

Making content accessible online

Web accessibility means that online content is available to anyone who wants to access it, including people with disability and people using limited or mobile technology.

Content type

Written content on the internet can be presented as HTML, Word or RTF documents, or PDFs. All of these formats can be made accessible.

If you are placing multiple versions of a document on the web (e.g. HTML, Word and PDF versions), at least one must be accessible. It is not necessary for them all to be accessible.

The following tips will help you to ensure that content or documents that you place on the web are accessible.

Styles and formatting

Use styles to tag content (rather than manually applying bold, italics, etc), including Heading 1 (used for section or chapter names), Headings 2 to 5 (used for subsections) and Normal (used for the main body text).

Don't skip heading levels (e.g. Heading 2 must be followed by Heading 3; do not skip straight to Heading 4). Check this in Outline view or the navigation pane in Word.

Don't include unnecessary spaces. Do a global check for multiple spaces and multiple line returns.

Make sure lists (e.g. abbreviations list, glossary) are not formatted as tables.

Tables

Enter your table as a table, not tabbed text, text frames or an image.

Specify column header rows (select header rows, go to the Table Layout menu, and select Repeat Header Rows).

Don't include subheadings as rows; convert to a new column or break the table into several tables.

Position tables in line with text (not floating).

As much as possible, avoid merging or splitting cells.

Don't leave cells blank – use text or numbers to indicate meaning:

nil not applicable 0

Use text as well as colour to convey meaning.

You do not need to include alternative text (alt text) to make a table accessible, but a short summary inserted as alt text can be useful.

Graphs, figures and images

Check figures and charts to make sure no objects are obscured.

Ensure that different series in charts are distinguished by patterns as well as, or instead of, colours.

Group elements of a chart or diagram together as a single object.

Make sure the colour contrast between figure elements and background is sufficient.

Attach to the figure alt text that describes the overall message of the figure.

Alternative text

Provide alt text for all meaningful nontext elements (e.g. figures, maps, photos).

Alt text should provide an overall description of the contents and message of the picture. For example, if describing a graph, describe the overall trend of the data:

Pie sales increased rapidly from 2008, reaching 4,000 per year in 2022

rather than:

Pie sales were 1,000 per year in 2008, 1,100 per year in 2010, 1,500 per year in 2011 ...

If the image contains text, reproduce this text exactly in the alt text.

If the image is a flowchart of a process with multiple points of divergence, include in the alt text the decision points and options at each point.

If only a short description is needed, in Word, select the picture, right click and select View Alt Text; type the description in the field.

If a long description is needed (e.g. for complex charts), include the long description in the text as a table or figure note, or in an appendix, and add a short description as alt text that directs the reader to the longer description.

Do not leave alt text blank. If the information is already in the document, use the alt text to point the user to where it is (e.g. main text, caption). If the image is decorative, simply check the box 'Mark as decorative'.

Hyperlinks

Make hyperlinks visually distinct (e.g. blue and underlined).

Write meaningful hyperlink text that describes the link destination, rather than just providing the URL:

Read more about [climate change](#).

rather than:

[Read more](#) about climate change.

Colour

Make sure that colour or shading is not used as the only visual means of conveying information, indicating an action, prompting a response or distinguishing a visual element. Any information conveyed by colour differences must also be available as text (or alt text).

Document properties

In Word, set the document properties (File > Info > Properties > Advanced Properties), including title, subject, author and keywords, and a description of the document in the 'Comments' field.

Set language to 'English (Australia)' (select all, Review > Language).

Final check

- In Word, run the accessibility checker (File > Info > Check for Issues > Check Accessibility).
- If exporting to PDF: File > Save as Adobe PDF. Select the Options button and ensure that Enable Accessibility and Reflow with Tagged Adobe PDF is checked. Do not Print to PDF.
- In Acrobat, run the accessibility checker (Tools > Accessibility > Accessibility Check) and troubleshoot any issues.

Remember that accessibility is about the needs of your readers, not about ticking off every item in Word's accessibility checker. Use your judgment about making the suggested changes from the checker – you may have dealt with an issue in a way that is different but makes the document equally accessible.