

Creating Simple Accessible Documents

This document is aimed at the creation of Microsoft Word documents; however the broad concepts can be used with other formats.

Students who have print disability access information contained within an electronic document through a variety of methods. These include clear (large) print, audio and braille output. Electronic documents can therefore be read by a student with print disability if they are designed with accessibility in mind.

Creating an accessible document has advantages for all students. Documents that have a simple, logical layout are clearer to read and comprehend. Using correct styles and structure allow a document to be updated, reformatted and edited quickly and with greater ease.

Formatting and layout are important factors in making documents accessible.

Always use the preferred font and formatting of the student.

General guidelines for optimising access are listed below:

Accessibility Factors

Accessible documents can be read by everyone, including those who use a screen reader. An accessible document enables easy navigation, and makes it more usable for all. Tagging images and using heading and list styles contribute to an accessible document.

Accessibility factors include:

Font

Using the correct font will allow a student with print disability to navigate when using a screen reader but more so when they are not. Always use the preferred font of the student, or use the following minimum standards:

- Use Arial font, size 12 point for standard print documents.
- Use Arial font, size 18 point for large print documents unless otherwise requested.
- Use "Straight Quotes" not "Smart Quotes". "Smart Quotes" may not appear when converting to other formats (e.g. braille).
- Use bold font for emphasis. Do not use *italics* and underlining. Do not present text in BLOCK CAPITALS.

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Contrast

A student with print disability may be able to discern text and images more easily when they contrast to the other colours on the screen or page. To ensure high contrast:

- Use black text on a white background or similar high contrast colours.
- Do not combine dark text on a light background with light text on a dark background on the same page.

Formatting and Layout

Formatting a page correctly will assist a student with print disability to navigate more easily, and within an acceptable timeframe. Use the preferred format of the student if the document is created for a specific individual or use the following minimum standards:

General

- Use consistent, simple and logical layout.
- Format text left aligned and horizontal.
- Use Word Wrap to avoid splitting a word over two lines.
- Line spacing of a minimum of 1.2pt.
- Place space equivalent to a blank line between paragraphs.
- Use Styles to format elements like headings, headers, footers, tables and lists.

Borders and Tables

- Use a border to add emphasis to a block of text. Do not use a text box.
- Insert a table only when presenting tabular information.
- Use bold visible borders in tables.
- Ensure there is adequate space between the borders and contents of a table cell.
- Place page numbers at the bottom right hand corner of the page for efficient visual location.

Heading Styles

Many students do not use true styles when formatting a document. For example, when creating a heading, they simply change the font, enlarge the font size, make it bold, etc. The text may 'look' like a heading however this visual representation cannot be identified as a heading by a screen reader. Always use heading styles.

Images

When including images within a document they should be labelled with appropriate text. This is also known as 'tagging'. It enables a student using a screen reader the

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ability to determine the content of pictures (e.g. photographs, WordArt). The text will not appear within the content of the document, but will only be discerned when using a screen reader.

Images should be large enough to be clearly seen by students with low vision.

- Text must not be laid over an image, texture or shading. Place text above, below or beside images.
- Label images with a short description.
- Describe information presented in complex graphics in the text of the document.
- Do not use scanned images of text. For example, most PDFs are images rather than electronic text. Use typed text only.

Lists

Always use list styles. Lists can be easily located if they are created as a 'list style'..

Glossary

Line Spacing

Line spacing is the vertical distance between lines of text. Most writers use either double-spaced lines or single-spaced lines—nothing in between—because those are the options presented by word processors. Accessible documents require a minimum line space of 1.2pt.

Keystrokes

Keystrokes are a combination of keys pressed simultaneously to perform a function or command. For example, to create a 'Heading 1' the keys Alt, Control and 1 are pressed at the same time.

Screen reader

A screen reader is a software application that enables students with severe visual impairment to use a computer. Screen readers work closely with the computer's Operating System (OS) to provide information about icons, menus, dialogue boxes, files and folders

Smart Quotes

Smart Quotes are quotation marks which, although all keyed the same, are automatically interpreted and set as opening or closing marks (inverted or raised commas) rather than vertical lines.

Straight Quotes

Straight quotes are the two generic vertical quotation marks located near the return key: the straight single quote (') and the straight double quote (").

Styles

A style is a set of formatting characteristics, such as font name, size, colour, paragraph alignment and spacing

Word Wrap

Word Wrap (in word processing) is a feature that automatically moves a word that is too long to fit on a line to the beginning of the next line.

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Additional References & Resources

These guidelines incorporate information from the following sources:

- Adobe Resources.
<http://www.adobe.com/accessibility/products/acrobat/training.html>
- Blind Foundation, Written Communication Style Guide (2012).
- Connell, Tim. What is the cost of a free product?
<https://nfb.org/images/nfb/publications/bm/bm14/bm1410/bm141006.htm>
- CNIB
<http://www.cnib.ca/en/services/resources/Pages/default.aspx>
- European Blind Union: Making information accessible for all
<http://www.euroblind.org/resources/guidelines/nr/88>
- Media Access Australia (MAA). Service Providers Accessibility Guide.
<http://www.mediaaccess.org.au/>
- Media Access Australia (MAA). Vision Scoping Report
<http://www.mediaaccess.org.au/education/low-vision-blindness/vision-education-scoping-report>
- Microsoft.
<https://support.office.com/en-in/article/Creating-accessible-Word-documents-d9bf3683-87ac-47ea-b91a-78dcacb3c66d>
- Round Table on Information Access for People with Print Disabilities. Guidelines on Conveying Visual Information. 2005
<http://printdisability.org/guidelines/guidelines-on-conveying-visual-information-2005/>
- Round Table on Information Access for People with Print Disabilities. Guidelines for Accessible E-text. 2009
<http://printdisability.org/guidelines/guidelines-for-accessible-e-text-2009/>
- Round Table on Information Access for People with Print Disabilities. Guidelines for Producing Clear Print. 2011
<http://printdisability.org/guidelines/guidelines-for-producing-clear-print-2011/>
- Round Table on Information Access for People with Print Disabilities. Guidelines for Accessible Assessment. 2011
<http://printdisability.org/guidelines/guidelines-for-accessible-assessment-2011/>
- Tom's Top Ten Tips for Accessible Documents
<http://printdisability.org/>
- VisionAustralia Resources:
<http://www.visionaustralia.org/business-and-professionals/digital-accessibility-services/resources>
- WebAIM.
<http://webaim.org/techniques/word/>

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- World Blind Union PowerPoint Guidelines. World Blind Union. 2007.
<http://archive.ifla.org/VII/s31/pub/wbu-visual-presentations-guidelines.pdf>
<http://www.worldblindunion.org/English/resources/Pages/General-Documents.aspx>
- World Wide Web Consortium (W3C).
<http://www.w3.org/>