

CREATING ACCESSIBLE DOCUMENTS

Accessible documents are essential for ensuring that everyone, including people with disabilities, can understand and benefit from the information you are providing. Screen readers (assistive tools that convert text to speech or braille) rely on well-structured documents to convey content to users who are blind or have low vision. However, accessible documents go beyond supporting those with disabilities. Well organized documents with consistent formatting are easier for all users to navigate and read.

Creating accessible Word documents ensures that everyone, including people with disabilities, can access and understand the information you provide. Below is a step-by-step guide to help you create accessible documents:

USE BUILT-IN STYLES AND FORMATTING

- Use Word's built-in heading styles (Heading 1, Heading 2, etc.) to structure your document logically. Headings make it easier for readers to navigate your document and are an easy way to ensure consistent formatting.
- Use the bullet and numbering tools built into Word instead of manually typing symbols or numbers.
- Keep text simple. Use plain language. Avoid jargon. Unfamiliar abbreviations should be defined the first time they are used.
- Use fonts like Arial or Calibri at a 12-point size or larger to make text easier to read.

ADD ALT TEXT TO IMAGES

Provide alternative text (alt text) for all images, charts, and graphics. This helps users who rely on screen readers understand the content. Alt text should be a brief description focused on the meaningful and relevant aspects of the image.

- For charts, include a summary of the data they represent.
 - Steps: Right click on the image > Edit Alt Text > type brief description.
- For images that convey meaning or add context to the written content, include a description of the visual.
- If an image is purely decorative, mark it as such in the alt text field. This tells screen readers to skip this image.
 - Examples of decorative elements are lines, flourishes, or other graphics used only to make the document look nicer.

USE DESCRIPTIVE HYPERLINKS

Provide meaningful link text that describes the destination.

- Use "Visit the Office of Equity website" instead of "Click Here".

ENSURE SUFFICIENT COLOR CONTRAST



Use tools like the Microsoft Accessibility Checker or online contrast checkers to ensure text is readable against its background.

- Avoid color-only communication. Do not use color as the sole means of conveying information. Combine colors with text or patterns.

USE TABLES APPROPRIATELY

Use tables for presenting structured data, such as comparisons, schedules, or numerical information. Ensure the layout is simple and easy to understand.

- Avoid using tables for page layout or formatting purposes. Instead, use Word's built-in alignment and spacing tools.
- Use simple tables for data. Avoid complex nested tables.
- Assign header rows to tables to help screen readers identify column titles.
 - Steps: Highlight the table > Table Design > Header Row

CHECK DOCUMENT LANGUAGE SETTINGS

- Set the document's language so screen readers will pronounce words correctly.
 - Steps: Go to Review > Language > Set Proofing Language.
- If part of your document is in a different language, mark it so screen readers can switch to the correct pronunciation.
 - Steps: Highlight the text, go to Review > Language > Set Proofing Language, and select the correct language.

USE THE ACCESSIBILITY CHECKER

Use Word's built-in Accessibility Checker to identify and fix accessibility issues.

- Steps: Go to Review > Check Accessibility.

SAVE IN ACCESSIBLE FORMATS

If converting the Word Doc to a PDF, ensure the PDF retains accessibility features.

If you have Adobe Acrobat Pro DC:

- Select the Acrobat ribbon in your Word application, then select "Create PDF."

If you do not have Adobe Acrobat Pro DC:

- Steps: Check "Document structure tags for accessibility" during the save/export process." This is very important, or it will not save your accessibility tags.
- Use the "Save As" or "Export" options in Word.