



Accessibility Best Practices

The state of Indiana is committed to inclusion and universal access in all of its services and programs. In the spirit of this commitment, Indiana Code 4-13.1-3 was created to ensure all state information technology equipment, software and systems used by the public or state employees complies with the accessibility standards of Section 508 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973. This document will cover how to address specific accessibility issues in Microsoft Office.

To make our digital content compliant, it must be intelligible to assistive technologies such as screen readers, primarily used by the blind and visually impaired. A “screen reader” is a software application that converts the text displayed on a computer screen into synthesized speech. Many people with visual and other impairments rely on this technology in order to enjoy access to websites and other digital content. Digital content must also be usable by people with other types of disabilities, such as hearing impairments, color blindness or mobility impairments.

Digital content comes in many forms, such as text, audio and video files, graphics, animations, images, PDFs, PowerPoint slides, Word documents, Excel spreadsheets and other documents posted on the state of Indiana’s websites. These must all be made accessible to users of assistive technologies.

When submitting documents to the FSSA Office of Communications and Media to be posted online, please provide the original documents (rather than a PDF) whenever possible. Our team will create PDFs from the documents and complete any further steps needed to make them fully accessible. If you follow the recommendations in this guide when creating documents, it will make the process much more efficient and yield better results for our stakeholders. Before sending content to be posted online, consider alternatives, such as emailing documents to interested parties or recording meetings that include PowerPoint presentations. Please send finalized documents for posting whenever possible.

If the best practices in this document are not followed, the content will be sent back to be fixed. The update will not be made until the content is fixed—this includes time-sensitive content.

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Accessibility Best Practices

Don't use scanned pages

Scanned text or forms cannot be read by screen readers. Please retype the text.

Add alternate text to images and objects

Images present challenges to visually impaired readers. Alternate text (also called “alt text”) helps people who can't see the screen to understand what's important in images and other visuals. Try to avoid using too many decorative images that don't add useful information. In alt text, briefly describe the image and mention the existence of the text and its intent. This includes pictures, maps, logos, clip art, charts, shapes, SmartArt graphics and embedded objects. See the next section for instructions on how to add alt text. Use clear, concise terms. For example, “Person in wheelchair on ramp” may suffice rather than “Smiling woman in wheelchair posing on ramp.” Decorative images should be removed or “artifactual:” artifacts are elements that are ignored by a screen reader, such as a background texture that does not contain important text. Avoid using text in images as the sole method of conveying important information. If you must use an image with text in it, repeat that text in the document. Do not use decorative bullets; use stand-

ard bullets instead. For charts and graphs, it is necessary to provide a meaningful summary of its content.

Fill in document properties

Go into the document properties and fill out the title, author, subject (short description), keywords and language. This allows users to have a bit of information about the document without needing to open it. For someone using assistive technology, this can help limit the necessity of opening a document in order to determine if it's the one they're looking for. The “author” should be the agency, division or program rather than the name of the person who has created or modified the document.

Use text to identify author and agency

In the opening pages, do not use a logo alone to identify the source of the document. Always accompany the primary logo with text.

Use color carefully

If your document has a high level of contrast between text and background, more people can see and use the content. You might test your designs by printing in black-and-white. Good color contrast will ensure readability. If possible, try using texture in graphs to highlight

points of interest. Ensure that color is not the only means of conveying information. People who are blind, have low vision or are colorblind might miss out on the meaning conveyed by particular colors.

Name your hyperlinks appropriately

Your link should contain meaningful text that reflects the link destination or subject. People who use screen readers sometimes scan a list of links. Links should convey clear and accurate information about the destination. For example, instead of only linking to the text *Click here*, include the full title of the destination page. You can also add ScreenTips that appear when your cursor hovers over text or images that include a hyperlink.

Use short titles in headings

Keep headings short (fewer than 20 words or one line long). This makes it easy for readers to quickly navigate your document.

Avoid using repeated blank characters

Extra spaces, tabs and empty paragraphs can cause people using screen readers to repeatedly hear the word “blank.” Instead, use styles with formatting and indenting to create white space.

Use document styles

Use built-in heading and paragraph styles to structure the document. See the next section for instructions on how to do this. To make it easier for screen readers to read your documents, use a logical heading order. For example, use Heading 1, Heading 2, then Heading 3, rather than Heading 3, Heading 1, then Heading 2.

Use simple (not complex) tables

These are easier for all to read, including people using screen readers. Avoid using nested tables, merged or split cells or blank cells for format-

ting. Screen readers keep track of their location in a table by counting table cells. If a table is nested within another table or if a cell is merged or split, the screen reader loses count and can't provide helpful information about the table after that point. Blank cells in a table could also mislead someone using a screen reader into thinking that there is nothing more in the table. Screen readers also use header information to identify rows and columns.

Don't use watermarks

Watermarks and other background images may be hidden or confusing to people with vision or cognitive

disabilities. Instead of using a watermark to identify a document as a "draft" or "confidential," include the text in the document title or heading.

Use text wisely

Real text instead of pictures of words is always preferred. Larger font size (around 12 points) enhances accessibility. Avoid text that is smaller than 9 points. Fonts with clean lines and without much embellishment are generally easier to read.

Table of contents

Providing a table of contents for longer documents is recommended.

Accessibility in Microsoft Office

Microsoft Office (Word, PowerPoint or Excel) supports creating accessible documents and keeps their accessibility information intact when converted to PDF. For example, a document created in Word should contain almost all the information necessary for an accessible PDF.

Creating accessible Microsoft Word documents

Heading styles

Create a uniform heading structure through use of styles in MS Word. This allows screen readers to navigate a document and improves accessibility for everyone.

1. Start a new line to create a heading or select text to change to a heading.
2. Open the **Home** tab and choose the appropriate heading in the **Styles** panel.
3. Headings 1, 2 or 3 can also be assigned using **Ctrl + Alt + 1, 2 or 3**, respectively.

Adding alternative text

Images can be given appropriate alt text in Word to assist the visually impaired; alt text is read by a screen reader.

1. Right-click on the image and select **Format Picture**. A dialog box will appear.
2. Select the **Layout & Properties** icon and choose **Alt Text**.
3. Enter appropriate alt text only in the **Description** field (not the **Title** field).

Columns

Don't create columns with tabs. Always create columns using the **Page Setup** group.

1. Select the **Layout** tab on the ribbon.
2. Select **Columns** in the **Page Setup** group.
3. Choose the number of columns.

Lists

Use Word-generated, not hand-typed, numbered and bulleted lists to emphasize a point or a sequence of steps.

1. Select the **Home** tab on the ribbon.
2. Choose the **Numbered List** or **Bulleted List** option from the **Paragraph** group.

Hyperlinks

Word automatically creates a hyperlink when a user pastes a full URL onto a page. These may be too long or confusing to make sense to screen reader users, so make sure the link text is unique and readable. For example, don't use <https://www.in.gov/fssa>. Instead, use [FSSA home page](#) and link the text to the URL.

1. Select a hyperlink, right-click and select **Hyperlink** or hit **Ctrl + K**.
2. Change the text in the **Text to Display** field to a more meaningful description.

Data tables

Accessible tables need a clear table structure and table headers to help guide a screen reader user.

1. Select the **Insert** tab on the ribbon, then select **Table > Insert Table**.
2. To add table headers to the first row, select **Table Tools > Layout** on the ribbon, then choose the **Repeat Header Rows** option in the **Data** section.

Options in the **Design** tab may be used to change appearance but will not provide the necessary accessibility information.

Creating accessible Microsoft PowerPoint presentations

Slide layouts

Use slide layouts provided within PowerPoint to ensure files have correctly structured headings and lists, and proper reading order. Download and use the [FSSA PowerPoint templates](#), under Communications Tools on The Hub, each time a new presentation is created.

1. Select **Home > New Slide**, then choose a layout from the drop-down.
2. To change a slide layout, select **Home > Layout**, then choose a layout from the drop-down.

Alternative text

Images should be given appropriate alternative text in PowerPoint.

1. Right-click on the image and choose **Format Picture**.
2. Select the **Size & Properties** icon and choose **Alt Text**.
3. Enter appropriate alt text only in the **Description** field (not the **Title** field).

Data tables

Accessible tables need a clear table structure and table headers to help guide a screen reader user.

1. Select the **Insert** tab on the ribbon, then select **Table > Insert Table**.
2. Keep tables simple.

There is no way to add table header information in PowerPoint in a way that will be identified by a screen reader.

Hyperlinks

PowerPoint automatically creates a hyperlink when a user pastes a full URL onto a slide and presses **Enter** or **Space**. These may not make sense to screen reader users or others, so make the link text descriptive and readable. For example, don't use <https://www.in.gov/fssa>. Instead, use [FSSA home page](#) and link the text to the URL.

1. Select a hyperlink, right-click, and select **Edit Hyperlink** or hit **Ctrl + K**.
2. Change the text in the **Text to Display** field to a more meaningful description.

Other principles

- Ensure the font size is sufficiently large. If your presentation will be viewed on a projector, the font size may need to be even larger.
- Provide plenty of contrast. If your presentation will be viewed on a projector, sometimes the contrast needs to be even more pronounced.
- Avoid slide transitions or animations if the document is to be posted online.
- Do not put accessibility information like alternative text in the **Notes** pane. The **Notes** pane is only used by the presenter; the notes will not be visible to end users.
- Before sending content to be posted online, consider alternatives. If it *must* be posted, decorative images should be removed.

Creating accessible Microsoft Excel documents

Alternative text

Include alternative text with all visuals. To find all instances of missing alternative text in the spreadsheet, use the Accessibility Checker.

Include alternative text with all images.

1. Right-click an image and select **Edit Alt Text** or select the image and select **Format > Alt Text**. The **Alt Text** pane opens on the right side of the document body.
2. Type one or two sentences to describe the image and its context to someone who cannot see it.

Add alt text to shapes or SmartArt graphics.

1. Right-click a shape or SmartArt graphic and select **Edit Alt Text** or select the shape or SmartArt graphic and select **Format > Alt Text**. To add alt text to the entire shape or SmartArt graphic, click the border of the shape or SmartArt graphic and not an individual shape or piece. The **Alt Text** pane opens on the right side of the document body.
2. Type one or two sentences to describe the shape or SmartArt graphic and its context to someone who cannot see it.

Add alt text to PivotCharts.

1. Right-click a PivotChart. Select **Edit Alt Text**. The **Alt Text** pane opens on the right side of the document body.
2. Type one or two sentences to describe the PivotChart and its context to someone who cannot see it.

If your visuals are purely decorative, such as stylistic borders that add visual interest but aren't informative, you can mark them as such without needing to write any alt text. People using screen readers will hear that these are decorative, so they know they are not missing any important information.

1. Right-click a visual. Select **Edit Alt Text**. The **Alt Text** pane opens on the right side of the document body.
2. Select the **Mark as decorative** text box. The text entry field becomes grayed out.

Add hyperlink text and ScreenTips

Links should convey clear and accurate information about the destination. ScreenTips are small windows that display descriptive text when you rest the pointer on the hyperlink.

1. Select the cell where you want to add a hyperlink.
2. On the **Insert** tab, select **Link**.
3. In the **Text to display** box, the content of the cell you selected is displayed. This is the hyperlink text. To change it, type the new hyperlink text.
4. In the **Address** box, add the hyperlink URL.
5. Select the **ScreenTip** button and, in the ScreenTip text box, type the text of the ScreenTip.
6. Click **OK > OK**.

Specify column header information

Use a simple table structure and specify column header information. To ensure that tables don't contain split cells, merged cells or nested tables, use the Accessibility Checker. You can also visually scan your tables to check that they don't have any completely blank rows or columns.

Specify a header row in a block of cells marked as a table.

1. Place the cursor anywhere in a table.
2. On the **Table Tools Design** tab, in the **Table Style Options** group, select the **Header Row** check box.
3. Type the column headings.

Specify a header row in a new block of cells you are marking as a table.

1. Select the cells you want to include in the table.
2. On the **Insert** tab, select **Table**.
3. In the **Create Table** dialog, select the **My table has headers** check box.
4. Select **OK**. Excel creates a header row with the default names Column1, Column2, and so on.
5. Type new, descriptive names for each column in the table.

Give all sheet tabs unique names and remove blank sheets

To find out whether all sheets that contain content in a workbook have descriptive names and whether there are any blank sheets, use the Accessibility Checker.

Give all sheet tabs unique names.

1. Right-click a sheet tab, and select **Rename**.
2. Type a brief, unique name for the sheet and press **Enter**.

Remove all blank sheets.

1. Right-click a sheet tab, and select **Delete**.
2. In the confirmation dialog, select **Delete**.



State of Indiana

Family and Social Services Administration

402 W. WASHINGTON ST., ROOM W363
INDIANAPOLIS, IN 46204-2739

www.fssa.IN.gov

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