Director of Institutional Development and Training, CAF

## Purpose of the Guide

This guide aims to provide insights into universal accessibility and neuroinclusion for the development of educational content offered by **CAF**. It suggests general accessibility measures, supports, and formats, addressing common challenges faced by various groups of people with disabilities or neurodivergences.

While serving as valuable support for creating educational content, it is recommended that each individual be consulted to determine and validate the specific, reasonable adjustments needed to navigate the educational platform. This guide should not be interpreted as a mandatory requirement for training courses organized by **CAF**.

This document compiles best practices and reflects the current advances in these fields. However, local regulations regarding accessibility in each country always take precedence over the recommendations outlined in this report.

## Content Summary

As you proceed through this guide, you will encounter the following:

1. A Description of the concepts of disability and neurodivergence, aligning with the current social paradigm.
2. A theoretical and regulatory framework, where the notions of accessibility, universal design and the principles of universal design for learning are introduced, along with key accessibility guidelines for both digital and educational content.
3. A series of best practices for designing course materials and content, which includes guidance on information presentation, the effective use of text and images, and audiovisual content.

All the information above is offered as a suggestion, intended to help institutions consider how to include neurodivergent individuals and individuals with disabilities within their audience.

Note: The text in this guide is left-aligned. For accessibility reasons, justified text or hyphenated words are not recommended. Left margins with "ragged right" edges are suggested for smoother traditional reading and better interpretation by screen readers.

## What is Disability?

Disability, as understood today, is **a social construct** that has evolved over time.

The most current and widely accepted perspective, which we support, is the social model of **disability**. This model posits that disability is defined by the interaction between individuals and their social environment, as it is through this interaction that the relationships of inclusion and exclusion are established. According to the United Nations International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006)<sup>1</sup>:

"...disability is a concept that results from **the interaction between people with disabilities and attitudinal and environmental barriers** that prevent their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others."

Essentially, barriers refer to any obstacles that hinder people with disabilities from fully engaging in all aspects of daily life.

<sup>1</sup> This was the first international treaty of the 21st century and the first legally binding human rights treaty specifically for persons with disabilities. It was adopted at the United Nations Headquarters in 2006 and entered into force in 2008, following ratification by the twentieth State Party. Argentina, Bolivia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, and Paraguay ratified it between 2007 and 2008.

**At its heart, the social model is based on a number of core principles:**

- Disability is not an illness, and the challenge lies not with the individual, but with environmental barriers. This model specifically addresses physical, communication, and attitudinal barriers.
- Disability is viewed as an inherent part of human and social diversity.
- The model encompasses both civil and political rights, such as voting and freedom of expression, as well as economic, social, and cultural rights like health, education, etc.
- It seeks to guarantee equal opportunities for all.

It is important to draw a distinction between congenital disability (present from birth or hereditary) and acquired disability (resulting from an accident, illness or old age). Individuals with disabilities include those with **physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments**, and the specific type of disability will determine the environmental barriers they encounter.

## **What is Neurodiversity?**

The term "neurodiversity" was coined in 1998 by Judy Singer, an Australian activist and writer. This concept reflects the fundamental idea that neurological differences should be recognized and valued as an integral aspect of human diversity, rather than being viewed as disorders or disabilities. Neurodiversity emphasizes the natural variability in brain function, promoting understanding and acceptance of diverse ways of processing information and experiencing the world.

## **What is Neurodivergence?**

Neurodivergence describes the inherent variability in the functioning and structure of the human brain. It refers to conditions where individuals experience neurological patterns that deviate from what is considered "neurotypical" or the statistical average.

Neurodivergent individuals may exhibit a wide range of cognitive characteristics and abilities that differ from conventional norms. These distinctions can manifest in areas such as sensory processing, social communication, perception, attention, and general cognition.

Conditions commonly associated with the neurodivergence spectrum include autism spectrum disorder (ASD), dyslexia, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), sensory processing disorder, and Tourette syndrome, among others.

It is important to emphasize that neurodivergence should not be considered a pathological or inherently negative condition, but rather a legitimate expression of human diversity. Neurodivergent

individuals often possess unique skills and perspectives that can make valuable contributions to society and the workplace.

Understanding and accepting neurodiversity are critical to fostering inclusion and equity in all aspects of life, including education, employment, healthcare, and social interaction. Recognizing and respecting neurodivergent differences is essential for promoting inclusive and empathetic environments where all people can develop their potential and fully participate in society.

## **What Is Accessibility and Neuroinclusion?**

“Accessibility is no longer a minority issue but an issue that concerns everyone” (Fernández, 2020).

Accessibility means providing everyone, especially people with disabilities, the opportunity to fully engage in all aspects of daily life, offering them diverse options based on universal design principles.

Neuroinclusion, in turn, is an approach and practice aimed at ensuring that neurodivergent individuals are recognized, valued, and fully integrated into all aspects of society. This approach is based on the premise that neurological diversity is a natural and enriching characteristic of the human condition, and that all people, regardless of their neurological differences, deserve equal opportunities and access to the resources necessary to thrive.

Neuroinclusion is about building environments, policies, and practices that are accessible, respectful, and responsive to the needs and abilities of neurodivergent individuals. This can mean implementing reasonable adjustments in educational, work, social, and community settings to ensure everyone can fully participate and reach their potential. Beyond that, neuroinclusion requires a cultural shift and greater awareness of the diverse ways people experience the world and process information. It fosters empathy, respect, and a celebration of individual differences, acknowledging that neurological diversity enriches our understanding of the world and drives innovation and creativity.

In essence, neuroinclusion and accessibility represent an active and ongoing commitment to equality, equity, and justice for all, regardless of their differences. It is a call to action to create a more inclusive and compassionate society where every voice is heard and valued.

## Universal Design

The concept of universal design, developed by American architect Ron Mace, essentially means creating products and environments that are usable by everyone, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialization. This definition lays the groundwork for the seven principles that should be met to ensure universal use or consumption of a product or service.

When applied to graphic design and communication, the seven principles are the following:

- 1) Equitable use:** The focus lies on an inclusive approach to ensure that all individuals, regardless of their neurodivergent differences, have equal opportunities to access and understand the information presented. Universal design considers the diverse needs and abilities of the target audience and eliminates barriers that might exclude anyone from the experience.

- 2) Flexibility in use:** This refers to creating adaptable and customizable products, allowing users to interact with information based on their individual preferences and needs. This might include various display options, adjustable text sizes, and other features that enable users to tailor their experience.
- 3) Simple and intuitive use:** It prioritizes simplicity in information presentation and graphic art. It avoids unnecessary complexity and uses clear, direct language to ensure information is easily understood. This is crucial for enabling individuals with diverse cognitive processing styles to access and comprehend the content.
- 4) Perceptible information:** Information must be clear and accessible through multiple sensory channels. This involves using visual elements and, when necessary, auditory or tactile components to convey information effectively. For example, in graphic design, both text and images can be used to communicate a message, allowing individuals to access information according to their preferred learning styles and needs.
- 5) Tolerance for variation and error:** The design must allow for flexibility in interpreting and interacting with content. This means accommodating different learning styles, cognitive approaches, and levels of understanding. For instance, when presenting information, using a variety of examples or approaches can address the needs of a diverse audience, fostering a broader understanding of the message.
- 6) Minimal cognitive and physical effort:** Information must be presented in an organized and coherent manner, avoiding unnecessary distractions, and facilitating understanding. Furthermore, it requires considering the needs of individuals with varying physical and mental abilities when designing interactive elements.

- 7) Accessibility in Size and Space:** Design elements and information must be accessible to people of different sizes, abilities, and needs. This may include using legible fonts, sufficiently large buttons and interactive elements, and providing adequate space for interaction, all of which benefit individuals with diverse abilities and conditions.

Therefore, it can be seen that Universal Design is an essential tool for ensuring accessibility to all regardless of ability.

## Universal Design for Learning

To facilitate the design, planning, and implementation of educational content on CAF's platforms, it is beneficial to introduce the concept and principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), building upon the definitions mentioned earlier.

UDL was developed by the Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST)<sup>2</sup>, drawing from the principles of universal design.

This framework offers a set of guidelines that assist in creating an inclusive educational curriculum—encompassing learning methods, communication, and educational materials—accessible to all individuals, regardless of their abilities. Essentially, UDL shifts the focus of disability from the student to the curriculum itself (e.g., materials, study aids, etc.). Put differently, a curriculum becomes disabling to the extent that it restricts access for any student.

Consequently, if an individual cannot perceive the information presented on the platform, effective learning cannot occur. For this reason, UDL is grounded in three core principles designed to ensure accessibility throughout the teaching and learning process.

<sup>2</sup> The Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST) is an American non-profit research and development organization focused on advancing inclusion in education.

## **1) Provide multiple forms of representation**

- Customize the display: for example, consider background contrasts, font size, or typeface.
- Propose alternatives for audio information.
- Propose alternatives for visual information.
- Define vocabulary and graphic symbols.
- Clarify syntax and structure, that is, explain the relationship between elements.
- Decode text, such as with a pre-recorded human voice, and explain mathematical formulas and/or numbers.
- Illustrate important concepts non-linguistically (with images, graphs, conceptual charts).
- Highlight important ideas and features without being redundant.
- Guide information processing clearly.

## **2) Provide multiple forms of action and expression to deliver information**

- Offer different means of navigation.
- Integrate access to technologies and tools.
- Use multiple means of communication.
- Employ various problem-solving and composition tools.
- Guide effective goal setting.
- Facilitate information and resource management.
- Improve the ability to develop the monitoring and evaluation process.

### **3) Provide multiple avenues for engagement**

- Reduce distractions.
- Offer a variety of engaging dynamics.
- Increase individual choice and autonomy.
- Emphasize objectives and goals.
- Provide different levels of challenge and support.
- Encourage collaboration and communication.
- Provide feedback.
- Support individual problem-solving skills and strategies.
- Develop self-assessment and reflection.

In this context, it is necessary to discuss web accessibility guidelines. These provide direction for planning, designing, and incorporating, as basic principles, the way in which **content** is presented (text or Word documents, PDFs, images, forms, multimedia content, etc.), the **software to be used** (desktop browsers, voice browsers, mobile browsers, etc.), and **the tools to be applied** (code editors, document conversion tools, content management systems, etc.).

Likewise, it is necessary to comply with the four principles to guarantee accessibility guidelines.

## 1) **Perceivable**

- Provide text alternatives for non-text content.
- Provide subtitles and other alternatives for multimedia.
- Create content that can be presented in different ways, including through assistive technologies, without losing information.
- Make it easy for users to see and hear the content.

## 2) Operable

- Ensure all functionality is accessible via the keyboard.
- Give users sufficient time to read and interact with the content.
- Do not use content that could cause seizures or adverse physical reactions.
- Help users navigate and find content easily.
- Provide input methods other than the keyboard.

## 3) Understandable

- Provide legible and understandable text.
- Create content that is predictable in its appearance and operation.
- Help users avoid and correct errors.

## 4) Robust

- Maximize compatibility with current and future user tools.

The ATAG 2.0 guidelines were developed by the Authoring Tool Accessibility Guidelines Working Group (ATAG WG), a part of the Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) of the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C). These guidelines provide standards for the **development of content creation tools**, such as the *Learning Management Systems* (LMS).

The ATAG 2.0 guidelines are divided into two parts:

1. Making the tool's interface accessible.
2. Helping to create accessible content.

## **1) Technological Tools**

When purchasing an educational technological tool, the following should be considered:

- **Compliance with accessibility guidelines:** Check the tool's website to see if it complies with guidelines like WCAG and if it has an accessibility statement.

- **An LMS (Learning Management System) platform:** This allows students to interact through features such as chats, forums, and video conferences.
- **Accessible use:** The tool must be usable by people with disabilities.
- **Additional accessibility features (plugins):** Some tools offer plugins with specific functions for different situations, some of them designed to improve accessibility.
- **Accessibility of the product created by the tool:** Often the chosen tools are accessible but due to lack of awareness of certain built-in accessibility features the product generated does not satisfy special needs.

## 2) Creating Accessible Content

If the tool and the product it generates are accessible, but the documentation uploaded is not, then learning barriers will persist. Therefore, accessibility must be a primary consideration for documents and multimedia content.

## **Best Practices for Generating Accessible and Neuroinclusive Content**

The following is a list of best practices for creating content, taking into account all the guidelines mentioned above.

These examples are general recommendations that can improve user experience. However, it is important to remember that individual needs vary and it may be necessary to consult with the user and make reasonable adjustments based on their specific needs and the tools available.

These examples designed for LMS platforms aim to facilitate interaction between participants and instructors through chats, forums, video conferences, and other resources.

## Information Presentation

The way information is presented and how users can navigate it will influence the learning process for both people with disabilities and those with neurodivergences. Therefore, consider the following practices to facilitate navigation:

- Provide the option to navigate using the keyboard as an alternative to the mouse.
- Review the navigation order to ensure elements follow a logical path from top to bottom and left to right.
- Avoid unexpected context switches (without a previous warning).
- Use clear and simple language.
- Use progress indicators (e.g., step-by-step processes or breadcrumbs).

## Text and Images

**Simplicity and clarity** are beneficial for all audiences. Avoiding sensory and cognitive overload is essential to ensuring accessibility.



Photos with a clear subject and an uncluttered background are easier to interpret.



Cluttered photos are less accessible

**Figure 1.** Comparison of two photographs of buildings. The image on the left shows a solitary house in an open field, while the one on the right shows a multi-level house within a park with abundant vegetation.

**Text readability** is key, use clear and simple fonts with good color contrast. This is especially helpful for people with diverse visual needs.

NEUROINCLUSION 

Open Sans Regular

NEUROINCLUSION 

Magnolia Sky

**Figure 2.** Comparison of the same two words written in different fonts. Open Sans Regular is a simple sans-serif typeface, whereas Magnolia Sky is a gestural typeface with many embellishments.

**Consistency and logical organization** create a predictable environment that makes information easier to understand.

**Avoid visual and auditory distractions** to help readers maintain attention and reduce anxiety.

**Ensure accessibility for multimedia content** by providing transcripts, subtitles, and other accessibility options so that the information is available to people with diverse needs.

**Usability testing** is also crucial; direct feedback from neurodivergent individuals is invaluable for verifying accessibility and making necessary design adjustments.

**Keep sentences short**, aiming for a 20-word limit whenever possible. This will greatly aid the reader.

**Keep paragraphs short**, with a maximum of four lines. This is particularly important for digital content like websites, where it significantly improves readability.


**Avoid jargon** and complex or technical words to make it easier on the audience. If a technical term is necessary, clearly explain its meaning to make the information more accessible.

**Follow the "two-click rule"** for websites and apps, ensuring that users can reach any information from the homepage in two clicks or fewer. This helps everyone find what they need quickly and easily.

**Use sans-serif fonts** such as Arial, Century Gothic, Calibri, Helvetica, Tahoma or Verdana. These are generally considered more accessible than serif fonts like Times New Roman because the letterforms are simpler and easier to read. While no font is 100% accessible, many users with reading challenges are already familiar with these fonts and can read them effectively.

The image shows the capital letters 'E' and 'F' in a clean, sans-serif typeface. The letters are simple and unadorned, with no decorative strokes at the ends of the primary strokes.

Sans-Serif font, characteristically lacking embellishments at the end of the main strokes.

The image shows the capital letters 'E' and 'F' in a serif typeface. The letters have decorative flourishes at the ends of their primary strokes. A blue circle highlights the top-right corner of the 'F', and a blue line points to the top-right corner of the 'E', illustrating the decorative strokes.

Serif font, featuring decorations at the end of the primary strokes.

**Figure 3.** The capital letters E and F shown in different typefaces: on the left, an unembellished sans-serif font; on the right a characteristic serif typeface with decorative strokes

**Do not use justified text**, as it can create uneven spacing between words. This makes reading less predictable and is particularly challenging for people with dyslexia.

Far away, beyond the mountains of words, far from the lands of vowels and consonants, live the simulated texts. They live isolated in houses of letters, on the coast of semantics, a vast ocean of languages. A stream called Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious flows through their village and supplies them with the necessary rules.



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Unjustified text maintains even spaces between words.

Far away, beyond the mountains of words, far from the lands of vowels and consonants, live the simulated texts. They live isolated in houses of letters, on the coast of semantics, a vast ocean of languages. A stream called Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious flows through their village and supplies them with the necessary rules.



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Justified text creates significant variation in word spacing.

**Figure 4.** Comparison of two identical paragraphs with different alignment styles. The top paragraph is left-aligned with a ragged right edge, which maintains even spacing. The bottom paragraph is justified, which creates variable spacing between words.

## **Accessible Writing**

- Screen readers can list all the links on a page, so make sure links are descriptive and explicit. Instead of using generic phrases like "click here," use clear descriptions such as "click here for more news" to inform users what to expect.
- Follow a logical and coherent order for information, typically from top to bottom and left to right.
- Use built-in styles and headings (H1, H2, H3) to create a clear hierarchy of content. For example, for a level 1 section of text use H1 and for a level 2 section use H2. Utilize only one H1 per page, and never apply headings just to format text size, which is considered a very poor approach. Headings should be used to provide titles and signify the importance of content. This allows users of screen readers to quickly navigate to relevant sections.

## **Accessible Documents**

- It is recommended to use the built-in accessibility checker in Microsoft products such as Word, Outlook, PowerPoint or Excel, among others.
- When creating presentations, ensure that each slide has its own unique title and check the reading order.
- For tables and spreadsheets, verify that all rows and columns have clearly defined headings.
- When working with spreadsheets, avoid merging or splitting cells.

- Instead of drawing tables, insert them. Regular tables will be read sequentially using this function. If you must use a merged table, add alternative text or a heading that summarizes its contents.
- Microsoft Office documents maintain key accessibility features intact when properly converted to PDF files. Your source document (e.g., a Microsoft Word file) must be properly structured by the use of:
  - Headings
  - Images with alt text or tagged as decorative
  - Correctly structured tables
  - Clearly identified links
  - Lists
  - Legible text size
  - Good color contrast
  - A document title

In Office 365, images tagged as decorative are automatically hidden when documents are converted to PDF files. However, for older versions of Office, it is advisable to simply describe such pictures as “decorative image”.

- Provide alternative text, which is a brief description visual content. It tells a screen reader what the image represents providing context for graphic material.

### **Alternative Text vs. Image Description**

Alternative text (or alt text) is informative and concise, it delivers information about a given image (illustrative graphic, photo, or picture) avoiding repetition.

Image descriptions, on the other hand, provide useful, more detailed information than alt text.

For example, while alt text might say, "An illustrative image of people attending a class," the image description could elaborate: "The image shows female students looking at the professor teaching the class."

Not all images require a description. The need for a description depends on the image's function: Does it provide or complement information? Is it illustrative or does it help interpret text? Is it merely decorative?

- **Contributory or Complementary Image:** This type of image provides additional information not fully detailed in the text itself, such as data, graphs, photographs, or illustrations. You should summarize its key data or message and integrate it into the text. An example is bar chart showing that boys make up 65% of a course's attendance while girls make up 35%.
- **Illustrative or Supportive Image:** This image clarifies the meaning of the text. It could be a photograph an illustration used to help the reader understand a concept. When describing it, focus on the image's relevant meaning or connotation rather than a literal description of its elements. For example, an image of a dove with a green branch in its beak should be described in terms of its symbolic meaning, representing peace, rather than just as "a bird holding a twig."
- **Decorative Image:** Decorative images are visual design elements like borders, dividers, or other miscellaneous items. They do not require a description or alternative text because their primary function is aesthetic, and describing them would be a distraction.

Logos and distinctive elements can be mentioned by name, as they give the material a unique identity. One such example is the CAF logo. The alternative text must be restricted to one or two sentences, be concise, and communicate the content and purpose of the image with no ambiguity.

Whenever possible, avoid the following accessibility issues:

- **Untagged components:** Elements like titles and subtitles should be properly tagged; if they are not, screen readers will be unable to interpret them correctly.
- **Inadequate contrast.**
- **Scanned text images:** Screen readers cannot recognize text within an image and provide audio support to users with special needs. Use an Optical Character Recognition (OCR) tool to extract text from images instead of using scanned images.
- **Images without descriptions.**
- **Complex tables with merged cells.**

## **Audiovisual Content**

People with hearing impairments face a significant communication barrier when audiovisual content is not adequately supported or available in accessible formats. Similarly, individuals with visual impairments or low vision cannot access information on visual-only media.

To address these challenges, the following best practices are recommended:

- Include transcripts for multimedia content that does not have audio.
- Include subtitles in videos.

### **Subtitling**

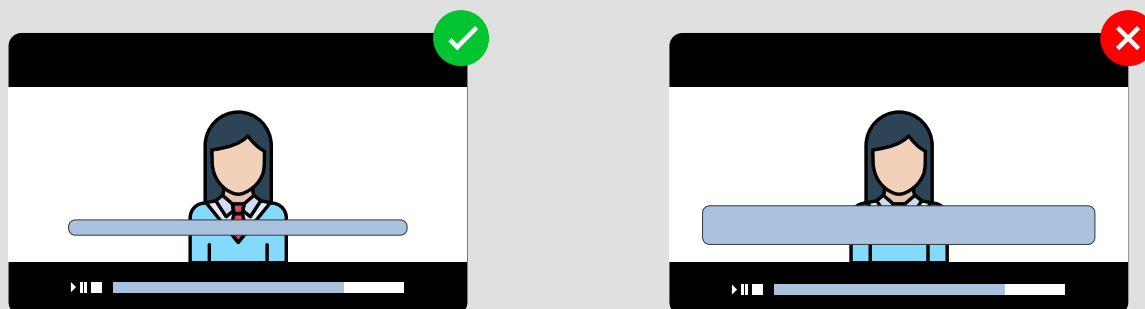
Subtitling is a tool that converts spoken audio into text. It reproduces visually what is being said, allowing people who are unable to hear the audio to access the information on an equal basis.

- For better readability, subtitles should have adequate contrast (such as white or yellow letters on a black background, or white letters on a blue background) and use a font size of 12.

- The font must be lowercase print, sans-serif style, and written in mixed case, in sentence case.



- They must occupy 8% of the total screen size and not exceed two lines per sentence.



- The subtitles must be synchronized with the audiovisual content.

Note: Subtitles do not replace sign language interpretation for all people with hearing impairments.

## **Audio Description**

Audio description is a form of accessible communication that converts information available only visually (such as on video and title cards) into an audio format.

It can also act as an auditory aid to help with concentration. It typically clarifies the when, where, who, what, and how of the situation being described or the information presented in an audiovisual piece.

In educational audiovisual materials, we recommend:

- Including a voiceover to narrate videos that display text on screen. This is because materials that rely on images and music do not effectively convey information to people with visual impairments.
- Adding a text transcription of the video content, (whenever the visuals include text on screen). You may also create an accessible digital document that describes the entire audiovisual content in writing.
- Creating an accessible digital document for audio-only podcasts, where the entire audio content is transcribed. If the podcast is in an audiovisual format, subtitles are to be used, just as they are for a video.

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Manual Práctico de Comunicación Inclusiva

<https://buenosaires.gob.ar/copidis/material-de-descarga/manual-practico-de-comunicacion-accesible>

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