



Best Practices for Creating Accessible Documents – Microsoft Word

Any distributed document (whether it's vital, supplemental, or even optional) needs to be accessible. Microsoft Word should be the go-to application for creating these documents as Word documents can be formatted to numerous file types while still being able to edit the original document. This guide will explain how to build an accessible document in Microsoft Word.

Structure:

A hallmark of an accessible document is a clear structure. Documents without clear labels and organization are unduly difficult to navigate for students using screen readers.

1. Keep basic design principles in mind when creating documents. If your structure is illogical or disorganized, your document may be inaccessible for everyone.
 - a. Be sure to have clear titles for your document: It should be obvious within the first few lines who the document belongs to and what its purpose is.
 - b. Utilize white space (sparingly): Too much information (whether it's words or images) can distract your audience. Use space to your advantage to set aside crucial information.
2. Use the style bar at the top of the **Home** tab to create titles, headings, and to style your words.
 - a. Using the **Heading** style gives screen readers checkpoints throughout the document. Without them, a student using a screen reader will have to navigate the document line by line to find the information they need.
 - b. Using **Emphasis** and other styles allows the screen reader to detect these styles and communicate them to the user (a screen reader will not differentiate between plain text and bold, italics, or underlines nor will it identify text color).

Tables, Pictures, and Other Graphics:

Use the **Insert** tab to add any non-text elements to your document. All visuals need to have Alternative Descriptive Text (See [Writing Alternative Text \(PDF\)](#)).

1. First rule for including visuals in your documents: Ask yourself if they serve a clear purpose.
 - a. If the answer is no, you should consider removing the visual.
 - b. If the answer is yes, follow the steps below:
2. Inserting Images:
 - a. **Click Insert**
 - b. **Select Pictures/Online Pictures**; this will open a new menu.
 - c. **Select** the desired picture
 - d. **Click Insert**



3. Inserting Charts and Graphs (Note: a chart or graph is inaccessible if it is presented without the data used to create the graph):
 - a. *Click Insert*
 - b. *Select Chart*; this will open a new menu
 - c. *Select* which chart or graph you would like. This will also generate an Excel field that you can edit in word or open in Excel.
 - d. The data table you create will follow the chart/graph when you copy and paste it into other Microsoft applications. This data table will have to be made available to maintain accessibility.
4. Inserting tables:
 - a. *Click Insert*
 - b. *Select Table*; this will create a drop-down menu where you can select the dimensions of your table.
 - i. From here, you can also insert tables from Excel,
 - c. Tables are more effective than columns and SmartArt. Tables can still be filled for color coding purposes, and borders can be hidden if you needed.
 - i. Note: Do not merge cells in tables as they make the whole table inaccessible. Instead, hide the borders of the cells to make it appear merged.
5. Text Wrapping: All images and graphics should be presented “In Line with Text”
 - a. *Select* the image and navigate to the **Format Image** tab.
 - b. *Select Text Wrapping* and choose “In Line with Text”

What to Avoid:

1. Avoid using fonts like Algerian, Blackladder ITC, and Monotype Corsiva. These can be difficult to read especially for English Language Learners and students who no longer learn cursive.
 - a. Stick to Ariel, Calibri, and other more standard fonts.
2. Avoid having text in low contrast colors
 - a. Similarly, you do not want to use the common colorblindness combinations together (i.e. red/green, blue/yellow, and purple/orange). If you are denoting importance with red for a key term, use a color other than green for definitions and concepts.
3. Avoid the use of memes. A lot of memes rely on a cultural understanding before they can be applied to a concept, creating effective Alternative Text for a meme becomes extremely difficult.
4. Avoid using a font size any lower than 11. If your document is going to be projected for a group setting, your text should be a minimum of 18.