

Solving accessibility problems

Issue	Why is it a problem?	How do I fix it?
Headings too long	Headings should be no more than 1 line long, so that screen readers can parse them quickly.	Shorten the heading by removing words or rewriting the heading. This may involve adding new subheadings or splitting up a heading so that its contents form 2 new sections.
Infrequent headings	Screen readers use headings as pointers for the reader to move through the text. More headings allow the reader to accurately identify where they want to be when reviewing the content.	Add more headings or subheadings. This could involve adding an additional level of subheadings, or more clearly separating content within an existing subsection.
Headings not identified	If the document is styled using headings that are not based on the default Word styles ('Heading 1', etc), a screen reader will not recognise them as headings.	Use the Word heading levels – if you don't like the way they look, change their formatting, but keep the name as it is.
Repeated blank characters	When a screen reader identifies blank characters, this is often a signal to the reader that the information has ended in that location.	Don't use line returns to create page space. Use formatting and select a style to create the appropriate amount of space, or use page breaks.
No header row specified in tables, or subheader rows present	Screen readers will repeat the headings occurring in the 'header row'. Any other heading rows will only be read once, not repeated for text in columns beneath.	Think about designing the table more effectively – move subheader information into the body of the table, where suitable, or consider splitting a table with several subheadings into several different tables. If several rows of headings are important, provide table alt text for users relying on screen readers to ensure that they can understand the table.
Merged or split cells in tables	Cells merged across columns may prevent a screen reader from being able to link headings to cell contents.	If merged cells are absolutely required, provide alt text for the table.
Empty table cells	A screen reader cannot identify the meaning of a blank cell, and cannot identify cell shading (ie shaded cells are considered to be blank).	Fill blank cells with something informative. Does it mean 'not applicable', or 'information not available'? Does it mean 'no'?
Line returns in table cells	When a screen reader identifies blank characters, this is often a signal to the reader that the information has ended in that particular location.	Use new cells for new lines or format content as a bullet list.
Images not identified	Alt text needs to be provided for all images so a screen reader can describe them.	Provide simple but descriptive text to describe the content of the image. Consider the audience and use technical language if it is appropriate.
Complex images (e.g. graphs, flowcharts)	Alt text can be used, but it is best to keep the description short so the reader is not bogged down in detail if they are not interested.	Use the 'long description' feature in HTML, or include a long text description in another location, such as an appendix or link.
Unclear hyperlink text	Hyperlink text should provide a clear description of the link destination, not just spell out the URL.	Rewrite the sentence so that the link text is descriptive and flows within the surrounding content. If the link will open another program on the user's device, specify this as part of the link.
Document not identifiable	For a Word document or PDF, document properties help the reader find and identify content within documents.	To provide document properties in Word, go to File > Info > Properties > Advanced Properties. Complete details for the document title, subject, author and keywords, and any other relevant information