

CREATING ACCESSIBLE WORD DOCUMENTS

A SUMMARY OF HOW TO MAKE A BASIC DOCUMENT ACCESSIBLE USING MICROSOFT WORD

When creating documents, it is always best to ensure that you are creating content that is going to be accessible to a broad audience. Here are some important things to remember when creating a document:

OBJECTIVES

After reviewing this document, you will have the basic skills to create accessible documents in Microsoft Word. Including:

- Opening and understanding the Accessibility Checker
- Converting Word Files (.doc) to Word Document Files (.docx)
- Fundamental formatting guidelines for accessibility
- Defining the documents properties

ACCESSIBILITY CHECKER

The current versions of Microsoft Word for both PC and Mac, have a built in Accessibility Checker. When open, the Accessibility Checker gives you instant feedback as you are working on your document. The Accessibility Checker provides you with a list of errors, warnings and tips of what you need to do to make the document more accessible. While it doesn't automatically fix the issues for you, it is a great way to make sure your document will reach the broadest audience.

Note: The Accessibility Checker will only work with Word Document Files (.docx)

OPENING THE ACCESSIBILITY CHECKER – PC

1. In the top menu, choose *File*.
2. The *Info* panel will open. Click the *Check for Issues* button next to *Inspect Document* and choose *Check Accessibility*.
3. The Accessibility Checker will open in a panel along the right side of the document.

OPENING THE ACCESSIBILITY CHECKER – MAC (V 16 AND ABOVE)

1. In the top menu, choose *Tools > Check Accessibility*.
Alternate method: In the *Review tab*, click *Check Accessibility*.
2. The Accessibility Checker will open in a panel along the right side of the document.

DOCUMENT FILE FORMAT

- Accessibility features and tools can only be used with current Word Document files (.docx).
- Word files that were created with older versions of Microsoft Word, that have the .doc file extension, cannot be checked for accessibility issues.

CONVERTING A OLDER WORD FILE (.DOC) TO A CURRENT WORD DOCUMENT FILE (.DOCX)

1. Open file that you wish to convert in a current version of Microsoft Word.
2. Using the Save As command (File > Save As...), name the file and set the destination and change the File Format to Word Document (.docx)

FONTS

- Fonts should be san serif, such as Arial, Helvetica, or Verdana.
- For ease in readability, the font size should never go below 10px.
- Varying text color should not be used to illustrate things that are different (ie: yes = green, red = no).

HEADINGS

- When structuring your document, use properly formatted headings. Headings should follow a natural order: Heading 1, Heading 2, Heading 3, etc. Try to avoid skipping a heading level
- Avoid using headings as ways to style your document. Headers are the primary way screen readers navigate through a document. When headings appear randomly in a body of text, a screen reader looks at it as a new content point, breaking the continuity of the content tree.
- Heading colors should maintain a high contrast. Avoid using lighter shades of a color. Use darker colors.

IMAGES, GRAPHICS, MAPS AND GRAPHS

- Make sure to provide alternative text descriptions (ALT text) for all images and graphics.
- Be thoughtful to describe the image so that it reflects the reason you added the image or graphic in the first place. If it is purely decorative, then you can simply describe it as such.
- Alternative text descriptions for graphs should describe the information that is being displayed.

LINKS

- When writing links, don't use the web address (URL) as the display text. Use the title of the page or indicate the links destination that you are linking to (ie: Adobe Support Site, New York Times article on snow removal).

COLOR

- Don't use colors to convey meaning. Individuals who are color blind may not be able to distinguish the color and associate its meaning. Screen readers may pass over the color of text as well.
- When using color with text, make sure there is a high contrast ratio. Use darker colors on white / light backgrounds.

DOCUMENT PROPERTIES

- Make sure to set the *Properties* of the document. To do this, in the menu go to *File > Properties*.
- If nothing else, make sure under *Summary* you add a title to the document. This will resolve issues down the road if later converting to PDF.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

While these are the fundamental considerations to take when crafting a document, there are other components to a more complex Word document that also require a similar attention.

- Portland Community College has created a wonderful in-depth [tutorial on making Word documents accessible](#). It provides you with step by step instructions on how to structure and craft all aspects of a Word document for overall accessibility.
- Syracuse University's Answers website has an [Accessible Technology Toolkit](#) chock full of [resources for Microsoft Word](#) and other programs as well.
- The National Center on Disability and Access to Education has a [cheat sheet for Creating Accessible Microsoft Word 2013 Documents \(Windows\)](#). The information contained within the cheat sheet is still relevant to the current version of Office