Ally Frequently Asked Questions for Faculty

Last Modified on 11/14/2024 2:20 pm CST

What is Ally?

The same company (Blackboard) that created the Blackboard Learn Learning Management System (LMS), has created another product called **Ally**. Ally works seamlessly with many different LMS (such as D2L Brightspace) to **gauge the accessibility of online course content** . Ally provides guidance and tips for lasting improvements to your content accessibility. Ally does the following:

- Automatically runs all course materials through an accessibility checklist that checks for common accessibility issues
- Provides feedback on the accessibility of your content
- Provides options and step-by-step instructions for improving the accessibility of your content

In addition to providing you with insight into your content accessibility, Ally **automatically creates alternative versions of your files**. This allows students to choose the type of file they want that best suit their needs. While you're in the process of improving files, students still access alternative copies.

Frequently Asked Questions

How will Ally be used? Will instructors be required to use Ally?

Ally is currently being utilized as a personal tool to help instructors more easily improve the accessibility of their course and provide students with alternative format options of course content.

What content does Ally check?

Ally currently checks these file formats:

- PDF
- Microsoft Word
- Microsoft PowerPoint
- Image files (JPG, JPEG, GIF, PNG, TIFF)
- OpenOffice/LibreOffice
- Uploaded HTML
- Content created in the LMS course editor

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.

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 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.

What accessibility issues does Ally check for?

Ally's accessibility checklist is based on WCAG 2.0 AA (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines). This is an international accessibility standard, and most of the new legislation and legal requirements worldwide aligns with this standard. Additionally, Ally also adds several additional checks on top of this that start to target the usability and quality of the course materials a bit more.

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.

Do students see the accessibility score indicators?

Students do not see the icons that indicate the content's accessibility score, the scores themselves, nor the accessibility feedback. That information is only visible to the instructor.

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 Ally provides.

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.

What alternative formats does Ally generate?
- OCR'd version (for scanned documents)
- Tagged PDF (structured PDF to support assistive technology)
- Semantic HTML (for viewing in a browser or on a mobile device)
- Audio MP3 (for listening on supported devices)
- ePub (for use on e-book readers or iPads)
- Electronic braille (for use on electronic braille displays)
- BeeLine Reader (enhanced version for easier and faster on-screen reading)
- Translated version (machine translation of original document)

Can I disable alternative formats for specific items?

Yes. You can turn off alternative formats for individual content items, if you need. You can enable it again later.

To disable alternative formats for a specific content item:

1. Find the content in your course and click the **Alternative Formats icon**
2. Click the **arrow** next to *Download alternative formats* to open the menu
3. Click **Disable alternative formats for this file**
4. Click **Close** to close the alternative formats pop-up

To then enable alternative formats:

1. Click on the **Alternative formats icon**, then click on "Enable for this file"

Is there a file size limit?

Ally doesn't enforce a file size limit. There may be cases where the algorithm fails to generate alternative formats for certain large files.

- Keep the original content to fewer than 100 pages to generate an OCR format for scanned documents.
- Limit content to 100,000 characters for the audio format. This character limit typically corresponds to at least 30 pages or several hours of audio.
- Limit content to 30,000 characters for the translated format.
- Limit to 50MB fixed files uploaded through the Instructor Feedback panel.

How does Ally handle password protected content?

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

More Information

- [Video - Ally Alternative Formats: D2L Brightspace](https://youtu.be/9k0ynzdqy24) (https://youtu.be/9k0ynzdqy24)
- [More Instructor FAQs for Ally](https://help.blackboard.com/Ally/Ally_for_LMS/Instructor/FAQs) (https://help.blackboard.com/Ally/Ally_for_LMS/Instructor/FAQs)