



Microsoft Word Accessibility Checklist

Accessible course documents help ensure that all students can access and use the materials they need to learn, including students who use screen readers or other assistive technology.

Use this checklist as you create or review a Word document to address common accessibility barriers, before sharing it with readers.

Document Structure

WHY IT MATTERS

Clear headings and lists help students find information quickly and organize content into sections that are easier to read. Students who use screen readers can also navigate by heading instead of reading the entire document from beginning to end.

- ☐ Section titles use built-in **Heading styles**, not just bold or larger text
- ☐ Headings follow a logical order without skipping levels (Heading 1 → Heading 2 → Heading 3)
- ☐ Headings clearly and concisely describe the section that follows
- ☐ Lists use built-in **Bullet** or **Numbering** tools instead of manually typed dashes or numbers
- ☐ The document has a descriptive **Title** in its document properties (File → Info → Properties)
- ☐ Content appears in a logical reading order, especially when using columns, images, or objects
- ☐ Important information is not placed only in a header or footer



Images & Objects

WHY IT MATTERS

Alternative text and text descriptions make important visual information available to students using screen readers. Text descriptions also enable students to easily search for important information that would not be available as an image.

- ☐ Images that communicate important information have **alternative text (alt text)**
- ☐ Alt text explains the image's meaning or purpose, not just what it looks like
 - › Example: "Bar chart showing enrollment increased from 2024 to 2025," rather than "bar chart"
- ☐ Images that do not add information (decorative borders or backgrounds) are marked **Decorative**
- ☐ Complex charts, diagrams, or graphics include the important information in nearby text or an accessible data table
- ☐ Important text that appears inside an image is also included as real, selectable text
 - › Example: A document with an embedded infographic image also includes the text transcribed into the body of the document.
- ☐ Important images and objects are placed **In Line with Text**, or avoided for anything important

Tables

WHY IT MATTERS

Students using screen readers rely on table headers to understand how information is organized. Simple, clearly labeled tables also make data easier to follow for all students.

- ☐ Tables are used for **data**, not to visually arrange content on the page



- ☐ Each data table has one clearly identified **Header Row** that contains the column headings (Table Design → Header Row checked)
- ☐ If the first column contains labels that identify the rows, **First Column** is checked (Table Design → First Column checked)
- ☐ Tables use a simple, regular grid without merged or split cells
- ☐ Tables do not contain unnecessary blank rows or columns
- ☐ Tables are not placed inside other tables

Color & Contrast

WHY IT MATTERS

Low contrast colors can make content difficult for students to read, and information that is communicated through color alone may not be available to students who are colorblind or cannot see the formatting.

- ☐ Use [WebAIM Color Contrast Checker](#) to ensure text has sufficient contrast to stand out clearly from its background
 - ☐ Normal-sized text has a contrast ratio of at least **4.5:1** with its background
 - ☐ Large text has a contrast ratio of at least **3:1** with its background
- ☐ Color is not the only way meaning is communicated
 - › Example: If required information is shown in red, also use an asterisk or the word “Required.”



Links

WHY IT MATTERS

Descriptive link text helps students quickly understand where a link will take them. Students using screen readers may navigate a document by reviewing its links. When link text is not descriptive, screen readers announce the complete URL.

- ☐ Link text describes its destination or purpose
 - › Example: Use “Download the course syllabus,” instead of “Click here”
- ☐ Avoid using the full web address as the link text when a short, descriptive label can be used instead

Language Settings

WHY IT MATTERS

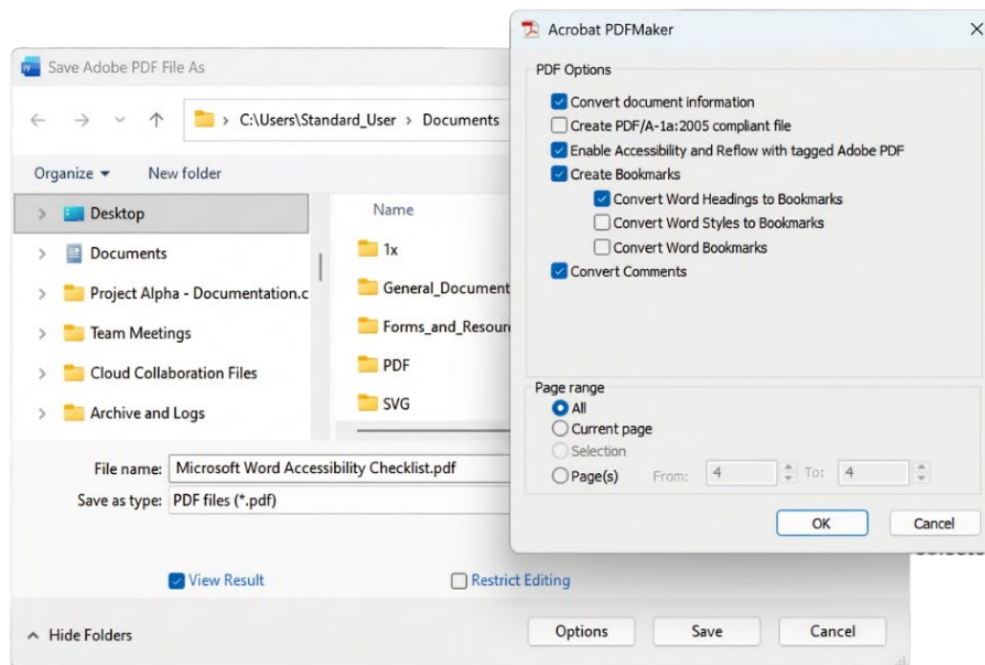
Screen readers use language settings to determine how words should be pronounced. Correct settings help students using assistive technology hear the document accurately. Using the correct language settings also enables Word to provide accurate spelling and grammar feedback.

- ☐ The document's language matches the language of its content (Review → Language → Set Proofing Language)
- ☐ Sections written in another language are identified with the correct language setting



Before You Share It

- ☐ Run, review, and fix accessibility issues identified by the Accessibility Checker (Review → Check Accessibility)
- ☐ If sharing a Word document, give the file a clear and descriptive filename
- ☐ If saving as a PDF, use File → Save as Adobe PDF
- ☐ Before saving the PDF, make sure **Enable Accessibility and Reflow with tagged Adobe PDF** is selected in the export options



Start Over