

Fundamental Principles for Creating Accessible Digital Documents

These basic accessibility principles apply to all document types (e.g., MS Word, PDF, etc.) that are digitally provided as attachments or as HTML on a website, in a Learning Management System (e.g., Blackboard, Canvas, etc.), in an email, etc. However, how to achieve these principles depends on which authoring tool, and/or which version, used.

Basic Accessibility Principles Tied to Content Style Editor

- **Headings**

- Document headings follow a logical sequence, similar to an outline.

- **Heading 1** <H1> – use only for document title
- Heading 2 <H2>
- Heading 3 <H3>
- Heading 4 <H4>

Common Errors

- Bold and/or larger text size is used to represent a heading instead of using the heading styles.
- Heading levels are skipped.
- Heading levels are out of order.
- There are multiple Heading 1 <H1> headings.

- **Lists**

- Ordered and unordered lists are created using the content editor's "bullet and numbered list styles."

Common Error

- List elements are manually designed.

- **Alt Text Descriptions**

- Provide alternative (Alt) text description for images, graphs, diagrams, etc.
- Alt text descriptions should sufficiently describe what is being presented visually.
 - Write a clear, succinct description of the image, and keep the explanation brief.
 - If text in an image is conveying meaning, then the alt description should include all text used in the image.
 - For an adequate explanation, a complex image may require more than just adding an "alt text description."
- Punctuate alt text descriptions.
 - This allows a screen reader to pause.
- Depending on the tool used, use the appropriate semantic markup to indicate purely decorative graphics and images.
 - Microsoft Word/PowerPoint: In the image description field, add the word "Decorative."
 - Websites: In the HTML code, include an empty alt attribute (alt="").

Common Errors

- An alt text description is not provided.
- The file name (e.g., "12345_img12.jpg") of the image is used for the 'alt text.'
- "Image of" or "Graphic of" is used as part of the image description.
 - Screen readers identify graphics.

• Tables

- Use tables for data.
- Identify table headers.
- Keep tables simple.
 - Tables do not have a mix of merged and/or split cells.
- Provide a table summary.

Common Errors

- Tables are used to layout page elements.
- Headers are not identified.

Basic Accessibility Principles Not Tied to Content Style Editor

• Links

- Link text should describe the link destination.
 - Link text should supply enough information so that the user can determine its purpose and decide whether to select it.
 - [Washington State University Admissions](#)
- Avoid using link text like "more information", "click here", or providing full URL: (e.g, <https://support.office.com/en-ie/article/make-your-word-documents-accessible-to-people-with-disabilities-d9bf3683-87ac-47ea-b91a-78dcacb3c66d>)

Common Errors

- Website URLs are used for link text.
- Links are not descriptive.
- Entire sentences are used to create a link.

• Color

- Use appropriate color contrast ratio between foreground and background colors.

Appropriate

Not Appropriate

Not Appropriate

- If showing **emphasis**, do not use color alone.
 - Along with color, use bold, or a symbol (*), or increase font size.
 - Save underlining for links only.
 - Avoid emphasizing large blocks of text.

Common Errors

- There is not enough color contrast between the text and background.
- Color is used alone to show emphasis.

- Underline is used to show emphasis.
- A variety of colors are used to show emphasis.
- Large blocks of text are emphasized.

Check Overall Accessibility

- **Complete Authoring Tool's Accessibility Check (if available)**
 - Tests overall accessibility of the document.
 - Identifies accessibility errors and warnings.
 - Provides tips on how to remediate issues.
 - Revise until document has no more accessibility errors.
 - **Exporting Original Document (e.g., MS Word) to Another Format (e.g., PDF)**
 - An accessible original document may not be fully accessible when exported to the new format.
 - Must use new format's accessibility checker to ensure document remains accessible.
 - Remember it is easier to create an accessible original source document than it is to remediate a PDF.
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Additional Resources

- [WSU's Accessible Technology Policy \(EP7\)](#)
- [WSU's Web Accessibility Training](#) – Provides more detailed information about the basic web accessibility fundamentals
 - Web accessibility features apply to making digital materials accessible
- [WSU's Workshop on How to Write for the Web and Make it Accessible](#) – Accessibility features apply to making digital materials accessible
- The National Center on Disability and Access to Education – [Accessible Material How To Cheatsheets](#)
- [WebAim- Microsoft Word Accessibility](#)
- [WebAim- Color Contrast Checker](#)
- [Microsoft Product Accessibility Trainings \(Video\)](#)
- [How to Make Documents Accessible in Microsoft Word](#)
- [Microsoft Accessibility Checker](#)

For Assistance or Questions

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