



If I Could Hear What You See: Electronic Resources and the Visually Impaired Patron

Laurel Kristick
Oregon State University Libraries
Laurel.kristick@oregonstate.edu



US Statistics on the Blind & Visually Impaired¹

- 6-8 Million Blind & Visually Impaired Americans are living in households (not institutionalized or homeless)
- 2-3 Million are adults who are employment-aged (ages 18-69)
- 1-1.3 Million are employed
- 16% have some college education; 24% of these have college degrees

¹American Foundation for the Blind
<http://www.afb.org>

What is Legally Blind?

- Legal blindness is a level of visual impairment that has been defined by law to determine eligibility for benefits. It refers to central visual acuity of 20/200 or less in the better eye with the best possible correction, as measured on a Snellen vision chart, or a visual field of 20 degrees or less.
- A patron can be visually impaired and need adaptive technology without meeting the legally blind criteria

The Personal Side of the Issue

Terry Christiansen, graduate student

- At age 41, he contracted Leber's optic neuropathy, a disease of the optic nerves.
- User of ArticleFirst, RLG, Project Muse, JSTOR
- Uses OpenBook software for accessibility

Terry was profiled in the *Corvallis Gazette-Times* newspaper: See Rouse, J. (March 5, 2005) "Guiding Light." *Corvallis Gazette-Times*.
http://gazettetimes.com/articles/2005/03/06/news/top_story/news01.txt
(Accessed 23 May 2005)

Accessibility Problems Encountered:

- Software incompatibility (e.g., JAWS doesn't work with OpenBook)
- PDFs that first need to be printed, then scanned into OpenBook
- Library equipment with accessibility problems (lack of high contrast, audio or Braille controls)

What Librarians Need to Know

- "Over there" doesn't mean anything to the visually impaired patron
- Know how to help without fostering learned helplessness

The Laws

- **Rehabilitation Act of 1973:** Section 508 mandates that all educational programs that receive federal funds are accessible to all students.
- **American With Disabilities Act of 1990:** Extends the requirements of the Rehabilitation Act to the entire nation, with some exceptions, not just to programs that are the recipients of federal funds.
- **Telecommunications Act of 1996:** Increases the standard from "Reasonable" to "Readily Achievable".

Common Tools for Blind & Visually Impaired Patrons

- Dragon Naturally Speaking (<http://www.scansoft.com/naturallyspeaking/>)
- IBM Homepage Reader
(http://www-3.ibm.com/able/solution_offerings/hpr.html)
- JAWS (http://www.freedomscientific.com/fs_products/software_jaws.asp)
- Kurzweil 3000 (<http://www.kurzweiledu.com/products.asp>)
- Omnipage (<http://www.scansoft.com/omnipage/>)
- OpenBook
(http://www.freedomscientific.com/fs_products/software_open.asp)
- SuperNova
(<http://www.dolphincomputeraccess.com/products/supernova.htm>)
- Triangle (<http://tap.oregonstate.edu/WinTriangle/WinTriangle.htm>)
- Genie II Computer Interface CCTV
- Scanners
- Braille

Early Database Accessibility

- The Technology Access Program (TAP) at OSU has reviewed database accessibility since 1997.
- In 1997, most were accessible (60% with some difficulty) (OSU Library's collection was mostly CD-based at this time)
- In 1999, 95% of the databases were inaccessible (most had moved to the Web)

3 Years Later: A Major Turnaround in Accessibility¹

- 120 Databases on 37 platforms were evaluated in 2002
- 95% of the databases now accessible

¹Stewart, R. (2003). "Accessibility of online databases. A usability study of research databases", Technology Access Program, Oregon State University. Available: <http://tap.oregonstate.edu/research/ahg.htm> (Accessed 23 May 2005).

Accessibility vs. Usability

Vast majority of databases are accessible, but...¹

- 40% lack meaningful ALT tags for images and image-based elements
- 40% lack descriptive link information
- 85% do not have capability to skip repeatedly occurring navigation information

¹Stewart, R., Narendra, V. and Schmetzke, A. (in press). "Accessibility and Usability of Online Library Databases," *Library Hi Tech*.



Electronic Journal Accessibility Study

- In 2004-05, OSU Libraries & TAP collaborated on the first systematic evaluation of electronic journal accessibility
- Results are being compiled and analyzed



Preliminary Electronic Journal Study Results

- 83 journals from 55 publishers have been evaluated to date
- 80% of the journals are fully accessible based on Section 508 criteria; 11 of these failed usability evaluation
- NRC Press is the only publisher which met all accessibility and usability criteria

The Same Article? Yes!

- <http://medicine.plosjournals.org/perlserv/?request=get-document&doi=10.1371/journal.pmed.0020079>

DESCRIPTION of CASE

A 75-year-old right-handed woman presented with symptoms suggestive of a right hemisphere stroke (right arm and left arm weakness). She had no previous symptoms of a previous transient ischaemic attack or vision in one eye due to a temporary lack of blood flow. Her medical history included long-standing hypertension and pulmonary disease. She was on amlodipine and fluticasone inhalers.

On examination, the patient had a Glasg

What You Can Do

- Get familiar with the tools used by your organization to meet the needs of blind & visually impaired users¹
- Include accessibility and usability in your selection criteria for new electronic resources
- Advocate for accessibility of electronic resources with your vendors

¹Appendix 3 of the 2002 Stewart article summaries the results of last database evaluations <http://tap.oregonstate.edu/research/Site%20Evals.htm> (Accessed 23 May 2005)

Acknowledgements

This poster presentation would not have been possible without the incredible work of Ron Stewart and the Technology Access Program (TAP) at OSU to support faculty and students with disabilities.