

NRTC RESOURCE SHEET

Creating an Accessible Document

Introduction

An accessible document is a document that is readable by any individual. Many people who are blind or have low vision use screen readers to access electronic documents, and electronic documents are often inaccessible to screen readers. Microsoft Word and Adobe Acrobat Pro both have features that allow you to create accessible documents. It is important to use those features, and this document provides tips to help you use them. Word and Acrobat Pro also have tools to check a document's accessibility, but it is best, if possible, to test the document with a screen reader to ensure its accessibility.

Creating an Accessible Document with Microsoft Word 365

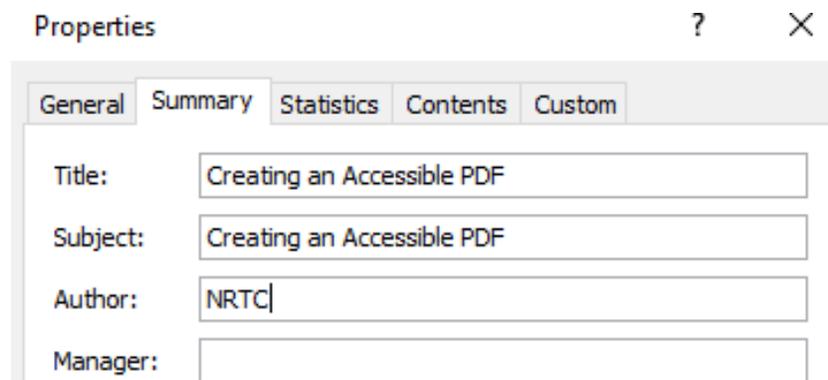
The following information is for Microsoft Word 365. Other versions of Word have similar accessibility features that may appear in a different format or location.

1. Update Document Properties

Properties identify the Title, Author(s), Tags, and Subject of the document. When saving a document, include as much detail as possible under the headings below the file name and document type (sample image 1 below). To update an existing document, click the "File" tab, select "Info," in the Properties Dialogue box to the right, select "Advanced Properties" (sample image 2 below). 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 with File Explorer.



File name: Creating an Accessible PDF
Save as type: Word Document
Authors: NRTC
Tags: accessibility;documen...
Title: Creating an Accessible PDF



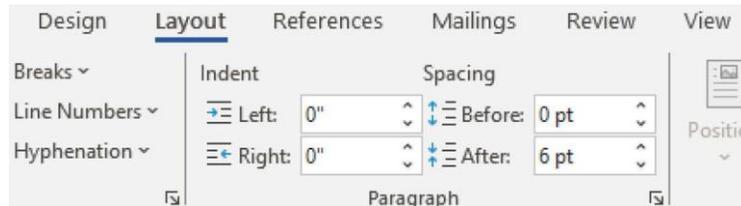
Properties

General Summary Statistics Contents Custom

Title: Creating an Accessible PDF
Subject: Creating an Accessible PDF
Author: NRTC
Manager:

2. Avoid Blank Spaces and Lines

Rather than using the Enter key to create white space on the page, use Paragraph Spacing or Styles. It is best to set up your spacing before you create the document. Select the "Layout" tab to navigate to the Paragraph editing toolbar, or right-click on a line of text and select "Paragraph" (also available from the Home tab) to update spacing options. To create equal spacing following a paragraph or non-text item, adjust the spacing instead of hitting Enter multiple times. To move text to a new page, add a Page Break instead of hitting Enter multiple times. If you are utilizing Styles options from the Home toolbar, right-click on the "Style" being used to update all text with the new spacing. If your document includes a Table, avoid leaving cells empty, as this may cause a break in understanding the contents. Below is an image of the Layout toolbar, including Breaks, Indent, and Spacing buttons:

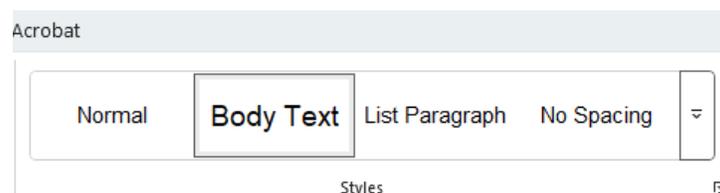


3. Use Styles and Headings

Use Styles (available from the Home tab) to allow for easier identification of document sections and navigation. Layouts and formatting should be consistent. Styles allow for quick formatting of text for easier document review because screen reader users can use specific commands to navigate to headings, sections, paragraphs, and other document properties.

Select the "Home" tab to navigate to the general editing toolbar and select the Styles option relevant to the selected text. Styles include Title, Subtitle, Heading 1, Heading 2, Normal, etc. You can customize the Styles to change the font, size, and color by right-clicking on the style and selecting Modify.

Simply changing the font to make headings appear bold or prominent is not enough. Text needs to be formatted using Styles for ease of navigation with a screen reader. Below is an image of the Styles buttons on the Home toolbar:



4. Include Hyperlink Descriptions

Hyperlinks are a common addition to documents. A meaningful description or ScreenTip will clearly identify the purpose and destination of the link.

To edit an existing hyperlink, right-click and select "Edit Hyperlink." Select the "ScreenTip" button located to the right of the Text to Display box and add a description that will be read aloud by the screen reader. The description should clearly state the action or purpose of the destination link (e.g., instead of "to visit our website, click here," use the phrase "to visit the NRTC website, select this link"). Below is an image of the ScreenTip dialog box:



5. Simplify Tables

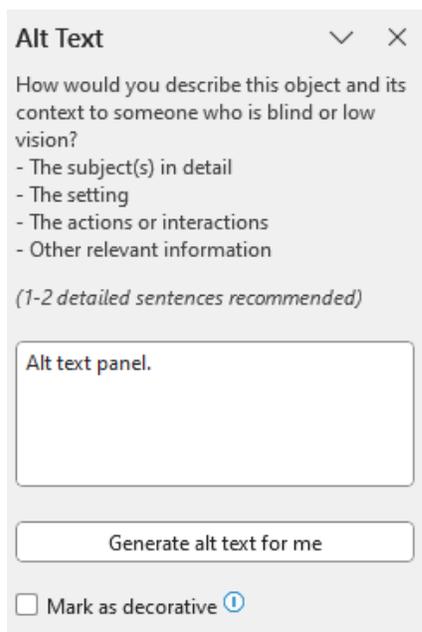
Table formatting should be simple, include alt text for the title and description, and identify row titles and column headers. Right-click anywhere in a table and select "Table Properties." Add a title and description under the Alt Text tab. Visually scan your tables to check that they don't have any completely blank rows or columns. Select the "Table Styles" option (accessed through Table Design in the top ribbon), "Header Row", and "First Column" options to correctly identify if the table has column and row headers. This will help navigation for screen reader users. Below is an image of a table.

Column Header 1	Column Header 2	Column Header 2
Row 2 description	Row 2, content 1	Row 2, content 2
Row 3 description	Row 3, content 1	Row 3, content 2

6. 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, etc. To include alt text, right-click on non-text items and select "View Alt Text" or "Edit Alt Text" (in older versions). Alt text can be included in the properties for that item by providing a short title and a brief description of the non-text item. The description should help the individual to understand what an image is and why it is relevant to the document.

There is a “Generate alt text for me” button in the Alt Text panel, but you should never solely rely on AI-generated alt text. One challenge is contextual understanding, as AI may struggle with interpreting complex images or understanding nuanced contexts, leading to inaccurate alt text. Additionally, the quality of AI-generated alt text depends on the training data it receives, potentially resulting in biases or inaccuracies. In addition, the generated alt text is often quite simple and does not provide adequate description. If you choose to use it, make sure you review the text for any of the above-mentioned concerns. More information about including alt text is available from the additional accessibility resources linked at the conclusion of this document. If your visuals are purely decorative and add visual interest but aren't informative, you can mark them as such without needing to write any alt text. Examples of objects that should be marked as decorative are stylistic borders. Below is an image of the alt text dialog box that appears when editing alt text properties:



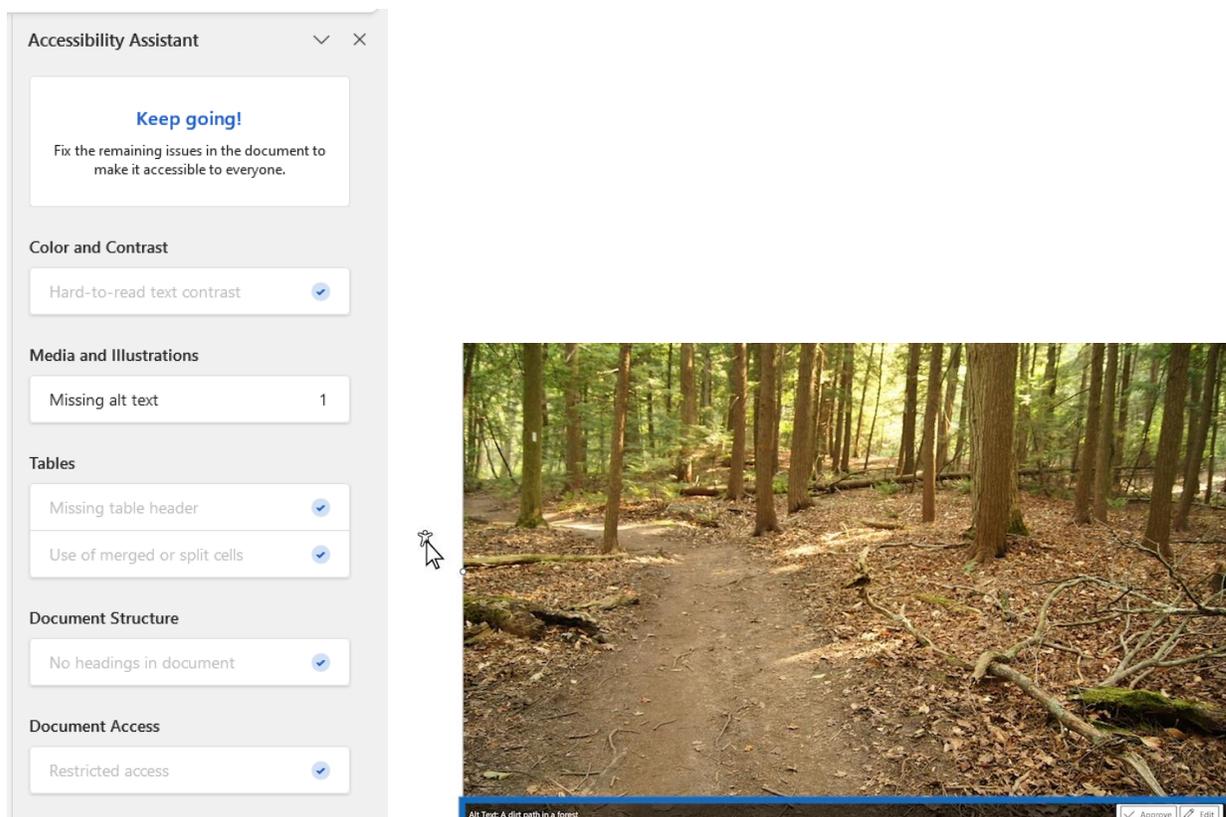
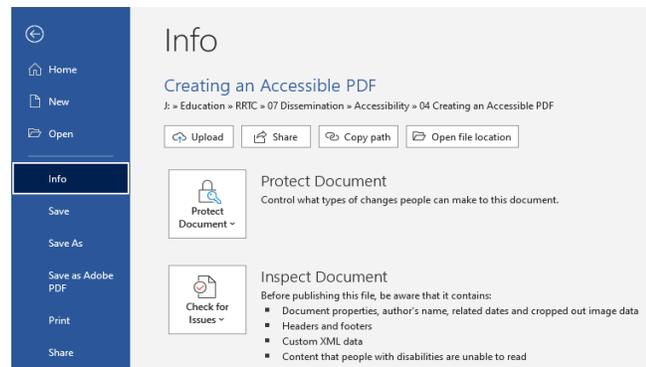
7. Use Accessibility Assistant Tools

Before finalizing or publishing a document, use available tools to inspect, identify, and correct any accessibility issues. Select the "File" tab, then select "Info" to view document options. Select the "Check for Issues" button, then select the "Check Accessibility" option to inspect the document. The “Accessibility Assistant” or “Accessibility Checker” (in older versions) pane will be available in a side tab next to the document view. This updated feature provides real-time and in-context remediation for issues such as low contrast and missing alt-text for images. You must have the newest version of Word to access the Accessibility Assistant.

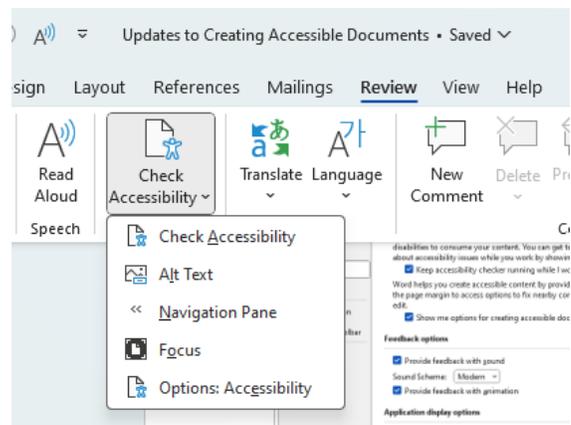
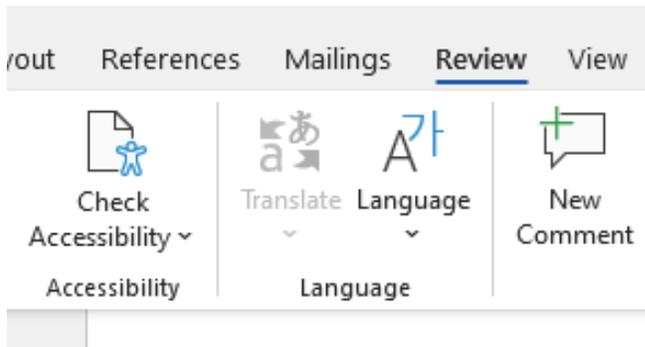
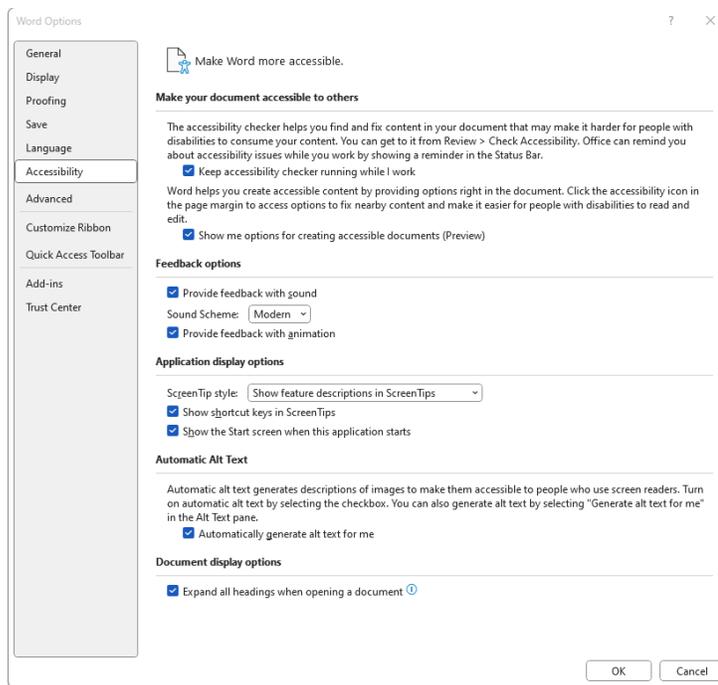
Unlike the older Accessibility Checker, the new Accessibility Assistant offers clear, simple guidance that appears in the flow of the work. Results will include warnings. When selected, additional information on why and how to

fix the warnings is shown below the results. Further information about making documents accessible is also linked at the bottom of the results.

Below is an image of the Info menu on the File tab, the Accessibility Assistant pane, and the alt text feature in Word:

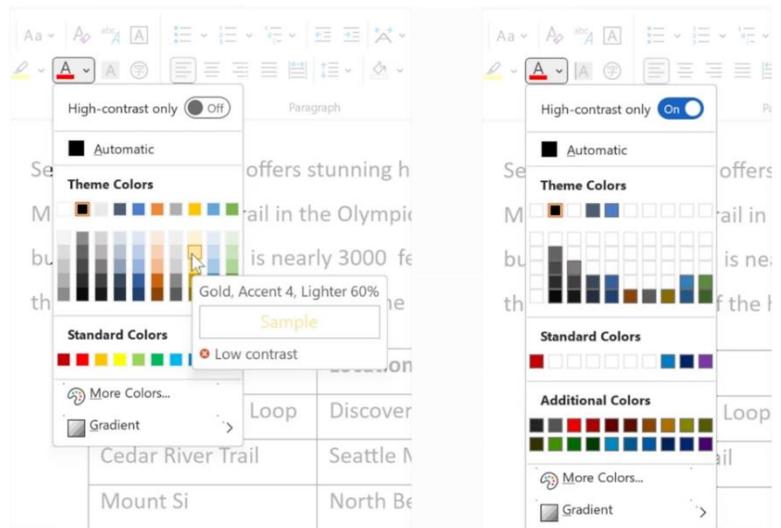


To activate the Accessibility Assistant, click the "File" tab, select "Options," then "Accessibility." From there, make sure you have all the boxes checked to ensure you are getting the most out of the Accessibility Assistant. You can also access the Accessibility Assistant features under the Review tab on the ribbon. Below is an image of the Accessibility pane and the Check Accessibility feature.



8. Use Color Picker

It can be challenging to choose colors that make content both beautiful and accessible. The new color picker experience ensures there is sufficient contrast between text and its background. The color picker has two modes. One looks much the same as before, but adds a tooltip to help guide you toward colors with sufficient contrast. While toggling the high-contrast switch takes you to the other experience, which narrows the available color options that meet contrast requirements (plus an additional row of accessible options that align with the selected theme and design). Below is an image of the new color picker experience.

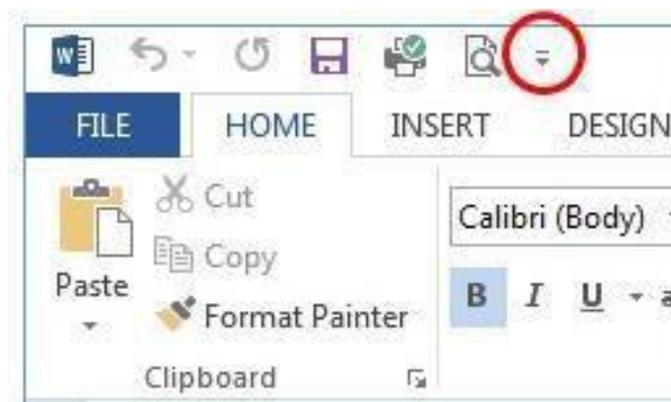


9. Listen to a Document

Have your computer read your documents aloud by using the Windows Read Aloud command.

How to use Read Aloud: While in your document, select a word and hit the "Read Aloud" button (Alt + Ctrl + Space) on your Quick Access Toolbar to hear that item read aloud. Use Ctrl + A to select your entire document and hit the "Read Aloud" button to hear it all read aloud.

How to add Read Aloud to your Quick Access Toolbar: In any of the Microsoft Suite (including Outlook), there is a Quick Access toolbar at the top of the 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). From the list below, select "Read Aloud." Either double click to add it to your list automatically, or single click and use the [Add>>] button to add it to your Customized Quick Access Toolbar list on the right of the screen.

10. Saving the Document as a PDF

If you would like to save your Word document as a PDF file, select the "File" tab, and then select "Save As." In the Save As dialog box, select "PDF" as the Save As Type. Then click "Options" to ensure that the Document Structure Tags for Accessibility checkbox is selected under the non-printing information heading. Then, click "OK" and save the document. You can also save your document as a PDF by selecting the "File" tab and then selecting "Save as Adobe PDF." Then click "Options" to ensure that the Document Structure Tags for Accessibility checkbox is selected under the non-printing information heading. Then, click "Save."

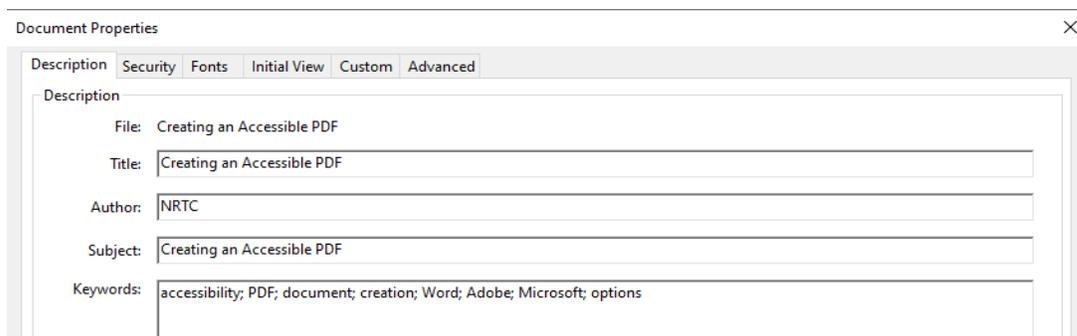
Creating an Accessible PDF with Adobe Acrobat Pro

The following information is for Adobe Acrobat Pro Version 2025.001.20435. Other versions of Adobe Acrobat have similar accessibility features that may appear in a different format or location.

Files that are saved as PDFs are typically not created in Adobe Acrobat. If accessibility errors are found, returning to the original document file to update accessibility options may save processing time.

1. Update Document Properties

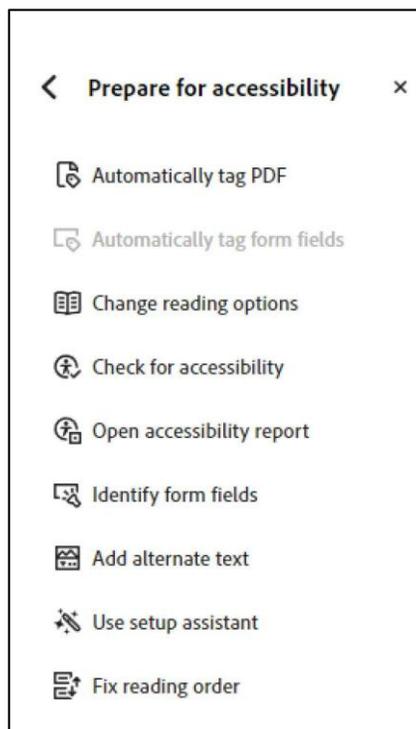
Select the "File" tab, then select "Properties." A Document Properties dialog box will appear, where description information can be entered, including Title, Author, Subject, and Keywords. Document properties allow an individual to find and understand the contents of any document quickly and easily. At the bottom of the description page, advanced information shows if the document is tagged for reading accessibility.



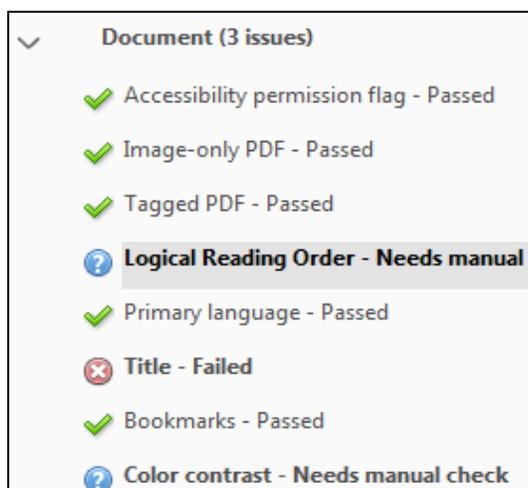
2. Use Accessibility Checker Tools

Select the "All Tools" tab or "Tools" tab (in older versions), then select "Prepare for Accessibility" or "Accessibility" (in older versions). A menu will appear on the side of the document view screen with various options, including Automatically Tag PDF, Change Reading Options, Check for

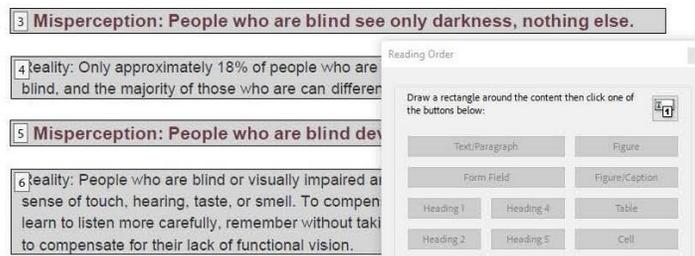
Accessibility, Open Accessibility Report, Identify Form Fields, Add Alternate Text, Use Setup Assistant, and Fix Reading Order (menu will appear differently in older versions).



Select the "Check for Accessibility" option or "Accessibility Check" option (in older versions), ensure the options you want to check are selected in the dialog box, then select the "Start Checking" button. Open Accessibility Report or Full Check (in older versions) will provide a report that includes a review of all accessibility features available, such as page content, form fields, alt text, tables, lists, and headings. Any issues will be noted with a question mark icon or an X icon. Right-click on any issues listed to receive an explanation, fix the issue, or view other options.



Some items, such as Reading Order, may require a manual check or review. Return to the "Accessibility" menu, select "Fix Reading Order" or "Reading Order" (in older versions), and a Reading Order dialog box or Touch Up Reading Order dialog box (in older versions) will appear. The document reading order will be highlighted, and all contents will be numbered in the order that a screen reader will read the document.



From the Reading Order dialog box, select the "Show Order Panel" button located at the bottom of the box. An order menu will appear next to the document view. Review the document order tags and structure types and note any items that need adjustment. To review the Page content order and Structure types (Paragraph, Heading, Figure, Table), select structure types under Show page content groups.

If the document reading order is incorrect and/or multiple errors are found, select "Automatically Tag PDF" or "Auto Tag Document" (in older versions) from the Accessibility menu to retag the document. This option typically removes errors and provides more consistency to the document reading order.

Again, select the "Fix Reading Order" option from the Accessibility menu, and select the "Show Order Panel" button located at the bottom of the Reading Order dialog box. Right-click on any item that needs correcting to view edit options, including moving, deleting, or tagging the selected item. If an item is in the wrong location, cut the item and paste the item into the correct location in the order list or select the item and drag it to the correct location.

While in the Reading Order review, right-click on any non-text items to review the Edit Alternate Text option. Make sure that the item is tagged appropriately (as a non text item such as a table, image, etc.) otherwise the accessibility checker won't recognize that it needs alt text or allow them to add alt text. Some alt text added with Word or other software may not populate, so this step of the review process is important to ensure accessibility. If alt text is missing, simply copy and paste the description from your original document and save the changes. When all edits are complete, select the "Check for Accessibility" option to run a new accessibility report and ensure that all updates have been made.

3. Use Read Out Loud Tool

Select the "View" tab, then select "Read Out Loud" from the menu options. Select "Activate Read Out Loud" (Shift + Ctrl + Y) to review the document.

Read Out Loud options include activate/deactivate, read one or all pages, and pause or stop.

Again, select the "View" tab, then select "Read Out Loud" from the menu options. Select the preferred reading option: read this page only (Ctrl + Shift + V) or read to end of document (Ctrl + Shift + B). Read Out Loud will read the document as it appears on the screen.

If the document was originally created in Microsoft Word, return to Word to review the document section in question, and review the Check Accessibility results for further information and suggestions.

Additional Accessibility Resources

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

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