# Create an Accessible Word Document

Run an Accessibility Check

An accessibility check is similar to a spelling and grammar check, but it focuses on correcting common accessibility barriers in word documents. In addition to highlighting any errors, this checker will describe why said errors need to be addressed, and provide a step-by-step guide on how to fix them. You can access the accessibility checker by navigating to:

**File, then Info, then Check for Issues, then Check for Accessibility**
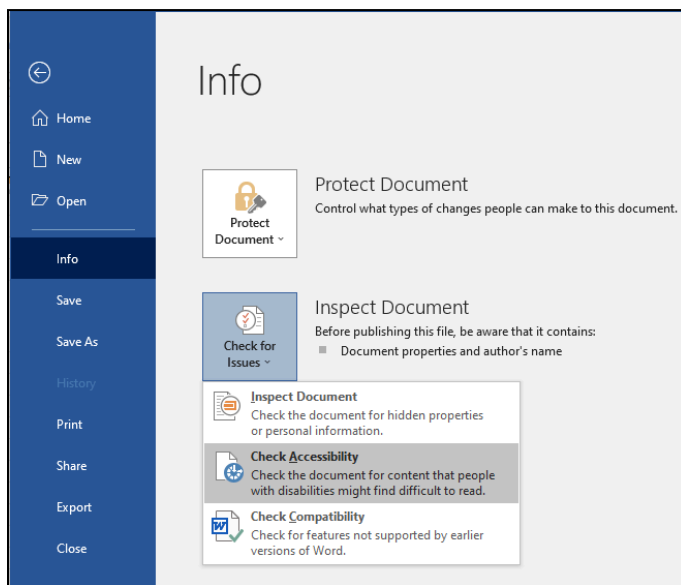
OR **Review, then Check for Accessibility, then Check for Accessibility**
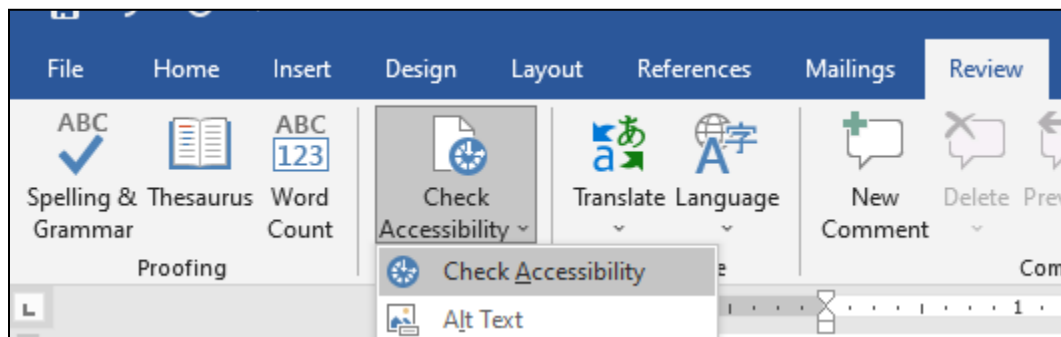
Add Alternative (alt) Text

Alt text is a textual description of a visual component that is encoded into your document. When a screen reader is used, these image descriptions are read aloud. This allows readers to access and understand visual elements that they may not be able to see. Without alt text, a person using a screen reader will not be able to gather any information from the visual components you have used, including pictures or diagrams as well as some charts and graphs.

To add alt text to a graphic element, **right click the element and select Format (Chart, Image, etc.), then Layout & Properties, then Alt Text.** From there, you can leave the title section blank and write a description for your visual element in the description field. If an image is purely decorative and conveys no important information, you can mark it as such within word allowing screen readers to skip over the image entirely by entering a pair of quotation marks ("") in the description box. Later versions of Word have a checkbox beneath the description field allowing you to mark the image as decorative.
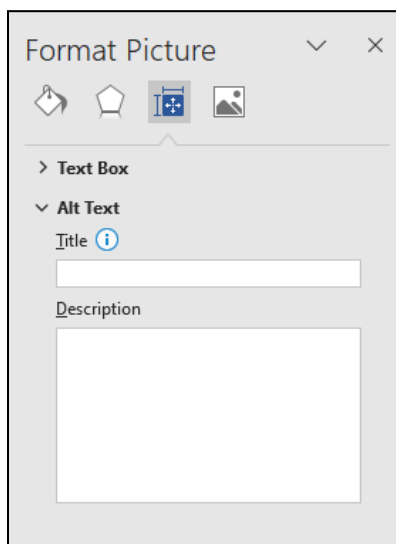
Writing useful alt text

You do not need to begin your alt text with "a picture of..." or "a screenshot of...". Screen readers will make the user aware that they are reading the content of an image before your description is read.

Aim to keep your alt text at 125 characters or less.

Try to write descriptively, providing context to the image. Good examples of alt text are available through the [University of South Carolina's Digital Accessibility webpage](#) and the

Working with Text

Serif fonts (including Times New Roman, Georgia, Cambria, and Garamond) tend to include letterforms with high visual distinction, making them easier to read and interpret. This makes them a good choice for print and long-form sections of text. Many sans-serif fonts, like Arial, Calibri, Century Gothic, Helvetica, Tahoma, and Verdana have likewise been designed to be highly readable

The minimum font size for your text should be 11 pt font, or 12 pt for a font that is more difficult to distinguish.

Ensuring high contrast between the background color and font color of your project will increase readability. There are many free contrast checkers you can use online, including the WCAG Color Contrast Checker.

Keep text left-aligned rather than center-aligned or justified. This ensures even spacing between letters which is easier on dyslexic readers.

Emphasize thoughtfully. Aim to use italicized, all-caps, and bolded text sparingly. Do not use color alone to indicate important text. Underlined text should be avoided if the included text is not a hyperlink.

Utilize bulleted and/or numbered lists rather than manually creating them.
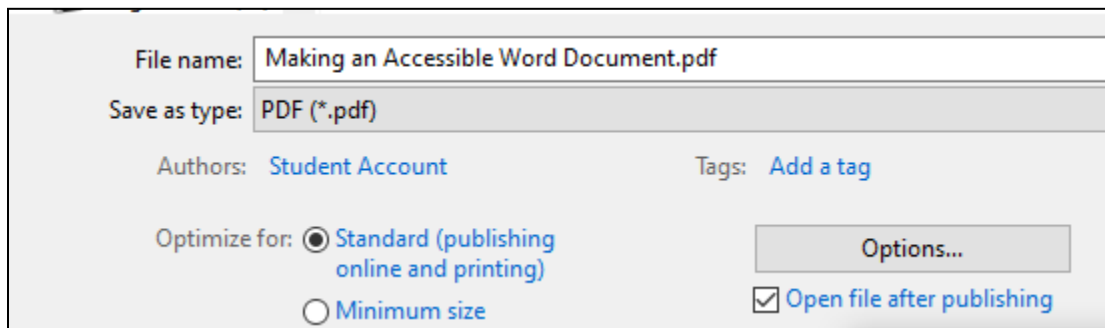
If you have vital information in a header or footer, consider moving it or repeating it elsewhere in your document as headers and footers are not read by all screen readers.

Manage white space in your document by adjusting the line and paragraph spacing rather than relying on the tab and enter keys.
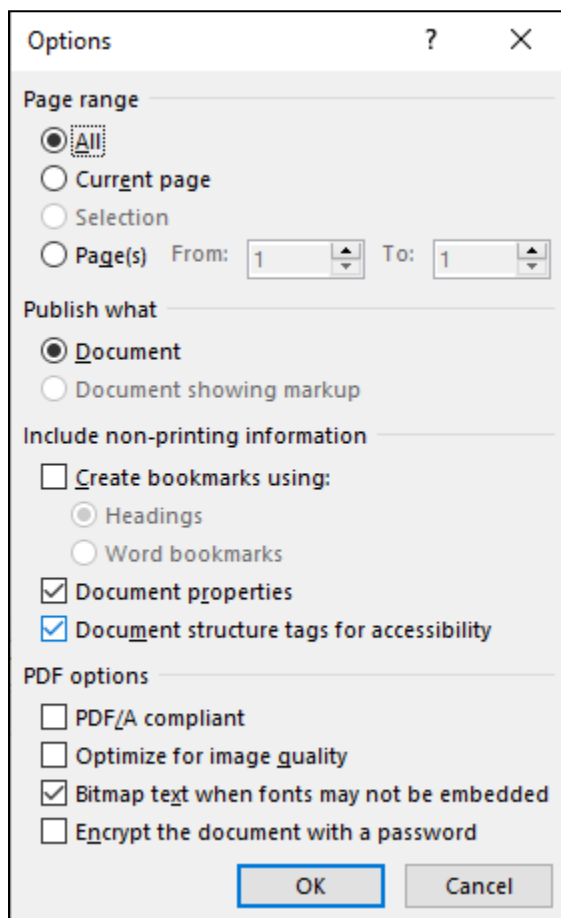
Rather than pasting a web address as it appears in your web browser's address bar, create hyperlinks with text descriptions through the insert hyperlink function. This reads better generally, and provides context to a reader utilizing a screen reader.

Convert your document to an accessible PDF

When converting your doc to a .pdf through Word, you need to ensure that the document's structure tags are properly encoded. Structure tags identify different document components, telling assistive technology whether the text it is reading is a heading, a paragraph, a chart, etc. When you are saving your document as a .pdf, select open the **Options** menu. From there, make sure that the **Document structure tags for accessibility checkbox is checked,** then hit okay. From there, you are good to save your converted pdf.

Design with Accessibility in Mind - General Tips

Consider supplying your document in multiple formats. Some accessibility applications handle word documents better than pdf documents, and vice versa.

Communicate your intended reading order in your document's layout and design. You can achieve this by placing images in relevant areas, ensuring that your document reads cleanly from left to right and from top to bottom, and by utilizing text styles. When using text styles, make sure to use them as intended. For example, the "Title" style should only be used once, and heading styles should be used in order without skipping. An appropriate text style layout is provided below.

- Title
- Heading 1: main content heading
  - Heading 2

    Normal
    - Heading 3

      Normal
  - Heading 2

    Normal

When including images, keep them formatted in-line with text rather than alternative text-wrapping options. This will ensure that screen readers read the image at the time you intend them to.

Tables can be a challenge for screen readers which will read them from top to bottom and from left to right. Prefer the use of headings, subheadings and bullet points over tables when possible. When using tables, always include a table header and keep the structure of your table simple. Avoid splitting cells, merging cells, or using nested tables.

When presenting a complicated image or an image needing context, you can add a caption by right clicking the image and selecting "Insert Caption". This will help everyone reading your document, not just those utilizing screen readers!