OhioLINK Electronic Theses and Dissertations (ETD) Center

ETD Digital Accessibility Decisions and Considerations Guide

OhioLINK
Connecting Libraries, Learning & Discovery
A Division of the Ohio Department of Higher Education
An OH·TECH Consortium Member

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Overview

This guide covers decisions and considerations about the digital accessibility of ETDs for the OhioLINK ETD Center. For more information on how to check digitally accessibility of an ETD and the minimum requirements for the OhioLINK ETD Center, please visit the Digital Accessibility Resources for the OhioLINK ETD Center webpage. If you have any questions or concerns, please email OhioLINK support.

As of January 2023, OhioLINK will require all submitted electronic theses and dissertations (ETD) PDFs to be digitally accessible. Other supplemental files submitted as part of the ETD submission will be left to local discretion. Currently, nearly all ETDs only have a single PDF file.

Each OhioLINK institution has its own way in which ETDs are submitted, reviewed, and approved. Due to this, while there will be some new requirements during the submission process for digital accessibility of ETD PDFs, it will be up to each institution to decide local policy and workflows for fulfilling them. This guide will serve as a means by which to think through various factors and help decide how best to locally fulfill these new digital accessibility requirements for ETD PDFs submitted to the OhioLINK ETD Center.

Decisions and Considerations

New Requirements and Changes

Starting in January 2023, the OhioLINK ETD submission form will be updated to include a new upload document category for an optional (at this time) digital accessibility report and the addition of agreement wording for acknowledging that local digital accessibility standards have been met for the uploaded ETD PDF. The Submitter will see updated wording on the first page of the submission form and the Reviewer/Administrator who publishes the ETD will also be shown a pop-up with an acknowledgement as well.

The pop-up acknowledgement appears when an ETD is published or queued in the "Ready to Publish" status, which allows for batch publication of multiple ETDs at a later date, so the acknowledgement is done at the time of queuing instead of batch publication since each ETD has its own acknowledgement.

If a digital accessibility report is uploaded as part of the ETD submission, the document will be treated the same as the PDF and any supplemental files: it will display on the public website once published, available to view and download, and would also have an embargo applied to it as well if there is once in place. This report should be run on the final version of the ETD PDF before being uploaded into the OhioLINK ETD Center and can be used to determine if the submitted ETD PDF meets the digital accessibility requirements. Though optional right now, it is recommended. There are multiple accessibility checker tools that create such reports. The Digital Accessibility Resources for the OhioLINK ETD Center webpage lists just a few. Based on the documents uploaded, the system itself controls the checkbox in the pop-up acknowledgement for if a document type "digital accessibility report" was uploaded, or not, as part of the ETD submission.

Local ETD Digital Accessibility Policy

While OhioLINK has created a [Recommended Minimum Requirements for Electronic Theses and Dissertations in the OhioLINK ETD Center](#) to provide a starting point, it is best practice to have your own local ETD Digital Accessibility Policy. It allows your institution the ability to decide local digital accessibility requirements for ETD PDFs, though at the very least it should contain the minimum requirements recommended by OhioLINK. Most institutions will want additional information or settings included in their digitally accessible ETD PDFs (one example might be color contrast). A local policy that contains local requirements can also be used to inform the local workflows, including how and who will do which aspects such as Submitters, Reviewers, and the local ETD Administrator.

Local Policy
- What, if any, additional digital accessibility requirements will your local policy include?
- Where is the policy going to reside or be posted?
- Will you require a digital accessibility report be generated and uploaded as part of the ETD submission? Who will generate and attach it to the submission?
- Periodic review and revision of a local policy should be considered as well, and dated versions can be useful in this process.

Workflows

Each institution has its own workflows and local practices for how ETDs get submitted, reviewed, and approved. Keep these in mind when deciding who will be responsible for the digital accessibility at different parts of the submission process.

Submission
- Do students submit their own ETDs or are they submitted on behalf of students by the local Administrator or Reviewer(s)?
- If it is student submission, will they be responsible for making their PDF digitally accessible? What about, if you decide to require it, generating and uploading the accompanying digital accessibility report?

Review and Publication
- Does review happen separately from the approval and publication?
  - If so, then the final approver will be responsible for the new digital accessibility acknowledgement pop-up.
  - Note: for institutions using "Ready to Publish" status to queue ETDs for later batch publication, the acknowledgement happens at the time the ETD is queued and not the time of the release. This allows ETDs to be published as a batch, without an additional step.
- What happens if an ETD PDF does not meet the digital accessibility requirements, or if a report is not attached (if your institution has decided to require it)?
  - Will the ETD submission be returned for the submitter to fix and resubmit? Will the local Reviewer/Administrator make the corrections or generate the report and replace the document(s) on behalf of the submitter?
    - For any staff edited and replaced documents, how do you manage that process and organize files locally? Are such files kept after upload?

Documentation and Training

This section is meant to get you thinking about what you need and for who. The Digital Accessibility Resources for the OhioLINK ETD Center webpage has a collection of information and resources that already exist online, including by other ETD programs throughout the U.S., as some have great webpages for their local needs. Given that each institution has its own submission and review process, the same will be true for local requirements and so it will be the responsibility of each institution to provide the necessary documentation and training needed to achieve the digital accessibility requirements, whether to local staff or students. Feel free to use the resources on the OhioLINK webpage for inspiration and reference to help prepare for these changes locally and address your local training needs.

Local resources
- Do you need to update any existing local instructions, either for your staff or submitters or both?
- Will you create your own local documentation for how to make ETD PDFs digitally accessible for your local policy requirements? Can you use what others in the ETD community (statewide or nationally) have already made, even if it is only for specific aspects or portions of the process?
  - One example is a streaming video showing how to format a table properly.
- How are you going to educate and train both staff and submitters on these new requirements and procedures for making ETD PDFs digitally accessible for ETD submission?
- What software is needed to achieve OhioLINK's and local requirements, for staff and/or submitters? Adobe Acrobat Pro is paid but there are other options including free ones available that help with checking for digital accessibility as well as generating a digital accessibility report for a PDF.
  - Does everyone need to use the same method and software? Is there sufficient documentation already that can be used or will specific instructions need to be made locally for your use and workflows?