

CREATING ACCESSIBLE DOCUMENTS IN MICROSOFT WORD

Microsoft Word is a commonly-used application among individuals with a variety of disabilities, and is reasonably accessible. The text within Word documents can be read by assistive technologies such as screen readers and Braille devices. However, in order for Word documents to be fully accessible, authors must follow several core principles. Below are the basic steps for implementing these core accessibility principles.



USE HEADINGS

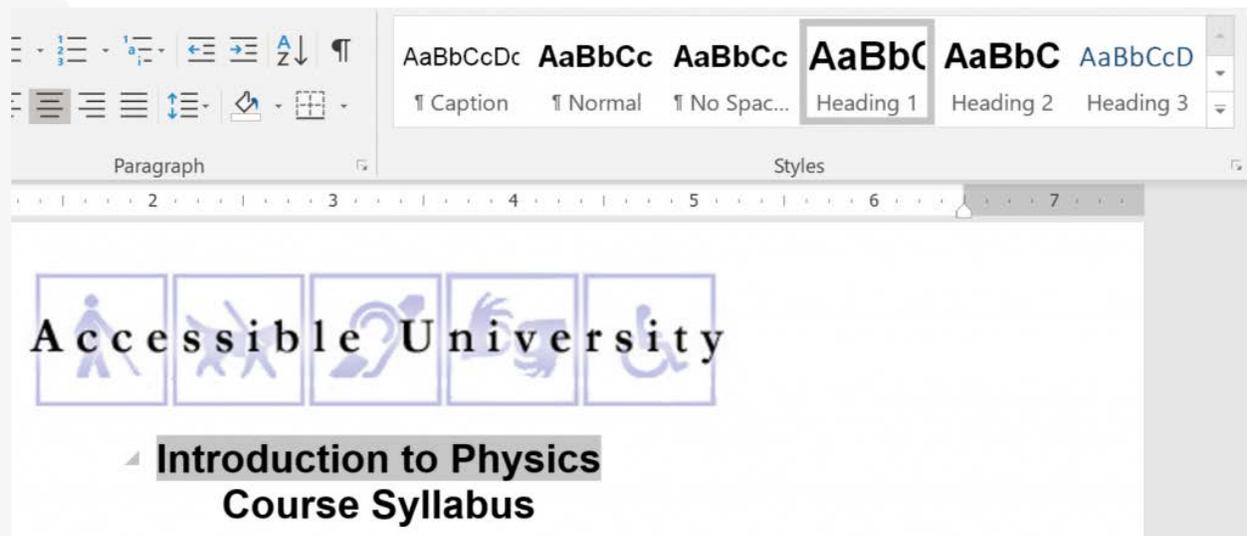
Headings and subheadings should be identified as such using the built-in heading features of the authoring tool. Headings should form an outline of the page content (Heading 1 for the main heading, Heading 2 for the first level of sub-headings, Heading 3 for the next level of sub-headings, etc.). This enables screen reader users to understand how the page is organized, and to quickly navigate to content of interest. Most screen readers have features that enable users to jump quickly between headings with a single key-stroke.

Virtually every document authoring format includes support for headings and subheadings.

Using good heading structure helps people without eyesight to understand how the document is organized. Screen reader and Braille users can also jump between headings, which makes navigation much more efficient than if there are no headings.

Making text larger and bold does not make it a heading. In order to convert text to a heading in Microsoft Word, you must use the built-in Heading styles like “Heading 1” and “Heading 2”, available under *Styles* in the *Home* tab.

Visit Microsoft website for more information about [creating Headers in Word](#).

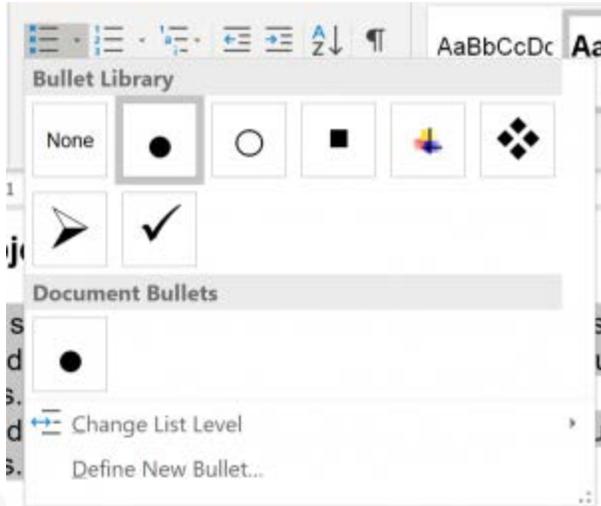


Headings should form an outline, using the “Heading 1” style for the main heading, and “Heading 2” for sub-headings. If there are additional levels of headings within the document’s outline, using “Heading 3”, “Heading 4”, etc.

USE LISTS

Any content that is organized as a list should be created using the list controls that are provided in document authoring software. Most authoring tools provide one or more controls for adding unordered lists (with bullets) and ordered lists (with numbers). When lists are explicitly created as lists, this helps screen readers to understand how the content is organized. When screen reader users enter a list, their screen reader informs them that they’re on a list and may also inform them of how many items are in the list, which can be very helpful information when deciding whether to continue reading.

Lists should be created using Word’s built-in tools for ordered (numbered) and unordered (bulleted) lists. Without using these tools, a list is not *really* a list, which makes the content more difficult for screen reader users to fully understand.



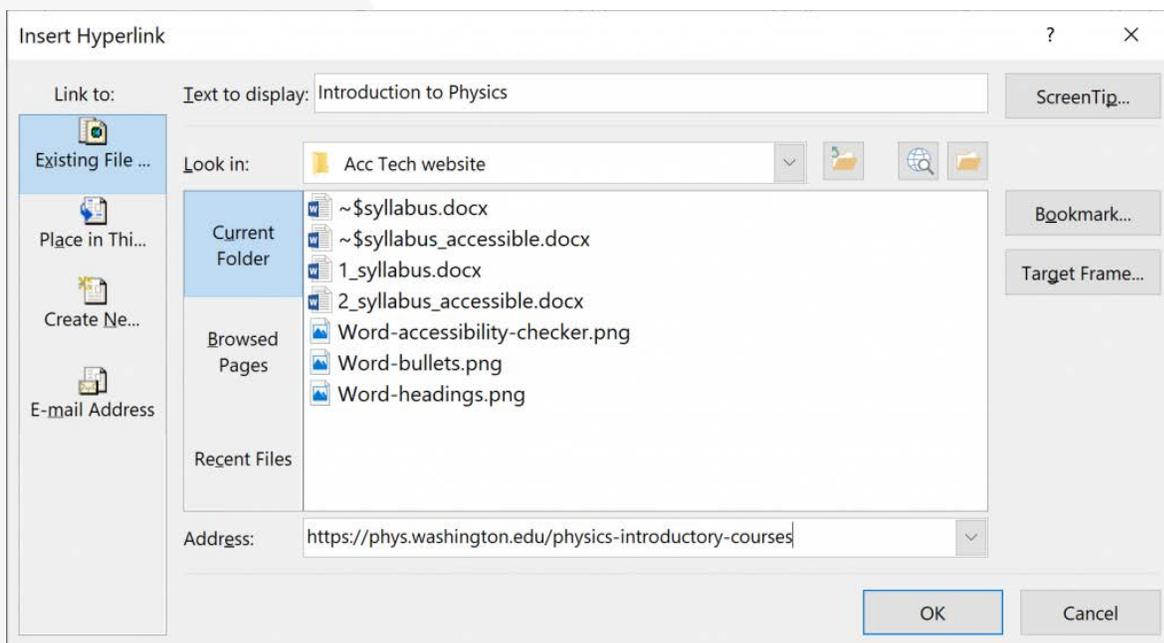
Note that both ordered and unordered lists are highly customizable. Just click on the arrow adjacent to the desired list button to design a list that meets your needs.

USE MEANINGFUL HYPERLINKS

Links presented in an electronic document should convey clear and accurate information about the destination. Most authoring tools allow the creator to assign a hyperlink to text.

For documents that will be circulated as print material, use a URL shortening service to create a customized and meaningful link name.

Adding meaningful hyperlinks in Word is simple. Include language in your document that conveys relevant information about the destination of the link, highlight that text and right click and select *Hyperlink*. Include the URL in the *Address* field and select *OK*.



Visit Microsoft website for more information about [creating accessible links](#).

ADD ALTERNATE TEXT FOR IMAGES

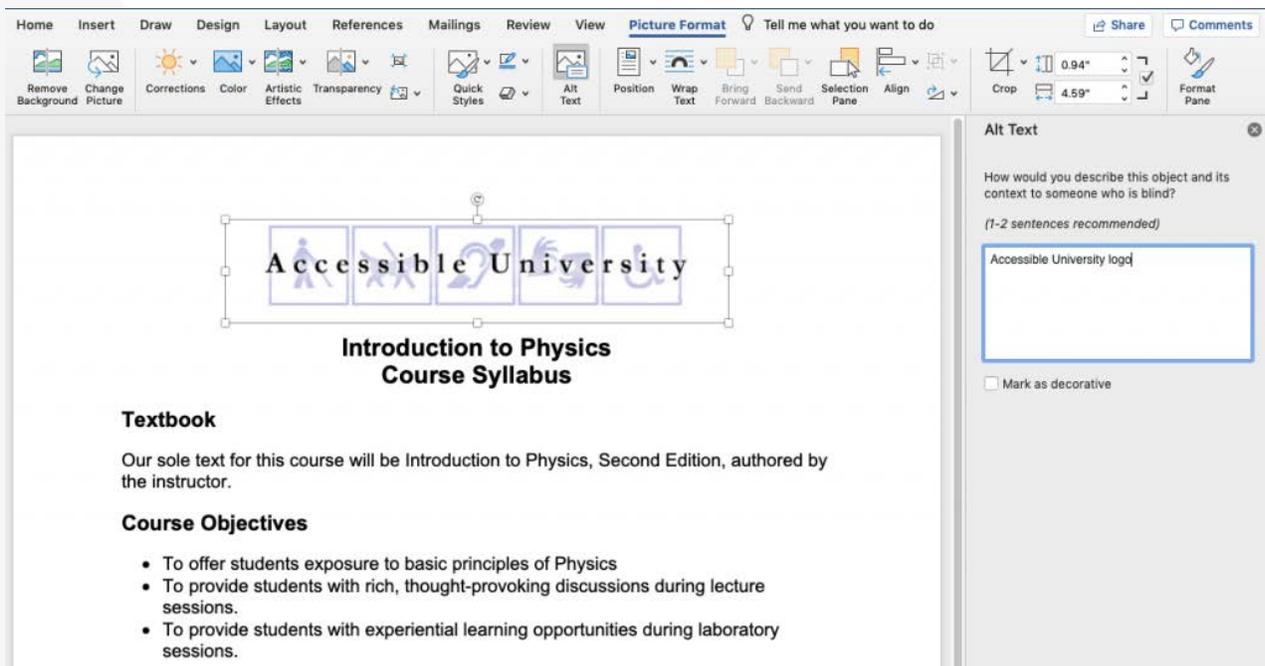
Users who are unable to see images depend on content authors to supplement their images with alternate text, which is often abbreviated “alt text”. The purpose of alt text is to communicate the content of an image to people who can’t see it. The alt text should be succinct, just enough text to communicate the idea without burdening the user with unnecessary detail. When screen readers encounter an image with alt text, they typically announce the image then read the alt text.

Most authoring tools provide a means of adding alternate text to images, usually in a dialog that appears when an image is added, or later within an image properties dialog.

If images are purely decorative and contain no informative content, they do not require a description. However, they may still require specific markup so screen readers know to skip them. The methods for hiding decorative images from screen reader is users is described in more detail in the format-specific pages within this section of the website.

Also, images that require a more lengthy description, such as charts and graphs, may require additional steps beyond adding alt text.

In most versions of Word, you can enter alternate text by right clicking an image and selecting *Format Picture*. Within the *Format Picture* dialog, select *Alt Text* and enter information in the *Description* field.



The screenshot shows the Microsoft Word interface with the **Picture Format** ribbon selected. The **Alt Text** task pane is open on the right side of the document. The task pane contains the following text:

Alt Text

How would you describe this object and its context to someone who is blind?

(1-2 sentences recommended)

Accessible University logo

Mark as decorative

The main document content shows a logo for Accessible University with the text "Introduction to Physics Course Syllabus" below it. The logo consists of the words "Accessible University" in a serif font, with icons of a person with a cane, a person with a wheelchair, and a person with a hearing aid. Below the logo, the text "Introduction to Physics Course Syllabus" is displayed in a bold, sans-serif font. Below this, there is a section titled "Textbook" and another titled "Course Objectives" with a bulleted list of three items.

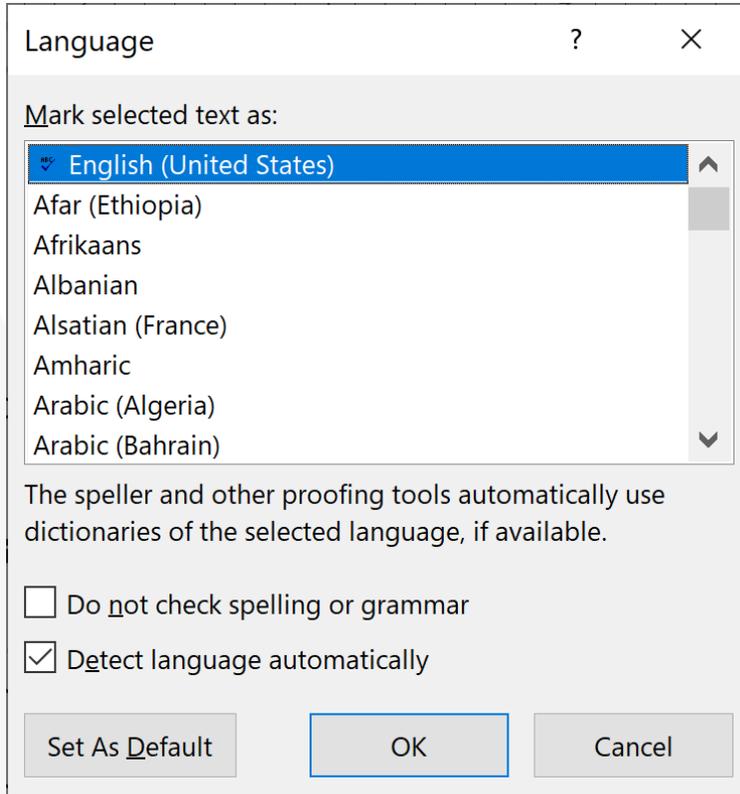
IDENTIFY DOCUMENT LANGUAGE

Leading screen reader software is multilingual, and can read content in English, Spanish, French, and a wide variety of other languages. In order to ensure that screen readers will read a document using the appropriate language profile, the language of the document must be identified.

You should also identify the language of any content written in a language other than the document's default language. With this information, supporting screen readers will switch between language profiles as needed on the fly.

Most document authoring tools provide a means of identifying the document language as well the language of specific parts.

In Office, select Tools > Language from the application menu to define the default language. To define a different language for part of the document, select each foreign language individually, then select Tools > Language to define the language for each.



NOTE: Currently language settings only effect accessibility of the Word document itself. They do **not** survive when exported to PDF. If PDF is the final format in which you intend to distribute your document, you will need to define language in the PDF directly using Adobe Acrobat Pro. For help see the [Fixing Inaccessible PDFs Using Acrobat Pro](#) document.

USE TABLES WISELY

Tables in documents are useful for communicating relationships between data, especially where those relationship can be best expressed in a matrix of rows and columns. Tables should not be used to control layout. Authoring tools have other means of doing this, including organizing content into columns.

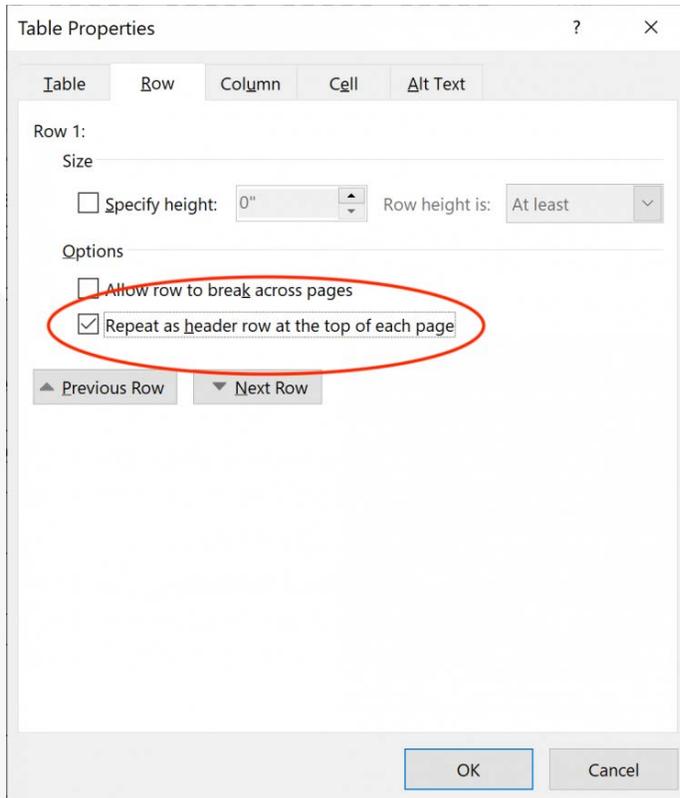
If your data is best presented in a table, try to keep the table simple. If the table is complex, consider whether you could divide it into multiple smaller tables with a heading above each.

A key to making data tables accessible to screen reader users is to clearly identify column and row headers. Also, if there are nested in columns or rows with multiple headers for each cell, screen readers need to be explicitly informed as to which headers relate to which cells.

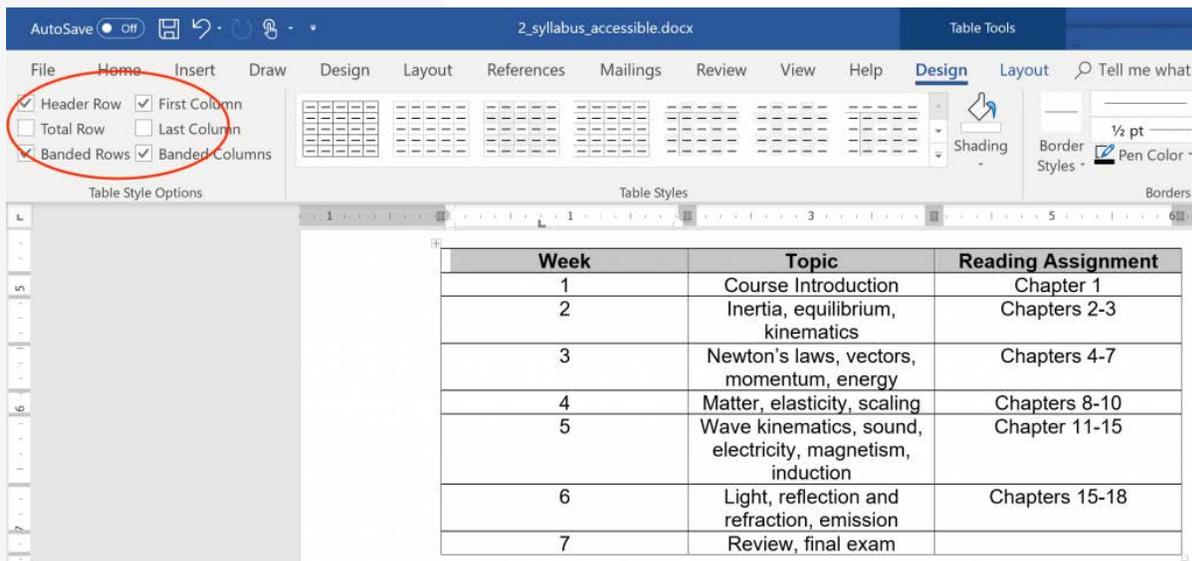
Word has limitations when it comes to making tables accessible. Tables can be very difficult for screen reader users to understand unless they include markup that explicitly defines the relationships between all the parts (e.g., headers and data cells). For a simple table with one row of column headers and no nested rows or columns, Word is up to the task. However, more complex tables can only be made accessible within HTML or Adobe PDF (accessible table markup can be added to the PDF using Adobe Acrobat Pro).

Often complex tables can be simplified by breaking them into multiple simple tables with a heading above each.

For simple tables, the only step necessary for accessibility is to identify which row contains the column headers. To do this in Word, select that row (Table > Select > Row), then right click the row and select "Table Properties". This brings up the *Table Properties* dialog. In this dialog, click the *Row* tab, and check the checkbox that says "Repeat as header row at the top of each page".



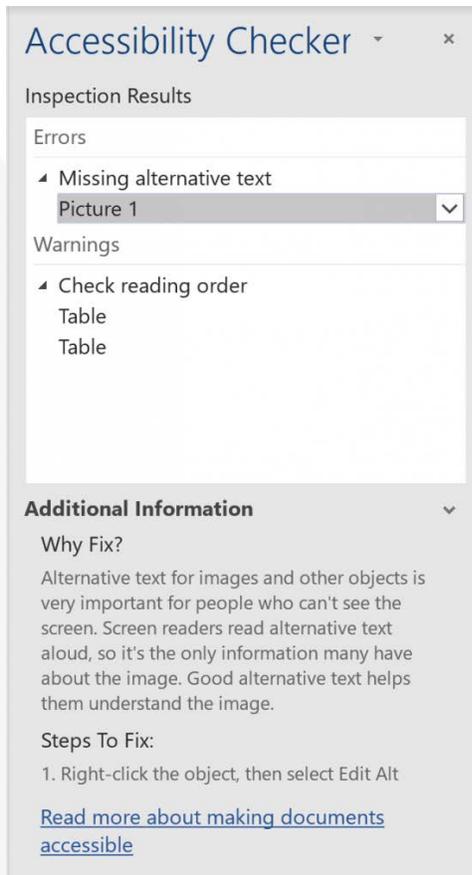
In addition, when creating a table two new tabs will appear in the ribbon. Selecting the *Design* tab will reveal the *Table Styles Option* group where you can define your Header Row.



Visit Microsoft website for more information about [creating Accessible Tables](#).

USE THE ACCESSIBILITY CHECKER

Microsoft products have a built-in accessibility checker which can help the document author test the overall accessibility of the document. The checker provides Inspection Results, feedback about the importance of each item, and tips on how to repair issues.



EXPORTING TO PDF, UNDERSTAND HOW TO PRESERVE ACCESSIBILITY

There are right ways and wrong ways to export to PDF. The steps required depends on which version of Microsoft Word you're using. For details see the [Creating Accessible PDFs from Microsoft Word](#) document.

FOR MORE COMPLEX ISSUES, SEEK HELP

As Word documents increase in complexity, accessibility challenges can also increase. Please contact the Teaching Transformation and Development Academy for additional assistance.