

## Creating an Accessible Document The Basics

### Introduction

Below is information, including a checklist, of basic properties and tools that can be utilized to create files that are accessible. Additionally, links to external resources and instructions for creating an accessible PDF are available for download from our [website](#).

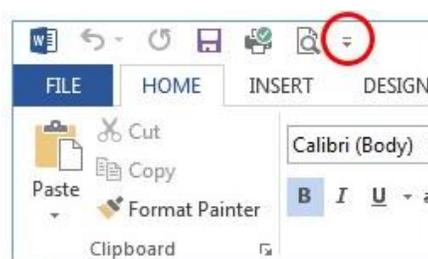
An accessible document is a document that is readable by any individual. Many individuals who are blind or visually impaired use screen readers to maneuver through files and documents. Be aware that, just as software and features are different for every user and device, something may work fine on your computer but still not respond correctly for another user or a person using screen reading software.

### Checklist

- **Update Document Properties**  
Properties identify the title, author(s), tags, title, and subject of the document. The properties can be included when saving the document or updated from the file folder location. This tip also makes documents easier to find for anyone searching the file explorer.
- **Use Accessibility Checker Tools**  
Before finalizing or publishing a document, use available tools to inspect, identify, and correct any accessibility issues. For example, check your document accessibility in Word by going to FILE – INFO – Inspect Document; click Check for Issues, then select Check Accessibility. The Accessibility Checker report will populate on your screen to list anything that may need addressing.
- **Listen to a Document**  
Have your computer read your documents aloud by using the Windows Speak command.

How to use SPEAK: While in your document, select a word and hit the SPEAK button in your Quick Access Toolbar to hear that item read aloud. Use Ctrl+A to select your entire document, and hit the SPEAK button to hear it all read aloud.

How to add SPEAK to your Quick Access Toolbar: In any of the Microsoft Suite (including Outlook), we have a Quick Access Toolbar at the very top of our screen (those little icons for our most-used items).



Select the small menu arrow at the far right of that toolbar (circled in red in the above image). Scroll down to select More Commands...in the Quick Access Toolbar screen, update the "Choose commands from:" to show All Commands. From the list below, select Speak. Either double click to automatically add it to your list, or single click and use the [Add>>] button to add it to your Customized Quick Access Toolbar list on the right of the screen. Click OK, and you're done.

- **Check Color Contrast**

Visit the WebAIM website at <https://webaim.org/resources/contrastchecker/> to use a free and easy to use contrast checker. Plug in the HEX color codes to find out if your display has enough contrast for normal and large text. Not sure what a HEX color code is? Use [www.hexcolor.com](http://www.hexcolor.com) to plug in the RGB numbers from your document format menu. WebAIM provides lots of information and tools to ensure accessibility across all means of communication.

- **Understanding JAWS Commands**

JAWS, Job Access With Speech, is the world's most popular screen reader. Want to better understand JAWS commands? Visit [Freedom Scientific](http://FreedomScientific.com) for a keystroke list. They also offers a free demo of JAWS, so you can test your files, but be warned that this may make your computer very sluggish. You'll have limited time to use the demo version, and you may want to remove the program from your computer after using it temporarily.

- **Add Alternative Text**

Alternative text, or alt text, provides a brief description for non-text items that would otherwise not be read by a screen reader, including images, photos, charts, tables, form fields, video and audio clips, etc. Include alt text by selecting an object, right-click, and select Format. Go to the Layout/Properties tab to add alt text. Boxes are available to add a title and description; descriptions are necessary and will be read by a screen reader.

- **Include Hyperlink Descriptions**

Hyperlinks are a common addition to documents. A meaningful description or Screen Tip will clearly identify the purpose and destination of the link. Include descriptions whenever a hyperlink is added, even in an email.

- **Use Styles and Bookmarks**

Use styles and bookmarks to allow for easier identification of document sections and document navigation. Layouts and formatting should be consistent.

- **Avoid Blank Spaces and Lines**

Page layout tools, such as paragraph spacing, and table properties, such as cell padding and spacing, should be used to update formatting. Blank lines, spaces, and table cells can be difficult for a screen reader to identify and may cause the screen reader to repeat unnecessary formatting commands or descriptions.

- **Simplify Tables**

Table formatting should be simple, include alt text for the title and description, and identify row titles and column headers.

#### Additional Accessibility Resources

- [Microsoft Word Accessibility Website](#)
- [Adobe Accessibility Website](#)
- [GSA Section 508 Website](#)
- [JAWS Screen Reading Software \(free demo download\)](#)
- [PAVE PDF Accessibility Checker](#)