



MaineAIM

Maine's AIM

Acquiring Accessible Instructional Materials for All Kids from Kittery to Fort Kent

Another tool to achieve universally designed curriculum

Prepared by Cynthia Curry, in collaboration with the Maine AIM Community of Practice



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Introduction

With support from their local school districts and the Maine Learning Technology Initiative (MLTI), increasing numbers of Maine educators are learning how to use technology to more successfully meet the needs of diverse learners. Our teachers and students now have more tools and resources available than ever before, and many have witnessed firsthand how the use of teaching and learning technologies contributes to student motivation, individualized and learner-controlled instruction, positive attitudes, collaborative behavior, and active learning experiences. The more ways that students can independently access the curriculum, the more likely they are to be fully engaged and successful learners.



Combining accessible instructional materials with educational technologies is a powerful way to extend strategies that meet the needs and preferences of diverse learners. Most instructional materials used in classrooms remain text-based, either in print or electronic format (e.g., a CD), making them inaccessible to some students. Multiple formats of the same curriculum material (Braille, audio, digital text, and large print) means that all students have access to learning. This is the intent of accessible instructional materials (AIM).

Consider the experience of a fourth grader at Burchard Dunn Elementary School in New Gloucester:

Whenever I don't have anything my classmates are reading, I feel sort of left out. It's not a very good feeling, and I would rather do something with the rest of the kids. I wish I had my lessons (in accessible format) right in front of me during class. It would be a lot easier than just sitting out and doing nothing. Sometimes, I can't hear kids in the back of the room when they're reading (aloud), and that's really bothersome.

Providing AIM to students who need them requires planning and forethought. This document presents a framework for guiding and supporting the acquisition of AIM in a timely manner so that students with disabilities don't find themselves "outside" of the curriculum. Indeed, innovative ways of supplying multiple formats of the same curriculum material for **all** students, including students who most need them, are emerging on the horizon.

Accessible Instructional Materials: 21st Century Stuff for Teaching and Learning

The print-based textbook is the traditional face of education. It has been the staple of the classroom for centuries. We hear echoes of our own teachers:

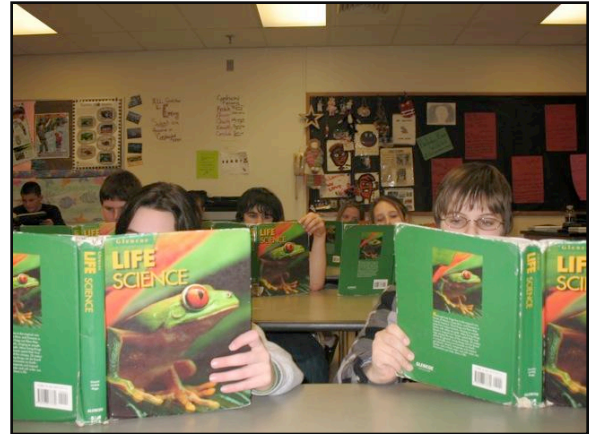
“...take out your book...”

“...turn to page 167 of your book...”

“...look that up in your book...”

“...the homework tonight is to read chapter 6 of your book and answer the questions at the end...”

Only a chalkboard and desks conjure up more images of the traditional classroom experience.



The majority of our students are able to use books as tools for learning, albeit at various levels of skill and comfort. Some students can read a print-based book fluently, simultaneously processing and retaining the content. Others need more time, along with research-based scaffolding methods, such as note-taking guides and mapping strategies. But for still other students, printed text is a barrier in and of itself. Due to physical, sensory, cognitive, or learning differences, print-based materials are not usable and cannot support their learning.

A student's inability to access printed text is rarely obvious. Blindness and low vision are discernable, but literally tens of thousands of PreK-12 students in the U.S. have disabilities that severely impair their ability to read printed text. The phrase, "Open your book..." leads only to lessons in frustration for these students.

Standard printed books can pose insurmountable barriers to kids with disabilities. The reason is simple: Printed text cannot be modified to meet individual needs. All components of print-based materials are inherently fixed: form, text, images, and layout.

The Specialized Formats of AIM

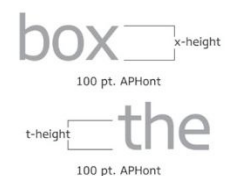
Accessible Instructional Materials (AIM) are specialized formats of curricular content. Each format addresses unique individual needs, and includes Braille, audio, digital text, and large print:

Braille “is a series of raised dots that can be read with the fingers by people who are blind or whose eyesight is not sufficient for reading printed material.” Rather than a language, Braille is a code for writing and reading languages ([American Foundation for the Blind](#)).

Audio refers to auditory alternatives to printed text. Examples of formats include audiotapes, MP3 files, and software programs that convert digital text to speech output.

Digital text, also known as “electronic text” or “e-text,” is what appears in common word processing or text editing programs. Examples of file formats include Rich Text Format (.rtf), ASCII, HTML, Microsoft Word (.doc), and Digital Talking Books. Digital text is malleable and transformable ([Center for Applied Special Technology - CAST](#)) because it can be formatted (e.g., font, size, color) and converted to accessible form (e.g., read aloud by speech synthesis). For more information on digital text, visit the [Center for Applied Special Technology \(CAST\)](#).

Large print is generally defined by the American Printing House for the Blind (APH) as “print for text passages that is larger than the print used by that segment of the population with normal vision. APH takes the position that large print for use by the low vision population is print that is eighteen points in size or larger.” For more information about large print, [please visit APH’s Web site](#).



AIM in the Classroom

Because most curricula rely on text-based instructional materials, AIM makes learning possible for many students who would otherwise struggle to keep up. Here are the testimonies of two students at Mount Desert Island High School:

My name is Joseph. I am 16 and I'm a sophomore. Just recently, I used an audio (format) for a book called Gilgamesh. (Audio books) have really improved how I can understand how and what the book is about. It has also made it easier to visualize the events that happen.

My name is Annie, and I use a lot of adaptive equipment. I have cerebral palsy and I use books on tape because I have a visual impairment. When I was in Sophomore English, I used books on CD to read the books so I didn't have a lot of eyestrain. My experience in class was better because instead of spending hours reading a book I could use CDs to help with the eyestrain.



While Joseph and Annie may access books in audio format for different reasons, both are having their individual needs and preferences met without accommodation or modification to the curriculum.

How It Works in Mr. Khan's Call of the Wild Unit

If you have experience with the acquisition of A.I.M, you may be familiar with some of the intricacies involved. Educators are often and understandably intimidated by copyright issues, which put restrictions on the use of many instructional materials. The details of copyright law are explained in another section of this document. Many materials that are commonly used across the curriculum, however, are in the public domain, meaning that they are not copyrighted and can be freely used by anyone and converted to multiple formats. Consider the following scenario, which demonstrates how a work in the public domain can be acquired and rendered in multiple formats for all students, including students with unique learning needs.

Mr. Khan, a middle school Language Arts teacher, is using "The Call of the Wild" by Jack London to explore basic questions about relationships among people and the natural world. Knowing that the "The Call of the Wild" was published in 1903 and is in the public domain, Mr. Khan searches for the book on the World Wide Web. He has many copies of the book in print, but wants to take full advantage of its digital format so that all of his students have a choice in how they will access it.

Mr. Kahn chooses to search for “The Call of the Wild” at Bookshare.org, which has over 41,000 books and periodicals in accessible digital format. Bookshare is formally known as an Accessible Media Producer (AMP), which is an organization that produces and distributes specialized formats of copyrighted works for individuals with print disabilities.

Although most of the materials in its collection are under copyright, Bookshare hosts many public domain works that anyone can access. Furthermore, several of Mr. Khan’s students have print disabilities that meet the requirements of copyright law exemption. These students are very familiar with Bookshare because, in addition to public domain works, they come here to download curriculum materials that are under copyright. This enables them to fully participate in teaching and learning activities alongside their peers, who have access to the standard print versions provided in the classroom.

At Bookshare, Mr. Khan finds “The Call of the Wild” in multiple formats, including Digital Talking Book, Braille, Text, and HTML. Because the book is in the public domain and therefore freely usable by anyone, all of his students, regardless of ability, can choose from this array of formats. Although many students choose to use the traditional print copies of the book available in the classroom, several students, with and without disabilities, take advantage of the alternative formats available at Bookshare.

Amanda has Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and struggles with staying focused while reading. She chooses to download from Bookshare the Text format of “The Call of the Wild.” With headphones and the speech synthesis software built into the computer, the sounds of the classroom are drowned out, greatly improving her ability to stay attentive to the story as she reads along with the text being spoken aloud.



Joshua is blind and an experienced member of Bookshare. For several years he has downloaded copyrighted works that are used in his classes. Joshua is a Braille reader and chooses to download “The Call of the Wild” in Braille format, which is compatible with his refreshable Braille display device.

Yanni has a specific learning disability in the area of reading. He chooses to download the Digital Talking Book file of “The Call of the Wild” and opens it in his specialized reading software program.

Several students in Mr. Khan's class who have MP3 players choose to download the Text file of "The Call of the Wild" and convert it to MP3 format. After transferring the file to their MP3 players, they listen to the book on MP3 players at their convenience.

Lucia is an English Language Learner and greatly benefits from simultaneously seeing and hearing text as it is read aloud. She chooses to download the Text file of "The Call of the Wild" and reads along with a speech synthesis program, which highlights each word as it's spoken aloud.

Maria has cerebral palsy. Due to her inability to use standard printed material because of physical limitations, she chooses to download the Text file of "The Call of the Wild" and uses voice recognition software to navigate the book, and speech synthesis software that reads the book aloud.

Because Mr. Khan takes full advantage of multiple formats of the same book, "The Call of the Wild," he eliminates the need for many of the typical accommodations and modifications that teachers make for students with unique learning needs. Through access and choice, each student has an equitable opportunity to achieve the objectives of his curriculum.

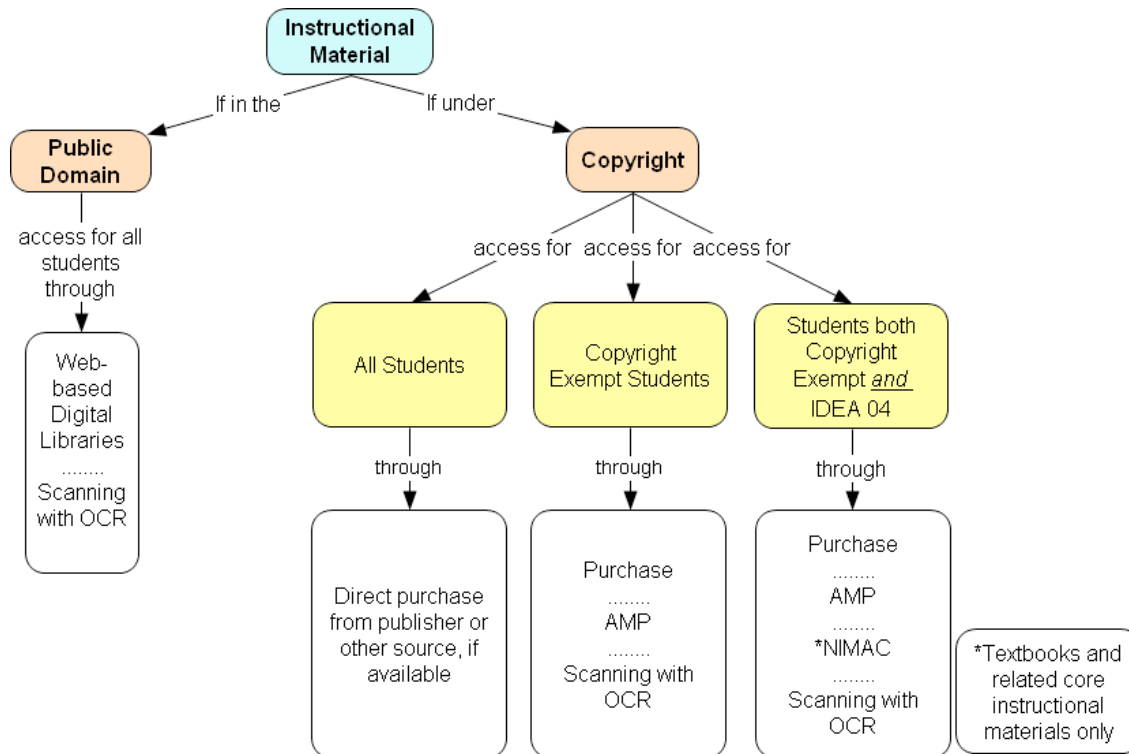
Works that are in the public domain, such as "The Call of the Wild," are ideal for use in the development of accessible curriculum. The sole use of public domain materials, however, is clearly not reasonable nor desirable. The selection of curriculum materials must be guided by sound educational decision-making rather than a single criterion, such as copyright consideration. At the same time, it is imperative to recognize the need for A.I.M, and to develop the necessary knowledge and skills for acquiring it in a timely manner.

Acquisition of AIM

Mr. Khan's use of "The Call of the Wild" at Bookshare provides one demonstration of how to acquire specialized formats of a particular curriculum material, in this case material that is in the public domain. But what if the material is copyrighted and therefore not freely usable by all students?

Figure 1 presents a framework that guides the determination of how to acquire AIM on a student-by-student basis. Once it is determined that a student needs A.I.M, the next step is to systematically consider the instructional material that will be needed in specialized format. One of the first indicators of the appropriate acquisition system is whether material is in the public domain or under copyright. Figure 1 is presented here as a preview of the acquisition systems available, and will be re-visited after each system is explained.

Figure 1 Framework of Acquisition Systems



Acquisition of Materials in the Public Domain

A work in the public domain is not protected by copyright and is freely usable by everyone. Public domain works may be freely copied, used, and redistributed. As a result, the World Wide Web has become a voluminous host to public domain works, particularly classics of literature.

Digital text is the most widely used accessible format, and before beginning to explore online libraries and collections, it's important to distinguish between digital text and an electronic image. As previously described, digital text is dynamic and flexible; among other features, its font, size, and color can be customized, and it can also be rendered by speech synthesis or Braille display devices. Digital text can be selected and copied from one application to another. By comparison, an image of text is static and inflexible; it can be seen but not customized for the needs or preferences of users. For example, some Portable Document Format (PDF) files contain images of text, which are not accessible to students who need to customize the appearance of the content, as well as how they access it. The goal is to acquire **accessible** instructional materials, so be sure to scrutinize for digital text materials.

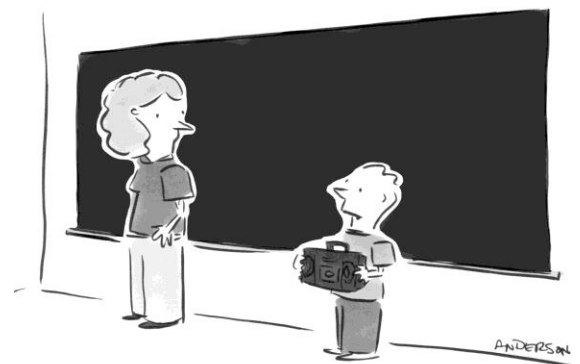
Common Web-based libraries and portals that offer public domain works in digital text format, as well as audio, include:

- Alex <http://infomotions.com/alex>
- American Library Association Great Web Sites for Kids <http://www.ala.org>
- AudioBooksforFree.com <http://audiobooksforfree.com>
- Authorama <http://authorama.com>
- Bartleby.com <http://www.bartleby.com>
- Berkeley Digital Library SunSITE <http://sunsite.berkeley.edu>
- Fullbooks.com <http://www.fullbooks.com>
- The Internet Public Library <http://www.ipl.org>
- LearnOutLoud.com <http://www.learnoutloud.com/>
- LibriVox <http://librivox.org>
- Lit2Go <http://etc.usf.edu/lit2go>
- LoudLit.org <http://loudlit.org>
- MARVEL! Maine's Virtual Library <http://www.maine.gov/marvel>
- The Online Books Page at the University of Pennsylvania <http://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu>
- Project Gutenberg <http://promo.net/pg>
- Read Print <http://www.readprint.com>
- University of Virginia Library Digital Collections <http://www.lib.virginia.edu/digital/collections>

Acquisition of Materials under Copyright

Copyright is a form of intellectual property law that protects original works of authorship, including literary, dramatic, musical, and artistic works. The creator of an original work is given exclusive rights to it for a limited time, after which the work enters the public domain.

If a publisher has a specialized format of a copyrighted material available for sale, it can be purchased directly and used by any student. That is, it doesn't have to be reserved for the sole use of a student with a print disability. To date, publishers have been slow to market copyrighted works in specialized formats. It is important for schools to continuously inquire with publishers about the availability. Repeated requests send a message to publishers that there is a demand for A.I.M, thus pushing the "market model" that will ultimately result in



"It's an audio book report."

multiple formats of a material being offered alongside its standard print version. So, ask the publisher - and keep asking over time.

If the specialized format of a copyrighted material is not available for direct purchase from the publisher or other source, several organizations are set up to support its acquisition for students with print disabilities. A 1996 amendment to the original copyright law of 1931, commonly referred to as the Chafee amendment, makes it permissible for an “authorized entity,” without asking permission of the rights holder, to convert materials into other formats, including scanned, electronic, Braille, or audio, for the use of people with print disabilities (17 U.S.C. 121). The conditions for this permission are that:

- the reformatted information is not further distributed;
- the original copyright information is copied into the new format;
- a notice is included with the reformatted version, stating that it is protected by copyright.

According to the law, “authorized entity” refers to “a nonprofit organization or a governmental agency that has a primary mission to provide specialized services relating to training, education, or adaptive reading or information access needs of blind or other persons with disabilities.”

As a result of this amendment to the copyright law, authorized entities in the form of nonprofit organizations have developed systems to produce and distribute specialized formats of copyrighted works for qualifying individuals with print disabilities. These entities, known as Accessible Media Producers (AMPs), include:

- American Printing House for the Blind <http://www.aph.org>
Specialized formats: Braille, human-narrated audio, large print, digital text (CD)
- Bookshare.org <http://www.bookshare.org>
Specialized formats: Digital text (including DAISY, ASCII, HTML, and Braille Digital Format) Note: Through funding from the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), Bookshare memberships for U.S. schools and qualifying U.S. students of all ages, including K-12, postsecondary, and adult education, are now free. Many schools throughout Maine have already created school membership accounts.
- Recordings for the Blind and Dyslexic <http://www.rfbd.org>
Specialized format: Human-narrated audio on disc format (requires RFB&D playback device or User Authorization Key for alternative device)
- National Library Service <http://www.loc.gov/nls/>
Specialized format: Braille and human-narrated audio on digital and cassette books (formats require specialized devices that are loaned at no charge)

Although each AMP shares the same purpose, i.e., to provide access to copyrighted works in specialized formats that those with print disabilities need, each is unique in its process and product. For example, each AMP offers specific and unique formats, which is important to note when acquiring AIM to meet the needs of an individual student.

Acquisition from the National Instructional Materials Access Center (NIMAC)

The National Instructional Materials Access Center (NIMAC) provides another acquisition system of A.I.M, specifically textbooks and related core instructional materials. The NIMAC is unique because it is a national repository of electronic files of textbooks and core instructional materials that are submitted directly by publishers. These files, once downloaded from the NIMAC, are then available to be converted (e.g., by an AMP) to any of the four specialized formats (Braille, digital text, audio, or large print). Although the process of downloading files is limited to authorized individuals, the NIMAC is freely searchable by anyone (<http://nimac.us>).

The NIMAC originated from a provision within the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA 04). While the statute does not change the central tenet of students' need of - and schools' legal obligation to provide - A.I.M, it contributes a unique acquisition system that previously did not exist.

The law requires that printed textbooks and related core instructional materials be provided to qualifying students with print disabilities in specialized formats in a timely manner (Sec 300.172). "Core instructional materials" are textbooks and related core materials published with texts that are

- primarily for use in elementary and secondary school instruction;
- required by state or local education agencies for use by students in the classroom.

In Maine, "timely manner" is defined as "at the same time as other students receive their core instructional materials in print format."

Timely access to appropriate and accessible instructional materials is inherent in a school's obligation under IDEA to ensure Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) to all students with disabilities so that they can participate in the general curriculum and meet their IEP goals. Historically, students who need textbooks in specialized formats commonly have not received them on time. For example, many schools are unaware that a Braille format of a math or science textbook must be ordered **at least six months** before the student needs it. Through the NIMAC, a partial system is now in place that addresses persistent obstacles for learners with print disabilities.

The files that publishers submit to the NIMAC must be based on the National Instructional Materials Accessibility Standard (NIMAS). The NIMAS is a technical standard used by publishers

to produce source files of their textbooks and related core instructional materials. As a result of using this standard, a single source file can be converted to any of the specialized formats. This is in sharp contrast to the previously fragmented system by which publishers used a wide range of conversion houses to convert diverse file types to specialized formats (e.g., one file type for audio, another for Braille, yet another for digital text). Today, a single file based on the NIMAS is built once and then rendered many times in multiple formats. This significantly reduces the amount of time it takes to get specialized formats of core instructional materials to the students who need them.

In addition to increasing the efficiency of converting publishers' files to specialized formats, the use of the NIMAS results in higher and more consistent quality. The NIMAS is based on today's most structured and accessible "markup language" for creating content, including textbooks. Because a NIMAS-based file is highly structured, all of its components are maintained, regardless of how it's rendered. For more information, please visit the Web site of the NIMAS Development and Technical Assistance Centers <http://nimas.cast.org>

In Maine, an AIM Community of Practice is in the process of developing a workflow by which schools can acquire textbooks and core instructional materials from the NIMAC.

Acquisition by Scanning Materials with OCR Software

"Scanning" refers to the process of using a scanner to convert an image of text (either hard copy print format or an electronic file of an image of text) to accessible digital format. The process requires a scanner, scanning software, and a computer.

If the specialized format of a copyrighted work is not available from the publisher nor from an AMP, scanning is an option as long as the process is consistent with the copyright law as amended. For example, if a textbook is several years old and no longer available from the publisher nor by an AMP, it can be scanned for the exclusive use by a student with a print disability (not distributed further), with the original copyright information, and a notice of protection of copyright included in the scanned version of the material. The scanned version is a digital text file, which can be converted to any of the other three specialized formats (audio, Braille, or large print).

Scanning is also a viable option for converting teacher-created hard copy materials to accessible format. For example, paper handouts, packets, and worksheets that a teacher created, but for which the original electronic files no longer exist, can be scanned and made available in digital version for all learners, regardless of unique learning needs.

A note on the technical aspects of scanning: The software that is bundled with a scanner is typically of low to moderate quality. For optimum scanning results, high quality Optical

Character Recognition (OCR) software is recommended. Experienced users of scanners will testify to the frustration of having specific characters of text consistently misread by low quality software, resulting in the need to follow the scanning process with excessive manual editing of the resulting digital file. High quality OCR software is designed to be meticulous about recognizing and converting characters of text from image to digital format, minimizing the need to edit the resulting digital file. If a scanner is bundled with low quality scanning software, it is worth the investment to purchase a high quality OCR program.

Accessibility of Portable Document Format

Portable Document Format (PDF) is a common and popular file format for curriculum materials. Although improvements have been continuous, PDF files are not inherently accessible. Creators of PDF files have control over the accessibility of the content they create. In addition to removing barriers for students with disabilities, the features and characteristics of accessible PDF files make them more usable by all learners. If you use PDF files in your curriculum, please refer to the Web site of WebAIM for information on and instructions for creating accessible PDF files <http://www.webaim.org/techniques/acrobat/>. Additionally, iTunes users can visit the Maine Department of Education's new iTunes U site, at which the "Accessibility and the MLTI" section hosts a series of podcasts on how to create accessible PDF files.

Qualified Students and the Definition of Print Disability

Student qualification for receiving specialized formats of copyrighted material is defined by copyright law, not education law. It is important to keep in mind that students with print disabilities are given permission to receive specialized formats of copyrighted materials because of a copyright law exemption. This exemption, under which royalties for the sale of copyrighted materials are not received, aims to balance the needs of people who are unable to read standard print with the rights of publishers and authors.

To meet the requirements of copyright exemption, a student must have a documented print disability, such as visual impairment, physical limitation, learning disability, or other disability with physical basis. A qualified professional, also known as a "competent authority," must certify the physical basis of the disability that limits the student's use of standard print.



Appropriate qualifying professionals may vary according to disability. For example, in the case of blindness and visual impairment, an appropriate certifier may be a physician, ophthalmologist, optometrist, or vocational rehabilitation counselor. An appropriate certifier of a learning or perceptual disability may be a neurologist, learning disability specialist, or psychologist with a background in learning disabilities.

Student qualification for copyright exemption is conducted on a case-by-case basis. The stringent language of copyright regulations can certainly interfere with a shared educator belief that **all** students require access to instructional materials in formats that meet their learning needs and preferences. Beyond that belief, schools have a legal obligation per Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and IDEA regulations to provide AIM to more students with disabilities than those that meet the requirements for copyright exemption.

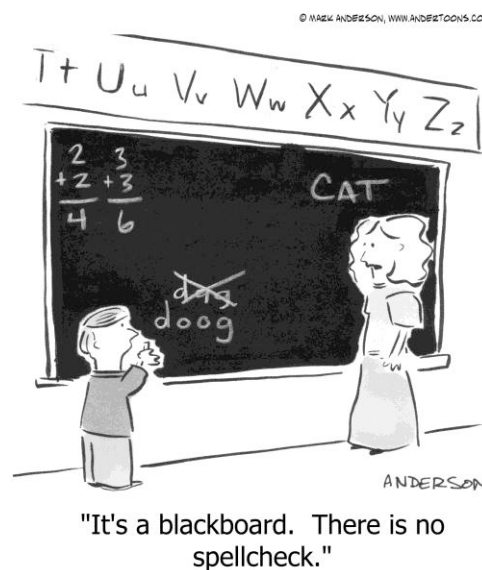
This conflict among students' rights, special education law, and copyright are currently being addressed through a collaboration of stakeholders. The objective is to create a solution that will both meet the learning needs of students and provide publishers and authors with compensation. At present, however, it is important to comply with the law in order to ensure that students who meet the requirements continue to be served.

Student Eligibility for Receiving Materials from the NIMAC

Students are eligible for acquiring specialized formats rendered from NIMAS files by **both**:

- Meeting the requirements of copyright exemption (as certified by a competent authority) **and**
- Qualifying as a student with a disability under IDEA 04 (i.e., students with IEPs)

The second requirement is a result of the NIMAC acquisition system being written into IDEA 04. This introduces additional complexity in the determination of "who gets what from where." It is important to keep this in perspective, however; files available through the NIMAC are limited to textbooks and related core instructional materials. When ordering textbooks, ask the publisher if the material is available in specialized formats for direct purchase. Also, require that the publisher deposit the NIMAS source files for all textbook purchases that your school makes.



Acquisition Guidelines: Who Gets What from Where

Clearly, the most complex issue related to the acquisition of AIM is the determination of what students are legally permitted to use what materials.

Consider the acquisition guidelines presented in the following table.

All Students	Students Who Qualify as Copyright Exempt	Students Who Qualify as Copyright Exempt <i>and</i> under IDEA 04
<p>Works that are in the public domain are usable by all students and can be converted to any format.</p> <p>Copyrighted materials in specialized formats can be purchased directly from publishers or other sources, if available.</p>	<p>Same as what is available for all students, plus:</p> <p>Copyrighted materials acquired through Accessible Media Producers</p> <p>Copyrighted materials that are converted to accessible format via scanning</p>	<p>Same as what is available to all students and those who are copyright exempt, plus:</p> <p>Specialized formats of textbooks and related core instructional materials rendered from NIMAS files acquired through the NIMAC</p>

These guidelines can be visualized in Figure 2, The Library of Accessible Text, created by Joy Zabala of the Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST).

Figure 2 The Library of Accessible Text

THE LIBRARY OF ACCESSIBLE TEXT



CAST | March, 2008

As depicted in this figure, all students can acquire AIM rendered from public domain works (e.g., Web-based digital libraries). Specialized formats of copyrighted materials, however, must be purchased, if available, for students who are not copyright exempt. Students who meet the requirements of copyright exemption can acquire additional AIM through AMPs, such as APH, Bookshare.org, RFB&D, and the National Library Service. Copyright exemption means that these students can also receive copyrighted materials made accessible via scanning. Finally, for the fewest number of students who are both copyright exempt and fall under IDEA 04, specialized formats of textbooks and related core instructional materials can be acquired from AMPs that produce specialized formats from NIMAS files available from the NIMAC.

Considerations for acquisition are also presented as a concept map in the previously presented Figure 1. In this case, the acquisition is considered from the perspective of the type of material,

whether public domain or copyright. If the material is in the public domain, then it is usable by everyone. If the material is under copyright, then the method will vary depending on the qualifications of the student for whom the material is being acquired.

AIMing for the Future of All Maine Learners

Although the acquisition of AIM is currently mired in the confluence of multiple laws, it is important to recognize the prospect and promise of the future marketplace. We are living in a swiftly changing digital age in which pre-existing notions are being challenged. New and emerging technologies are creating solutions for teaching and learning that were unimaginable just a generation ago. Our students are growing up in a participatory culture in which they expect to be shapers and contributors of content rather than mere recipients of information. The materials and resources that we integrate in teaching and learning must reflect this reality in order to be relevant to our students' perceptions of what is meaningful, as well as to maintain their engagement.



While the full acquisition of AIM is presently confined by requirements and definitions that apply to a small population of our learners, those same requirements and definitions are setting in motion higher expectations for all. As has been demonstrated by universal design, solutions and tools created for the few end up benefitting everyone. In this case, the legal requirement of specialized formats of copyright material for the students who qualify for them will increase their production and availability, resulting in the marketplace emergence of better, more flexible learning materials for all.

