Accessible Content and Communications at The Graduate School

Why should we take the time to ensure our content is accessible?

We are required to do so by federal law[1]. It is not optional. Even content that we create primarily for alumni or the general public must still be accessible to persons with disabilities[2]. Offering accessible versions of content only "on request" is generally not sufficient unless you are able to provide the accessible version within one day of the request.

Every step we take to make content more accessible improves the content experience for everyone, even those without disabilities. Here are some examples of how these practices benefit *all* audiences:

- Adding subtitles/captions to your video makes the video content accessible to persons who are riding the bus or in a library and are unable to turn up the volume on their device.
- Using plain language makes your content more accessible to those for whom English is a second language or someone reading on their phone in a busy environment. Plain language also reduces confusion and questions, which makes all of our jobs easier.
- Using properly structured documents makes your content easier for search engines to find and index, which in turn improves your content's findability and ranking in Google.

Following the guidelines in this document will enhance your content's overall effectiveness. Please incorporate these steps into your standard procedures.

Which content formats are the *most* accessible?

For text and graphic content, the following list shows potential formats in the order of most accessible to least accessible.

1. HTML web pages
2. Plain text emails
3. HTML emails
4. Office documents (MS Word, MS Excel)
5. PDFs created from properly structured MS Office documents

Which content formats are the *least* accessible?

The following formats are *not* accessible and should be avoided for Graduate School communications.

1. PDFs created by scanning a document
2. Text contained in an image (text is not selectable using mouse cursor)
3. Screenshots of text

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[1] Title III of the ADA, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act
[2] In response to lawsuits pending against MIT and Harvard University, the US Department of Justice affirmed (June 2015) that these requirements apply to content "of general interest" and not just to content intended for students.

If you want to enhance your text content, the best practice is to *start* with the simplest and most accessible format, and *then* add supporting elements or complex formats to supplement the text. For example, if you want to create instructions for completing a task, first create simple written instructions suitable for a web page (since this is the most accessible format). Then *supplement* that basic text with printable PDFs, videos, PowerPoint animations or whatever else you think may be useful.

How do I create accessible content?

Plain language writing:

- Plain language is easier for everyone to read and understand. It is especially important for content displayed on a screen (web or email).
- Use simple, plain language as much as possible.
- Revise content to be as short as possible and eliminate unnecessary words.
- Use short sentences and limit each paragraph to a single topic.
- Use headings and subheadings.
- Avoid jargon or acronyms that are not widely known.
- Use bulleted lists or tables when presenting complex information.
- Use the active voice. It is briefer, clearer and more effective than the passive voice.
- Write directly to the reader using the second-person pronoun "you." This style is more direct and has a greater impact on the reader.
- Try to avoid using "it is," "there is" or "there are" to begin sentences.

Plain language examples:

Before: The official copy of the student applicant's transcript should be submitted by April 15.

After: Submit an official copy of your transcript by April 15.

Before: It is important to note that an applicant should be very careful when modifying his or her application information.

After: Be careful when modifying your application information.

Plain language measurement goals

You can find these numbers using the tool built into MS Word or the any of the other tools listed at the end of this document. Your text will be more effective the closer it is to the target scores below.

- Flesch-Kincaid Reading Ease: Aim for between 60.0 and 80.0
- Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level: Aim for grade 9 or lower

- Passive voice: Aim for less than 10 percent (caution: MS Word stats on passive voice are sometimes inaccurate)
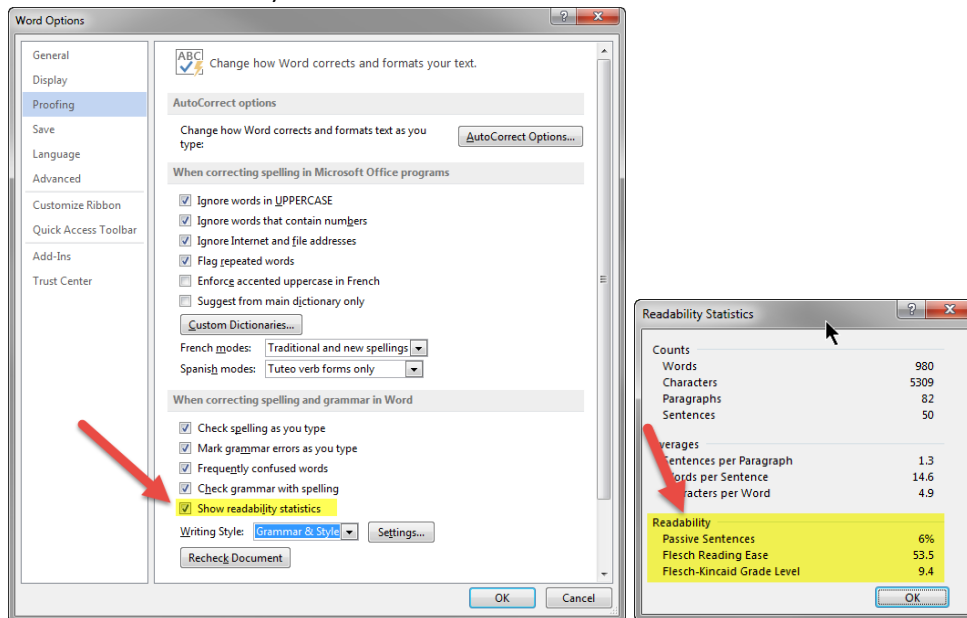
Audio and video content:

- Video and audio content **must include synchronized captions/subtitles** (a transcript alone is helpful but does not meet the legal requirement).
- Be sure to budget for the time and cost of adding transcripts/subtitles to your content.

Document structure:

- Use **true headings** (heading 1, heading 2, etc.) - don't simply increase the font size or bold the text to indicate the appearance of a heading.
- Use headings in order- don't skip heading levels.
- Use **true bulleted or numbered lists**- don't just tab over and type in numbers or bullets.
- Use **true columns-** don't use tabs or spaces to create the *appearance* of columns.
- *See handout for instructions on doing the above in MS Word.*

Color and visual design:

- *Do not use color alone* to convey information ("the items in red are required.") Color should enhance information conveyed in other ways.
- Ensure **color contrast** is strong and within acceptable levels. There are tools that will help you measure color contrast listed at the end of this document. You should aim for a minimum contrast ratio of 4.5:1.
- Use an adequate **font size**, 10pt as a minimum but 12pt and above is preferable.
- Use simple tables with **true header** cells; don't just bold the column headers.

Web links in documents:

- Never use "Click here or "Read more" as the linked text. The linked text should describe the link destination.

- Avoid using a URL (e.g., http://gradschool.unc.edu) as the linked text unless the document is only printed.

Word documents:

- Follow all above guidelines. You can use this document as a working example. For example, open the "Navigation Pane" to view proper heading structure.
- Use Word's built-in **Accessibility Checker**, but don't rely on this tool alone.
- *See NCDEA handout for additional instructions.*

PDF documents:

- **Create your document in MS** Word following above guidelines. Then use "Acrobat" menu from ribbon to select "Create PDF." "Enable Accessibility…" should be pre-selected in the preferences.
- If you have an existing PDF that is not accessible, Rachell can help you, but it is best to use an accessible source document and then convert to PDF rather than working in the other order.

For other document types (Excel, PowerPoint), please contact Rachell for assistance.

Tools and Resources:

Deb and Rachell are happy to help you with your content preparation or revision. Here are some web resources that may be helpful:

Plain language guides

- plainlanguage.gov
- Quick tips to help you write more clearly (plainlanguage.gov)
- 18F Content Guide (federal government digital services agency guide)
- Federal Plain Language Guidelines (plainlanguage.gov)

Tools to test your content

- Hemingway App – Tests for clear writing, style, complexity, and passive voice
- Slick Write – Tests for grammar, style, passive voice and more
- The Readability Test Tool (Use "Test by Direct Input" tab to paste your content, don't use URI) -Tests for readability scores
- MS Word built in spelling & grammar readability check - *Sometimes results are unreliable*

Passive vs. active voice guides

- Passive Voice Handout - The UNC-Chapel Hill Writing Center
- Active and Passive Voice Handout - Perdue University Writing Lab

Color contrast tools

- Contrast Checker
- Color Contrast Checker

Creating accessible documents

- MS Word Accessibility check (built-in) *See NCDAE handout*
- National Center on Disability and Access to Education- Guides for Word, Excel, PowerPoint, etc.

# CREATING ACCESSIBLE MICROSOFT WORD 2013 DOCUMENTS (WINDOWS)

Heading Styles

Create a uniform heading structure through use of styles in Word. This allows screen readers to navigate a document and improves accessibility for everyone.

Adding and Editing Headings

1. Select the text and **choose the appropriate style** under **Styles** on the **Home** ribbon. (e.g., "Heading 1")
2. Headings 1, 2, or 3 can also be assigned using **CTRL + ALT + 1, 2, or 3,** respectively.
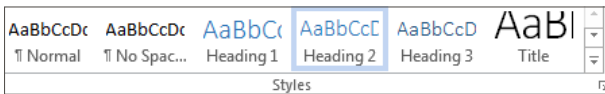
Alternative Text for Images

Images can be given appropriate alternative text in Word. This alt text is read by a screen reader in a Word file and should remain intact when exporting to HTML or PDF.

Adding Alt Text

1. Right-click on the image and choose **Format Picture.**
2. Select the **Layout & Properties** icon and choose **Alt Text.**
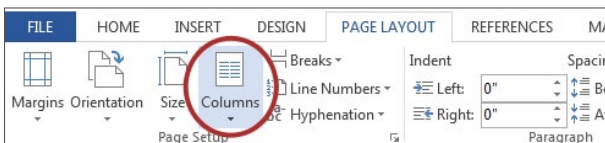3. Enter appropriate alt text only in the **Description** field (not the **Title** field).
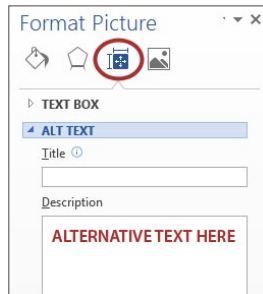
Columns

When creating columns, **always use true columns,** not columns created by hand with the **Tab** key.

Creating Columns

1. Select **Page Layout** on the ribbon.
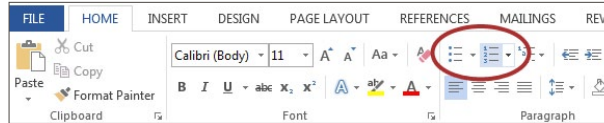2. Select **Columns** under **Page Setup** and choose the **appropriate number of columns.**

Lists

Use **true numbered and bulleted lists** to emphasize a point or a sequence of steps.

Creating Lists

1. Select the **Numbered List** or **Bulleted List** option on the **Home** ribbon, under the **Paragraph** section.

Links

Word **automatically creates a hyperlink** when a user pastes a full URL onto a page. These may not make sense to screen reader users, so **more information is needed.**

Adding Hyperlinks

1. Select the text you want linked, right click, and select **Hyperlink** or **CTRL + k.**
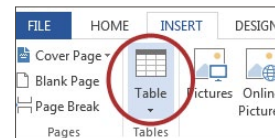2. Make sure the text in the **Text to Display** field is a meaningful description and type the link URL in the **Address** bar.
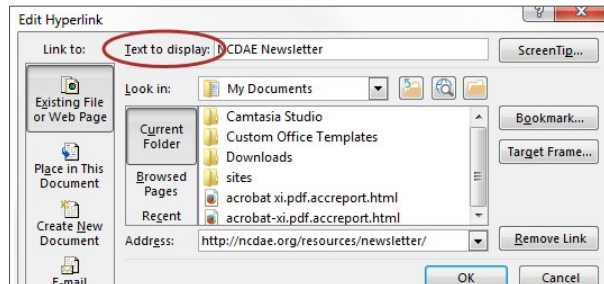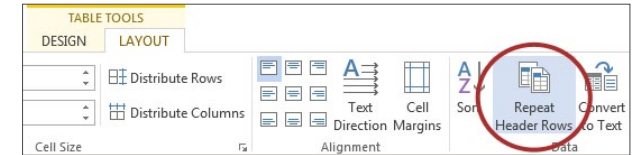
Data Tables

Accessible tables need a **clear table structure** and **table headers** to help guide a screen reader user.

Creating Tables

1. Select the **Insert** tab on the ribbon, then select **Table > Insert Table.**

2. To add table headers to the first row, select **Table Tools> Layout** on the ribbon, then choose the **Repeat Header Rows** option in the **Data** section.

Options in the **Design** tab may be used to change appearance but will not provide the necessary accessibility information.

Accessibility Checker

Word includes an accessibility resource that **identifies accessibility issues.**

1. Select **File> Info.**
2. Select the **Check for Issues** button and choose **Check Accessibility.**
3. The Accessibility Checker task pane will show **accessibility errors, warnings, and tips** on how to repair the errors. Select specific issues to see **Additional Information** at the bottom of the task pane.
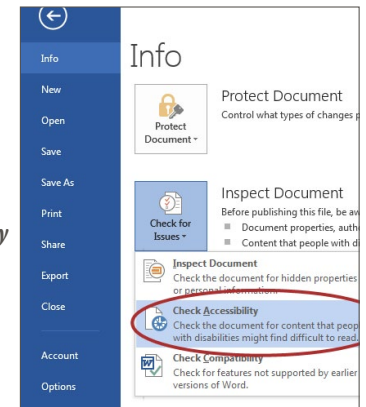
Other Principles

- Ensure that font size is sufficient, around **12 points.**
- Provide **sufficient** contrast.
- Don't use color **as the only way** to convey content.
- Provide a **table of contents** for long documents.
- Use **simple** language.

Contact us at **goals@ncdae.org** or **#435.797.3381**   For a digital version go to **ncdae.org/resources/cheatsheets**