Creating Accessible Documents

Headings

Headings are used to create the structure of the document and are necessary for ease of navigation using a screen reader. They are assigned using the Styles toolbar. Headings must be used in a hierarchical manner – headings cannot be skipped. For instance, you cannot have a Heading 1 and a Heading 3 without a Heading 2.

Text

## Paragraph Spacing

Indentations and paragraph spacing should be used in a Word document for structure. This prevents the screen reader from reading blank spaces and lines and avoids the need, upon conversion to PDF, to artifact those elements.

## Color Contrast

It is always best to address color contrast issues in the original Word document. Regular text should have a contrast ratio of 3:1, with large text (18 pt or larger) needing a contrast ratio of 4.5:1. There are web browser and desktop tools that you can use to ensure a strong color contrast.

Color Use

**Don’t use color alone to convey information.**

Lists

A correctly formatted list makes it easier for a screen reader user to understand the context within which the list is presented. Both bulleted and numbered lists, when created using the appropriate method in Word, will convert cleanly to well-tagged lists in a PDF. It is best practice to use the built-in tools provided in Word.

## Bulleted List

Bulleted lists are used commonly to delineate a list of information that may be too long or too detailed to present in sentence format. It’s important to use the built-in Word bulleted list structure.

-A list of non-prioritized items.

-A list of resources which may be links (e.g. [AT3 Website Accessibility](https://www.at3center.net/repository/AT3websiteraccessibility) page)

-A subset of detailed information that fleshes out a higher-level comment or outline item.

-Other information that doesn’t need the hierarchy provided by a numbered list.

## Numbered List

Numbered lists are frequently used to list things in priority order, such as a list of countries to visit, as shown below. Just like with bulleted lists, the numbered lists should be created using the Numbered list tool.

1. United Kingdom
2. Italy
3. New Zealand
4. Australia
5. Japan
6. China

Tables

Tables present unique challenges for screen reader users. This will negatively affect reading order.

| Column 1 | Column 2 | Column 3 |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 5 | 3 | 3 |
| 4 | 1 | 5 |

Links

Link text should make sense in context at a minimum. If you can, avoid “read more” or “click here” and instead use descriptive link text. Avoid putting the entire web address (URL). ([Read more about Link Text](https://webaim.org/techniques/hypertext/))

More on links:

* https://www.accessibilityoz.com/2014/02/links-and-accessibility/
* [Click Here](https://accessibility.oregonstate.edu/descriptivelinks)

Images

Information conveyed in images needs to be conveyed in text as well. This can be done either through alt text or by using captions. When using captions, the author may want to artifact the image (set as background) if the document is made into a PDF so that the screen reader isn’t reading duplicate information.

