

Creating Accessible Documents

Accessible materials benefit all learners, including students with visual impairments, low vision, or those using assistive technologies. By following these guidelines, you can create content that is legible, navigable, and reusable.

1. Font Selection

- **Use readable sans serif fonts:** Arial, Verdana, Calibri, Tahoma. Avoid decorative, script, or novelty fonts—they are difficult to read and not screen reader-friendly.
- **Font size:** Body text: 11–12 pt minimum
- **Avoid all caps, shadows, or excessive italics**—use bold or underline for emphasis.
- Apply fonts using **styles** (Word: Styles pane; Google Docs: Format → Paragraph styles) to maintain consistency.

2. Spacing and Alignment

- **Left-align text;** avoid right-aligned or fully justified text.
- **Do not hyphenate words** to fit lines; maintain natural spacing.
- **Use adequate white space:** double-space between lines or paragraphs, and provide space around headers.
- **Group related content** to clarify relationships visually and reduce clutter.

3. Contrast and Background

- Ensure **high contrast** between text and background. Examples:
 - Good: black on white, white on dark blue, yellow on black
 - Poor: grey on pink, black on blue, yellow on red
- **Plain backgrounds** improve readability; avoid complex graphics, photos, or patterns behind text.

4. Headings and Titles

- Use **built-in heading styles** rather than bolding or enlarging text.
- **Unique titles for each page or slide** help navigation, especially for screen reader users.
- Organize headings hierarchically to enable **skimming and table of contents generation**.

5. Pictures and Objects

- **Place images inline with text;** do not wrap text around images.
- Provide **alternative text (alt text)** for all images, charts, and graphics:
 - Brief, concise descriptions (1–2 sentences)
 - Include context: why the image is relevant
 - Mark decorative images as “**decorative**” so screen readers skip them
- Ensure **color is not the sole indicator;** add labels, letters, or patterns as needed.

6. Lists and Columns

- Use **built-in bullets or numbered lists** for clarity; avoid custom symbols or vertical text.
- Use numbers only for sequential lists; otherwise, use bullets.
- Avoid **unnecessary columns**—they make reading and navigation harder, especially for low-vision students.
- If columns are necessary, ensure **adequate spacing** between them; do not simulate columns with tables.

7. Tables

- Use **actual tables**, not shapes or manually spaced text.
- Identify **column headers** and enable table styles with visible gridlines.
- **Do not merge or split cells**; this can break screen reader functionality.
- Provide **alt text and captions** for tables.
- Limit table use to essential data; screen readers announce each cell, which can be tedious for users.

8. Headers, Footers, and Watermarks

- Include **title, author, and page numbers** in headers or footers for print readers.
- Place page numbers in **outer corners** for easy navigation.
- **Do not include critical information** in headers, footers, or watermarks—they cannot be read by screen readers.
- Keep watermarks minimal to avoid reducing legibility.

9. Hyperlinks

- Use **descriptive hyperlink text** (e.g., “Visit NASA Website” instead of “click here”).
- Provide **screen tips** if available.

10. Accessibility Features and Checks

- Use **built-in tools and styles** for tables, headers, lists, and charts; avoid text boxes and manually simulated layouts.
- Use **accessibility checkers**:
 - Word/PowerPoint: Review → Check Accessibility
 - Google Docs: Follow universal design principles (no built-in checker)
- Conduct **human review**: confirm reading order, contrast, spacing, and alt text.

11. File Management

- Save with **descriptive filenames**: clearly indicate the document's purpose (e.g., Photosynthesis_Chapter5.docx).
- Include **version numbers or dates** if needed.
- Use **universal fonts** when sharing across platforms (Word → Google Docs conversion can alter non-standard fonts).