Microsoft Word: Create accessible documents

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This article describes the best practices you can adopt to ensure **Word documents** you create and share can be read by everyone, including individuals who use assistive technologies, such as screen readers, text-to-speech, or Braille devices.

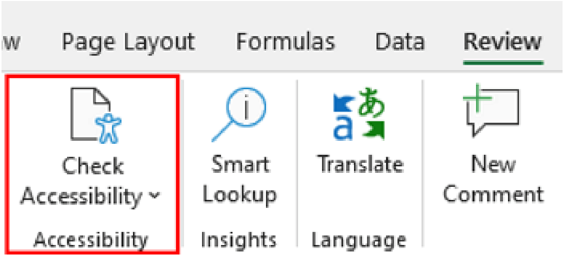
Prefer video? See Microsoft's Create accessible Word documents series

Use the accessibility checker

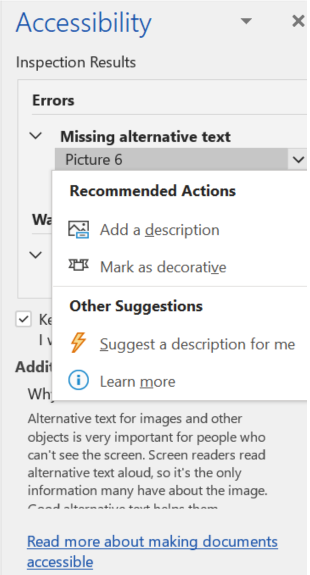
Microsoft Office has a **built-in accessibility checker** that can scan documents, flag potential problems and recommend actions you can take to fix them.

Prefer video? See Microsoft's demo on how to check document accessibility

1. Click the **Review** tab of the ribbon, then click **Check Accessibility.**

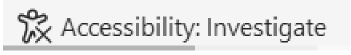

w
Page Layout
Formulas
Data
Review
Check Accessibility
Accessibility
Smart Lookup
Insights
Translate
Language
New Comment

2. Word will list potential problems in the **Accessibility** pane. Click on a issue to see more information and highlight the object or place in the document where the issue occurs.


Accessibility
Inspection Results
Errors
Missing alternative text
Picture 6
Recommended Actions
Add a description
Mark as decorative
Other Suggestions
Suggest a description for me
Learn more
Read more about making documents accessible

Alternative text for images and other objects is very important for people who can't see the screen. Screen readers read alternative text aloud, so it's the only information many have about the image.

3. Click one of the **Recommended Actions**, if available, to fix the issue or ℹ **Learn more** for an explanation and possible remedies.
4. Check the **Keep the accessibility checker running while I work** box to add an **Accessibility** button to the status bar at the bottom of your Word window.
5. This button will flag you when issues appear in documents you open; click it to open the **Accessibility** pane and fix them.

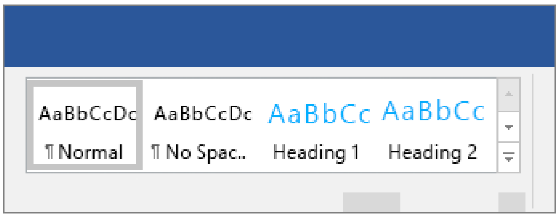

Accessibility: Investigate

Add headings using built-in styles

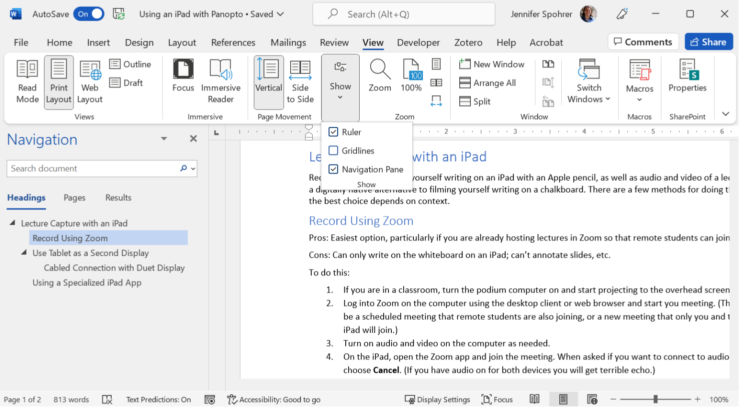
Creating headings with **Word's built-in heading styles** (e.g., Heading 1, Heading 2) **formats the text** for easier visual scanning **and adds an outline** that assistive technologies use to infer reading order. Headings help all readers navigate within documents, but they are especially important for readers using formats in which pagination is absent or varies.

Prefer video? See Microsoft's Apply Styles demo.

1. Select the text you want to format.
2. Click the **Home** tab in the ribbon to display it.
3. Scroll through the **Styles** gallery and choose a heading style (if you don't see the one you need, you may need to expand the gallery).


AaBbCcDc
¶ Normal
AaBbCcDc
¶ No Spac..
AaBbCc
Heading 1
AaBbCc
Heading 2

4. Repeat, using different **heading levels to outline your document**:
    - The **document's title/main heading** should be **Heading 1.**
    - Titles of **sections** should start be **Heading 2**. Sub-sections will have **Heading 3** titles, sub-sub-sections **Heading 4** titles, and so on.
    - **Don't skip heading levels or use heading levels out of order** as this can make the document inaccessible; assistive technologies use the outline for navigation and to infer reading order.
    - Open the **Navigation Pane** to see your headings in outline form, increase or decrease heading levels, and reorder sections.


AutoSave
On
Using an iPad with Panopto • Saved
Search (Alt+Q)
Jennifer Spohrer
File
Home
Insert
Design
Layout
References
Mailings
Review
View
Developer
Zotero
Help
Acrobat
Comments
Share
Read Mode
Print Layout
Web Layout
Outline
Draft
Views
Focus
Immersive Reader
Immersive
Vertical
Side to Side
Page Movement
Show
Zoom
100%
Zoom
New Window
Arrange All
Split
Switch Windows
Window
Macros
Macros
Properties
SharePoint
☑ Ruler
☐ Gridlines
☑ Navigation Pane
Show
Navigation
Search document
Headings
Pages
Results
Lecture Capture with an iPad
Record Using Zoom
Use Tablet as a Second Display
Cabled Connection with Duet Display
Using a Specialized iPad App
Page 1 of 2
813 words
Text Predictions: On
Accessibility: Good to go
Display Settings
Focus
100%

Le with an iPad

Rec yourself writing on an iPad with an Apple pencil, as well as audio and video of a le
a digitally native alternative to filming yourself writing on a chalkboard. There are a few methods for doing t
the best choice depends on context.

Record Using Zoom

Pros: Easiest option, particularly if you are already hosting lectures in Zoom so that remote students can join

Cons: Can only write on the whiteboard on an iPad; can't annotate slides, etc.

To do this:

1. If you are in a classroom, turn the podium computer on and start projecting to the overhead screen
2. Log into Zoom on the computer using the desktop client or web browser and start you meeting. (Th be a scheduled meeting that remote students are also joining, or a new meeting that only you and t iPad will join.)
3. Turn on audio and video on the computer as needed.
4. On the iPad, open the Zoom app and join the meeting. When asked if you want to connect to audio choose **Cancel**. (If you have audio on for both devices you will get terrible echo.)

5. (Optional) customize the formatting of the built-in heading style if you want to change how it looks. (Don't rename built-in headings, however, as this could prevent some software from accurately recognizing heading levels.)

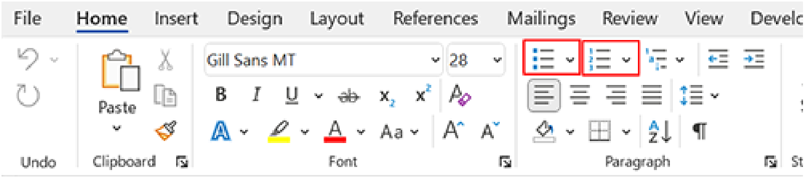
> **Note:** When you **convert a Word document to a PDF or a web page**, Word **automatically converts text styled with built-in heading styles to the appropriate tags** (e.g., <h1>, <h2>) in those formats to maintain accessibility. Applying styles in Word before converting a document to a PDF or HTML page is usually much faster than trying to add the tags after the fact.

Create lists using built-in tools

Lists assist reader comprehension by breaking up text and making it easier to visually scan and by adding information about order or hierarchy. Creating lists using Microsoft Word's built-in tools ensures that assistive technologies recognize them as lists and supply the additional information to readers using these tools.

Prefer video? See Microsoft's Create a list demo

- **Create lists with Autoformat**: Type a **1.** (one followed by a period) or an * (asterisk) followed by a space or tab and some text, and Word will automatically start a numbered or bulleted list.
- **Create lists using menu options**: Select the content of your list or click where the list will begin, then click the **Home** tab in the Ribbon and choose the **bulleted** or **numbered list** option,



Use meaningful text for hyperlinks

When adding hyperlinks to a document, use **"link text"** or **"display text"** (that is, the part of a hyperlink that is visible onscreen and underlined or formatted to show it can be clicked) **that briefly describes what happens or is visible when the link is clicked**.

Prefer video: See Microsoft's guide to creating accessible links.

1. Type the text that you want to make a hyperlink.
    - **Don't use the URL as the link text**. URLs are hard for assistive technologies to parse and disruptive when read aloud (character by character!) for readers using text-to-speech technologies.
    - **Avoid repetitive or vague links, such as "click here."** Assistive technology users don't always have the text surrounding a link for context; for example, they might navigate to a link by choosing it from a list of all links in the document.
2. Highlight that text and right-click (⊞) or press Control and click () to open the context menu.
3. Choose 🔗 **Link.**
4. Word will show a list of recent files for you to choose from; click 🔗 **Link** or **Insert link ...** to add a URL instead.
5. The text you've highlighted will show up in the **Text to display** or **Display text** box; paste the URL in the **Address** or **Enter link** field, then click **OK** or **Insert**.

Note: If you need to make a URL visible within a text -- for example, to share a DOI name/link as a reference -- place it in a note or footnote where it won't interrupt the flow of the text and use human-readable phrases for links embedded in the main body of your document.

Add alt text for images

Alternative text, or alt text, provides a description of an image for screen reader users and appears in place of the image if it cannot be rendered properly.

Prefer video? See Microsoft's Improve accessibility with alt text demo

1. Right-click (Windows) or Control-click on the image to open the context menu.
2. Select **Edit Alt Text**.
3. In the **Alt Text pane**:
    - Type a description of visual information that is essential to a reader's understanding and not already conveyed in the text
    - OR check **Mark as decorative** if the image does not convey essential information

See also:

- Everything you need to know to write effective alt text
- Writing effective alt text

Use tables wisely

Tables can help many readers visually process information, but they present considerable challenges for assistive technology users. Readers who need to magnify screens, increase font size, or who view on a tablets may need to scroll horizontally and vertically to see everything. Screen readers and Braille display technologies present tabular information by numbering cells in columns and need metadata explicitly defining the relationships between headers and data cells to do this accurately.

- **Don't use tables as layout tools** for aligning text and graphics. Use Word's paragraph formatting, styles and picture tools instead.
- **Remove blank rows and columns and fill blank cells** with an appropriate null value, such as zero or NA.
- **Include a single header row** that states what kind of data is included in contained in each column. For example, the first row of in the three-column table pictured below, contains the column headers Assignment, Point Value, and Due Date, which describe the data in those columns.
- **Designate it as a header row** so that Word adds metadata for screen readers and other assistive technologies. In the example below, Word applied a bold text and yellow background to the header row, but regular text and gray or no background to non-header rows.
- **Use a simple, regular table structure** without split or merged cells, multi-row headers, or nested tables. In the table shown below, the merged cells used to create TESTS and PROJECTS sub-headings in rows 2 and 4 would interfere with the numbering that screen readers use to associate the data cells with the proper column. Deleting these rows (which are redundant since the assignment names Test 1, Test 2, Project 1 and Project 2 contain the same information) creates a simple table that a screen reader can parse.

Assignment	Point Value	Due Date
TESTS		
Test 1	100 points	February 21
Test 2	100 points	April 4
PROJECTS		
Project 1	100 points	January 31
Project 2	150 points	March 14

Identify document language(s)

Assistive technologies need to know what language a document or text is written in to properly encode or present it.

- **If you write in a single default language** that Office uses spelling and grammar checking tools your documents will be encoded in that language.
- **If you write in multiple languages, set the language for the text passages within your document** so assistive technologies (and Word's spelling and grammar checking tools) can identify them:
  1. Select the text in a language.
  2. Click **Review**, then click **Language**
  3. Choose the appropriate language from the list and then click **OK**
  4. Repeat for each passage in a different language.

Attention: These language settings do **not** carry over when a Word document is saved as a PDF. You will need to set the document language for the PDF using Adobe Acrobat Pro

Questions?

If you have any additional questions or problems, don't hesitate to reach out to the **Help Desk**!

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