



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

Developing Accessible Microsoft Word documents

The following guidelines are enforced by the General Services Administration to assist GSA Employees and Customers in the development of accessible Microsoft Word documents.

MS Word files must be Section 508 compliant or the content contained made accessible through accommodation.

Document Layout and Formatting:

- Make sure your Word document is well structured. This can be done by formatting the document using heading Style elements in a hierarchical manner (i.e. headings different from body text etc.)
- When using heading styles, make sure that the headings follow the proper progression. Heading 1 comes before Heading 2 then Heading 3 and so forth. You will want to make sure not to skip heading levels. For example, don't jump from Heading 1 to a Heading 3. You should change the heading styles to fit your document rather than skip a heading level because you don't like the preset appearance.
- Make sure to keep lots of white space between columns of text. This will help people with low vision, users of screen reading software and people with sensory or cognitive disabilities.
- Make font sizes 10 point or larger.
- Do not use flashing, blinking or flickering text and/or animated text. Flashing or blinking can cause seizures in people with photosensitive epilepsy.

- Page numbering codes must be used as opposed to manually typed page numbers.
- If footnotes are present, they must be created through Word Footnote linking.
- Format documents with high contrast. Black text on white provides the highest contrast.
- Don't rely on color alone to convey important information. If color is used to emphasize the importance of selected text, there must be an alternate method.
- The Bullet or Numbered style must be used as opposed to manually typed characters or numbers (e.g. Hyphens).
- Track Changes must be accepted or rejected and turned off.
- All comments and formatting marks must be turned off.
- The Document must be reviewed in Print Preview for a final visual check.
- All URL's must contain the correct hyperlink and display the fully qualified URL be hyperlinked with the full address (i.e. <http://www.gsa.gov> not www.gsa.gov)
- All URL's must be linked to active Web destinations.

Document Images:

- Avoid lots of graphics on one page. A simple page is easier to read.
- All images, grouped images and non-text elements that convey information must have alternative text descriptions.
- Complex images, diagrams or charts must have descriptive text immediately after the image.
- Use text to convey information. Do not use WordArt or create graphics that contain text.
- The document must be free of background images or watermarks.
- The image text wrapping style "In Line with Text" must be used for all images.
- Multiple associated images must be Grouped as One Object (i.e., Organizational Charts).
- All multi-layered objects must be flattened into one image and use one Alternative Text (Alt Tag) for the image.

Document Tables:

- Tables must be used, to create a tabular structure (not tabs or spaces). i.e. Do not use tabs or spaces to display columns of information.
- All tables must read from left to right, top to bottom. (For proper reading order by the Screen reader)
- Screen readers and Braille displays read tables row by row across the columns which may not make sense to someone using a screen reader or Braille display. When possible, use lists to convey information.
- Tables containing 'data' must have the first row designated as a 'Header Row' in table properties.
- Tables must not use merged cells.
- If tables are used, where appropriate, they should be described and labeled.
- Rows should not break across pages as it will make it more difficult. In MS-Word, Table properties, the "Allow to break across pages" must be unchecked.

Notes/Additional Requirements:

- The document file name must not contain spaces and/or special characters.
- The document file name must be concise, generally limited to 20-30 characters, and make the contents of the file clear in the context in which it is presented.
- The document must utilize the recommended fonts i.e. Times New Roman, Verdana, Arial, Tahoma and Helvetica. Avoid decorative or serif fonts such as Brush Script.
- The Document Properties (i.e. Subject, Author, Title, Keywords, and Language) must be properly filled out. Note: For "Author" do not use individuals name or contractor name. Should use government organization name (i.e., HHS).
- Files that contain a Table of Contents (TOC) must use the TOC field (e.g., created using the TOC Command in MS Word).
- A separate accessible version of the document must be provided when there is no other way to make the content accessible. (Example: An organizational chart).

The information provided in this document is intended to help you create documents that will be accessible to someone using assistive technology software such as a screen reader or screen magnifier. These guidelines will also help you produce better documents for all users and will contribute to the success of document conversion to HTML or PDF files.

Much of the information provided will apply to any type of document that you create. If you are posting materials on the Web then standards compliant HTML is the most accessible format. Also consider posting materials in multiple formats so your readers can choose the format that works best for them. Types of formats might be HTML, Word or plain text or PDF.

The information described in this document is for educational and informational purposes only and does not necessarily reflect the position of the General Services Administration and no official endorsement of these materials should be inferred.

Resources:

U.S. Department of Health & Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201
Web Site: <http://www.hhs.gov/web/policies/checklistword.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
<http://office.microsoft.com/training/training.aspx?AssetID=RP063800471033&CTT=6&Origin=RP063800491033>

Access Board
Office of Technical and Information Services
1331 F Street, NW, Suite 1000
Washington, DC 20004-1111
phone: (800) 872-2253 (voice)
(800) 993-2822 (TTY)
fax: (202) 272-0081
e-mail: <mailto:508@access-board.gov?subject=U.S. Access Board Inquiry>
Web Site: <http://www.access-board.gov/508.htm>