

## BALL STATE UNIVERSITY

# Social Media Accessibility Compliance Guide

For all University social media publishers | Effective date: April 24, 2026

## Purpose

On April 24, 2024, the U.S. Department of Justice published a final rule requiring state and local governments—including public universities—to make their web content and mobile apps accessible to people with disabilities under Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The technical standard is WCAG 2.1 Level AA. Ball State University's compliance deadline is April 24, 2026.

This guide applies to **every person who posts content on behalf of Ball State University** on Instagram, Facebook, X (Twitter), LinkedIn, TikTok, or YouTube. Content posted after April 24, 2026, must comply. Content posted before that date is grandfathered under the preexisting social media posts exception.

All individuals who post on behalf of Ball State University **must complete accessibility training and review this guide** prior to posting and periodically thereafter as required by the University. Failure to comply with this guide may result in removal of content, suspension of posting privileges, or other corrective action consistent with University policy.

If the University, or any account that represents it, reposts, shares, or collaborates on third-party content, that content must meet accessibility requirements prior to publication.

### Key Rule

You are not responsible for making a social media platform itself accessible. You are responsible for making **your posts** accessible.

## Section 1: Universal Requirements for All Platforms

### How to Read This Guide: Required vs. Best Practice

Not every item in this guide carries the same legal weight. Two categories apply:

**Required (WCAG 2.1 AA):** These items are legal obligations under the ADA Title II final rule. Failing to meet them after April 24, 2026, constitutes non-compliance and exposes the University to enforcement action. Both WCAG Level A and Level AA criteria are included in this category—Level A criteria are the foundation; Level AA builds on them. Both are required.

**Best Practice:** These items exceed the legal standard but represent the spirit of inclusive, accessible content. They are strongly recommended and reflect professional best practice for public university communications. They are not legally required under WCAG 2.1 AA.

The pre-post checklist near the end of this guide, in Section 4, labels every item with its status so you know exactly which items you cannot skip.

## Images

Every image you post must have alternative text (alt text)—a written description that conveys the same information the image conveys to a sighted user. Every platform covered in this guide has a built-in alt text field. You must use it. Do not rely on auto-generated alt text; it is inaccurate and does not meet the standard.

### What to Write in Alt Text

- Describe what is in the image and why it matters in context. If you are posting a photo of students at an event, don't write "students." Write "Three students in Ball State gear tossing bean bags at the Homecoming tailgate on the Student Green."
- Do not start with "image of" or "photo of." Screen readers already announce that the content is an image.
- If the image contains text (see Section 3 of this guide), include the full text in the alt text field.
- Keep it concise but complete. Aim for one to two sentences. There is no need to pad it, but do not leave out meaningful details.
- Be objective. Describe what is visible, not your interpretation of mood or meaning.
- [Learn more about Alt Text with this guide.](#)

### Alt Text Examples

Bad Alt Text	Good Alt Text
"Event"	"Students lined up at folding tables to register for spring campus organizations at the Involvement Fair in Worthen Arena."
"Building"	"Exterior of Beyerl Residence Hall at dusk, with warm light visible through ground-floor lounge windows."
"Campus photo"	"Aerial view of Ball State's campus in fall, with Beneficence statue visible at center surrounded by trees in red and gold foliage."

## Video

**Captions:** Every video you post must have accurate, synchronized captions. Auto-generated captions are a starting point, not a finished product. You must review and correct them before posting. Captions must include speaker identification, relevant sound effects, and musical cues—not just dialogue.

**Audio description:** If your video shows meaningful visual content that is not described in the audio track—on-screen text, graphics, demonstrations, physical actions—that content needs to be made accessible. The best approach is to script your narration so that it describes all meaningful visuals. If that is not possible, an audio-described version of the video is desirable, if the platform supports that versioning.

## Color and Contrast

- Any graphics you design for posts (branded templates, infographics, event announcements) must meet a 4.5:1 contrast ratio for normal text and 3:1 for large text (18pt or 14pt bold).
- Do not use color as the only means of conveying information. If a graphic uses red to indicate a deadline, also use a label or icon.

## Link Text

When including links in post captions, provide meaningful context. Write “Register for the spring career fair at [link]” rather than “Click here: [link].”

## Descriptive or Shortened Hyperlinks

- Whenever possible, make sure the link is descriptive in nature and not a long string of code (numbers/letters), as this helps individuals understand where the link will take them.
- Avoid using phrases like “click here” or “read more” without an additional descriptor, as it is difficult for individuals using screen readers to understand where the link is taking them.
- Links should be indicated by more than color alone. You can add [Link] prior to the actual link as an indicator.
- Indicating when a link will open in a new window is a helpful practice for all users. For example: “Read more about the president’s speech (opens in new window).” This is a best practice, not a WCAG 2.1 AA requirement.

## GIFs, Emojis, and Hashtags

### GIFs

**Required:** GIFs are animation files that typically loop continuously without user controls to pause, stop, or hide the animation. Under WCAG 2.2.2 (Level A), moving content that starts automatically must provide a mechanism for users to pause, stop, or hide it. Under WCAG 2.3.1 (Level A), content must not flash more than three times per second. Most platform-embedded GIFs meet neither requirement.

As a result, GIFs should generally be avoided in Ball State social media posts. If a GIF is used, it must:

- Not flash more than three times per second.
- Be controllable by the user (pause, stop, or hide)—a standard that most social media GIF tools do not support.
- Have alt text added wherever the platform supports it.
- Meet color contrast requirements for any text the GIF contains.

**If you cannot confirm that a GIF meets all of these requirements on the platform you are using, do not post it.**

### Emojis

**Best Practice:** Screen readers announce every emoji individually and by its full text description. A string of three fire emojis becomes “fire fire fire” in a screen reader. Stacked emojis create a disruptive, confusing experience for users relying on assistive technology.

Follow these guidelines when using emojis in post text:

- Limit emojis to one or two per post.
- Never stack multiple emojis consecutively.
- Never use an emoji as a substitute for a word or to replace punctuation.
- Place emojis at the end of a sentence or post, not in the middle of text.

## Hashtags

**Best Practice:** Screen readers parse multi-word hashtags as a single word, which produces unintelligible output. #ballstateuniversity becomes “ballstateuniversity”—one unrecognizable string. CamelCase formatting signals word boundaries to the screen reader.

Always capitalize the first letter of each word in a multi-word hashtag.

**Correct:** #BallStateUniversity, #CardinalPride, #MunicipalCollege

**Incorrect:** #ballstateuniversity, #cardinalpride, #municipalcollege

## Section 2: Platform-by-Platform Guide

The following tables show the specific fields you must use on each platform when uploading content. These are the fields that make or break compliance.

### Instagram

Element	Where to Find It	What to Enter
<b>Alt text (images)</b>	During upload: Mobile: final screen, at bottom click on “more options” → Scroll to bottom to “Write alt text”; On desktop: the “Accessibility” tab appears on final upload screen.	Write a description of the image content and context. See alt text guidance in Section 1.
<b>Alt text (editing existing posts)</b>	Open the post → tap “...” → “Edit” → “Edit Alt Text” appears at the bottom-left of the image.	Replace the auto-generated text with your custom description.
<b>Alt text (carousels)</b>	Each image in a carousel has its own alt text field. Swipe between images in the accessibility screen to add descriptions to each.	Write a separate, specific description for each image in the carousel.
<b>Captions (video)</b>	Instagram auto-generates captions. Review them by playing back the video after upload.	Review for accuracy. Auto-captions are a starting point—you must correct errors before the post is considered compliant.
<b>Captions (Reels)</b>	During Reels editing: tap the sticker icon in the editing toolbar and select “Captions.” Instagram will auto-generate captions from the audio.	Correct any errors in the auto-generated captions. Reels use a separate captions sticker workflow

	Review the generated text before publishing.	from standard video uploads—both require review.
<b>Stories</b>	Instagram Stories do not support alt text fields or screen reader functionality.	Do not use Stories as the sole channel for important information. Repost Story content to your feed or provide it on your website where it can be made accessible.

### Instagram Limitation: No SRT Uploads

Instagram does not support SRT (SubRip Subtitle) caption file uploads. If auto-captions are inaccurate, your only option is to burn open captions into the video file (placing text directly onto your video) before uploading.

### Instagram Collabs: Accepting an Invitation Is an Editorial Decision

When you accept a collaboration invitation on Instagram, the post appears in your account’s feed and lists your account as a co-author. That content is indistinguishable from content you posted yourself—and your account bears the same compliance responsibility for it. Before accepting any collab invitation, review the post against this guide’s checklist. If it does not comply, contact the originating account and request corrections before accepting. If corrections are not made, decline the invitation.

## Facebook

Element	Where to Find It	What to Enter
<b>Alt text (images)</b>	During image upload: click the edit button → “Alternative text.” Auto-generated text may appear—replace it.	Overwrite the auto-generated description with your own. See Section 1 for guidance.
<b>Alt text (editing existing posts)</b>	Open the post → click “...” → “Edit Post” → click the photo → Click edit button → “Alternative Text”.	Click “Custom alt text” and replace the auto-generated text.
<b>Captions (video)</b>	All videos on Facebook are now published as Reels. Two caption paths exist: (1) Native Facebook app: During the Reel creation flow, enable the closed captions toggle. Auto-captions will generate. Review and correct before posting. (2) SRT file upload: Use Meta Business Suite → Create Reel → Add Video → Share tab → Closed Captions section → upload your .srt file. SRT upload is not available through the native app.	Never rely on auto-captions alone. Review and correct the auto-generated captions for accuracy before publishing. If you need precise control, upload a corrected SRT file through Meta Business Suite. Auto-captions are a starting point, not a finished product.

<b>GIFs</b>	Facebook’s built-in GIF feature does not provide an alt text field for GIFs inserted through that tool.	Because no alt text field is available, include a description of the GIF’s content in the post caption itself. Note: animated GIFs should generally be avoided—see the GIFs guidance in Section 1.
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### Facebook Limitation: All Videos Are Now Reels

As of 2025, Facebook publishes all new video uploads as Reels. The native Facebook app provides an auto-caption toggle during the Reel creation process, which must be reviewed for accuracy before publishing. SRT caption file upload is only available through Meta Business Suite, not the native app or Page interface. Facebook does not support alt text for video content.

## X (Twitter)

Element	Where to Find It	What to Enter
<b>Alt text (images)</b>	After selecting image for upload: on mobile, tap the “+ALT” button in the bottom-right corner of the image. On desktop, click “Add description” below the image.	Write your description in the text field (up to 1,000 characters). Tap “Done” (mobile) or “Save” (desktop). An ALT badge will appear on the image.
<b>Alt text (multiple images)</b>	Each image has its own +ALT button. On iOS, swipe between images. On desktop, use the arrow buttons at the top of the description dialog.	Write a separate description for each image.
<b>Alt text reminder setting</b>	Settings → Accessibility, Display, and Languages → Accessibility → “Receive image description reminder.”	Turn this ON. It will alert you if you try to post an image without alt text.
<b>Captions (video)</b>	On desktop only: upload the video, then click “Upload caption file (.srt)” below the video preview.	Upload a corrected SRT file. X does not auto-generate captions for uploaded video, so you must provide your own.
<b>GIFs</b>	When using X’s built-in GIF library, alt text can be added. For uploaded GIFs, the +ALT button appears as with images.	Describe what the GIF depicts and any text or action it contains. Note: animated GIFs should generally be avoided—see the GIFs guidance in Section 1.

### X Limitation: Alt Text Cannot Be Edited After Posting

You cannot edit alt text on X after a post is published. If you discover missing or incorrect alt text, you must delete and re-post. SRT caption uploads are only available via the desktop web interface, not the mobile app.

## LinkedIn

Element	Where to Find It	What to Enter
<b>Alt text (images)</b>	After uploading an image: on desktop, click “Alt” that appears below the image. On mobile, tap the image and select “Alt text.”	Write your description. LinkedIn may auto-generate alt text on desktop—always replace it with your own.
<b>Alt text (multiple images)</b>	Each image has a separate “Alt. text” button. Click each to add descriptions individually.	Write a unique description for each image.
<b>Captions (video)</b>	During video upload on desktop: click the “CC” icon beneath the video preview. You can toggle auto-captions on or upload your own SRT file using “Select Caption.”	Upload a corrected SRT file whenever possible. Auto-captions on LinkedIn are English-only and should be reviewed for accuracy.
<b>Carousel/PDF posts</b>	LinkedIn carousels are uploaded as multi-page PDFs. There is no alt text field for individual slides within a PDF carousel.	Describe key visuals from the carousel in the post caption. Better yet: post multiple images instead of a PDF carousel so you can use the alt text field on each image.

### LinkedIn Limitation: Alt Text Cannot Be Edited After Posting

LinkedIn does not allow alt text to be added or edited after a post is published. If you discover missing or incorrect alt text on a LinkedIn image post, you must delete and repost. Write your alt text before you publish—there is no recovery path after the fact.

## TikTok

Element	Where to Find It	What to Enter
<b>Alt text (photo posts)</b>	During upload in the mobile app: tap “Add alternative text” on the photo post composer screen. Alt text can also be added after publishing (within seven days).	Write a description of the image content and context. See Section 1 for guidance. Note: alt text can only be added via the mobile app, not the desktop version of TikTok.
<b>Alt text (editing existing posts)</b>	Open the photo post → tap the three dots on the right side → scroll the gray icon row to the right → tap “Edit Post” → select “Add Alternative Text.”	Edit the alt text and tap “Done.” Edits can be made within seven days of posting. The option may not appear immediately after publishing—wait a few minutes.
<b>Captions (video)</b>	During video editing: TikTok offers auto-generated captions that can be	Review and correct auto-generated captions before publishing. Ensure speaker changes and meaningful

	toggled on. The auto-caption text can be edited before posting.	sounds are included. Auto-captions are a starting point, not a final product.
<b>Text-to-speech</b>	During video editing: add text overlays to the video, then select the text and choose “Text-to-speech” to have TikTok read it aloud.	Text-to-speech can help make on-screen text accessible, but it is not a substitute for captions or alt text. Use it as a supplement, not a replacement.
<b>Audio description</b>	TikTok does not support a secondary audio description track.	

**TikTok Limitations**

Alt text for photo posts can only be added through the mobile app—the desktop version does not support it. TikTok also does not currently allow users to view a published post’s alt text, making it difficult to verify after posting. There is no way to upload SRT caption files; you must rely on TikTok’s auto-generated captions and manually edit them within the editor before publishing.

## YouTube

Element	Where to Find It	What to Enter
<b>Captions (video)</b>	YouTube Studio → “Languages” tab in the left sidebar → select your video → click the pencil icon. Your auto-generated and manual caption tracks appear here. Edit inline or upload an SRT/VTT file. Note: some accounts may still see “Subtitles” instead of “Languages” during the platform’s ongoing interface transition.	Never rely on auto-captions alone. Review and correct the auto-generated transcript, or upload a professionally produced caption file. Ensure speaker changes, sound effects, and musical cues are included.
<b>Video title and description</b>	YouTube Studio → select video → “Details” tab.	Use a descriptive title. In the description field, include a summary of the video content. This helps all users but is especially useful for accessibility.
<b>Thumbnail alt text</b>	YouTube does not provide a native alt text field for thumbnails.	Ensure the video title is descriptive enough to convey the thumbnail’s purpose.
<b>Audio description</b>	YouTube has introduced a native descriptive audio upload feature under the “Languages” tab in YouTube Studio. However, this feature has not rolled out to all accounts—Ball State’s account does not currently have access.	Until the native feature is universally available, upload a separate audio-described version as an unlisted video on the same channel. Link to it in the original video’s description and on any bsu.edu page where the original is embedded.

**NOTE**

YouTube publishers should also reference the University's **Video/Podcast Accessibility Compliance Guide** for additional information.

## Section 3: The Problem with Graphics That Contain Text

One of the most common social media practices at universities is posting designed graphics that include text—event flyers, quote cards, announcements, infographics, branded templates with dates and details rendered as part of the image. These are among the most problematic content types for accessibility compliance.

### Why Graphics with Text Are Problematic

**Screen readers cannot read text inside images.** When you design a flyer in Canva, Adobe Express, or Photoshop that says “Spring Career Fair | March 12 | Worthen Arena | Register at [bsu.edu/careerfair](https://bsu.edu/careerfair),” a screen reader user sees... nothing. The image is opaque to assistive technology. All of that information—the event name, date, location, and registration URL—is invisible to anyone who cannot see the image.

Standards require that all information conveyed through images be available as text.

### How to Post Graphics with Text Compliantly

**Option 1: Put all the text from the graphic into the alt text field.** This is the minimum viable approach. If your graphic says “Spring Career Fair | March 12 | Worthen Arena | Register at [bsu.edu/careerfair](https://bsu.edu/careerfair),” your alt text should be: “Ball State Spring Career Fair. March 12. Worthen Arena. Register at [bsu.edu/careerfair](https://bsu.edu/careerfair).” Include every piece of text that appears in the image. Do not summarize or paraphrase—reproduce the text content exactly.

**Option 2: Duplicate the information in the post caption.** In addition to (or instead of) putting the text in the alt text field, include all the information from the graphic in the body of your post. This has the added benefit of being visible to all users, not just screen reader users. Many people with low vision, cognitive disabilities, or who are scrolling quickly will benefit from seeing the information in text form. This is the recommended approach for posts where the graphic contains critical details like dates, locations, and registration links.

**Option 3: Don't use a graphic with text at all.** Consider whether the graphic is adding value or whether you're using it because it is visually appealing. If the purpose of the post is to convey information (an event, a deadline, a policy change), write the information as text in the post and use a photo or simple branded image as the visual. This eliminates the problem entirely.

### Checklist for Graphics with Text

- Does the graphic contain any text? If yes, every word of that text must appear somewhere accessible—in the alt text field, the post caption, or both.

- Does the graphic use sufficient color contrast? Text on the graphic must meet 4.5:1 for normal-sized text and 3:1 for large text, measured against the background color behind it. Use a contrast checker tool (WebAIM's contrast checker at [webaim.org/resources/contrastchecker](http://webaim.org/resources/contrastchecker) is free).
- Is color the only way information is communicated? If a section of the graphic is highlighted in red to indicate urgency, is there also a text label like “Deadline” or “Urgent”?
- Is the text in the graphic legible when viewed on a mobile device? Small text in graphics becomes unreadable on phone screens, which is where most social media consumption occurs.

### Best Practice

The most accessible approach is to use graphics for visual appeal (photos, branded backgrounds, simple design elements) and put all informational content—event names, dates, times, locations, URLs, and calls to action—in the post caption as regular text. This is easier to maintain, easier to comply with, and better for engagement.

## Section 4: Pre-Post Checklist

Before you hit “Publish” on any post, verify the following. Items marked **Required (WCAG 2.1 AA)** are legal obligations. Items marked **Best Practice** exceed the standard but are strongly recommended.

✓	Check	Applies To	Status
<input type="checkbox"/>	Every image has custom alt text written in the platform’s alt text field (not auto-generated).	All platforms	<b>Required (WCAG 2.1 AA)</b>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Any text that appears in a graphic is reproduced in the alt text and/or post caption.	All platforms	<b>Required (WCAG 2.1 AA)</b>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Video has accurate, reviewed captions (not raw auto-captions).	All platforms	<b>Required (WCAG 2.1 AA)</b>
<input type="checkbox"/>	If video has meaningful visual content not in the audio, an audio-described version is available, or the narration covers all meaningful visuals.	All platforms	<b>Required (WCAG 2.1 AA)</b>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Graphics meet color contrast requirements (4.5:1 for normal text, 3:1 for large text).	All platforms	<b>Required (WCAG 2.1 AA)</b>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Color is not the sole means of conveying information in any graphic.	All platforms	<b>Required (WCAG 2.1 AA)</b>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Links in post text have meaningful context (not “click here” or bare URLs).	All platforms	<b>Required (WCAG 2.1 AA)</b>
<input type="checkbox"/>	If a GIF is used, it does not flash more than three times per second and includes user controls to pause, stop, or hide it. If those conditions cannot be confirmed, the GIF is not posted.	All platforms	<b>Required (WCAG 2.1 AA)</b>

<input type="checkbox"/>	Emojis are limited to one or two per post and are not stacked consecutively.	All platforms	Best Practice
<input type="checkbox"/>	Multi-word hashtags use CamelCase formatting (e.g., #CardinalPride, not #cardinalpride).	All platforms	Best Practice
<input type="checkbox"/>	No important information is conveyed solely through Stories (which lack accessibility support).	Instagram, Facebook, TikTok	<b>Required (WCAG 2.1 AA)</b>
<input type="checkbox"/>	For Instagram Reels, captions were reviewed and corrected using the Captions sticker before publishing.	Instagram	<b>Required (WCAG 2.1 AA)</b>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Before accepting an Instagram Collab invitation, the post was reviewed against this checklist for compliance.	Instagram	<b>Required (WCAG 2.1 AA)</b>
<input type="checkbox"/>	If posting a TikTok photo post, alt text was added via the mobile app (desktop does not support it).	TikTok	<b>Required (WCAG 2.1 AA)</b>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Links include an indication when they will open in a new window.	All platforms	Best Practice

## Section 5: Compliance Authority

Accessibility compliance is the responsibility of any individual creating content for use on behalf of Ball State University. Account administrators are responsible for ensuring that all content posted on their accounts—including content created by primary publishers, delegates or student workers—complies with this guide.

This guide is issued under the requirements of the ADA Title II final rule (28 CFR Part 35, Subpart H), published April 24, 2024, which adopts WCAG 2.1 Level AA as the technical standard for public university web content and social media. Ball State University's compliance deadline is April 24, 2026, based on the university's status as part of the State of Indiana (population exceeding 50,000).

Non-compliance after the deadline exposes the university to enforcement action by the U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, and potential complaints filed through the ADA complaint process. Every individual who posts on behalf of Ball State contributes to the university's compliance posture.

Questions about this guide or its requirements should be directed to Greg Fallon, Associate Vice President of University Communications and Digital Strategy, in Marketing and Communications, [gmfallon@bsu.edu](mailto:gmfallon@bsu.edu), 765-285-0048.