



Microsoft Word Accessibility Checklist

The following checklist should be used as a guideline for creating accessible Word documents.

Document structure using styles

A document with good structure contains logical headings for all of its sections. To make it easier for screen readers to read your documents, use a logical heading order and the built-in formatting tools.

Use the column feature to create columns

For multi-column documents, use the Column layout feature instead of using text boxes and manual spacing to create columns. This will ensure that columns are interpreted correctly by screen readers.

Use Word's lists features when creating lists

Bullets, Numbering and Multilevel List options can be found on the *Home* tab in the *Paragraph* group.

Properly format Headers and Footers

Headers and Footers must be formatted properly using the Header/Footer feature in order for users of assisted technologies to distinguish headers/footers from page content. Note: JAWS 15 and earlier versions of JAWS do not announce the presence of headers and footers. Therefore, if vital information such as "CONFIDENTIAL" or "Do Not Distribute" is included in the header or footer area it must also be included in the main content area of the document.

Assign alternative text to all non-text elements

Non-text elements are the things in a Word document that are not text such as an image, graph, table, etc. In order for non-text elements to be accessible, alternative text must be added.

Make objects accessible by moving them to inline

Some types of objects (text boxes, word art, etc.) in Word are not part of the document's "normal structure". They are on a separate "Drawing Layer" that is unavailable to screen readers. In some cases, the objects can be inserted inline with the text, and can therefore be read in the flow of the document by screen readers.

Avoid using Smart Art

Unfortunately, Smart Art is not directly accessible to screen reader users. The object would not be read when the user reads the document top to bottom. Therefore, it is not recommended to use Smart Art.

Include descriptive text to complex charts and graphs

Sometimes you need to use complex images like pie charts or bar graphs. Most types of objects in Word allow writers to add alt text, but alt text is generally meant to be short. Include the description under the chart or include a data table.

- Use text in addition to color to convey information**

For example; “Important items are red and marked with an *.” Don’t rely on highlighting alone to convey meaning. Screen readers do not convey any information about highlighting to blind users. Include text such as “Important”, “Attention” before the highlighted content.
- Make sure any videos in the document have closed captions, and any audio has a transcript**

Captions and/or transcripts (video/audio files) are essential components of multimedia access for individuals with hearing loss or auditory processing issues. Ensure that all videos have closed captions and audio description and all audio has a text transcript.
- Provide meaningful text description of links to websites**

Screen reader users often list the hyperlinks in a document; a series of "click here" links is meaningless. “Sue’s Ice Cream Shoppe” is more meaningful than <http://www.sueics.com>.
- Specify column header information when using tables**

Also use a simple table structure and ensure your tables do not contain merged or split cells.
- Long documents should include a Table of Contents**

A Table of Contents inserted via the Review tab has internal links which allow screen reader users to jump to the relevant parts quickly.
- Run the Accessibility Checker to address any warnings or errors in your document**

The Accessibility Checker tool in Word finds accessibility issues in your document. The tool generates a report of issues that could make your content difficult for people with disabilities to understand. Accessibility Checker also explains why you should fix these issues and how to fix them.
- Give your document a title**

Adjusting the document’s meta data can assist in making your document more accessible for those using assistive technology.
- Save your accessible document as a Template**

Once you have made your document accessible, saving it as a Template will help to **preserve** structure for future documents.
- Save your document as a PDF**

If saving your Word document as a PDF, making your document accessible will reduce the amount of time it will take to make the PDF file accessible. Headings, lists and table structures will automatically carry over to the PDF.
- Test your document for accessibility using the Read Out Loud feature in Adobe Acrobat Pro**

You can listen to your document to test if it is readable in the *Read Out Loud* feature in Adobe Acrobat Pro. *Read Out Loud* is a Text-to-Speech tool.