

Creating Accessible Microsoft Word Documents

Heading Structure

Headings create a logical structure that allows screen reader users to navigate content efficiently.

- Use Word's built-in heading styles.
- Use only one Heading 1 per document.
- Use Heading 2, Heading 3 and subsequent levels in hierarchical order.
- Do not manually bold, underline or enlarge text to simulate a heading.



Add Alternative Text to Images

Alternative text, or alt text, provides a description of images for users who rely on screen readers. Without alt text, images are either skipped or announced without context.

How to add alt text:

1. Right-click the image.
2. Select "View Alt Text."
3. Enter a clear description in the "Alt Text" pane.

Use Meaningful Hyperlinks

Screen reader users often navigate documents by links. Use descriptive text, avoid pasting full URLs and ensure link text makes sense out of context.

1. Right-click the link.
2. Select "Edit Hyperlink" or press Ctrl + K.
3. Replace the "Text to Display" field with meaningful wording.

Use True Lists

Screen readers recognize built-in bulleted and numbered lists and announce them correctly. Manually typed numbers or dashes do not provide proper structure.

1. Go to the "Home" tab.
2. Select "Bulleted List" or "Numbered List" in the "Paragraph" group.

Create True Columns

Using tabs or spaces to simulate columns disrupts reading order and causes accessibility issues

1. Select the "Layout" tab.
2. Choose "Columns" in the "Page Setup" group.
3. Select the desired number of columns.

Format Accessible Tables

Tables should be used only for displaying data. Proper formatting ensures screen readers can correctly interpret row and column relationships.

- Use tables only for data, not layout.
- Include a designated header row.
- Ensure header rows repeat when tables span multiple pages.

Run the Accessibility Checker

The Accessibility Checker identifies errors that may prevent assistive technologies from interpreting the document correctly.

1. Select the "Review" tab.
2. Click "Check Accessibility."

Export Documents Properly as Accessible PDFs

Headings create a logical structure that allows screen reader users to navigate content efficiently.

1. Select "File."
2. Choose "Save As."
3. Select "PDF" from the file type dropdown menu.
4. Click "Options."
5. Confirm "Document structure tags for accessibility" is checked.
6. Click "Save."

Before You Share or Submit

Use the following checklist before distributing your document:

- One Heading 1 used
- Proper heading hierarchy applied
- Meaningful alt text included in all images
- Descriptive text used in all hyperlinks
- Lists created using built-in tools
- Columns created using "Layout" tools
- Header rows included in all tables
- Accessibility Checker used
- All identified issues resolved



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