Creating Accessible Documents In Microsoft Office

The information provided in this document is intended to help you create documents that will be accessible to people with disabilities. This guide offers tips and resources that you can use to improve the accessibility of your documents as you create them.

This guide offers tips for Microsoft Word, Excel, and PowerPoint.

Microsoft Word

Microsoft Word is currently the most common word processor on the market. Because it is so common, the .doc (and to a lesser extent, the .docx) format has become the defacto format for text formats. Use these best practices to greatly improve the accessibility of Word documents for individuals with disabilities. Another benefit is that accessibility improvements made in the Word document will remain when converted to PDF or HTML.

.Docx Format

The ".doxc" format is the default file format for documents created in Word 2007 and newer. The format has some advantages (such as smaller file size), but is not as widely supported as the old "doc" format. If the Word file is going to end up on the web consider saving the file as Word 97-2003 (.doc) in Office 2007 and 2010.

Word 2010 Accessibility Checker

Word 2010 includes a new accessibility checker that allows you to check for accessibility problems. The accessibility checker makes it much easier to identify and repair accessibility issues. To use the tool, select File > Info > Check for Issues > Check Accessibility.

- How to use Word Accessibility Checker (http://webaim.org/techniques/word/#checker)

Converting Word to PDF

To export from Word to tagged PDF follow these steps:

- In Word 2010 (Windows), select "Save as PDF". (NOTE: Word 2011 for Mac does not produce a tagged PDF, so the PDF is not accessible.)
- In Word 2003 and 2007 (Windows), use the Adobe PDFMaker Plugin (found in the Adobe menu or toolbar, if available. It ships with Adobe Acrobat).
- When saving, select Options and be sure that "Document structure tags for accessibility" is checked. (NOTE: This is checked by default, but will be unchecked if you select "Minimize size" and will need to be re-checked.)
- Convert Word to PDF (http://webaim.org/techniques/acrobat/converting#word)

Document Layout

- Keep lots of spacing between columns of text. This helps people with low vision and users of screen reading software.
- People with sensory or cognitive disabilities will benefit from documents with a lot of white space.
- Make hyperlinks descriptive. Don't use "click here".
- Format documents with high contrast. For example, black on white provides the highest contrast.
- Use font sizes 12pt or larger.
- Use fonts consistently. Avoid decorative fonts or serif fonts such as Brush Script.
- Use built in features for creating bulleted lists. This provides navigational structure that is important to those using assistive technology.
- Add Lists in Word (http://webaccess.msu.edu/tutorials/accessible-word-documents.html#lists)

Document Structure

- Use built in styles to identify Heading 1, Heading 2, etc. This provides structure that is used to navigate through the document when using assistive technology.
- Don't skip heading levels.
- Change the heading styles to fit your document rather than skip a heading level because you don't like how it looks.
- Add Headings in Word (http://webaim.org/techniques/word/)

Images, Charts and Graphs

- Avoid lots of graphics on one page.
- If the document contains graphic elements such as pictures, diagrams or charts, be sure to convey your information about those graphics in the text of the document.
- Add "alt text" to the images so that someone unable to see them will understand their purpose and content. This is not turned on by default. (**In Office 2010 use Description field,** *not* **Title field**)
- Do not use WordArt or create graphics that contain content. Use text to convey information.
- Avoid flashing or blinking elements.
- Add Alt Text to Charts and Graphs in Word (http:// http://webaccess.msu.edu/tutorials/accessible-word-documents.html#images)

Tables

- Screen readers and Braille displays read tables row by row across columns which may not make sense to someone using a screen reader or Braille display. When possible, use lists to convey information.
- Indicate the Heading Row on data tables. Go to Table Properties > Row tab > select the checkbox "Repeat as header row at the top of each page". This provides structure for navigating the table.
- Mark the Header Row in Word Tables (http://webaim.org/techniques/word/#tables)

Microsoft Excel

These files are generally accessible. Use the following best practices to improve the accessibility of Excel files for individuals with disabilities.

- Use clear and meaningful row and column headers
- Provide descriptions of charts and graphs in the comment area
- If using the Chart Wizard, create a variety of dotted lines in line charts to improve legibility for color blind users.
- Microsoft Office Creating Accessible Excel Workbooks (http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/support/creating-accessible-excel-files-HA102013545.aspx)
- Penn State AccessAbility (http://accessibility.psu.edu/excel)
- University of Minnesota Excel Tips (http://accessibility.umn.edu/ms-excel.html)

Microsoft PowerPoint

When you create a presentation to view online, whether you post the PowerPoint file (.PPT or .PPTX) or another file format such as PDF, there are steps you can take to make your file as accessible as possible.

- Use PowerPoint 2010 Accessibility Checker. PowerPoint 2010 has a built-in tool that checks your document for accessibility problems. This tool makes it much easier to identify and repair accessibility issues. To use the tool, select **File > Info > Check for Issues > Check Accessibility**.
    - Use PowerPoint Accessibility Checker (http://webaim.org/techniques/powerpoint/#checker)
- Use built-in slide layout templates. Using them correctly will ensure that the resulting file will have proper structure for headings and lists, correct reading order, etc..
    - Use layout templates (http://webaim.org/techniques/powerpoint/#layouts)
- Include alt text for images unless they are decorative.
    - Add Alt Text to PowerPoint Images (http://webaim.org/techniques/powerpoint/#alttext)

Sources

- Michigan State University Web Accessibility(http://webaccess.msu.edu/index.html)
- Microsoft Accessibility (http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/)
- Penn State AccessAbility (http://accessibility.psu.edu/)
- Purdue University Web Accessibility Committee (http://www.purdue.edu/webaccessibility/)
- University of Minnesota (http://accessibility.umn.edu/home.html)
- WebAIM (http://webaim.org)

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