

NRTC RESOURCE SHEET

Creating an Accessible Word Document

Introduction

An accessible document is a document that is readable by anyone. Many people who are blind or have low vision use screen readers to access electronic documents, but these documents are often inaccessible or difficult to read with a screen reader. Microsoft Word offers features that help you create accessible documents. It is important to use these features, and this document provides tips to help you do so. Word also has tools to check a document's accessibility, but it is best, if possible, to test it with a screen reader to ensure it is accessible.

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.

Update Document Properties

In Microsoft Word, document properties are the hidden details attached to a file such as the title, author, subject, tags, company name, and comments. These properties are important because they help organize documents, help screen reader users and also make documents easier to find for anyone searching with File Explorer.

To update Properties information, click "File" in the upper-left corner. You should automatically land on the "Info" page. On the right side of the screen, look for a section labeled "Properties." If you do not immediately see all the fields, click "Show All Properties." From there, you can click directly into fields like Title, Author, Tags, or Comments and type in the updated information.

If you need more detailed properties, click the small Properties dropdown near the top-right of the Info page and choose "Advanced Properties". This opens a more detailed window with tabs for Summary, Statistics, Contents, and Custom properties. The Summary tab is especially useful for accessibility and professional document management because it allows you to define a clear document title and subject. Once you finish updating the information, click "OK" and save the file.

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Info

Creating an Accessible Word Document 2026-5-7

J: » Education » RRTC » 12 Website » 07 Website Documents » Accessibility Resources

Upload Share Copy path Copy local path Open file location

Protect Document
Control what types of changes people can make to this document.

Inspect Document
Before publishing this file, be aware that it contains:

- Comments and revisions
- Document properties, author's name and cropped out image data
- Characters formatted as hidden text

Version History
View and restore previous versions.

Properties

Advanced Properties
See more document properties

Total Editing Time	16 Minutes
Title	Creating an Accessible Word...
Tags	Accessible, Word, Adobe Ac...
Comments	Add comments

Related Dates

Last Modified	Today, 8:42 AM
Created	Today, 8:41 AM
Last Printed	

General Summary Statistics Contents Custom

Title:

Subject:

Author:

Manager:

Company:

Category:

Keywords:

Comments:

Hyperlink base:

Template: Normal

Save Thumbnails for All Word Documents

OK Cancel

Avoid Blank Spaces and Lines

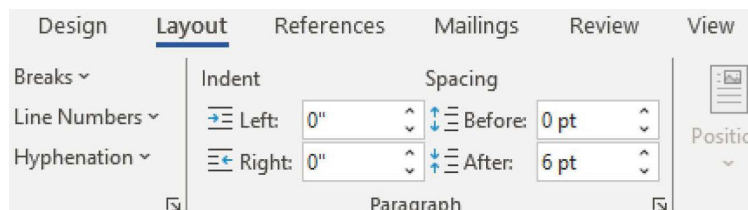
Rather than using the Enter key to create white space on the page, use Paragraph Spacing or Styles. It is best to set your spacing with one of these options before creating the document.

Select the "Layout" tab to navigate to the Paragraph editing toolbar, or right-click on a line of text and select "Paragraph" (available from the Home tab) to update spacing options. 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.

To create equal spacing following a paragraph or non-text item, adjust the spacing. To move text to a new page, add a Page Break instead of hitting Enter multiple times. Hitting Enter to add white space inserts a hard return, which a screen reader reads as "blank."

If your document includes a Table, do not leave cells empty, as this may make it difficult for screen reader users to understand the content.

Below is an image of the Layout toolbar, including Breaks, Indent, and Spacing buttons:



Use Styles and Headings

Use Styles (available on the Home tab) to make it easier to identify document sections and navigate. As mentioned previously, Styles also allow you to set your white spacing for the document. Layouts and formatting should be consistent. Styles allow quick text formatting for easier document review, as screen reader users can use specific commands to navigate to headings, sections, paragraphs, and other document properties.

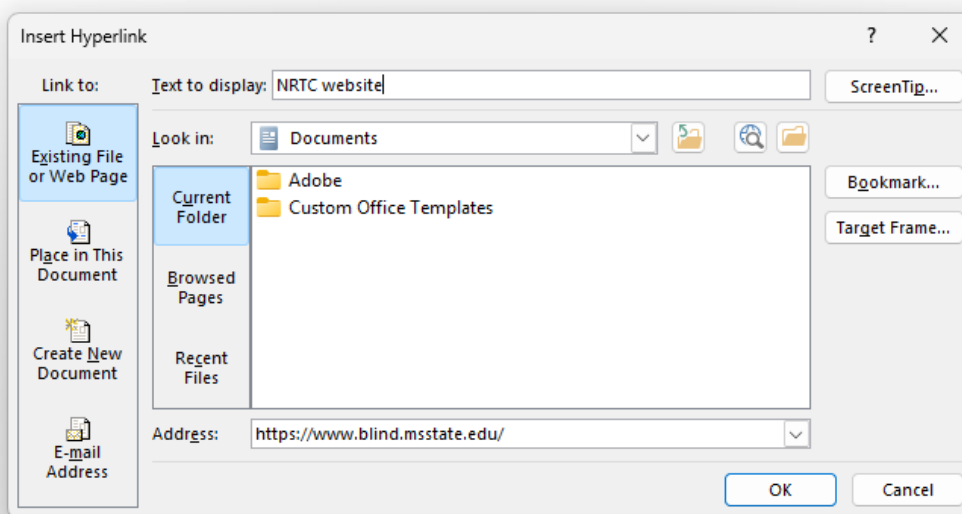
Select the "Home" tab to open the general editing toolbar, then select the Styles option relevant to the selected text. Styles include Title, Subtitle, Heading 1, Heading 2, Normal, etc. You can customize the Styles to change the font, size, and color by right-clicking on the style and selecting Modify.

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

Include Hyperlink Descriptions

In Microsoft Word, adding hyperlink descriptions makes documents more accessible because screen readers will read this description so their users understand where a link leads. Instead of using vague text like “click here,” use descriptive wording such as “Visit the NRTC website”

To edit a hyperlink, right-click the linked text and choose “Edit Hyperlink.” In the dialog box, update the “Text to display” box (this is what the screen reader will read). For accessibility, make sure the visible link text clearly describes the destination or purpose of the link. Once updated, click “OK” and save the document.



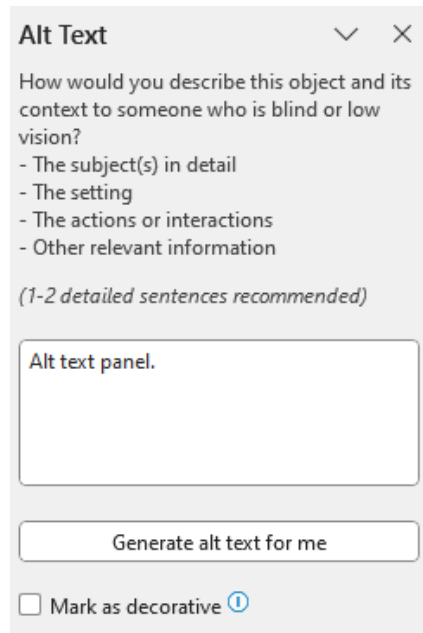
Add Alternative Text

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 to interpret complex images or grasp nuanced contexts, leading to inaccurate alt text. In addition, the generated alt text is often quite simple and does not provide adequate description. If you choose to use AI-generated alt text, make sure you review the text for any of

the above-mentioned concerns.

If your visuals are purely decorative and add visual interest but aren't informative, you can mark them as such without writing 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:



Simplify Tables

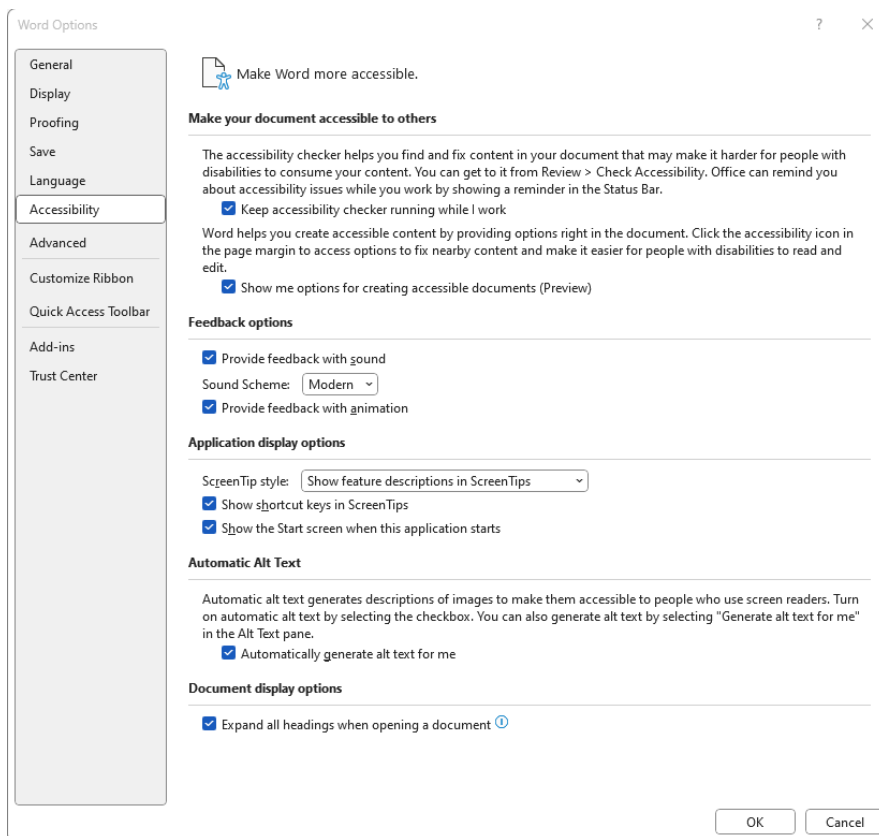
Table formatting should be simple, include alt text for the title and description, and identify row titles and column headers. Right-click anywhere in a table and select "Table Properties." Add a title and description under the Alt Text tab. Visually scan your tables to check that they don't have any 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

Use Accessibility Assistant Tools

In Microsoft Word, the Accessibility Assistant and the Accessibility Checker work together, but they serve different purposes. The Accessibility Assistant is a guided experience. It appears as a side panel and actively helps you fix accessibility issues as you work by explaining the problem, why it matters, and often providing a one-click fix. It is designed to be user-friendly and instructional, especially for people who are still learning accessibility practices.

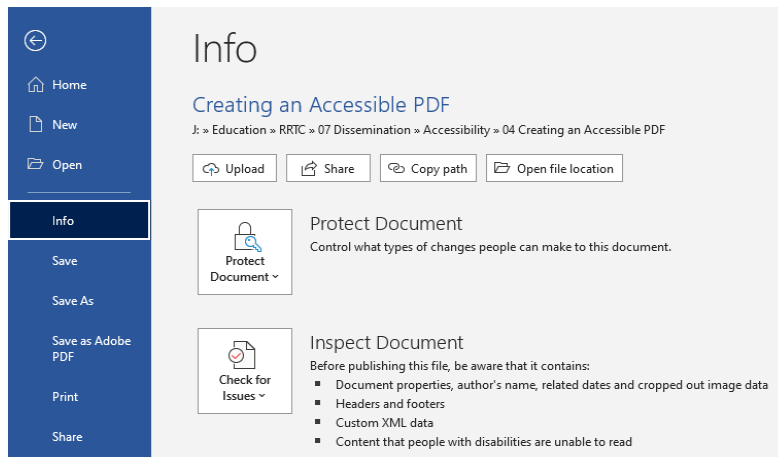
To activate the Accessibility Assistant, click the "File" tab, select "Options," then "Accessibility." From there, check the appropriate boxes to get the feedback you need. Below is an image of the Accessibility pane and the Check Accessibility feature. Note that you can also access the Accessibility Assistant features under the Review tab on the ribbon.



The Accessibility Checker is a diagnostic scan of an existing document. You can open it by clicking the "File" tab, selecting "Info" from the left-hand menu bar, and then the "Check for Issues" button. It reviews the entire document and generates a list of errors, warnings, and tips, such as missing alt text, poor heading structure, or unclear hyperlinks. You can click each issue in the results panel to jump directly to the problem area in the document. The checker is especially useful as a final review step before exporting or sharing a document.

Below is an image of the Info menu on the File tab, where you can find the

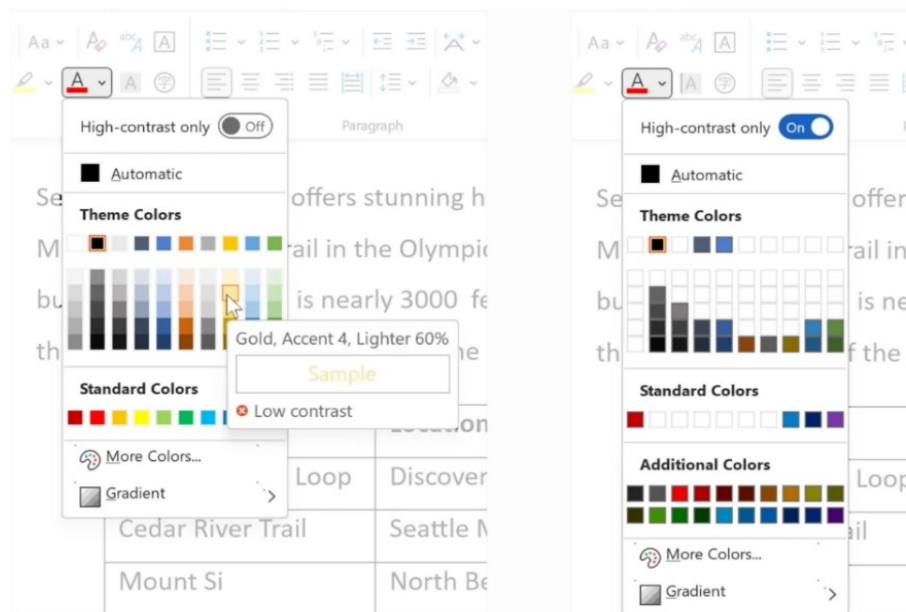
“Check for Issues” button (next to the “Inspect Document” title):



Use Color Picker

It can be challenging to choose colors that make content both beautiful and accessible. In Microsoft Word, you can access the color picker anywhere you see a color dropdown for text, shapes, highlights, or design elements. For example, to change text color, select the text and go to the Home tab. Click the small dropdown arrow next to the Font Color button (the “A” with a colored underline). A palette of theme and standard colors will appear. By selecting the “High-contrast only” toggle ensures there is sufficient contrast between text and its background.

Below is an image of the color picker experience.



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."

For more detailed instructions on ensuring that your PDF document is accessible, see the NRTC's Guide for Creating Accessible PDFs.

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