

Creating Accessible PDF files using Word

When creating web content, there are basic steps that should be followed in order to ensure your content is accessible. Assistive technology software is often used by people with disabilities (e.g., blindness) to read the web content including PDF files. The core steps needed for accessibility are the same regardless of whether your document is in HTML, Microsoft Word, Adobe PDF, or another document format.

- Keep it simple!
 - For ADA compliance, the plainer the better. Example: no background colors or patterns, no graphs, and limit pictures that are decoration only.
- Create well-structured documents
 - Use Headings
 - Use Lists
- Add alternate text to images (right click the image and select EDIT ALT TEXT)
 - Alt text needs to describe the image—think about describing the image to someone who is blind.
- Avoid using verbiage within images and/or using images to convey key information such as graphical flyers, graphical announcements, charts, color-coded information.
 - Assistive technology cannot “read” a picture
- Avoid using the actual URL address for hyperlinks. Links should be descriptive (so that 'web readers' can pick up all the information) and put into context. Don't use "click here" to instruct a user where to click. For example:
 - Don't Do: [Click here](#) for a complete listing of upcoming events
 - Use Instead: [Upcoming Events](#)
- Avoid using tables for layout purposes.
 - Assistive technology sometimes has trouble determining the proper reading order of the text in a layout table.
- Tables should only be used to display data and need to be formatted correctly
 - Headers at the top of each column
 - Designate the top row of a table as the header row (right click the top row, select TABLE PROPERTIES, select ROW tab, click check box by “Repeat as header row at top of each page”)
 - No merged cells
- **Create PDFs Properly**
 - Create PDFs from the electronic version of the original file via “Save As” and choose PDF.
 - **DO NOT scan or take a picture of the hardcopy document as this only creates an image that cannot be read by assistive technology.**
- Avoid using colored text
 - ADA requires a high contrast between font color and background color. You are safe using black or dark maroon font on white background.
- Word has a built-in Accessibility Checker that will tell you exactly where there are issues in your document. (Select the FILE tab, select CHECK FOR ISSUES, and then select CHECK FOR ACCESSIBILITY.)
- Majority of the PDF files on the web were probably created in Microsoft Word. Microsoft support has a great website showing the various tools available to make your Word document accessible: [Office Accessibility: Word](#)