M3-S3: Accessibility across learning environments

CLH	Hello Gina, and hello Listeners! Welcome to the third session in Module 3 of your TALE Academy learning experience : accessibility across learning environments. Let's start this lesson by exploring what it means to go from available to accessible.
GK	When the Food and Drug Administration approved the first at-home test for COVID-19 in November 2020, it was a big deal in turning the tide of disease transmission. This was the first test that could be fully self-administered and provide results at home. This new testing option was a big diagnostic advancement in addressing disease transmission. In the weeks and months that followed, agencies focused on key barriers to leveraging the power of the home tests, including distribution and availability, ensuring proper use of the tests, and debunking myths around false positives or false negatives. But one major barrier went unnoticed by most people: the tests were inaccessible to many individuals with disabilities, particularly the visually impaired.
CLH	Consider the situation for Christy Smith and her husband, who are both blind. As reported in *The New York Times*, when her husband developed a sore throat, stuffy nose, and fever in fall 2021, they were unable to find out if he had COVID. They could not drive to a local drug store or distribution site to retrieve a test, and even if they had been able to get one delivered to the house, they wouldn't have been able to use it, as most tests came with instructions in multiple languages but not braille. The processes required to use the tests also posed other problems: users had to deftly drop collected liquid samples into small openings on test strips, and the results were displayed visually. Smith told *The New York Times*, "Not all of us have access to somebody sighted to help with things

	on a regular basis. It's kind of a mix of frustration and just feeling a bit helpless."
GK	This high-stakes example illustrates the difference between availability and accessibility. As with so many other barriers we faced during COVID, people managed work-arounds by using video apps such as Be My Eyes. But what if instead of putting the onus for overcoming barriers on the individual, we focus on minimizing barriers in the initial design? That's the work of accessibility.
CLH	Now, moving from Covid tests to education…a joint letter from the U.S. Department of Justice and the U.S. Department of Education issued in 2010 explained that for educational materials to be considered accessible, a person with a disability must be able to "acquire the same information, engage in the same interactions, and enjoy the same services" in "an equally integrated and equally effective manner, with substantially equivalent ease of use" as a person without a disability.
GK	That's a pretty clear standard, but to know how to put this standard into action we probably need a supportive checklist. As our listeners know, we love checklists. The National Center on Accessible Educational Materials – or AEM – translates this definition into three simple questions: 1) To whom is it accessible? 2) Under what conditions? 3) For which tasks? Taken together, the answers to these three questions recognize that "accessibility is shaped by what we need to do, our interactions with the environment, and our personal preferences."

CLH	In terms of educational materials, AEM groups accessibility into four areas: **First, accessible educational materials** are print- and technology-based educational materials, including printed and electronic textbooks and related core materials that are designed or enhanced in a way that makes them usable across the widest range of learner variability, regardless of format (for example, print, digital, graphic, audio, video). **Second, accessible formats** provide the same information in another form to address the barriers text-based materials can present for some learners. Examples of accessible formats include audio, braille, large print, tactile graphics, and digital text conforming with accessibility standards.
GK	**Third, accessible technologies** are hardware devices and software that provide learners with access to the content in accessible digital materials. These technologies are designed to be flexible and provide supports that benefit everyone – they are universally designed. **And lastly, assistive technologies** are designed to address specific barriers learners with disabilities may face when they interact with their materials. Examples of assistive technology include text-to-speech, screen readers, and speech recognition. Assistive technology services assist learners with disabilities in selecting, acquiring, and using the assistive technologies that are the best match for them.
CLH	Many aspects of accessibility must be addressed at the school and district levels, such as purchasing educational materials in multiple formats, such as print and e-textbooks. However, now more than ever before, teachers and students can develop or secure resources and tools to increase

	accessibility. Let's start with the development of accessible educational materials. Teacher-developed content is essential to quality education. Whether adapted from another source, born of your own experience, or curated from multiple sources, the content you provide students needs to be accessible. So how do you do that?
GK	First, consider going digital. The Web Accessibility Initiative has been working for decades to help make sure that digital content on the web is as accessible as possible for all users and has created the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), an international standard for making web content accessible. The organization developed a set of standards that is regularly updated, but the standards boil down to four key content development principles that form the acronym POUR.
CLH	Oh good, an acronym! Basically just a checklist in disguise.
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CLH	**The P in POUR stands for perceivable.** What is it? Content that all of your students can perceive through sight or sound. Note that assistive technologies are required to move beyond sight and sound. You can achieve perceivability in the following ways: ● Add text descriptions to your images. ● Include closed captions and transcripts. ● Provide sufficient color contrast. ● Do not use color alone. ● Make your text readable and legible.
GGK	**The O in POUR stands for operable.** Operable content helps all students navigate the information independently using their preferred tools. You can achieve operability by doing the following: ● Provide a clear structure with headings. ● Create descriptive links. ● Check for keyboard accessibility. ● Provide sufficient time. ● Avoid content that flashes.

CLH	**The U in POUR stands for understandable.** Understandable content means your students understand a consistent and predictable design. You can ensure understandable content by doing the following: • Provide clear directions. • Aim for consistency. • Use plain language. • Identify the language.
GGK	**The R in POUR stands for robust.** What is it? Content that is "evergreen" in that it will work with current and future technologies, including assistive technologies. You can ensure robust content by doing the following: • Provide descriptive metadata. • Perform an accessibility check. • Test for accessibility with people.
CLH	I honestly don't get that one – I think they needed something that started with an R.
GGK	Well fortunately, you can go into the podcast transcript and read these definitions again, and better yet, click on the link to the AEM website. This site provides teachers with simple-to-use instructions on how to achieve POUR. We recommend exploring the webpage "Designing for Accessibility with POUR" to learn more about each of the strategies we've just listed. The web address for that page is on your screen. Now let's explore how to leverage the power of TALE to increase accessibility

CLH	And just as a reminder, when we talk about teaching across learning environments, or TALE, we are describing two different – but interrelated – practices. The first is moving across learning environments: moving between in-person, remote, hybrid, etc. The second is integrating teaching strategies across learning environments: using web-based tools within the in-person classroom, flipping instruction to use web-based resources for content-heavy instruction, and focusing on tactile learning in person, etc. To increase accessibility to learning for all of our students, the second aspect of TALE is particularly valuable. Let's consider three scenarios to see how planning for accessible learning can be portable across learning environments.
GGK	**Scenario 1**: Peter has significant hearing loss. When his teacher uses videos, they provide the following to ensure Peter can access and interact with the content: ● Closed captioning is displayed as he views the video. ● A transcript of the audio is provided, **and** ● Directions for any assignments are provided in writing. This works in remote, hybrid, and in-person learning environments.
CLH	**Scenario 2**: Jessie has a learning disability with specific needs in the area of reading decoding. Her teachers provide the following to assist her in accessing grade-level text: ● Alternative text on the same topic content at the student's reading level ● Use of text-to-speech software

	• Teacher recording of text • Embedded links to a dictionary/thesaurus or videos • Copy and paste text into rewordify.com, where content will be reworded to a more accessible Lexile level, **and** • Podcasts

GGK	**Scenario 3**: Korie's visual impairment impacts their access to text on a screen. Their teacher provides tools they can use in the classroom or wherever they are accessing the content, including the following: • Large print enhancer • Contrasting background and font choices • Audio description of materials, such as VoiceOver • Speech-to-text and text-to-speech software, **and** • Podcasts This also works in remote, hybrid, and in-person learning environments.
CLH	One major caveat to keep in mind: Older students may be able to manage their movement across learning environments more independently than younger students who are more dependent on an adult for assistance. In the same way, students with disabilities that impact their independent functioning may need the support of another adult. When students that depend on accessible content move to remote environments where they have a different level of access to a teacher or a paraprofessional, it is critical to embed explicit instructions. While we will be digging into the broader topic of explicit instruction in Session 4, it is important to note here that in addition to student-directed instructions, teachers of young students or students with multiple needs should embed into their content explicit instructions to guide individuals who are supporting student learning, such as a sibling, parent or family member, tutor, etc.

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GGK	Let's give it a go! After exploring more about web accessibility in a choice board, you will then implement the POUR model to increase the accessibility of a resource or content you use in your classroom.
CLH	The goal of the TALE Academy is to help teachers rethink education so that everyone–students, families, educators, school leaders, and communities–all have the opportunity to succeed. You've added another tool to your toolbox when you work to achieve accessibility across learning environments. Thanks for listening. You can now make your choice board selection to continue your learning! BYE!