Creating an Accessible Microsoft Excel Spreadsheet

This tip sheet will help you improve the accessibility of Excel spreadsheets for persons with disabilities.

Tip sheet is applicable to Excel versions 2010, 2013, and 2016. More comprehensive information can be found

Create Dense Documents

Design your documents to minimize the use of empty cells within worksheets. Ensure elements of the worksheet are placed close together as users can avoid hunting through empty space to find content.

Using Descriptive Text

Write an introduction at the top left corner of the first worksheet to describe the content and layout of the workbook. It is better to be overly descriptive. Include any accessibility techniques that have been used. Make sure to save your document for distribution with the cursor at the top left corner of the first sheet. Also consider creating an index to all relevant elements of the workbook using hyperlinks.

Naming and using regions

Using regions can simplify the movement between important locations within a worksheet.

• Select the *cell* or *range of cells* to name and use **Formulas** tab → **Define Name** → **Define Name** from dropdown menu.
• Type a descriptive name and press enter.

Headings and Labels

Headings and labels must accurately describe cells and regions important to the worksheet. Worksheet tab names should reflect the purpose of each worksheet within the workbook.
(Avoid using defaults of sheet1, sheet2, etc.)

Objects and Images

Objects and images that convey meaning need descriptive text equivalents.
• Right click on object or image.
• Select **Table Properties** for tables, **Format Chart Area** for charts, **Format Image** for images.
• In the dialog box choose the "**Alt Text**" tab.

• Enter descriptive text in the **Title** field. Decorative images must not have alternative text to avoid providing unnecessary information. Avoid the use of floating images as they are hard to focus the cursor on, and will obscure the cells beneath.

Hyperlinks

Include meaningful descriptions to your hyperlinks. Avoid vague instructions e.g. "click here" or "press the red button"
• **Insert** tab → **Hyperlink** → Enter a description in the **Text to Display** field → Reference cell or URL in **Address** field.

Hyperlinks are also an effective way of jumping to different sections or sheets within a workbook.
• **Insert** tab → **Hyperlink** → **This Document** tab

Formatting

When formatting documents using fonts and colours, use Sans-Serif (non fancy) font shapes. Preferred fonts include *Verdana, Helvetica, and Arial.* For colour formatting or conditional formatting, ensure that a suitable colour contrast of 5:1 is used in selecting the interaction of background and foreground colours.

Publishing as HTML

Workbooks published using HTML export are not generally accessible to assistive technologies and should be avoided. Save as PDF instead.

Accessibility Checker (Windows)

Use the accessibility checker to validate the accessibility of your document before publishing.
• **File** → **Info** → **Check for Issues** button → **Check Accessibility** from dropdown. Review the inspection results and *Saving as a tagged PDF.*

While making your document into an accessible PDF involves the accessibility features of your PDF Maker software, the task is made easier by following the techniques in this guide and saving the document as a tagged file.
• **File** → **Save As** → **Save As Type** dropdown → **PDF** → **Document structure tags for accessibility** checkmark → **Ok** button → **Save**