

Creating accessible Word documents

This guidance explains how to create accessible Word documents for use in teaching sessions and for sharing them electronically. This benefits all students, not just those with identified needs.

1. Making text accessible

- Ensure that the print size is at least 12 point size sans serif font (e.g. Open Sans, Arial or Verdana). These fonts are preferred because it means each letter takes up exactly the same space and so makes the fonts easier to read. Use 1.5 spacing and aligned to the left with a right ragged margin. Do not use justified text (that has a straight margin on the right and one the left) as this is much harder read because the space between letters and words is not the same all the time. Note some font sizes appear bigger than others.
- Rather than using italics and underlining, which can be difficult to read, use bold text to emphasise words.
- When linking to other resources, avoid using the phrase 'Click here'. Instead, give hyperlinks descriptive text. For example, use [Wikipedia](#), not 'Wikipedia: Click [here](#)' or <https://www.wikipedia.org/>. This allows students using assistive technology such as screen readers to follow the link.
- Use a strong contrast between text and background, for example, dark text on a pastel coloured or cream background (not white). Avoid contrasting red and green as these colours can be difficult to differentiate for those with colour blindness.
- Ensure that colours are not the only means of conveying information: use headings to help students distinguish between content.

2. Sharing documents

- Make documents available online **24 hours in advance** of teaching.
- This allows time for students using assistive technologies to access materials and will give all students time to prepare.
- Sharing documents in advance, including glossaries of new terms or acronyms, is especially helpful for those with some disabilities (e.g. dyslexia) and those whose first language isn't English.

3. Structuring documents

- Give documents an explicit structure using formatting (headings, bullet points and numbered steps) instead of using dashes or the space tab to indicate structure.
- Rather than indicating headings solely through font style or size, use the ['Styles' tool](#) in Word (Heading 1, Heading 2, and so on) which can be recognised by a screen reader and used to navigate a document. This also means that content is visible in ['Outline View'](#), which all students can use to navigate the words and structure of a document.
- Use Word to add headers and footers that contain key information (e.g. author, name of course and session, version, date). Do not use italics for headers or footers and do not make the font size smaller than in the main text.
- Number pages if the document is longer than a single page. Provide a table of contents for long documents.

4. Making images accessible

- Using charts, graphs and illustrations can be a useful means to convey information.

- Using the '[Alternative text](#)' feature to add a description to images ensures this information is available to all students, including those using assistive technologies such as screen readers.
- This function is available in Word, PDF and HTML files. Read our [Creating Accessible PowerPoints](#) resource for more guidance on describing images in alternative text.

5. Displaying data

- When displaying data, avoid using tables simply for formatting purposes.
- If you do need to display data in a tabular format, use the table function rather than formatting using the space bar. This will allow assistive technology to recognise the format.
- If you decide to use a table to display data, use column headings to indicate information needed to read cells. Read our [Creating Accessible PowerPoints](#) resource for more guidance on using tabular content.