



How to make your Word documents more accessible.

When we consider being inclusive it's not just physical access we need to think about. It's important that we also think about the accessibility of information and documentation. If we had a penny for every time we heard "but we don't have anyone who works for us that's disabled so what's the point", we would be rich indeed!

Consider this scenario; you have recently employed someone who is visually impaired and it's only after they start that you realise that all your documents aren't accessible. You also realise your team don't know how to create accessible documents. Think of the stress of having to amend all your documents retrospectively. Think about the impact that this can have on someone's onboarding process and how they feel welcomed into your team. It's a good idea to embed these simple practices which make documents more accessible as standard. You never know when this may be necessary.

Here are a few tips which you can share with your team:

Use the inbuilt accessibility checker

The accessibility checker in Word is designed to highlight issues which may prevent people from accessing your content. There are 3 types of alerts which are provided:

Errors

Content which is not readable for people with specific impairments, such as visually impaired people who use screen readers.

Warnings

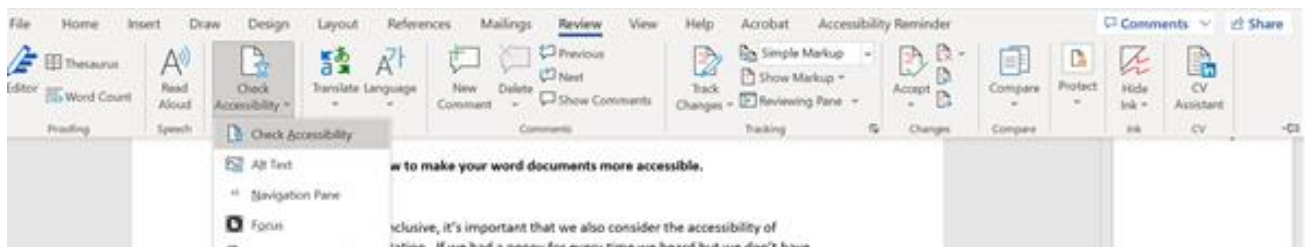
These highlight content which may be difficult for people to access.

Tips

These give tips on how to make content even more accessible.

The accessibility checker is simple to use. You just:

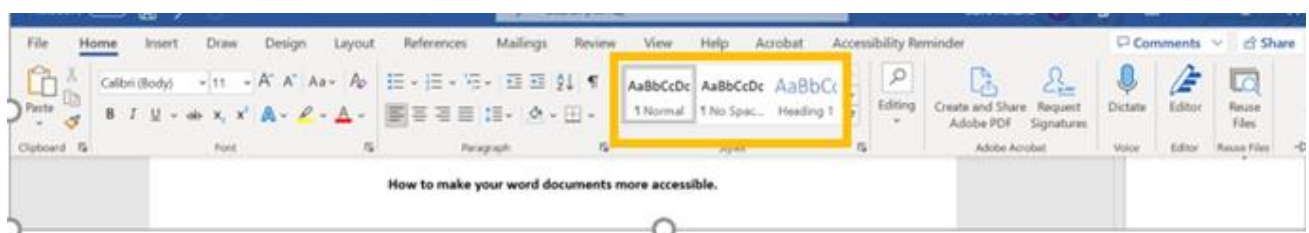
- Select the review tab
- Click on check accessibility



Once you have opened the accessibility checker, click on the keep accessibility checker running while I work tab and it will let you know of potential issues as you create your content.

Use Heading Styles

A style is a collection of formatting options that are applied to characters or paragraphs. Word allows you to apply styles to your document by simply clicking on the style which you would like (for example 'heading 1'). The styles can be found on the home menu ribbon. If you don't like the inbuilt styles, it's simple to edit them by right clicking on the style you want to change and clicking on modify.



Not only do the styles save you time and make it easy to create contents pages, but they also make your document more accessible.

Headings make text stand out and help people to scan your document and find the information they are looking for. They are also essential for people who use screen readers as they allow them to navigate the document by listening to the headings to quickly find the section they want. Make sure you use heading styles in the correct order by their number, 'nesting' them sequentially.

- Heading 1 (main content heading)
 - Heading 2
 - Heading 3
 - Heading 3
 - Heading 2
 - Heading 3
 - Heading 3

Use bullet points and numbered lists.

Large blocks of text can be off-putting and difficult for many people to read, especially if they are neurodivergent. Consider adding bullet points and numbered lists to provide information efficiently and make sure there is plenty of white space in your document.

Use colour carefully

Colour can add visual interest to your document, but it can be problematic for people with visual impairments or who are colour blind. On a side note, did you know that 4.5% of the UK population are colour blind? To make sure your document is accessible do not use colour alone to convey information. For example, it's not good practice to only use the colour green to mark an item as completed. Add a tick symbol too.

Use colour for text which has a good contrast against the colour of your background. You can check the colour contrast by using the [WebAIM's free colour contrast checker](https://webaim.org/resources/contrastchecker/). You require as a minimum the colours to pass WCAG AA requirements.

<https://webaim.org/resources/contrastchecker/>



Avoid italics, underlined text and intricate fonts.

Did you know Sans serif fonts are more accessible? Also, you should avoid Underlining text and using italics as they can make your content very difficult for some people to read.

Use meaningful link text

Links can be useful for directing people to other resources. It's important that the text you use describes where the link will take someone. This helps people to scan the document and find the one they are looking for. Also screen readers can read out a list of links and several 'click here' or 'read more' aren't helpful!

Change "[Click here](#) to find out more about our training", to "Find out more about our [disability awareness training](#)".

Add ALT text to images

ALT text is a written description of images. These also include charts, shapes, graphs and infographics. They are read out by screen readers to allow someone using them to understand the information provided by the image. You can add ALT text to an image by right clicking on the image and selecting edit ALT text from the dropdown menu.

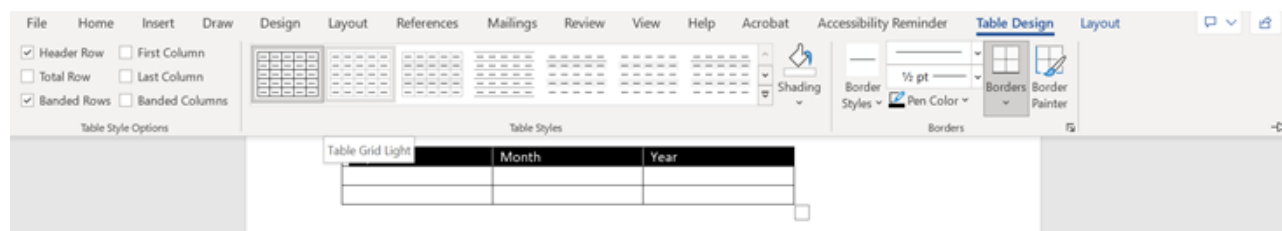
Be cautious of the automatically created ALT text in Word. Often the descriptions do not give sufficient information and aren't very good. You should always write your own. When writing ALT text:

- Describe the image as specifically as possible – thinking about the context and what information the image adds to the document.
- Don't include "image of," "picture of," etc.
- Keep it short. Ideally no longer than 125 characters

If an image is purely to make your document look attractive and doesn't add any information you can mark it as decorative.

Make your tables accessible

Avoid using tables to lay out blocks of text. They should only be used if you want to show the relationship between data. Tables should have header rows which are marked as such. You can do this by clicking on the table design menu and on the left of the ribbon you will find table style options. Click the box beside header row. This will tag this row as headings for each column. You can also add headings to the first column if needed.



To ensure tables are accessible:

- Avoid nested, merged or blank cells
- Check the reading order makes sense. Click on the table and tab through cell by cell.
- Give an explanation in the surrounding text, summarising and highlighting key information.

Check the readability of your content

You can find the readability statistics of your document in the proofing section of Word. The Flesch reading ease score should be 60 points or more. The higher the score the easier your document is likely to be to read.

When writing your content try to:

- Use shorter sentences. A good average sentence length is 15 to 20 words.
- Mainly use 'active' verbs, not 'passive' ones. For example, "We will send you an appointment" (active), rather than "An appointment will be arranged for you" (passive)
- Be cautious using acronyms and jargon. If you must use them think about adding an explanation of what they mean, when they are first used