



**General Services Administration (GSA)
Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO)
IT Policy and Compliance Division (IEC)**

Guidelines to Develop Accessible Microsoft Excel Documents

The following guidelines are enforced by the General Services Administration to assist GSA Employees and it's customers in the development of accessible Microsoft Excel documents.

Excel files must meet W3C accessibility (W3C.org) requirements to ensure the information contained in Worksheets is accessible by assistive technology.

- Complete document properties by identifying pertinent information under "Summary" and "Custom" tabs.
- All images must include alternative descriptive text or be indicated as a spacer image if appropriate.
- Do not use color to convey important information. Use textual annotations instead.
- Label row headers and column headers to enhance accessibility. Make sure row and column headers are clear and self-explanatory. Avoid ambiguous headers.
- Name all worksheets to enhance navigation.
- Indicate blank cells which may be used for formatting purposes, by using the "hidden word" technique.
- Place charts and graphs on separate worksheets and include axis information.

Helpful Tips for Posting Excel Documents on the Internet

When worksheets are developed to present a data set, the Excel file should be presented on the web as a Comma Separated Value (**CSV**) file and not as an **XLS** file. (The CSV ("Comma Separated Value") file format is often used to exchange data between disparate applications). The file format, as it is used in Microsoft Excel, has become a pseudo standard throughout the industry, even among non-Microsoft platforms. The CSV link must clearly state that the CSV is a raw data set. A separate data definition document must accompany all CSV files. Workbooks posted as .XLS only must include a link to an Excel viewer (<http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/downloads/HA010449811033.aspx>).

An Excel data set that would be presented as a CSV has the following characteristics:

- A single row of headings in the first row.
- The data set contains no formulas.

References:

U.S. Department of Health & Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Web Site: <http://www.hhs.gov/web/policies/webstandards/508excelpresentations.html>

California Polytechnic State University
San Luis Obispo, CA 93407
Phone: (805) 756-7000
E-Mail: <mailto:accessibility@calpoly.edu>

Microsoft Corporation

Microsoft quick reference card for creating an accessible Office document

Web Site:

<http://office.microsoft.com/training/training.aspx?AssetID=RP063800471033&CTT=6&Origin=RP063800491033>

Access Board

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e-mail: <mailto:508@access-board.gov> Web Site: www.access-board.gov/508.htm