



ARIZONA DEPARTMENT OF  
**EDUCATION**

# **Conference Materials and Accessibility**

*Assistance for submission of materials to all ESS-sponsored conferences*

## **Technical Assistance Manual**

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# Accessibility Checklist

Check each option off of the list as you verify it

## General Requirements

- Begin with the intention of accessibility
  - Ensure that templates being used start out as being accessible
- Branding or color scheme meets contrast requirements
- Use MS Word or PowerPoint whenever possible
  - Run accessibility check (Review menu) before finalizing
  - If not using MS products, use an accessibility checklist
- Set the document properties
  - Title (File menu, Info)
  - Author (File menu, Info)
  - Language (Review menu)
- Save as PDF (accessible)

## Text

- Minimum font size for Word is 11 pt and for PowerPoint it is 18 pt
- Keep sentences short and easy to follow (8th grade reading level)
- Use left justification for everything and keep everything on the left margin
  - Never** use full justification
- Use a font commonly known to be accessible
- Avoid angled or vertical text
- Use paragraph spacing instead of extra return characters
- Line spacing should be at least 1.0; commonly 1.5
- Use indents instead of extra tabs
- Use native list tool instead of typing bullets

## Links

- Use descriptive links instead of URLs
- Limit use of the same link
- Wording of each link must be understandable with no other context
- Verify each link is still correct when document is complete

## Images

- Images that convey information must have alt text and those that do not must be marked decorative
- Avoid images with angled or vertical text
- Contrast rules apply for images, especially for text over an image
- Never use AI services for alt text
- Double-check every image, even decorative ones and logos

## Color and Contrast

- Dark text goes with light background and vice versa
- Do not use color alone to convey information

## Tables

- Tables must always have a single, identified header row
- If a table has a header column, it must be identified as well
  - No empty header cells
- Empty data cells should say "no data" rather than being left blank

## MS PowerPoint

- Every slide within a presentation must have a unique title content holder
- Links intended for use during the presentation can be in URL form
  - Use a link shortener for long URLs
- Ensure reading order on each slide

## MS Word

- Proper use of headings

## Adobe PDF

- Run accessibility checker (if available)
- Verify reading order and color contrast

## Google Docs

- Google support page to check accessibility yourself (there is no tool)

## General Accessibility Considerations and Requirements

To paraphrase [Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act](#), any agency that accepts federal money is required to make public communication and documentation accessible to people with disabilities. The Arizona Department of Education (ADE) is one such agency. The Exceptional Student Services (ESS) section of ADE takes this requirement very seriously and is also very pleased to accept the requirement, considering that accessibility is the right thing to do. The requirement of Section 508 holds true for conferences that ESS funds, so we require that all presentation materials be accessible, even those that originate from outside entities. ESS measures accessibility requirements against [the WCAG 2.1 AA standards](#). We provide this assistance guide to help you to make your materials accessible.

### Begin with Accessibility in Mind

Build documents and templates with intention. The first intention is accessibility. The fact is that approximately 20% of people have some sort of disability (to varying degrees), and it is crucial to develop public information that is accessible to all people. If your administration or corporate structure require specific branding or a certain impressive look, take the steps to ensure that accessibility is not ignored. Branding, for example, can sometimes work against requirements for color and contrast (see page 4) or against readability, depending on which and how fonts are used (see page 5).

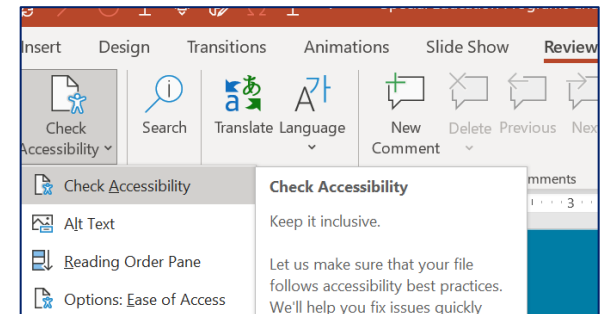
Templates are a good way to ensure consistency and accessibility. Create templates and include instructions for people who do not use the software so often. Re-examine old templates and old versions of your current document or presentation and update them to be accessible

## General Guidance

Create documents in MS Word and MS PowerPoint whenever possible. **Add a Title and ensure the Author** in the File Menu under Info/Properties. Next, ensure that the appropriate language is being used in the Review menu, especially important if you create documents in Spanish (or for any other language audience). Adding the title will change the displayed document title in the top of the window. If a title is present, AT devices will read the title instead of the file name. Finally, run the **Check Accessibility** tool in the Review menu before posting or sharing the document and make adjustments as needed. Note: **errors** must be corrected for accessibility; **warnings** could go either way and are subject to a reviewer's verification.

Best practice for shared or publicly available documents is to make them PDFs. Be sure to save a document as a PDF in an accessible format (after you have done all of the verification listed in this document). In MS Office, go to File menu, Save As (or Save a Copy), and to the PDF export option and select the option that maximizes accessibility. If you are fortunate enough to have Adobe Acrobat Pro, you should have an 'Acrobat' menu in your MS Office products. If so, use this menu (Create PDF button) to save your file as a PDF. (It is a slightly better option than Save As.)

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## Text

Text should be easy to follow and understand. For public documents, best practice is to have a minimum font size of 11pt in text documents and 18 pt for presentations. Also, aim for an 8th Grade reading level and limit the use of jargon. Documents designed specifically for professionals can contain more advanced language and more liberal use of jargon.

- Have someone review the document who was not involved in its creation to look for spelling/grammar errors and confusing content.
  - Pro tip: someone who is not an expert in the subject matter can be ideal for spotting confusing content.

Keep sentences short. Keep text on the left margin and use left justification; limit use of centering text to document titles and maybe slide titles. Never use full justification because of the odd spacing it often creates. The most commonly lauded fonts for accessibility are Verdana, Tahoma, Arial, Georgia, Palatino, Lucida Sans/Lucida Grande, Calibri, Times New Roman, and Helvetica. Finally, avoid angled or vertical text, even in images.

Line spacing should be at least 1.0; 1.5 is commonly used. Use paragraph spacing judiciously to avoid extra carriage returns (return characters); AT devices sometimes read each return character, which is a waste of the user's time or possibly confusing. Instead of using several tabs to line up text, use the Indent feature. (Tabbing or indenting is counter to keeping text on the left margin, but use indenting if you must.) For lists or outlines, be sure to use the List buttons (bullet points, numbers, outlines) instead of typing the characters and trying to space the lines. AT devices can interpret lists easily, so using these tools can save a lot of trouble.

## Links

Use descriptive links instead of the URL (example: [Arizona Department of Education website](#) rather than [www.azed.gov](http://www.azed.gov)). Be both as **descriptive** as possible and **concise** as possible. (It is a balancing act.)

- [take the session survey](#) as opposed to [click here](#)
- best practice: words to avoid in links: here, this, link

Each link within a short document should be unique; in longer documents, try not to use duplicate links more than once per page or section (use your judgment).

Links should be worded in such a way that they can be **understood with no other context**. For some practice, copy the words of each link into a separate, plain text document. Give it to someone else and see if they can tell you the full meaning of the link and where the user will end up. Then, verify (click on) each link when you suppose your document to be complete, especially if it is a link you have used many times before; they sometimes change over time.

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Correct

[Take the session survey](#)

Incorrect

[Click here](#)

Bad (just the URL)

[www.azed.gov/specialeducation](http://www.azed.gov/specialeducation)

Good (not quite clear enough- whose site?)

[Special Ed website](#)

Better (fully descriptive)

[Arizona Department of Education Special Ed website](#)

Best (fully descriptive and more concise)

[ADE Special Ed website](#)

## Images

Every time you place an image into your document, ask yourself a question: **Does this image convey information?** If the answer to the question is **no**, then the image should simply be marked as decorative (in some software, this is called archiving).

If the answer is **yes**, then the image must have alternative text (commonly shortened to **alt text**). Alt text is background text, not visible in the document, that Assistive Technology devices such as screen readers can interpret. The point of alt text is to describe the image accurately so that a person who is blind or visually impaired can interpret the meaning of the image in relation to the nearby text. Also, avoid images of text where the text is angled or vertical.

To add alt text, right-click on the image. In the menu that appears, you should see something like 'Edit Alt Text' (the exact wording may vary depending on what software you use). Do your best to describe the image accurately and without bias. Do not provide any context to the surrounding material; let the reader infer the full context. Finally, as with descriptive links, mentioned above, balance being fully descriptive and fully concise. There is no need to begin with 'image of' or 'picture of'; the AT device will take care of that for you.

## Color and Contrast

It is important to pay attention to contrast of colors. Color and contrast make some documents difficult to read for people with certain visual impairments.

The simplest rule is that dark text goes on a light background and vice versa. The same rule applies with images, but they are a more complicated to work with. If you want to add text in front of an image, add a rectangle or other appropriate shape to provide a background for the text.

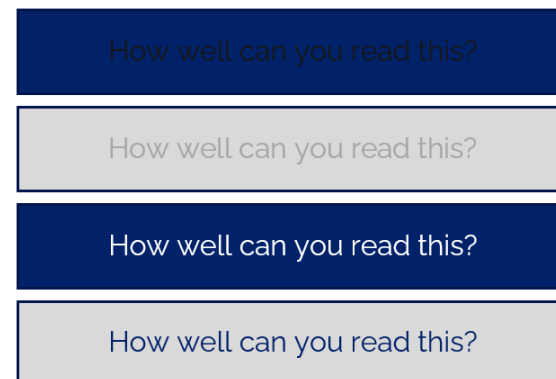
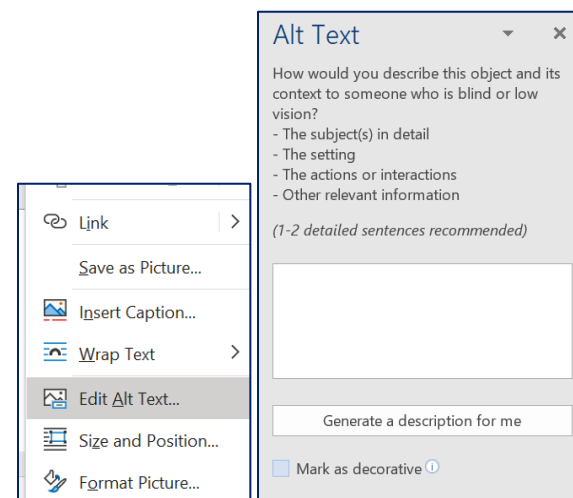
Do not use color alone to convey info (e.g., green font for something positive and red for negative). People with certain kinds of color blindness cannot infer meaning from color alone. Accompany the use of color with symbols and end notes, or maybe italics and underlining.

[WebAIM](#) is an excellent resource for accessibility information. They specialize in website accessibility but have plenty of info about documents as well. WebAIM offers two tools to highlight in this guidance:

- Compare colors as foreground (text) and background via [WebAIM's contrast check tool](#)
- Compare colors as link, used link, and background via [WebAIM's link contrast check tool](#)

Contrast between background and foreground (text) must be maintained at the minimum at a ratio of 4.5:1. For large text (18 pt font size or bigger), the ratio must be 3.5:1 or higher.

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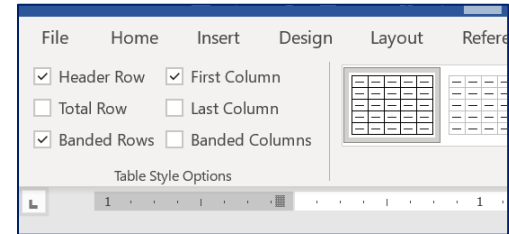


## Tables

Do not use Table structure for layout or format; Tables are meant to be used for data tables. **A header row in a Table is crucial** and must be marked as such; not every Table requires a header column, but when one is present, it should also be marked.

- **Simple rule:** if there is not a proper header row, do not use a Table.

Avoid complex tables, meaning when there is more than one header row or column. Also, avoid leaving header cells blank; the sole exception is if the top left cell, one that is over a header column, could be empty. Finally, if you have blank data cells (it happens), be sure to type 'no data' or something similar in those cells rather than having a dash or keeping the cells blank.



## Software-Specific Guidance

Continue to abide by the guidance listed above and include the info below.

### MS PowerPoint

Every slide must use the **Title content holder**. Titles must not be duplicated within the same presentation. If you have a series of slides within one presentation:

- If there are two in the series, end the second title with "(continued)"
  - Do not abbreviate "continued"
  - It is OK to make it smaller text to keep the eye focused elsewhere
- If there are three or more, mark them "(slide 2 of 5)" and so on

Links that are intended for use during the presentation session should be written out in URL form; for very long links, consider using a link shortener (like Bitly) or a QR code.

- Use CamelCase in links and URLs, which helps screen readers make sense of smooshed-together words.
  - Example: SpecialEducation as opposed to specialeducation

Reading order ensures that the document makes sense according to English reading convention: we read from left to right, then top to bottom, and AT devices interpret reading order the same way. Reading order is more difficult to ensure in presentations than in text documents. There is a new Accessibility Menu in MS Office products when you are doing accessibility checks. It makes verifying object order (reading order) and adding slide titles much easier.

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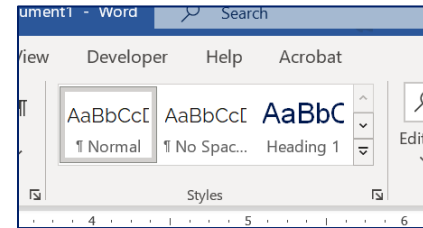


## MS Word

Use the **Styles** feature in the Home menu for documents of more than a couple of pages, which creates a structure of headings. Headings (H#) allow for ease of navigation with AT devices, similar to how sighted readers can scan a table of contents and jump to the proper section.

Headings must go in order. Do not skip any numbers (e.g., H1 to H3 without H2 in between).

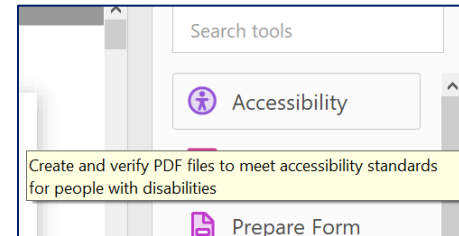
**H1 should be used precisely once**, only for the title of the document. H2 is applied to the main sections of the documents, H3 to subsections, and so on. Try not to go beyond H4.



## Adobe PDF

The Adobe accessibility checker is very thorough. It is a Tool that requires a paid subscription to the Pro version of Acrobat. If you do not have a paid subscription, consider getting it. ESS does not have any solid information on how to make a PDF accessible without the paid subscription, but it can be done.

Two items will always appear in the check: color/contrast and logical reading order. These two items require manual inspection to allow you to do a final visual check, and then you can right-click to pass them when you are sure. Make adjustments to reading order **before** adjusting any tags.



## Google Docs and Slides

Google Docs does not have an accessibility check tool. Browser plug-ins may be available; ESS does not have any information on their quality. The best tool in this case is knowledge. Use the lessons given above for Word and PowerPoint and apply it to the appropriate document type. There is also a pretty good Google support page that gives [advice on making Google Docs accessible](#); supplement the knowledge you gained above with the information on this web page.

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