CREATING ACCESSIBLE DOCUMENTS

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Purpose

This job aid outlines how to improve the accessibility of your documents. This Job Aid focuses on creating accessible documents in Microsoft Word but the principles involved can be applied to other software. By considering accessibility as you create your documents, you create documents that can be read and understood by a wide audience.

Background

Creating accessible content is important because users access it in different ways for example, by using a screen reader (Caldwell, 2021). It is much easier to build an accessible document from the start then to try to adapt a document once it is already created. Accessible documents end up benefitting **all** people, not just those with accessibility needs(The Chang School of Business, 2020). Applying the principles of accessibility and universal design to your document makes it easier for everyone to find and use the information that they need (Wilfred Laurier University, n.d.).

How To

Document Design

Use the built-in styles (example: Normal, Heading 1, Heading 2, Heading 3, etc.) in your document to create a uniform heading structure in your document. It is best practice to break your document into shorter sections or chunks using headings to make it easier to read and ore accessible for all students.

How to

To use the headings settings built into word:

1. Start a new line to create a heading, or select text to change to a heading.
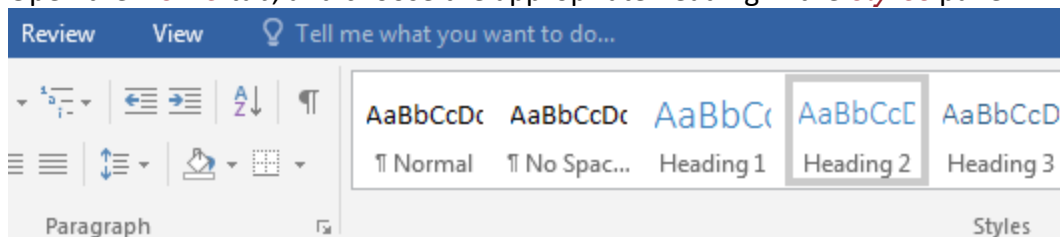2. Open the *Home* tab, and choose the appropriate heading in the *Styles* panel.

Figure 1 Image showing the heading function in Microsoft Word.

Why

Using the built in makes it easier for readers to scan through the document and understand its structure. For those students who are using a screen reader to assist them, using headings allows them to listen to all the headings on the page or skip to a heading and read the section under the heading (*Headings | Usability & Web Accessibility*, n.d.).

Do not use bold or change the font instead of a heading. One of the most common accessibility mistakes is making text bold when a heading is needed. Though the text may look like a heading, the underlying code is not set correctly, and screen reader users will not benefit.

Text Boxes

Avoid the use of text boxes in your documents. Textboxes sort of float over the text of a document and many not be read by screen reader (in the correct sequence or at all). The most accessible way to highlight important information is to use Word's built in styles. Look in you're the styles panel in the home tab to choose or create a style to highlight information.

This text was created using "Intense Quote" in word. This highlights the text while maintaining its accessibility.

Captions and Alternate Text

Adding descriptive text to the graphics in our document allows the information conveyed by an image to be accessible to all who read it. Captions can be read by screen readers which enables those who are visually impaired to access the content. Captions should be added to every image that conveys meaning in instructional and communications materials. Captions are preferable to alternative text because more screen readers register them.

To add a caption to an image in word right click on the image and choose caption. Answer to the question "What content is conveyed by the image in this context?" using simple, direct language to briefly describe what is in the image. It is important to note, that in order to work correctly with screen readers captions must be added by righ-clicking on the image rathe than by creating a textbox.

Alternative text can also be used to communicate the content and purpose of an image. To access alternative text, right click on the image and choose alternative text. Enter the same types of information that you would include for a caption.

Colour

Ensure that the use of color does not interfere with users' ability to read the document. It is also important that color not used as the only visual means of conveying information (*WebAIM:*

Contrast and Color Accessibility - Understanding WCAG 2 Contrast and Color Requirements, n.d.). Color can be used to reinforce information but can not be the only way that it is communicated.

Tables

Tables can and should be used in documents to present information in a grid or matrix with rows and columns that show the meaning of the information. Do not use table to lay out your document, even if the table is invisible to visual users they can confuse the screen reading software (Caprette & Caprette, n.d.).

When using tables, it is important to create tables using headers to indicate the header row and column. Do not change the font size or color to visually indicate the header row, use word to create a header row.

To create a header row in word:
1. Highlight the contents of the top row of your table.
2. Right click and choose 'Table Properties'
3. In the row tab check the box next to "repeat as a header row across the top of each page"

Hyperlinks

The text of your links should be meaningful when read out of context and describe what is in the link. Avoid the use of text such as "click here" or more as screen readers generate a list of links and users navigate the list alphabetically and generic text will not be helpful to the user.

To add hyperlinks with meaningful text

Type (or paste in) a web address and press spacebar or "Enter" to convert into a hyperlink.
Select the link and right-click*.
Select Edit Hyperlink (Ctrl + K).
Edit the text in the Text to display box.

Checking Accessibility

Accessibility checker is a free tool in Microsoft Office to ensure that your content is easy for people with disabilities to read and edit.

Use the Accessibility Checker

1. On the ribbon, select the **Review** tab. If you're using Outlook, note that you'll only see the **Review** tab when writing or replying to messages.
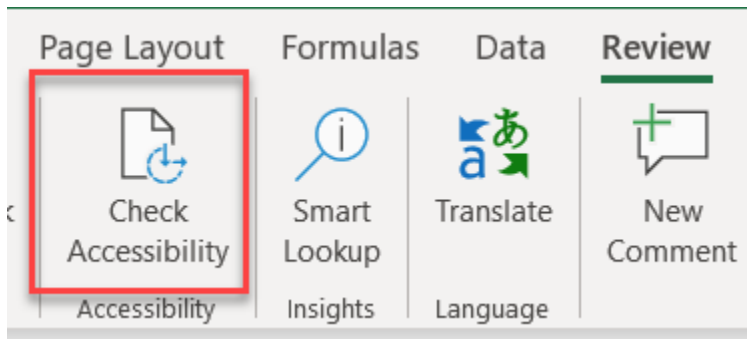2. Select **Check Accessibility**.

Figure 2 Shows the check accessibility button on the review tab.

3. Review your results. You'll see a list of errors, warnings, and tips with how-to-fix recommendations for each.

Using the Accessibility Checker allows you to quickly see if there are any aspects of your document which may make it less accessible.

References

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