BALL STATE UNIVERSITY

Video/Podcast Accessibility Compliance Guide

For web publishers, video and podcast producers, and YouTube channel managers | Effective date: April 24, 2026

Purpose

Under the ADA Title II final rule (28 CFR Part 35, Subpart H), Ball State University must ensure that all web content—including video—meets WCAG 2.1 Level AA by April 24, 2026. This guide covers what you need to do when uploading video to YouTube and when embedding video on bsu.edu pages.

This guide is for two audiences: (1) anyone who manages a Ball State YouTube channel, and (2) anyone who embeds video on a bsu.edu web page. If you do both, the entire guide applies to you.

> **The Bottom Line**
>
> Every video needs three things to be accessible: (1) accurate captions, (2) audio description if the video has meaningful visual content not conveyed by the audio, and (3) a properly coded embed with a descriptive title attribute if placed on bsu.edu (handled by MarCom developers). These are not optional after April 24, 2026.

Section 1: What the Law Requires

WCAG 2.1 Level AA includes several success criteria that apply directly to video. The table below shows each requirement, what it means in practice, and when it applies.

WCAG #	Name	What It Means	Applies To
1.2.1 (A)	Audio-only / Video-only	Audio-only content (podcasts) needs a transcript. Video-only content (no audio track) needs either a transcript or audio description.	Podcasts, silent video
1.2.2 (A)	Captions (Prerecorded)	All prerecorded video with audio must have synchronized captions.	All video with sound
1.2.3 (A)	Audio Description or Media Alternative	Prerecorded video must have either audio description or a full text alternative.	All video with sound
1.2.4 (AA)	Captions (Live)	Live video with audio must have real-time captions.	Live streams
1.2.5 (AA)	Audio Description (Prerecorded)	Audio description must be provided for prerecorded video content when meaningful information is conveyed visually.	Video with visual-only info
4.1.2 (A)	Name, Role, Value	Interactive components (including embedded players) must have	All embeds on bsu.edu

		accessible names. For YouTube embeds, this means a title attribute on the iframe (handled by MarCom developers).	

Section 2: Captions

Captions are synchronized text of spoken dialogue and other meaningful audio information (sound effects, music, speaker changes) displayed on screen. They are required for every prerecorded video that contains audio.

Why Auto-Captions Are Not Enough

YouTube, TikTok, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram all offer auto-generated captions. These are a starting point, not a finished product. Section 508 guidance from the federal government is explicit: auto-captioning technology "does not yet provide an equivalent experience" and "would not allow your agency to meet the minimum standard for pre-recorded media."

Common problems with auto-captions:

- Words are frequently incorrect, especially for proper nouns, technical terms, and names.

- Speaker changes are not identified.

- Punctuation and grammar are missing or wrong, which changes meaning.

- Non-speech audio (sound effects, music, ambient noise that conveys information) is not described.

- Synchronization with the audio can be off, especially when speakers talk quickly.

What Good Captions Look Like

- Every spoken word is captured accurately, with correct spelling and grammar.

- Speakers are identified when there is more than one person speaking (e.g., [Dr. Smith] or [Interviewer]).

- Meaningful non-speech sounds are described in brackets: [applause], [phone ringing], [upbeat music playing].

- Captions are synchronized—they appear at the same time as the corresponding audio.

- Style is consistent throughout the video (same format for speaker names, sounds, and music).

How to Produce Compliant Captions

Option 1: Edit auto-generated captions (minimum viable approach)

- Upload your video to YouTube.

- Go to YouTube Studio → select the video → "Subtitles" in the left sidebar.

- Click the auto-generated caption track. Review and correct every line. Add speaker identifications and sound descriptions.

- Save. The corrected captions will display on the YouTube player and in any embed.

Option 2: Upload a caption file (recommended for important content)

- Write or commission a caption file in SRT or VTT format.

- In YouTube Studio: go to Subtitles → "Add Language" (or select existing) → click "Add" next to Subtitles → "Upload file" → select your SRT/VTT file.

- Review the upload for sync accuracy, then publish.

Option 3: Script-based captions (most efficient for new productions)

- If the video follows a script, use the script as the basis for your caption file. Add timestamps, speaker identifications, and sound descriptions. This is the fastest and most accurate method for scripted content.

Open Captions vs. Closed Captions

Closed captions can be turned on and off by the viewer. YouTube's caption system produces closed captions. This is the standard approach.

Open captions are permanently burned into the video image and cannot be turned off. If needed, use open captions when posting to platforms that lack reliable caption controls (such as Instagram, where SRT uploads are not supported) or when you want to guarantee captions display regardless of player settings.

Both are acceptable under WCAG. The requirement is that captions exist and are accurate—not that they be one type or the other.

Section 3: Audio Description

Audio description (AD) is narration added to a video's soundtrack that describes meaningful visual content not conveyed by the existing audio. It is required under WCAG 1.2.5 (Level AA) whenever a video communicates important information visually that a person who cannot see the screen would miss.

When Audio Description Is Required

Not every video needs audio description. The determining question is: **does the video convey meaningful information visually that is not also spoken in the audio track?** If the answer is yes, AD is required.

AD Likely Needed	AD Likely Not Needed
Campus tour video with music and minimal narration—buildings, rooms, and facilities are shown but not described.	A talking-head video of a professor explaining a policy, with no on-screen text or visuals beyond the speaker.
Video with text overlays showing event names, dates, and statistics that are not read aloud. Or, video displaying graphics, charts or other visual elements meant to communicate information.	A recorded lecture where the speaker verbally describes every slide and diagram they show.
Screen-capture tutorial where the narrator says "click here" without naming the button, menu, or field being clicked.	A podcast-style video of two people having a conversation, with no meaningful visuals beyond the speakers.
Event recap video with b-roll of activities, performances, and attendees not described in voiceover.	An interview where the subject is introduced by name in the audio, and no additional visual context is needed.

Three Approaches to Audio Description

Approach 1: Build description into the primary audio (best for new videos)

The most cost-effective method is to write scripts so that narrators describe everything meaningful on screen. Instead of "As you can see here," the narrator says "The double room includes a twin XL bed, a desk with a chair, a wardrobe, and a three-drawer dresser." This eliminates the need for a separate AD track entirely.

This should be the standard for all new video production at Ball State. It costs nothing extra during production and produces a better video for all viewers.

> **Scripting Tips for Built-In Description**
> Have speakers identify themselves verbally rather than relying on name-lower-thirds. Describe locations, actions, and on-screen text as part of the natural narration. If you show data, read the data. If you show a building, name the building. If you show a process, describe each step.

Approach 2: Create a separate audio-described version (for existing videos)

For videos already produced where the narration does not cover the visuals, create a second version of the video that includes a secondary narration track describing the visual content. This AD version is uploaded as a separate video.

- On YouTube: upload the AD version as a separate video (it can be unlisted to keep your channel clean). Title it clearly, e.g., "Beyerl Residence Hall Tour [Audio Described]." Link to this version of the video in the original video's description.

- On bsu.edu: next to the original embed, add a link (in this example): "Watch audio-described version of Beyerl Residence Hall tour." The link text must name the specific video (WCAG 2.4.4). The link should point to the AD version on YouTube or to a separate page hosting the AD embed.

Approach 3: Extended audio description (rare cases)

If there are not enough natural pauses in the audio to insert description, extended audio description pauses the video to allow time for the description before resuming. This is a Level AAA requirement (1.2.7)—not required under the rule—but may be the only option for highly visual, fast-paced content. Consider it for critical content where Approach 2 is insufficient. If you find yourself exploring this, please reach out to Marketing and Communications for strategic discussion about your project.

Tips for Producing Audio Description

- Describe what is seen, not what you interpret. "A student walks across the quad" rather than "A happy student enjoys campus."

- Prioritize information essential to understanding the narrative. If time is limited, describe the most important visuals first.

- Description should occur during pauses in dialogue—never over spoken words, unless absolutely necessary.

- Identify speakers, on-screen text, title cards, and end credits.

- Keep description style consistent throughout the video.

- The AD version also needs accurate captions—it is a complete accessible version, not a partial fix.

Section 4: Embedding Video on bsu.edu

For those on campus who have proper Sitecore publishing permissions, when you embed a YouTube video on a bsu.edu page, there are requirements beyond what YouTube handles natively. The embed itself must be accessible.

The iframe Title Attribute

Every YouTube embed uses an HTML **<iframe>** tag. That iframe must have a **title** attribute that describes the video. Without it, a screen reader user encounters an unlabeled frame and has no idea what the embedded content is. This functionality is handled by developers in Marketing and Communications. As a publisher, you will be prompted when embedding a video block to provide a title.

Providing a Link to the Audio-Described Version

If the embedded video requires audio description, you must provide a route to the AD version from the same page. Place a link near the embed—either directly above or below it—with specific link text:

- Good: "Watch audio-described version of Beyerl Residence Hall tour"

- Bad: "Click here for audio description"
- Bad: "AD version"

The link should go to the unlisted YouTube video with the audio-described version (which is likely unlisted but works fine when linked to).

Keyboard Accessibility

YouTube's embedded player is generally keyboard-accessible—users can tab to it, press Space to play/pause, use arrow keys for volume and seeking, and press Tab to move through controls. However, verify the following on your page:

- A keyboard user can reach the video player by tabbing through the page.
- The player does not trap keyboard focus—a user can tab past it after interacting with it.
- If you have custom JavaScript or overlays on the page, ensure they don't interfere with keyboard navigation to or within the player.

When the Video Is the Only Way to Get the Information

If a page presents video as the sole source of certain information, that is an accessibility problem independent of whether the video itself is captioned and described.

Always provide a text equivalent on the page for any instructions, processes, or information that the video conveys. This is not a Level AAA transcript requirement; it is a basic principle of ensuring that the content is accessible to anyone who cannot watch the video for any reason (assistive technology limitations, bandwidth, preference).

Section 5: YouTube Channel Management

This section covers the specific fields and settings in YouTube Studio that affect accessibility. This information applies only to the select few individuals at Ball State responsible for managing institutional YouTube accounts.

Element	Where to Find It	What to Do
Captions	YouTube Studio → select video → "Subtitles" in left sidebar. Auto-generated captions appear here. Edit inline or upload SRT/VTT.	Review and correct auto-generated captions or upload a professionally produced file. Include speaker IDs, sound descriptions, and music cues.
Video title	YouTube Studio → select video → "Details" tab → Title field.	Use a clear, descriptive title. This serves as the accessible name for the video across the platform and when embedded.
Video description	YouTube Studio → select video → "Details" tab → Description field.	Include a brief summary of the video content. If an AD version exists, include a link to it here: "Audio-described version: [URL]."

Thumbnail	YouTube Studio → select video → "Details" tab → Thumbnail section.	YouTube does not support alt text for thumbnails. Ensure the video title is descriptive enough to serve this function. If the thumbnail contains text, include that text in the video description.
Audio description	Not natively supported by YouTube.	Upload a separate AD version of the video (can be unlisted). Title it with "[Audio Described]" appended. Link to it from the original video's description.
End screens and cards	YouTube Studio → select video → "Editor" tab.	Any text on end screens or cards should be spoken in the video or repeated in the description. Do not rely solely on visual end cards to convey calls to action.
Playlists	YouTube Studio → Playlists.	Use descriptive playlist titles and descriptions. If you maintain AD versions of videos, consider creating a dedicated "Audio Described" playlist.

Section 6: Decision Guide

Use this guide to determine what accessibility work a video requires.

Step 1: What type of media is it?

Media Type	Definition	What's Required
Video with audio (synchronized media)	The standard case: a video that has a soundtrack with speech, music, or meaningful sound.	Captions + audio description (if needed). See Steps 2 and 3.
Video-only (no audio)	A video with no audio track at all—e.g., a timelapse, a silent screen recording.	Either a transcript published alongside the video player or an audio description track.
Audio-only (no video)	A podcast, audio recording, or similar content with no video component.	A transcript published alongside the audio player.

Step 2: Are captions needed?

If the media has audio, yes. Review and correct auto-generated captions or upload your own SRT/VTT file. Captions must include speaker identification and descriptions of meaningful non-speech audio.

Step 3: Is audio description needed?

Watch the video with your eyes closed. If you miss information that is important to understanding the content, audio description is needed. Specifically, ask:

- Is there on-screen text (names, titles, dates, statistics, URLs) that is not read aloud?
- Are there visual demonstrations, actions, or processes that the narrator does not describe?
- Are there locations, people, or objects shown that are important to the message but not identified in the audio?
- Does the narrator say things like "as you can see here" or "this screen shows" without specifying what "here" or "this" is?

If the answer to any of these is yes, audio description is required.

Step 4: Is the video being embedded on bsu.edu?

If yes, ensure a title attribute is provided for the the iframe upon embed and, if AD is needed, provide a link to the audio-described version near the embed. Also ensure that any information conveyed only via the video is also available as text on the page.

Section 7: Pre-Publish Checklist

Complete this checklist before publishing a video to YouTube or embedding one on bsu.edu.

✓	Check	Applies To
☐	Video has accurate, human-reviewed captions (not raw auto-captions). Speaker changes and meaningful sounds are identified.	All video with audio
☐	I watched the video with my eyes closed. If I missed meaningful information, I have addressed audio description via one of the three approaches in Section 3.	All video with visual-only info
☐	The YouTube video title is descriptive and specific.	All YouTube uploads
☐	The YouTube video description includes a content summary. If an AD version exists, it is linked in the description.	All YouTube uploads
☐	If the video is embedded on bsu.edu, the iframe has a descriptive title attribute (e.g., title="Video: [name]").	All bsu.edu embeds
☐	If the video requires AD and is embedded on bsu.edu, a link to the audio-described version appears near the embed with video-specific link text.	bsu.edu embeds needing AD
☐	If the video is the only source of information on the page (instructions, processes, etc.), a text equivalent is also provided on the page.	All bsu.edu embeds

☐	If the thumbnail contains text, that text is included in the video description or on the bsu.edu page.	All YouTube uploads
☐	On-screen text, title cards, and end credits in the video are either spoken in the audio or described in the captions.	All video

Section 8: Compliance Authority

Accessibility compliance is the responsibility of any individual creating content for use on behalf of Ball State University.

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. Ball State University's compliance deadline is April 24, 2026.

The Section 508 standards (particularly 503.4 regarding user controls for captions and audio descriptions) and the Section 508 synchronized media guidance from section508.gov have also informed this guide, as they represent federal best practices for accessible media.

Non-compliance after the deadline exposes the university to enforcement action by the U.S. Department of Justice and potential complaints through the ADA complaint process.

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, 765-285-0048.