Accessibility Guidelines for Microsoft Word Documents

This document offers tips and tools to ensure that the Word documents you submit for this conference are 508 accessible.

Table of Contents

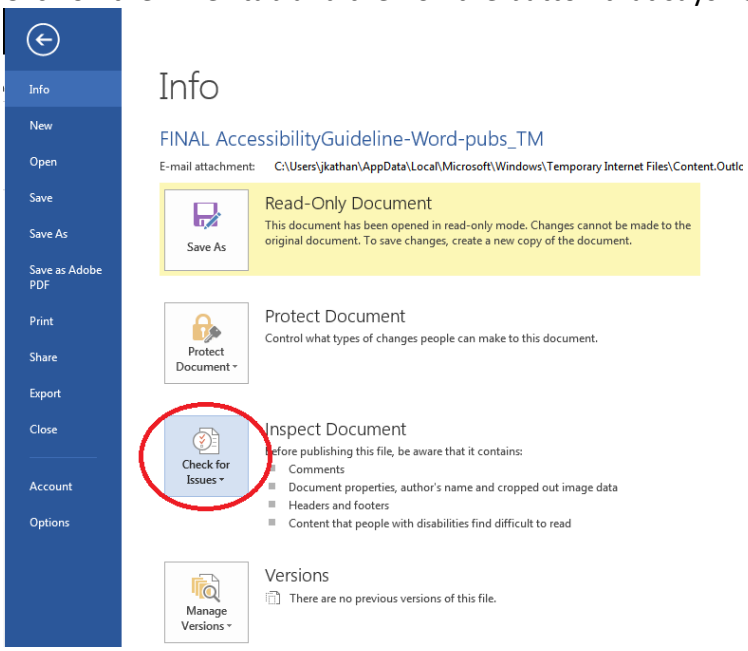
1. Check the Accessibility of Word Documents
2. Accessibility Tips for Word Documents
3. Accessibility of Images (Alt Text)
4. Tips for Accessibility When Using Multiple Icons or Complex Graphics

Check the Accessibility of Word Documents

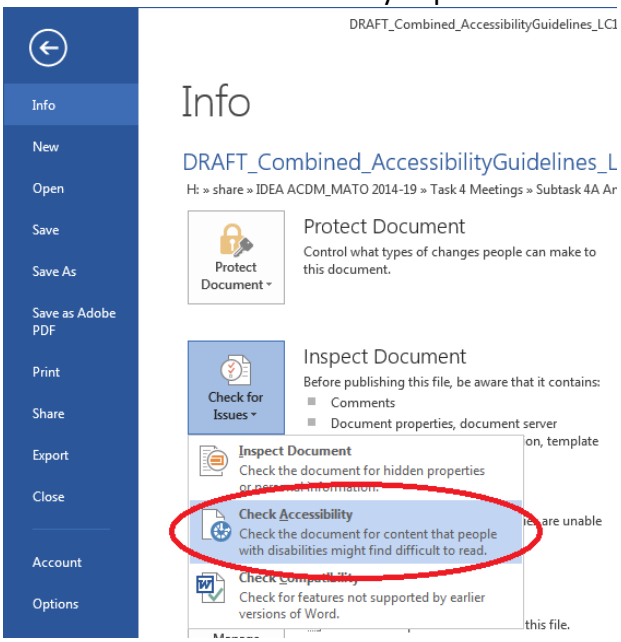
The first thing to do when making a document file 508 compliant is to check its accessibility to know what aspects of the file need to be revised. All Microsoft Suite programs allow you to check the accessibility of the file.

To check the accessibility of your file, follow these steps:

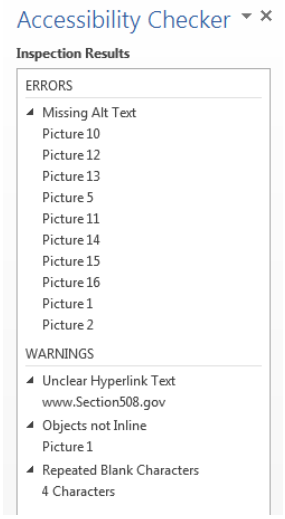
1. Click on the "File" tab and then on the button that says "Check for Issues."



2. Select the “Check Accessibility” option.



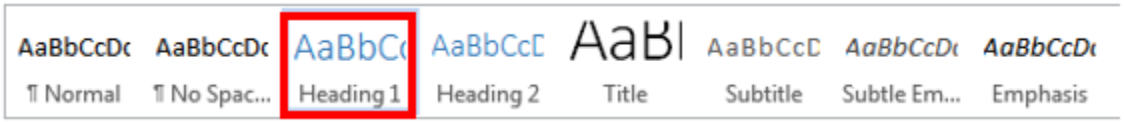
3. The results of the Accessibility Checker will appear in a box on the right-hand side of the screen. Text in the box will describe errors that need to be addressed.



Accessibility Tips for Word Documents

When submitting a Word document, please make sure that you follow these steps to ensure accessibility:

1. Use Heading styles to establish a clear structural hierarchy throughout the document. This helps put content in the correct reading order. The title of the document should always be assigned "Heading 1." To do this, you must highlight the text that you want to make the main heading and then select "Heading 1" under the "Home" tab. This means that "Heading 2" will be the first subheading in the main part of your document. (You can modify headings by right-clicking on the heading and clicking "Modify.")



2. Ensure that color contrast is sufficient for those with low vision and for black-and-white printing and that colors are not the sole means of conveying meaning. Use the color contrast checker from WebAIM to see if the colors in your document are accessible (to use the checker you will have to enter in the colors you are using in RGB hexadecimal format).

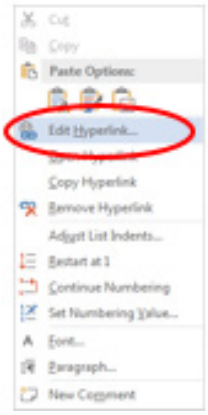
3. Use recommended, standard fonts (e.g., Times New Roman, Verdana, Arial, Tahoma, Helvetica, or Calibri) and font sizes larger than 10 pt.

4. When possible, use bullets or numbering to help make the content easier to read and support proper reading order, rather than incorporating long lists into your textual narrative.

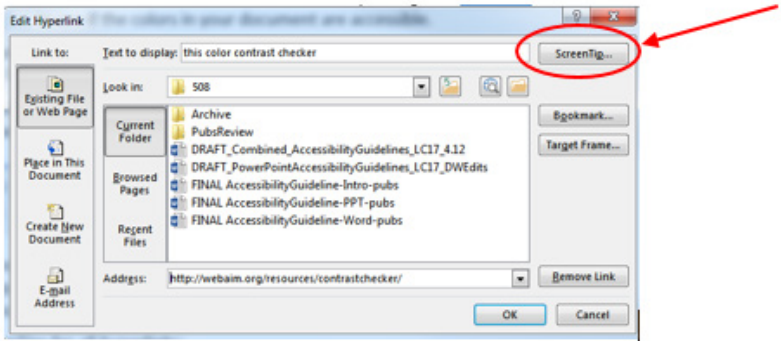
5. Ensure that each hyperlink uses descriptive text to identify the destination of the link and is distinguishable from the text surrounding it. The descriptive text should be explicit (e.g., website name), not ambiguous (such as "click here").

6. Include ScreenTips for all hyperlinks:

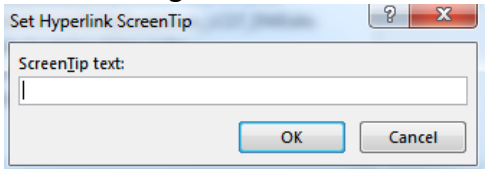
   – Right-click on the hyperlink and select “Edit Hyperlink.”



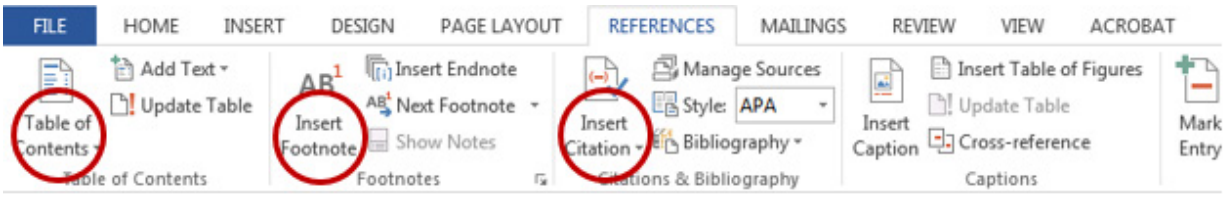
   – Click on the “ScreenTip” button in the top-right corner of the Edit Hyperlink dialog box.



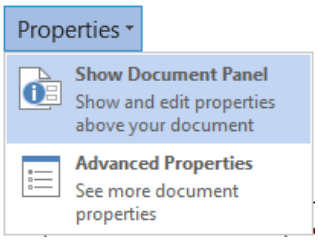
   – Enter a brief description of where this link will take the user. The Accessibility Checker will generate an error if this is not done.



7. Use automatic linking features in Word when creating footnotes, endnotes, or a table of contents.



8. Fill in the Document Properties for Title, Author, Subject (e.g., Description), Keywords, Language, and Copyright Status. To access these fields, click on the "File" tab. Then access the drop-down menu under "Properties" (at top right) and select "Show Document Panel."



9. Name the document with a file name that is between 20 and 30 characters. The file name should not include spaces or special characters. You can use hyphens to separate words in a file name. This is a best practice and should be followed, if possible.

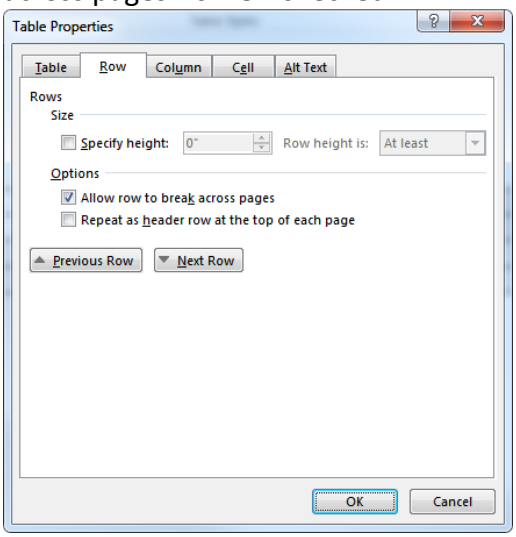
Using Tables in Word

Use tables in Word sparingly because they may be difficult for users to access. If you must use a table in your Word document, follow these tips:

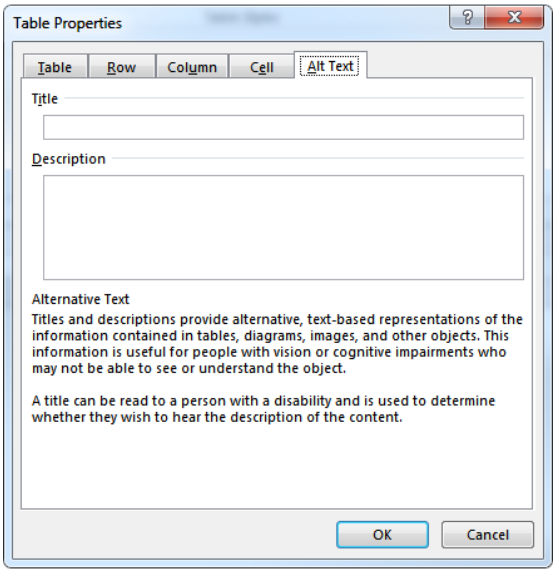
1. Do not use the "Draw Table" tool in Word to create tables. Instead, use the "Insert Table" option.

2. Use only simple tables. A simple table has no merged cells. If possible, do not leave any table cells blank. If you must use a complex table (i.e., one with merged cells as part of the header row), either (a) convert the table to an image and apply alt text or (b) rework the table into multiple simple tables.

3. Identify the header row by right-clicking in the header row of your table; select “Table Properties” and “Row,” and finally mark the box labeled “Repeat as header row at the top of each page. In this same box, make sure that the box labeled “Allow row to break across pages” is NOT checked.



4. Apply alt text to each table. Right-click anywhere in the table and then select “Table Properties.” Next, click on the “Alt Text” tab and insert text in the “Description” field; the “Title” field is optional.

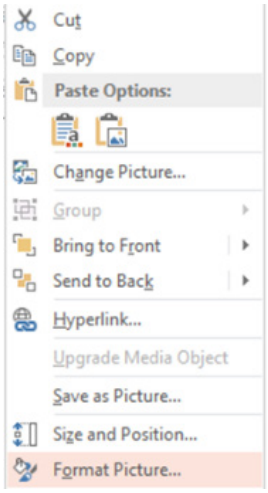


Accessibility of Images (Alt Text)

Alt text must be applied for all images and graphics in your document.

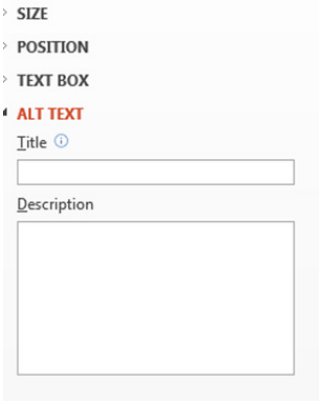
1. Right-click on the image or graphic.

2. Select “Format Picture.”



3. Select “Alt Text.”

4. Insert text in the “Description” field (the “Title” field is optional) and then close the box.



Best practices for alt text:

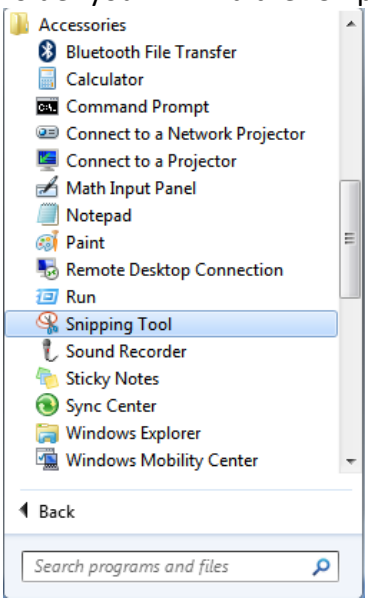
- Accurately describe the content of the image so that its meaning is understandable for an individual with a visual impairment.
- Be concise with the description.
- Do not use "image of" or "graphic of" when describing the image or graphic.

Tips for Accessibility When Using Multiple Icons or Complex Graphics

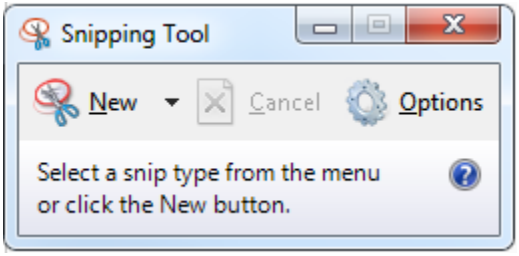
If you are using multiple icons or complex graphics (including smart art), two easy ways can be used to capture all the visual information in one picture: The first is the "Snipping Tool," and the second is "Print Screen." *Note: If you are using a Mac, you can only use the "Print Screen" option.*

Snipping Tool

1. Navigate to your computer's "Start" button and find the "Accessories" folder. In that folder you will find the "Snipping Tool" application.



2. The application will look as follows, and you will need to hit the "New" button to begin snipping:



3. After you have hit the "New" button, you can select any area of your screen for the "Snipping Tool" to capture. Once you have made this selection, you can simply select the area you would like the image to be and hit "Paste."

Print Screen

1. The vast majority of keyboards have a button that is labeled "Print Screen" or a variation of abbreviations of those words. Hit that key, and your entire screen is captured and copied to your computer's clipboard. *(If your computer does not have a print screen key, it most likely has an onscreen keyboard option where that key is accessible. To access the onscreen keyboard, search in your computer's start menu or application menu.)*

2. Paste that image in your preferred image editor (for PCs we recommend Paint; for Macs we recommend Paintbrush) and use the cropping tool to isolate the image you would like to include in your presentation.