

# How to Personalize a Common Course Syllabus to Your Course Syllabus

**Purpose:** This guide explains how to take a Common Course Syllabus and customize it to your own individual course syllabus — while preserving all accessibility features built into the original document. Keep in mind that if you post your course syllabus to Generals Online, it must be a WCAG 2.1 AA compliant document.

## Overview

The Common Course Syllabus (CCS) files posted in Teams are accessible-compliant documents. They can be found at:

Academic Assessment Team > Common Course Syllabi

**Note:** If you don't see the Common Course Syllabi channel, it may be a hidden channel. To show the channel, click hidden channels to display the list of your hidden channels. Then click the More Actions ellipsis (...) on the right side of the Common Course Syllabi channel. Select Show.

The CCS files use proper Word heading styles (Heading 1, 2, and 3), structured numbered lists, a table with a marked header row, and correctly formatted hyperlinks. These features allow screen readers and assistive technologies to navigate the document clearly.

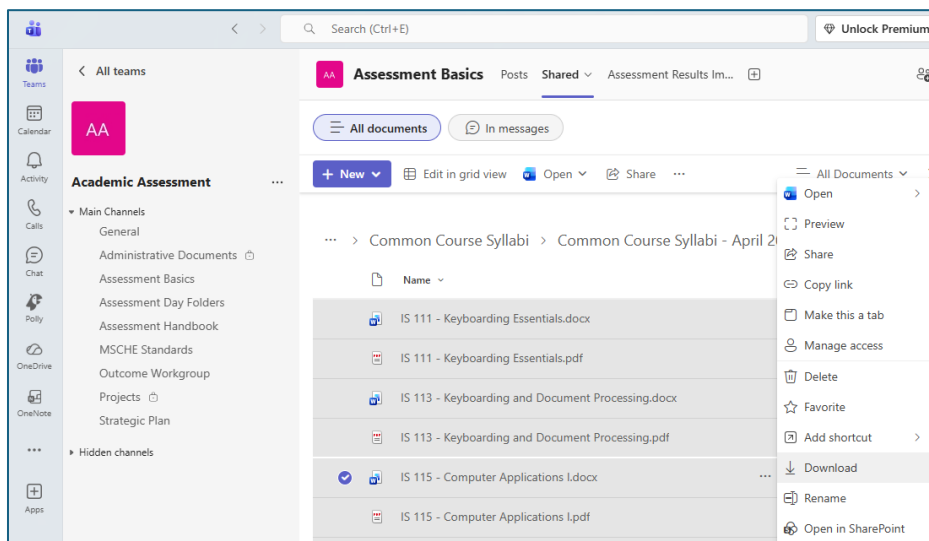
When you create your individual course syllabus (CS), you are adding your personal and course-specific information to this accessible foundation. The golden rule is to add your content using the same accessible techniques already present in the document. Do **not** bypass them.

## Before You Begin

### Step 1: Save a New Copy

Always start from the original CCS file. Never overwrite it.

1. Locate the CCS in the following location in Teams:  
Academic Assessment Team > Common Course Syllabi
2. Click the More Actions ellipsis (...) to the right of the CCS filename you wish to use. Click Download.

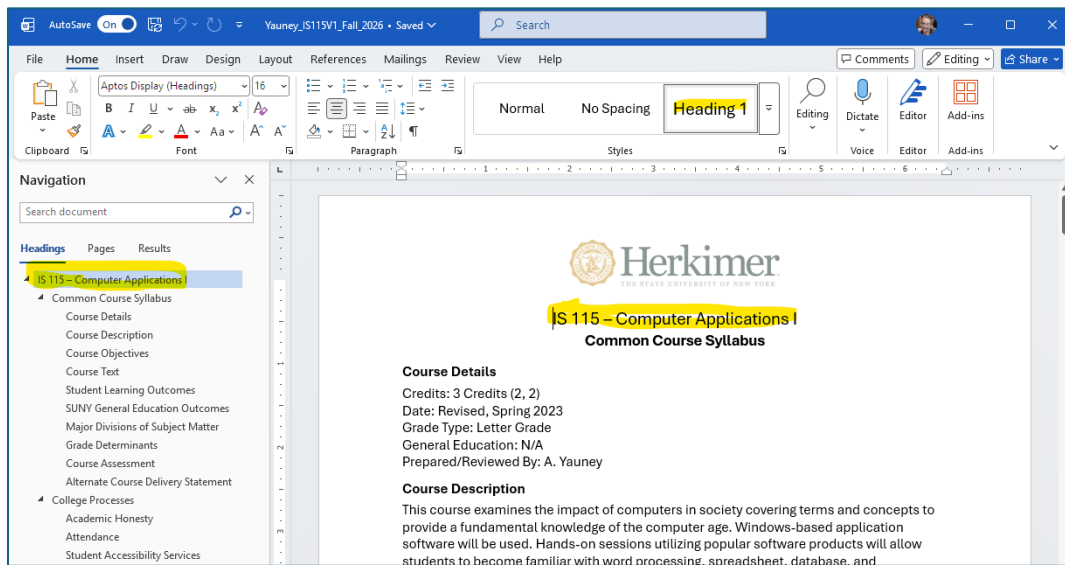


3. Open the file from your Downloads folder and do File > Save As to save a new copy with a name that identifies your section, for example: "YauneY\_IS115\_01\_Fall2026.docx"
4. Work only in your new copy from this point forward.

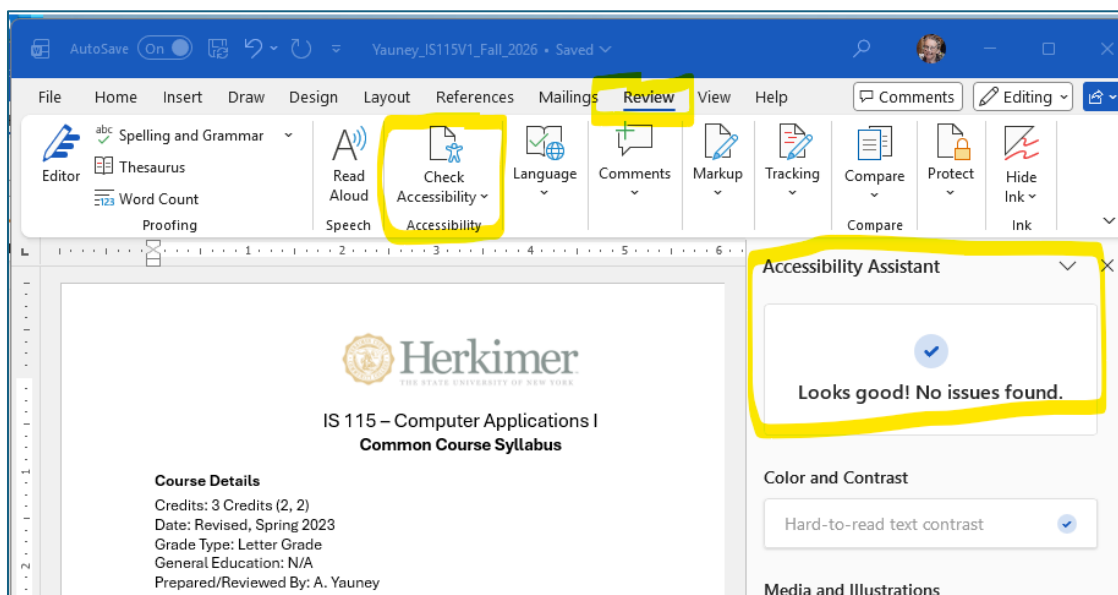
## Step 2: Confirm Accessibility Features Are Intact

Before making any edits, verify the document's accessibility foundation is in place.

5. Go to View > Navigation and then click the Headings tab in the Navigation pane. You should see Heading 1, Heading 2, and Heading 3 styles applied throughout the document. If you click one of the headings in the Navigation pane, you will be able to see the specific style that has been applied. Do not remove the heading styles. They are used for navigation purposes by screen readers.



Go to Review > Check Accessibility (in the Accessibility Checker). Note any issues flagged. The Common Course Syllabus should pass with no errors. If errors appear, do not proceed — contact the Office of Assessment, Institutional Effectiveness and Research, [ie@herkimer.edu](mailto:ie@herkimer.edu), CA 225.



## Modify and/or Add to Your Individual Course Syllabus (CS)

The CCS is your starting point. You need to modify and/or fill in content to make the CCS your individual CS. Each item below includes accessibility guidance.

| Field to Modify or Add                    | How to Add It Accessibly                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|-------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Modify Heading</b>                     | Add your section number to the heading and remove the word "Common." Include the semester.                                                                                                                             |
| <b>Instructor Name &amp; Title</b>        | Type directly into the existing "Course Details" section. Change "Prepared/Reviewed By" to "Instructor, Faculty, Professor, Taught By, etc." (your choice). Use plain body text (Normal style). Do not use a text box. |
| <b>Office Location</b>                    | Add as plain body text in the Course Details section. Example: "Office: TC 317"                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Office Hours</b>                       | Add as plain body text. If listing multiple days/times, use a simple numbered or bulleted list (see Lists section below). Do not use a table for office hours — it adds unnecessary complexity for screen readers.     |
| <b>Phone / Email</b>                      | Type your phone number as plain text. For email, make it a proper hyperlink (see Hyperlinks section below).                                                                                                            |
| <b>Course Section &amp; Meeting Times</b> | Add as plain body text in Course Details. Example: "Section: 01 Meets: MWF 9:00–9:50am, Room: JH 230"                                                                                                                  |
| <b>Semester / Term</b>                    | Update the existing "Date:" line to reflect the current semester. Example: "Semester: Fall 2026"                                                                                                                       |

Example:



IS 115-02 – Computer Applications I  
**Course Syllabus – Fall 2026**

**Course Details**  
 Credits: 3 Credits (2, 2)  
 Semester: Fall 2026  
 Section 02: Meets: TR 1:30 p.m. to 3:20 p.m., TC 313  
 Grade Type: Letter Grade  
 General Education: N/A  
 Professor: Ms. Annette Yaunev  
 Office: TC 317  
 Phone: 315-866-0300 Ext. 8656  
 Email: [yaunevam@herkimer.edu](mailto:yaunevam@herkimer.edu)  
 Office Hours:

- Monday and Wednesday 12:15 p.m. to 1:15 p.m.
- Tuesday 11:30 a.m. to 12:20 p.m.
- Friday 8 a.m. to 9:20 a.m.

**Course Description**  
 This course examines the impact of computers in society covering terms and concepts to provide a fundamental knowledge of the computer age. Windows-based application software will be used. Hands-on sessions utilizing popular software products will allow students to become familiar with word processing, spreadsheet, database, and presentations software.

**Course Objectives**  
 This course is designed to:

1. Provide students with the skills necessary to utilize personal productivity software

## How to Add Content Accessibly

### Using Heading Styles

The CCS uses three heading levels. Maintain this hierarchy when adding any new sections:

| Heading Level    | When to Use It                                                                                                                                             |
|------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Heading 1</b> | Document title only. Already set — do not add another Heading 1.                                                                                           |
| <b>Heading 2</b> | Major divisions (e.g., "Course Information", "College Processes"). Already set. Only add a new Heading 2 if you are introducing a truly new major section. |
| <b>Heading 3</b> | Subsections within a major division (e.g., "Course Text", "Office Hours", "Assignment Descriptions"). Use Heading 3 for any new subsection you add.        |

#### How to apply a heading style:

1. Click in the paragraph you want to make a heading.
  2. In the Home tab, click the Styles panel and select the correct Heading level.
  3. Then type (or edit) your heading text.
- Never bold regular text to create a visual heading — it looks like a heading but is invisible to screen readers.

### Adding the Assignment/Grading Section

The "Grade Determinants" section in the CCS instructs that your individual syllabus must include assignments and their percent of grade. Add this as follows:

6. Click after the first paragraph in the "Grade Determinants" section.
7. Type your grading breakdown. Use a simple table or a list — see below for accessible options.
8. If using a list, use the built-in List Paragraph style or the Bullets/Numbering toolbar — never type dashes or asterisks manually.

#### Example of an accessible grading breakdown (list format):

Exams (3 × 15%) — 45%  
Homework Assignments — 25%  
Quizzes — 15%  
Final Exam — 15%

You could also type each item as a bulleted list item using Home > Bullets, but do not use manual characters for list items.

9. Adjust the grading scale table as appropriate for your class. Follow the table accessibility rules described later in this document.

## Adding Office Hours

List office hours as plain text or a simple bulleted list in the Course Details section. Do not use a separate table. Example:

- Monday & Wednesday: 10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m., Johnson Hall 231
- Tuesday: 1 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. (virtual, via Teams)
- Or by appointment — email to schedule

If you hold virtual office hours, note the platform (e.g., Microsoft Teams) and include a link using a proper hyperlink (see below).

## Working with Lists

The CCS uses numbered and bulleted lists throughout (Course Objectives, Student Learning Outcomes, Major Divisions, etc.). When adding your own lists, always use Word's built-in list tools.

**To create a bulleted list:** Select your text, then click the Bullets button (¶ icon) in the Home tab or use Home > Paragraph > List Paragraph style.

**To create a numbered list:** Use the Numbering button next to the Bullets button. Never type numbers manually ("1. 2. 3.") as this creates plain text that cannot be recognized as a list.

| ✓ DO                                                                                                                                 | ✗ DO NOT                                                                                                                   |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Use Home > Bullets or Numbering buttons<br>Use the List Paragraph style from the Styles panel<br>Press Tab to create sub-list levels | Type bullet characters manually (•, -, *, —)<br>Type manual numbers (1. 2. 3.)<br>Use spaces or indents to fake a sub-list |

## Adding a Schedule or Course Calendar

Many faculty include a week-by-week schedule. If you add one, use a table — not a series of manually formatted lines. Tables are accessible when created correctly. Follow these rules:

10. Insert your table via Insert > Table. Set the number of columns you need (e.g., Week | Topic | Readings | Due Dates).
11. Designate a header row: click in your top row, then go to Table Design > Table Style Options > check Header Row. This allows screen readers to announce column names with each cell.
12. Add a brief table title as a Normal paragraph immediately above the table, such as "Table 1: IS 1115-02 Weekly Course Schedule".
13. Do not merge cells in ways that break the logical column structure. Avoid splitting cells.
14. Do not leave the first row blank. Column headers should be descriptive (e.g., "Week" not "1").
15. Do not use the table solely for visual layout (e.g., to create two columns of text). Tables are for data only.

## Adding or Editing Hyperlinks

The CCS contains properly formatted hyperlinks. When adding your own links — such as your email address, a Teams meeting link, or a course website — always create a real hyperlink. To do so:

16. Select the text you want to link (e.g., your email address or the word "course website").
17. Right-click and choose Hyperlink (or use Insert > Link > Insert Link).
18. In the "Address" field, type the full URL (https://...) or email address (mailto:you@herkimer.edu).
19. Click OK. The text will appear underlined and in the hyperlink color.
20. Verify the link is descriptive: link text like "click here" or "this page" is not accessible. Use the actual URL, your email address, or a meaningful phrase like "BU 104 Course Website".

#### Accessible link text examples:

- ✓ **Good:** "Email me at joneska@herkimer.edu" — linked on the email address
- ✓ **Good:** "Visit the BU 104 Generals Online page" — linked on the descriptive phrase
- ✗ **Avoid:** "Click here for assignments" — "click here" gives no context to a screen reader user

### Using Bold and Emphasis

**Bold** is used in the original syllabus for important warnings (e.g., the mental health crisis line). You may use bold for genuinely critical information but avoid overusing it — excessive bold reduces its impact and can be disorienting for readers with cognitive disabilities.

**Italic:** Use sparingly for titles of works (e.g., textbook titles) or key terms on first use. Do not use italic for body text emphasis.

**Underline:** Reserve underline exclusively for hyperlinks. Underlining plain text is confusing because readers expect underlined text to be a clickable link.

**Color:** Never use color alone to convey meaning (e.g., "items in red are required"). Some readers cannot distinguish colors. Always pair color with another indicator (bold, label, or symbol).

### Font and Text Formatting

The CCS uses a consistent, accessible font (Aptos) and size (12 point). Maintain these defaults:

| Setting               | Guidance                                                                                                    |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Body text font</b> | Aptos (or another sans serif font such as Arial, Calibri, etc.)                                             |
| <b>Body text size</b> | 12 pt (or larger; do not use smaller than 12 pt)                                                            |
| <b>Line spacing</b>   | Do not compress line spacing below single. The document default is appropriate.                             |
| <b>All caps</b>       | Avoid using ALL CAPS for body text. It reduces readability for many readers. Use bold instead for emphasis. |
| <b>Text boxes</b>     | Do not add text boxes. Screen readers may skip text box content entirely. Use regular paragraphs.           |

## What Can and Cannot be Changed

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The following indicates elements that must remain exactly as they appear in the CCS and those that may be adjusted in your CS:

- Course Description — do not edit the approved course description text.
- Course Objectives — do not remove or reorder the approved objectives.
- Student Learning Outcomes — do not alter the SLO text. You may, however, adjust the assessment methods to the methods you use in your class.
- SUNY General Education Outcomes — required language; must not be modified. You may, however, adjust the assessment methods to the methods you use in your class.
- Major Divisions of Subject Matter — do not remove or modify topics.
- Grading Scale table — This is indicated as a college grading scale, but you may adjust it for your class to the grading scale you use. If you do adjust it, be sure to maintain it as a table with a heading row.
- College Processes section — Academic Honesty, Attendance, Student Accessibility Services, and Counseling Center are required college processes statements. Do not edit, shorten, or remove any of them. Your personal attendance policy and any other course policies can be added as a section above the College Processes section.
- The document's Heading style hierarchy — do not reformat headings as bold plain text or change heading levels.
- Hyperlinks to [herkimer.edu/catalog](http://herkimer.edu/catalog) and [herkimer.edu/handbook](http://herkimer.edu/handbook) are required and must remain active links.

## Running the Accessibility Checker Before Distributing

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Before sharing your syllabus with students or posting it online, run Word's built-in Accessibility Checker to catch any issues you may have introduced.

21. Go to Review (in the top ribbon).
22. Click Check Accessibility.
23. A panel will open on the right side of the page listing Errors, Warnings, and Tips.
24. Address every Error and Warning before distributing the document. Tips are optional improvements.

Common issues to watch for:

- Missing alternative text on images — if you insert a photo or graphic, right-click it and select "Edit Alt Text" to add a description.
- Table missing header row — if you added a table, make sure the first row is marked as a header (Table Design > Header Row).
- Unclear hyperlink text — if you see this warning, update your link text to be descriptive.
- Color contrast — if you changed text color, the checker will flag low-contrast combinations. Revert to default black text when in doubt.

## Save Your CS as a PDF File

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If you wish to post your CS in PDF format, do File Save As > Change the file type to PDF > Click Options > Check "Document structure tags for accessibility" (checkbox should be checked)

## Quick Reference: Accessible Editing Checklist

Use this checklist before submitting or distributing your individualized syllabus.

| ✓                        | Item                                                                                                   |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Saved a new copy of the file — did not overwrite the original Common Course Syllabus                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Added my name, title, office, phone, and email in the Course Details section using Normal (body) style |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Updated the semester/term date                                                                         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Added office hours as plain text or a bulleted list (not a table, not manual dashes)                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Added course section number and meeting times                                                          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Added my grading breakdown (assignments and percentages) in the Grade Determinants section             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Used Heading 3 style for any new subsection headings I created                                         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Did not type manual bullet characters (•, -, *) — used the Bullets button instead                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Did not type manual numbers (1. 2. 3.) — used the Numbering button instead                             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Made my email address a real hyperlink (Insert > Link) with mailto: format                             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Checked that all link text is descriptive — no "click here" links                                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Did not use underline for anything other than hyperlinks                                               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Did not use color alone to convey meaning                                                              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Did not use text boxes (content within text boxes is skipped by screen readers)                        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | If I added a table: designated the header row using Table Design > Header Row                          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Did not modify any required college processes text (Academic Honesty, Attendance, etc.)                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Ran the Accessibility Checker (Review > Check Accessibility) and resolved all Errors and Warnings      |

## Questions or Accessibility Concerns?

If you are unsure whether an editing choice preserves accessibility, err on the side of caution and use the simplest approach: plain body text or an approved list/heading style.

For questions about document accessibility, contact the Office of Assessment, Institutional Effectiveness and Research, CA 225, [ie@herkimer.edu](mailto:ie@herkimer.edu)

**Remember:** Accessibility is not about extra work — it is about making your course information available to every student, regardless of ability or assistive technology. The Common Course Syllabus has already done the heavy lifting. Your job is simply to add your content in the same accessible way.