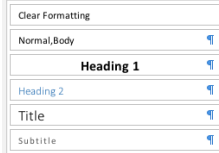


Creating Accessible Microsoft Word Documents

Accessibility is a hot topic in education. Not only is it our [legal obligation](#) to make our online materials accessible to people with disabilities; it's the right thing to do. Even if you don't teach online, you may wish to share documents electronically, either now or in the future. Creating accessible documents now will save you the trouble of retrofitting materials later. Making all course materials accessible might seem like an overwhelming task, but a few small changes to the way we work can make many of our everyday materials accessible.

Apply a style:



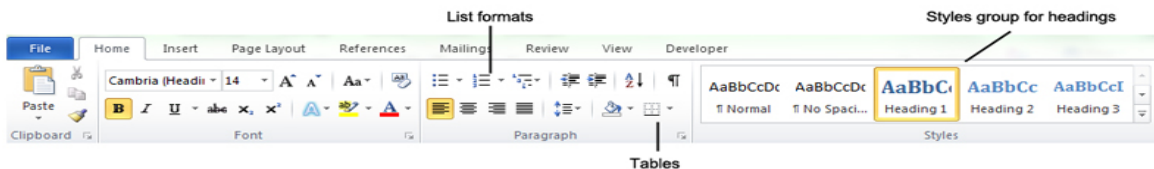
Use Built-in Organizational Features

Most faculty create text documents for our classes, for example, the syllabus, homework assignments, and supplementary material. Making these documents accessible, so that screen readers can read them to students with visual disabilities, is really just a matter of establishing a few good habits. The tools to make a document accessible are built into Microsoft Word and will help you create documents that are easier for all students to navigate and easier for you to modify.

Review Educational Guides to Accessibility

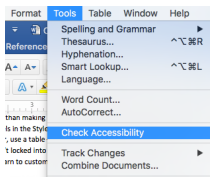
[This excellent video](#), from High Tech Center at Taft College, demonstrates how a screen reader reads an accessible Word document versus an inaccessible one.

Most of the guidelines for making a text document accessible involve using the built-in tools to format structural elements of your document, rather than using formatting that makes something look structural. For example, rather than making something look like a heading by making the font large and bold, use the heading levels in the Styles group on the Home ribbon. If information is a list, use a list structure. If it's tabular, use a table – don't just use the tab key. And when you use these structural elements, you aren't locked into the default appearances. There are a variety of built-in options, and you can also learn to customize the way these elements appear.



[Portland Community College](#) and [Microsoft](#) have both published excellent guidelines for making elements of your document accessible. Review these brief guides to learn how to make your headings, images, lists, links, scientific formulae, tables, color, and forms accessible.

*Written by Maggie Burke and Maria Wallace, Community College of Rhode Island.
Designed and edited by Christina Moore. Published April 2017.*



Use MS Word's Accessibility Checker

Microsoft Word also has a built-in accessibility checker. Consult Microsoft for the location of the checker in the version of Word that you're using. In Word 2010 and later for Windows, it is located in the File menu. Under Info, choose Check for Issues, and then Check Accessibility. Word will check your document and a pane will appear to the right of your document with warnings and suggestions for improvement.

Time invested learning these habits now will pay dividends down the road. Not only will your students be able to navigate your document by structure (check the "Navigation Pane" box in the View ribbon to see your document's outline), but you will easily be able to change the formatting of your entire document with a single click. If you're not teaching an online or technology-enhanced course yet, you will be better prepared for the transition in the future, should you choose to make it. But most importantly, you will have created documents that are significantly easier for people using screen readers to access.

Resources

University System of Georgia. "Higher Education, the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 508." Retrieved from

http://www.usg.edu/siteinfo/higher_education_the_americans_with_disabilities_act_and_section_508

Taft College. "Screen Reader User's Experience and MS Word":

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D8XFkGMF0sw>

Portland Community College. "How to make a Word document accessible." Retrieved from

<http://www.pcc.edu/access/word>

Microsoft. "Creating accessible Word documents." Retrieved from

<https://support.office.com/en-us/article/Creating-accessible-Word-documents-d9bf3683-87ac-47ea-b91a-78dcacb3c66d>

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