



TIPS FOR CREATING ACCESSIBLE DOCUMENTS

Tips For Creating Accessible Documents

Documents created with accessibility in mind help to ensure that they can be read and understood by as wide an audience as possible. An accessible document is a document created to be as easily readable by a low-vision or non-sighted reader as a sighted reader.

The following accessibility guidelines are helpful regardless of the type of document you are preparing Word, PowerPoint, HTML, PDF, etc.

This document covers the use of headings, lists, and document properties, the correct formatting of hyperlinks and tables, the use of color, the addition of alt text to Images, and the accessibility of PDF documents and videos.

Headings

Identify headings and subheadings using the built-in heading features of the authoring program. Headings enable screen reader users to understand how a document is organized and quickly navigate to content of interest. Most screen readers have features that allow users to jump quickly between headings with a single keystroke.

Hyperlinks

Use meaningful words to identify a hyperlink. That allows the reader to identify the information the hyperlink provides easily. Avoid the terms "here" or "go to this link." Instead, use more descriptive text such as "go to the event registration page" or "visit Paralympics Games to learn more about this topic."

Tables

The following suggestions help to create tables that screen readers can read aloud.

- Identify the header row to your table, and don't let rows break across pages.
- Add alt-text to your table.
- Add a table caption.
- Don't use tables for design layout since they will make it difficult for people using assistive technology to understand.

Lists

Create lists using the document authoring software's bulleted or numbered list controls. When lists are explicitly created as lists, this helps screen readers understand how the content is organized and how many items are on the list.

Colors

People who are color-blind, have low vision, or have other print disabilities may not be able to perceive certain colors. You should not convey information solely through color. Use text, shapes, patterns, or other visual indicators in addition to color to communicate information.

Make sure to provide sufficient color contrast. Use an online contrast color tool to evaluate the readability of your document: [WebAIM Color Contrast Checker](#) or [Adobe Contrast Analyzer](#).

Images

Whenever you include images in a document, add an alternate text (Alt Text) that describes them. The Alt Text gives readers with disabilities, especially those who are blind or have low vision, information to help them to get full access to the document.

Images that are purely decorative and contain no informative content do not require an Alt Text. However, they may still need specific markup, so screen readers know to skip them. For example, Microsoft Word allows marking the image as decorative when adding the Alt Text.

Alt Text

How would you describe this object and its context to someone who is blind or low vision?

- The subject(s) in detail
- The setting
- The actions or interactions
- Other relevant information

(1-2 detailed sentences recommended)

Content marked as decorative will not expose a description to screen readers.

Mark as decorative

Generate alt text for me

As for images that convey information, provide an Alt Text that gives information about the setting, the interaction, and the subjects on the image.

Also consider the context in which the image is used. Check the example below.

[This video from the Perkins School for the Blind](#) introduces the creation of Alt Texts in an informative and fun way.



Alt Text in a document about healthy living or helping the environment:

A bicycle is parked in front of a long building.

Alt Text in a document about enhancing architecture with nature:

Vines climb up the brick wall of a long building.

Alt Text in a document about a college campus:

A concrete walkway runs parallel to a three-story building partially covered in vines on a college campus.

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Document Properties

Document Properties allow the creator to enter information about the Title, Author, Key Search Words, Language, and the document's Subject Matter. That information makes documents easier to find for everyone.

PDF

If you convert documents to a PDF format, the accessibility of the PDF document will depend on the accessibility of the original document.

Remediating a PDF document for accessibility can be cumbersome, so make sure the original document is accessible. Keep your document simple. Intricate layouts will pose more challenges for accessibility.

In addition to the previous considerations of using headings, alt texts, document properties, etc., take into account the following: define document language, review tab and reading order, and use simulators to verify the accessibility of your document.

Video

Full accessible videos should have captions, audio description, and a transcription. However, providing all that for every video may not always be possible. At a minimum, captions are recommended.

If you publish videos on YouTube, you can upload your captions file or use the [YouTube Automatic Captioning Tool](#). If you use the Automatic Captioning Tool, once the captions are generated, you can always edit them for accuracy using YouTube Studio. A transcription can be included on the description area of the video or published on a separated link.

Accessibility Checkers

Fortunately, many authoring programs now come with accessibility checkers that can help you identify issues while creating and after you have created a document. Look for them on the Tools menu of your program.

For more information about documents accessibility, visit:

[WebAim Document and Media Accessibility](#)

[University of Montana - Overview of Accessible Documents](#)

[University of Arkansas - Making Tables in Microsoft Word Accessible](#)

[Wichita State University - PDF Remediation for Accessibility](#)

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Disclaimer

The contents of this document were developed under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education #H327C210001. However, those contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the U.S. Department of Education and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal government. Project Officer, Eric Caruso.

August 2022