



Accessible Documents and Presentations Guide

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Overview

However you decide to distribute information to the general public, it's important that it's appropriate and accessible to all audiences. The following guide lays out how to create accessible digital documents, presentations, and printed handouts.

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Accessible Documents and Presentations Checklist

This checklist includes basic considerations to help you create accessible documents.

Language

- Use plain language
- Use person-first language
- Provide contact information, include multiple ways to contact

Document styling

- Use bullets or lists to break up large blocks of text
- Use sufficient color contrast between text, graphic, and background colors, with a minimum ratio of 4.5:1
- Use accessible non-serif fonts like Verdana, Arial, Helvetica, Tahoma, or Roboto
- For digital documents and websites, use a minimum font size of 12pt
- For presentations, use a minimum font size of 24pt
- For large print documents that will be printed, use a minimum font size of 18pt
- Export PDFs for electronic distribution or accessibility (not print)

Formatting

- Use correct, properly tagged headings in sequential order (h1 through h6)
- Begin large documents with tables of contents
- Use alt text (image descriptions) for all images
- Clearly label links to describe where they lead

Hard copies

- Have copies of your handouts available in regular print, large print, and Braille

Presentations

- Follow best practices for visual accessibility (e.g. text layout, contrast)
- Make presentations available in accessible digital formats (e.g. alt text, proper headings)
- Avoid flashing graphics or gifs

Document Content

When creating any document, handout or presentation, make sure you're using the appropriate language.

Plain Language

Text written for the general public should use plain language, which is defined as writing that can be understood the first time it's read or heard.

Plain language is not “dumbed down” writing—it's a way of writing that makes text easier for all readers to understand. Aim for an 8th-grade reading level or below, and ideally below a 5th-grade reading level. Try to keep your sentences short and use simple words that most people are familiar with.

Use [Hemingway App to check your reading levels](#).

Person-first Language

When referring to people with disabilities, use what is called “person-first language.” Examples of this include: “person with a disability,” “people with disabilities,” “person with cerebral palsy,” or “person who uses a wheelchair.”

Some words you should avoid altogether. These include: handicapped, retarded, lame, midget, crazy, crippled, physically challenged, differently-abled, suffering from, or other words with negative connotations.

Learn more in the [NYC Inclusive Terminology Guide](#), and the [Conscious Style Guide](#).

Contact Information

When including contact information for a resource or organization, offer several ways to get in touch. These should include phone numbers, email addresses, and 711 relay. Website addresses are also helpful to include.

Creating Digital Documents

Documents posted on a website for download should be readable both visually and by a screen reader. This means that, stylistically, content should be in a readable font and have high contrast. These elements will make documents readable for all readers, and especially those who have low vision. In addition, content should be formatted with headings and image descriptions so it can be fully interpreted by someone using a screen reader.

Digital Document Formatting

Please adhere to the following rules when designing a document.

- Avoid using all caps
- Contrast between background and text has to be a minimum of 4.5:1
- Use accessible, non-serif fonts such as, Verdana, Arial, Helvetica, Trebuchet MS, Calibri or Tahoma. Avoid serif fonts like Times New Roman or Georgia
- For digital documents and websites, use a minimum font size of 12pt
- For presentations, like PowerPoints, use a minimum font size of 24pt
- For large print documents that will be printed, use a minimum font size of 18pt

Proper headings

Headings (h1 through h6) can help you create content hierarchy for better readability, and are key to making information accessible to users with disabilities and low-literacy levels.

Sighted users navigate web pages by skimming text, unconsciously using headings, links, and formatting to pick out the information needed. People who rely on screen readers also need to skim, which headings help with. But in order to make these functional for a screen reader, you need to properly format your headings.

On pages with properly formatted headings, people using screen readers can skip to page titles, relevant sub-headings, or search results with just a few keystrokes.

Below are descriptions of how to use different heading levels:

- h1 headings: Main page topic. Try to only use one h1 per page. This heading typically appears at the top of the content area
- h2 headings: Broad sections such as the beginning of the News or Results section
- h3 headings: Article titles, program titles, search results, and other subsections
- h4 – h6 headings should progress in consecutive order, as subsections of the previous heading

Add a heading in Microsoft Word:

1. Select the text and right click on it
2. Go to the “Format” menu and choose “Style”
3. Choose the appropriate level heading style such as “Heading 1,” “Heading 2,” “Heading 3,” etc.

Table of contents

Tables of contents and page numbers help all users navigate around a document more efficiently. Including a table of contents for documents longer than four pages makes it less overwhelming, since readers are able to understand the document’s scope without having to scroll through it. This is especially true for screen reader users, who can use tables of contents to quickly jump to later sections.

(For documents with three pages or fewer, tables of contents make the document longer without adding helpful functionality.)

Add a table of contents in Microsoft Word:

1. Select the “References” tab in the ribbon menu and choose “Table of Contents”
2. Choose a style from the formatting options
3. Properly formatted headings will automatically populate in your table of contents (another reason it’s important to create properly formatted headings)
4. Page numbers will be automatically generated within the table of contents, but not inserted onto the pages themselves. To create page numbers, select the “Insert” tab and select “Page Numbers.”

Image Descriptions

Any photo, logo, or graphic needs to have a text description so that users with visual disabilities can understand its relevance. Adding an image description is using alt text.

Add alt text in Microsoft Word and PowerPoint:

1. Right click on the image and select “Format picture”
2. Navigate to the “Alt Text” pane
3. Type the image description in the description field on the right side of the window

When writing alt text, think about the reasons you’re including the image in the first place. Ask yourself the following questions:

1. Who is in the photo?

If there’s no one notable, use general characteristics like “marathon runners” or “happy people.”

2. What are they doing?

If they’re just standing or sitting around, describe their visible emotions, such as “smiling” or “looking focused.”

3. Where and when is this taking place?

This can be a general physical location like “outside,” or specific, like “at the NYC Marathon.”

4. Why are you showing this photo at all?

There’s a reason the photo is being shown — maybe it’s to show off how well attended an event was. If so, talk about the number of people in the photo.

Graphs or data visualizations should have proper alt text. For simple ones, the alt text should include important trends and provide a summary of the data represented. For more complex ones, the data can be represented in an alternative table view or a downloadable report as an accessible PDF or Word document. A caption with a summary of the data can also be included for users with cognitive disabilities.

Links

Both sighted and blind users navigate by scanning through links. Make sure your hyperlink text always explains where your user is going. Avoid link labels like “Click here,” which don’t give any information to screen reader users skimming through links. Use underlining only for hyperlinks, not other text elements.

- **Do:** [Freeze your rent.](#)
- **Don’t:** [Click here](#) to freeze your rent.

Exporting as PDF

To create an accessible PDF from your document, it must follow the guidelines listed in this guide, including heading styles and alt text. When you save or export your document as a PDF, make sure to select the export option for electronic distribution and/or accessibility (not print). This will transfer the document styles to the PDF.

Hard Copy Handouts

Whether in the office or at an outreach event, there are ways to create accessible print documents for all audiences. For any hard copy documents that will be distributed, create three versions:

- Regular print
- Large print
- Braille

Regular Print

- Avoid using all caps
- Contrast between background and text must be a minimum of 4.5:1
- Use accessible, non-serif fonts, such as, Verdana, Arial, Helvetica, Trebuchet MS, Calibri, or Tahoma. Avoid serif fonts like Times New Roman or Georgia

Large Print

- Avoid using all caps
- Contrast between background and text must be a minimum of 4.5:1
- Use accessible, non-serif fonts, such as, Verdana, Arial, Helvetica, Trebuchet MS, Calibri, or Tahoma. Avoid serif fonts like Times New Roman or Georgia
- Font size: Minimum of 18pt

Braille

You should always create five to ten Braille copies of your handout in case someone requests one. The Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities can help you make a few copies for free. You can also use one of the services listed in the Resources section of this guide.

When you send a document to get embossed in Braille, make sure to:

- Submit as a Word document
- Remove any images in the document
- Use headings, lists, and normal styles to organize the document

Presentations

Whether you're out in the community or at a fellow agency, you should always make sure your presentations are accessible. These should be accessible both from a visual standpoint and a digital one, in case someone who is blind or has low vision requests the presentation in digital form.

Text

- Avoid using all caps
- Use accessible, non-serif fonts, such as, Verdana, Arial, Helvetica, Trebuchet MS, Calibri, or Tahoma. Avoid serif fonts like Times New Roman or Georgia
- Use a minimum font size of 24pt

Layout and Colors

- Avoid using large blocks of text
- Contrast between background and text has to be a minimum of 4.5:1
- Use bullets for lists
- Use and edit standard slide styles, which have properly tagged headings
- Give each slide a unique slide title

Images and Tables

- Include [alt text](#) for all images
- Export any tables to a Word document as an alternative for screen reader users

Language

- Do not use: handicapped, retarded, lame, midget or crippled
- Use: people with disabilities, people who are blind, people who have low vision, people who are deaf, people who are hard of hearing, people with physical disabilities, people with mental health disabilities, people with developmental disabilities instead
- Write text at an eighth-grade reading level or below
- Keep your text as simple as possible. If a word has a less complex alternative, use it

Flashing

- Avoid using graphics or transitions that flash because they might cause seizures

Contact Info

- If sharing contact info in your slide deck, include phone numbers, email addresses and website addresses so that people can contact you regardless of their disability
- Include 711 relay with any phone numbers: “For New York Relay users, please call 711”

Resources

Websites and Digital Documents

- [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\) 2.0](#)
- [Web Accessibility Initiatives Tutorials](#)
- [PDF Techniques WCAG 2.0](#)
- [WAVE Accessibility Checker](#)
- [Web Accessibility In Mind \(WebAIM\)](#)
- [WebAIM Color Contrast Checker](#)
- [Paciello Group Color Contrast Analyzer](#)
- [Tota11y Accessibility Visualization Toolkit](#)
- [Adding Alternative Text in Office 365](#)
- [Make PowerPoint Presentations Accessible](#)
- [Make Word Documents Accessible](#)
- [Make Google Docs Accessible](#)
- [Make Google Slides Accessible](#)
- [Make Keynote Presentations Accessible](#)

Braille Transcription Services

All Global Solutions International: Makes Braille, large print, audio and electronic formats in English and 20+ languages including Arabic, Spanish and French.

Website: <http://allgsi.com/services/braille/>

Phone: 1-800-896-7030

E-mail: info@allgsi.com

Baruch College's Computer Center for Visually Impaired People (CCVIP): Offers quick and affordable service producing good quality literary Braille.

Website: https://www.baruch.cuny.edu/ccvip/services_products.htm

Contact: Judith Gerber

Phone: 646-312-1425

E-mail: Judith.gerber@baruch.cuny.edu

Andrew Heiskell Braille and Talking Book Library: Get books in braille and audio, and find free events, workshops and classes. Every Saturday, there is a free computer clinic where individuals can learn about how to use a computer, browse the web, read and send emails, download books, and Word processing as a blind/low vision person. They also have a tactile graphics Braille embosser for creating Braille documents, and a 3D printer for creating 3D touch objects. Both are free to use.

Website: <http://www.nypl.org/about/locations/heiskell>

Phone: 212-206-5400

Tech department: 212-621-0627