

Making Accessible Word Documents

The following are step-by-step instructions for creating an accessible Microsoft Word document for individuals with vision impairments. These instructions are for documents that will be converted to PDF and published on public-facing webpages, like the [WISD's website](http://www.washtenawisd.org/) (<http://www.washtenawisd.org/>).

Before Beginning Your Document, Keep the Basics in Mind

- Use sans serif font (which is easier to read electronically), use font no smaller than 11 or 12 point, and use no more than two different fonts in one document.
- Left align text paragraphs (do not center or justify align).
- Use headings to convey structure, and use these headings in a logical order (Heading 1 should be used for the document title, Heading 2 should be used for major section headings, Heading 3 should be used for subsection headings, and so on).
- Keep heading titles short (fewer than 20 words).
- Put nothing important in document headers or footers (screen readers do not read header and footer information).
- Do not use the "Enter" key to create white space. Instead, use the before/after paragraph spacing.
- Use list formatting styles rather than manually creating lists. Use numbered lists for specific orders or quantities and use bulleted lists when items are in no particular order.
- Include alternative text (alt text) for visual elements (e.g., pictures, tables, figures).
- Use adequate color contrast between text and background with a minimum 4.5:1 ratio.
- Save early and often.

Update Document Title and Author

1. Click on File.
2. In the column on the right, under Properties, click on Add a Title and add a short but descriptive title to your document.
3. Under Related People, update author name(s) as appropriate.

Use Headings to Convey Structure

Document Title

1. Highlight your document's title.
2. Under the Home tab, go to the Styles section and select Heading 1. This should change the look of your heading.
3. To change font, color, size, etc., go to the Styles section and click on the tiny arrow in the bottom-right corner. A Styles window that lists the various types of headings should appear.
4. Hover your cursor over Heading 1 in the Styles window.
5. Click on the down arrow and select modify. A Modify style window should appear.
6. Choose the font, color, size, etc., for Heading 1 and select OK.

Major Section and Subsection Headings

1. Highlight the first major section heading in your document.
2. Under the Home tab, go to the Styles section and select Heading 2. This should change the look of your heading.
3. To change font, color, size, spacing, etc., go to the Styles section and click on the tiny arrow in the bottom-right corner. A Styles window that lists the various types of headings should appear.
4. Hover your cursor over Heading 2 in the Styles window.
5. Click on the down arrow and select modify. A Modify style window should appear.
6. Choose the font, color, size, etc., for Heading 2 and select OK.
7. Highlight the rest of your Heading 2 headings and click Heading 2 in the Styles section.
8. Repeat for subsection Headings 3 through 6 as needed (screen readers will not read beyond Heading 6).

Create White Space with Paragraph Spacing

Each space created with the enter key is read by a screen reader. To avoid this auditory clutter, insert space using the spacing option under Paragraph section.

Between Paragraphs*

1. Before starting a new paragraph, place your cursor at the end of the paragraph you've typed and hit the enter key one time (this one-time enter will alert the reader that a new paragraph is about to begin without causing auditory clutter).
2. Click on the Home tab and select the small arrow in the right-hand corner of the Paragraph section.
3. Under Spacing, click the up arrow next to "Before" to add space (the higher the number, the larger the space).
4. Click OK to apply the spacing before you begin typing the next paragraph.

*You can also use Styles for this, like you would with headings, but adjusting the "Normal" category instead of a heading number.

Around Headings

1. Under the Home tab, go to the Styles section and click on the small arrow in the bottom-right corner.
2. Hover over the heading number you would like to update, click on the down arrow, and select Modify.
3. Click on Format in the bottom-left corner and select Paragraph.
4. In the Spacing section, type in the point number (or use the up or down arrow) in the "Before" and/or "After" parameters, and click OK.
5. Click OK again to apply the spacing to the heading you selected.

Use List Formatting to Create Lists

First, decide if your list should be bulleted or numeric (numeric connotes order or quantity).

List Not Yet Typed

1. Under the Home tab, go to the Paragraph section.
2. Click on the appropriate list icon in the upper-left corner of the Paragraph section. (The icon for the bulleted list has three vertical bullet points, and each bullet point is followed by a short line. The icon for the numbered list has the numbers 1, 2, 3 listed vertically, and each is followed by a short line.)
3. After you click on the appropriate icon, a bullet point or number should appear before the cursor. Begin typing your list.
4. Hit the enter key for each additional item you'd like to add to the list.

List Already Typed

1. Check that the enter key has only been used one time after each listed item, and delete any extra spaces created with the enter key.
2. Highlight the items you would like to appear as a list.
3. Under the Home tab, go to the Paragraph section.
4. Click on the appropriate list icon in the upper-left corner of the Paragraph section. (The icon for the bulleted list has three vertical bullet points, and each bullet point is followed by a short line. The icon for the numbered list has the numbers 1, 2, 3 listed vertically, and each is followed by a short line.)

Add Hyperlinks Where Appropriate

1. Highlight the word(s) or title you would like convert to a hyperlink.
2. Right click on the highlighted text and select Hyperlink.
3. Type in (or paste) the web address you would like to hyperlink to in the "Address:" parameter.
4. Click OK. The text should change to a hyperlink that is both a different color and underlined. You may change the color to any color other than black (remember the required 4.5:1 color ratio), but keep the underline.
5. In parentheses, type out the web address next to its respective hyperlink. This will allow readers to access the web address information if they decide to print out the document.

Add Alternative Text to Images

Alternative text (alt text) provides a linguistic description of visual content. It is read by screen readers and used to communicate an image's content and function to those who cannot see it. Decorative images may or may not need alt text depending on the end goal.

1. After an image has been inserted in text, right click on the image, hover over Wrap Text, and click on "In Line With Text."
2. Right click on the image again and select Format Picture. A dialogue box in the right side bar should appear.
3. Click on the square icon with arrows pointing in each direction.
4. Click on Alt Text.

5. Enter a helpful description of the text that is fewer than 125 characters. Do not start description with “Image of” or “Photo of.”
6. Close out of the dialogue box.

Create a Table

1. Under the Insert tab, go to the Tables section, click on the table icon, and select “Insert Table” (do not draw a table).
2. Choose the number of columns and number of rows and click OK.
3. Populate row and/or column headers as well as the cell data.
4. Avoid merging cells, splitting cells, and using blank cells to format your table.
5. Click on a cell in your table. A Table Tools tab should appear at the top of the screen above Design and Layout.
6. Click on Layout beneath the Table Tools table.
7. In the Table section, click on Properties. A dialogue box should appear.
8. Click on the Row tab and select “Repeat as header row at the top of each page,” adding a check mark next to this parameter.
9. Place cursor at the beginning of the first cell.
10. Under the Insert tab, go to the Links section and click on “Bookmark.” A dialogue box should appear.
11. Type the appropriate bookmark name into the box and click “Add.” Type the word *Title* if the table contains both column and row headers, the word *ColumnTitle* if the table contains only column headers, and the word *RowTitle* if the table contains only row headers.
12. If you have more than one table, add a unique bookmark in the first cell of each table (e.g., Title_1, Title_2).
13. Right click on the table again and select “Table Properties.”
14. Click on the Alt Text tab and add a description of the table that is fewer than 125 characters.

Check Document’s Accessibility

1. Click on the File tab.
2. Click on the Check for Issues button and select “Check Accessibility.”
3. An Accessibility Checker dialogue box will appear on the right side of the screen. Correct any issues the Accessibility Checker has found.

Convert Document to a PDF

1. Click on Save As in the File Tab
2. Select the folder in which you’d like to save your document.
3. Under “Save as Type,” select PDF.
4. Click on Options (in the Save As dialogue box)
5. Add a checkmark to “Create Bookmarks using: Headings” and click OK.
6. Click Save.