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info@accan.org.au

02 9288 4000

Making documents accessible December 2022

# Why make documents ‘accessible’?

People with disabilities will be able to access the information and services we produce on an equal footing if documents are accessible for them. Documents are presented by screen readers as a list of sections by heading enabling the ‘reader’ to select which section to read, or more frequently, listen to.

# How do screen readers work?

Screen readers break documents up into sections according to the headings you use. Word works more widely with a wider range of screen readers and is much easier to operate than acrobat and other programs, so often it is the first preference. Often hyperlinks will be compiled into a separate list reading the hyperlinked text and the URL in one burst.

# Microsoft Word

## Accessibility Checker

MS Word has a standard accessibility assessment feature.   
This can be found from the menu at: Review tab -> Check Accessibility

Make sure the order of reading matches the order in the document.

## Headings

It is essential that defined heading paragraph styles are applied. This reduces the rework needed to convert to a final accessible version.

The bulk of text should be ‘body text’ or ‘Normal’.

## Special features in text

Rather than using unnecessary tables or paragraph frames, use a box around the text with an appropriate ‘Alt’ tag. Alt tags should explain briefly what the emphasis means.

## Pictures

Use ‘Alt’ text with every picture to give a clear idea of what the picture is. Right click on a picture, select ‘Format Picture’, ‘Alt Text’ and then add a title and description as appropriate. Information should describe the picture accurately and impart the image intended by the author.

## Tables

Use ‘Alt’ text on all tables to describe what the table represents. Enter a title, and in the description describe the table, using the column/row headings as necessary. Right click on the table, select ‘Format Table’, ‘Alt Text’ and then add a title and description as appropriate.

Tables should also have headings. If the table spans more than one page remember to mark the row with the column headings in the table properties to "Repeat as header row at the top of each page." Make sure the cursor is in the table row or rows that are header rows. If more than one row contains headers, select all the header rows first. Then right click, select ‘Table Properties’ -> ‘Row’ and check the check box for ‘Repeat as header row at the top of each page’.

Bookmarks should also be used to label each heading row and column so that large tables embed the row and column titles all the way through the table.

## Bookmarks

Bookmarks can be useful for identifying specific points within the document in addition to headings and allows a reader to jump straight to a specific point in the document. This is often used to identify sections where a particular topic is discussed for example. It can be used with text, pictures, tables or any object within the document. Each bookmark represents a unique location within a document and must have a unique name.

Bookmarks should be placed before the relevant text, picture or object, however, in tables bookmarks should be placed in the cell where the row and column headings meet. Label the rows and columns appropriately and incorporate the string ‘RowTitle’ and ‘ColumnTitle’

To insert a bookmark, choose from the menu: ‘Insert’ -> ‘Bookmark’, choose a suitable name for the location and click ‘Add’.

Microsoft Word does not allow two bookmarks to use the same name.  If there is more than one table in the document, a number or descriptive word can be added to the end of the bookmark label used to indicate headings.  For example, Title1, RowTitleRainfall or ColumnTitleJanuary.

Bookmarks will generally be invisible to sighted people and can only be seen when this option is set within Word. To make bookmarks visible: from the menu select ‘File’ -> ‘Options’ -> ‘Advanced’ then check the ‘Show bookmarks’ check box under the ‘Show document content’ heading.

# Adobe Acrobat

Documents created in pdf form using the MS Word ‘save as pdf’ option will not necessarily produce a document with the items in the correct reading order.

After creating a pdf form of a document, open it in acrobat and use the menu to go to:   
Advanced -> Accessibility -> TouchUp reading Order.  When that panel shows, use the ‘Show Order Panel’ to see the order of items. Select each item on your page and tag it as ‘Text’, Background’ or the corresponding ‘Header’ value.

Order the items in the document appropriately. Headings should precede pictures and pictures also should be in the appropriate place within the text.

## Pictures

Use ‘Alt’ text with every picture to give a clear idea of what the picture is. Select the picture, right click on it, select ‘Format Picture’, ‘Alt Text’ and then add a title and description as appropriate. Information should describe the picture accurately and impart the image intended by the author.

## Stray items

Stray items, such as unnecessary frames, backgrounds etc., will show up within the pdf version. Select these, right click and label them as ‘background’ in the ‘touch up reading order’ menu. Items unnecessary for the reader can be rendered as ‘background’.