Creating an Accessible Microsoft Word Document

This tip sheet will help you improve the accessibility of Word Documents for persons with disabilities.

Tip sheet is applicable to Word versions 2010, 2013, and 2016.

Add Structure to Documents

Design your documents with styles. Styles add the structure necessary to make your documents usable to people with disabilities.

Graphics and Images

Ensure ample spacing of graphics from text. This can cause problems if converting to PDF file.

Alternative Text or Alt Text

Alternative Text or "Alt Text" refers to text that can be read by a screen reader to describe graphics and images, which people with visual disabilities cannot see.

- Right click on an image and select the **Format Picture** dialog.
- Select the **Layout & Properties** tab → **Alt Text** → enter the alternative text.

Text

- Text should be at least 12-point type using a clean sans-serif font such as Verdana, Helvetica or Arial
- Avoid using the Enter key to create space between paragraphs. Use the space before and space after properties in your styles.
- Avoid using Text Boxes in documents

Columns

When creating columns, avoid using the tab key to create space between text columns or put text in a table. Use Word's column command:
- **Layout** tab → **Columns** button.

Headings

Use Styles to create heading formats, i.e. Title, Heading 1, Heading 2, Heading 3, etc. Make styles progress in a logical manner - a Heading 2 should come after a Heading 1. Headings should be short (fewer than 20 words) for easy navigation.
- **Home** tab → Styles
- Keyboard Shortcuts for applying Styles
    - *Heading 1:* Ctrl + Alt + 1 **or** ⌘ + Alt + 1
    - *Heading 2:* Ctrl + Alt + 2 **or** ⌘ + Alt + 2
    - *Normal:* Ctrl + Shift + n **or** ⌘ + Shift + n

Hyperlinks

Add a meaningful description to hyperlinks. Avoid giving vague instructions i.e. "click here".
- Insert Hyperlink (Ctrl **or** ⌘ + K).
- Additionally, you can use ScreenTip which provides a text description in a similar way to alt text.

Lists

- Use Bulleted Lists to emphasize individual points.
- Use Numbered Lists to describe the proper order for a series of steps in a sequence.

Tables

- Use simple table structure by not using nested, merged, or split cells.
- Do not use tabs and spaces to manually create tables. Use the Insert Table command.
- Avoid letting table rows break across a page.
- Tables that go beyond a page should have repeat header rows.
- Use the table properties dialog to change formatting.
- Once your table is complete, check the reading order to ensure it makes sense by tabbing through the cells.

Publishing as HTML

Workbooks published using HTML export is not generally accessible to assistive technologies and should be avoided. Use accessible PDF instead.

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Accessibility Checker (Windows)

Use the accessibility checker to validate the accessibility of your document before publishing. **File** tab → **Info** → **Prepare for Sharing** → **Check for Issues** → **Check Accessibility** from dropdown.

Review the inspection results and make appropriate corrections.

Saving as a tagged PDF (Windows)

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**.