



Creating Accessible Documents

September 2021

Scope

The following requirements apply to electronic documents. For example,

- Course syllabi posted in Canvas or distributed by email to students
- PDF flyers posted on a web page or emailed as a districtwide announcement
- Reports including graphs and tables of data distributed electronically to shared governance committees or as part of Board of Trustee agendas.

Who Benefits?

Accessible documents benefit a variety of users, not only users with a specific disability. For example,

- Consistent visual document layout benefits users with learning disabilities and limited vision
- Good color contrast benefits users with color blindness and limited vision
- Document formatting that is programmatically determinable benefits users of assistive technology, including users who are blind, have limited vision, individuals who use the keyboard instead of the mouse, and users with learning disabilities
 - “Programmatically determinable” means that content or functionality works with assistive technology, such as screen reading software used by individuals who are blind or individuals who have limited vision.

Remember the Color LIST

To help ensure basic accessibility in any document, consider the use of the Color LIST: Color, Links, Images, Structure and Styles, and Tables.

Color and Use of Color

Use color in documents carefully to ensure accessibility.

- Contrast between the foreground and background must be clear in text and images with text.
 - **Good:** Black on white
 - **Not good:** Yellow on white (yellow on white)
- Do not use color as the only means of conveying information.
 - **Good:** Use a combination of color and text or symbols in text and informational graphics, for example, "Comments about correct answers have a green check mark (✓)."
 - **Not good:** Comments about incorrect answers are in red text.
- Combine bold text with formatting that is programmatically determinable, for example, headings or text at the beginning of list items. Alternatively, describe the use and meaning of bold for users, for example, "Key terms are in bold text."

Links

Use descriptive text for links to web pages, electronic documents, and email addresses.

- Avoid descriptions that are not clear.
 - **Good:** [Document X \[opens document type\]](#) has the information.
 - **Not good:** [Click here](#) for Document X.
- Do not use underlining for text other than hyperlinks.

Images

Add meaningful and brief alternative text descriptions to images.

- Meaningful images
 - Describe as briefly as possible, up to 150 characters
 - For complex images or images with a lot of text, use a caption or provide the description in the text to benefit all readers
- Decorative images, for example, an ivy border on a page
 - **Good:** mark decorative
 - **Not good:** Border of dark green overlapping ivy vines trailing
- Use text instead of images of text, when possible

Structure and Styles

Use software tools to create document structure that is accessible and useful for all readers.

Fonts and Text Formatting

Use fonts that make electronic documents easy to read.

- Use 12-point font size for the smallest text in the document, including captions and footnotes
- Use sans serif fonts, for example, Verdana or Arial
- Avoid using multiple fonts in a single document
- Most content should be left justified (do not use justified text)
- Do not use all caps, except for acronyms
 - Write out the words the first time an acronym is used
- Only use italics when required by a formatting convention, such as in bibliographies.

Headings

Use the tool in the program to create visual headings (for example, Styles on the Home ribbon in Microsoft Word for Windows).

- Use headings in order (heading 1, heading 2, heading 3, etc.)
- Do not skip heading levels as levels increase
- Use heading 1 for the document title and do not reuse heading 1
- Reuse heading 2, heading 3, etc. as needed
- All visual headings must be programmatically determinable, in other words, created so that the headings work with assistive technology
 - Bonus: programmatically determinable headings can be used to automatically create a Table of Contents in Microsoft Word.

Lists

Use the tool in the program to create lists (for example, Paragraph tool on the Home ribbon in Microsoft Word for Windows).

- Use numbered lists for ordered information (Step 1, Step 2, etc.)
- Use bulleted lists for information that does not have an order (grocery list).

Paragraph and Line Spacing

Use the program tools to create blank space between paragraphs and lines of text (for example, Paragraph on the Home ribbon in Microsoft Word).

- Use at least 6-point spacing between paragraphs
- Set line spacing to at least 1.15 points
- Increase spacing after or before a paragraph to create blank lines
 - Do not use the “Enter” key to create line spacing or blank lines

Text Boxes

Text boxes change the order of content in a document so that the reading order of the content is not logical and may make the content invisible to assistive technology.

- Do not use text boxes
- Apply borders to text and use headings or another type of programmatically determinable formatting option to create emphasis that is accessible (example of paragraph borders).

Columns

For simple side-by-side text or to layout content, use columns instead of tabs or tables (for example, Columns on the Layout ribbon in Microsoft Word for Windows).

- Use the More Columns options in Microsoft Word for Windows to adjust column width
- Do not use the “Space” key to create multiple spaces between words
- Do not use the “Tab” key to create columns.

Page Headers, Footers, and Watermarks

Ensure meaningful information in page headers, footers, and watermarks is part of the main document content, including:

- Section headings
- Document versions
- Document status (draft)
- Contact information.

Tables

Use tables for data and not for layout.

- Use the first row of the table for the column headers (labels)
- Use the first column of the table for the row headers (labels)
- Make the table headers visually distinct from the table content
- Set table column headers to repeat
- Do not break rows across pages
- Keep table layout simple and use multiple tables for complex data
 - Do not merge cells
 - Do not use blank cells
 - Do not create lists within table cells
 - Place the table title above the table, on a separate line

After Using the Color LIST

- Add a title in the document properties
 - In Microsoft Word for Windows, the Title is under Info on the File ribbon
- Set the document language
 - In Microsoft Word for Windows, the document language is on the Review ribbon
- Run the Accessibility Checker
 - In Microsoft Word for Windows, the Check Accessibility tool is on the Review ribbon
- For an accessible PDF version from an accessible Word document:
 - Set the Adobe Preferences, Advanced Settings, Compatibility to "Acrobat 8.0 (PDF 1.7)" and Object Compression Level to "Off"
 - Use the Create PDF or Save as Adobe PDF command, not the Print command with the printer set to Adobe PDF
 - Run the Adobe Acrobat Accessibility Check
 - Note: Additional corrections may still be needed to ensure the PDF is accessible, especially if the document contains tables
- For complex documents or documents that are highly visible, distribute multiple versions, for example, an accessible PDF and an accessible Word version of the same document.