



# Book Review of *Inclusive Design for a Digital World: Designing with Accessibility in Mind*

## BOOK REVIEW

KRISTA CROGHAN 



## ABSTRACT

Gilbert, Regine M. (2019). *Inclusive Design for a Digital World: Designing with Accessibility in Mind*. Apress, 272 pages. ISBN 978-1-4842-5015-0. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4842-5016-7>.

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## INTRODUCTION

In *Inclusive Design for a Digital World*, Regine M. Gilbert appeals to readers' empathy for the human need for inclusion. From the very first sentence of the introduction, "Have you ever been left out of something?" (p. xxi), she compels readers to relate to the disappointment of being excluded and illuminates the ubiquity of inclusion inequities often embedded in user experiences. Throughout this book, Gilbert exudes her passion and expertise on the subject. She is an Assistant Professor who teaches courses in User Experience Design and is a Certified Accessibility Professional. She offers perspectives to be viewed through the optics of disability, like seeing the world through a colorblind lens or imagining oneself unpackaging a new gaming system with a dexterity disability. She wrote this book for anybody wanting to learn more about web accessibility and how to make online content more inclusive and accessible for the broadest audience possible.

## STRUCTURE AND CONTENT

The book consists of ten chapters and a robust appendix of resources for further exploration. The author includes theory, practical application, case studies, and "Try it Yourself" activities to convey the information. She visually supports the content with illustrations, tables, charts, models, graphic organizers, screenshots, and color photographs.

She motivates the reader to grasp the basic principles of web accessibility, consider why web accessibility is essential, and recognize governing accessibility laws and regulations. She encourages embracing a culture of web accessibility, cultivating an understanding of assistive technology, and ultimately designing virtual environments to proactively include all who would like to be included.

The author introduces the medical and social models of disability. She explains how “the medical model of disability says that people are disabled by their impairments or differences” (p. 4). From this perspective, a person with a disability needs to be fixed or adapted. In education, this is represented by identifying accommodations for learners with disabilities.

On the other hand, the social model of disability endorses the idea that disability is a social construct defined and imposed upon humans by society. The social model promotes adapting the environment to the person instead of the person to the environment, thus detaching the stigma from people with disabilities. In education, this relates to using Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in course design. UDL is an educational framework grounded in the idea that a proactive, inclusive design of the learning environment benefits more than just people with disabilities. Many UDL supporters feel this approach may eliminate the need for individual student accommodations. The author bases this book on the social model of disability.

## OVERALL IMPRESSION AND RELEVANCE TO THE FIELD OF DISTANCE EDUCATION AND E-LEARNING

Instructional designers, online course developers, and online educators can all benefit from reading this book. The following section provides a synopsis of the chapters applicable to distance education. Chapters 6 and 8 are not as applicable to online education and will not be highlighted in this review.

Chapter 1 is “Designing with Accessibility in Mind.” The author presents the different models of disability and existing design models, including Universal Design for Learning.

Chapter 2, “Best Practice for the Web,” scans web-based programming topics like HTML, JavaScript, and CSS. This chapter may not be practical for an online educator, but an instructional designer may take an interest and be able to apply the content.

Chapter 3 is “If It’s Annoying, It’s Probably Not Accessible.” In this revelatory chapter, Gilbert explores examples of technology aggravations, which stir the reader to ponder how one’s annoyances are someone else’s exclusions. Examples include pages that take too long to load, poor content layout, and pop-ups. This information inspires online course developers to consider how their courses may be annoying to learners and, therefore, inaccessible.

“Web Standards” in Chapter 4 highlights the laws and regulations of web accessibility, which are relevant to distance education. Gilbert outlines each element of the POUR acronym from the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), which guide the design of online content: P for Perceivable, O for Operable, U for Understandable, and R for Robust.

Chapter 5, “Design Principles,” introduces different design frameworks and strategies. The “Do’s and Don’ts of Inclusive Design” table is paramount to designing online learning content for people with specific disabilities.

“Assistive Technologies” is the title of Chapter 7, which presents different assistive tools that help make online content more accessible for different disabilities. This information is significant for online educators who care to know about the different measures some students must go through to access their courses.

Chapter 9, “Usability Testing,” has a business focus. However, the concept of usability testing is not excluded from education, so the concepts from this chapter can be applied.

In Chapter 10, “Beyond the Web,” Gilbert introduces different innovations throughout history and explains how they were invented out of necessity. She also predicts the future of accessibility with virtual and augmented reality, which are extremely relevant concepts to simulation education.

Though the author only provides a half page detailing the UDL framework, she models the use of UDL principles in her content with a simple writing style marked by straightforward, intelligible language. Text content is balanced with captioned visual content labeled as “figures,” providing multiple forms of content representation. There is white space within the pages, providing the perception of breathing room. Titles and headings delineate the hierarchy of each chapter. These are benchmark traits of UDL.

Though Gilbert is mostly thorough and careful in expressing content, there are occasions where the reader may be left questioning the details. For example, she mentions that screen readers cannot recognize text formatting such as strikethrough, bold, color, italics, or underline. She also states that other types of indicators should be used to signify importance but doesn't suggest alternatives (p. 96). Another example is when she differentiates between adaptive and assistive technology but doesn't provide examples of adaptive technology (p. 123). And then in another section, the illustration she gives for not using color to convey meaning appears to teach instead about color contrast ratios for accessibility (p. 38).

This is not a comprehensive guidebook on accessibility practices. Rather, it is precisely what the author claims it to be: a launching point. While the concepts and ideas are not restricted to pedagogical environments, this book is a relevant resource for understanding and applying web accessibility principles to online content, making it a valuable contribution to distance education.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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