

Creating Accessible Microsoft Documents

Microsoft Word is currently the most common word processor on the market. Because it is so common, the .doc (and to a lesser extent, .docx) format has become the de facto format for text documents. Word is often used to create files that end up in PDF and HTML. This article will cover several things that you can do to make web content created in Word more accessible.

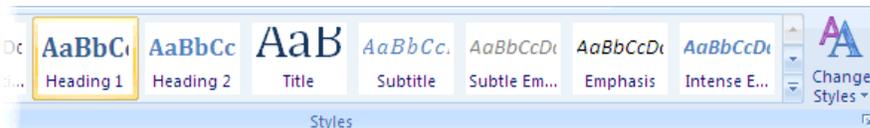
Create Accessible Word Documents

Headings

A good heading structure is probably the most important accessibility consideration in most Word documents. Headings will allow screen reader users to navigate through the page easily and will make the page more usable for everyone. Many people do not use true styles in Word. For example, when creating a heading, they simply change the font, enlarge the font size, make it bold, etc. If this is done, the document has no real structure that can be discerned by a screen reader. In Word, the correct way to provide structure is to use Word styles. This section will outline how to add and edit headings in all common versions of Word. You can also add 1st, 2nd, or 3rd level headings using Ctrl + Alt + 1, 2, or 3 (Cmd + Option on a Mac).

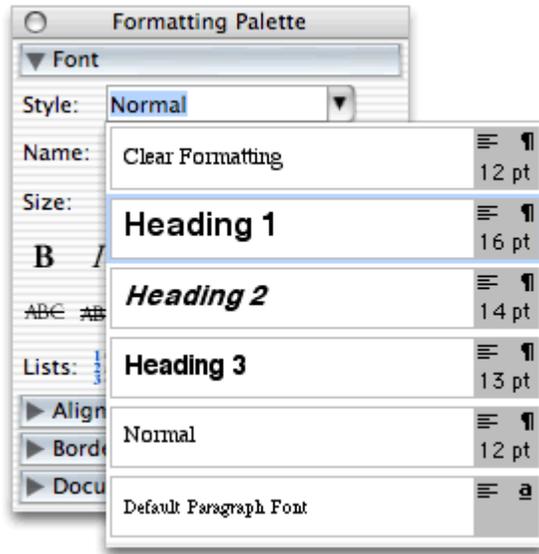
Word 2007 and 2010

Word 2007 and later does a good job of encouraging the use of proper styles. About half of the default toolbar is devoted to styles. To change a block of text, select the text and click on the appropriate style.



Word for Mac

Styles on Word for Mac are available in the Formatting palette. The Styles dropdown list is similar to the list found in Word 2000-2003 for Windows.



Alternative text for images

Images can be given appropriate alternative text in Word. This alt text will be read by a screen reader in a Word file and should remain intact when exporting to HTML or PDF.

Note

- Embedded charts should be given a text description within the context of the document itself. The data that is used to create the chart will be accessible in the original file (it is basically a simple spreadsheet), but will not be included in a PDF or HTML version.
- "Word art" is actually converted to an image in Office 2003-2007 and must be given alt text. It remains text in Office 2010.
- There is **no way** to add alt text to images in Word 2004 or 2008 for Mac.

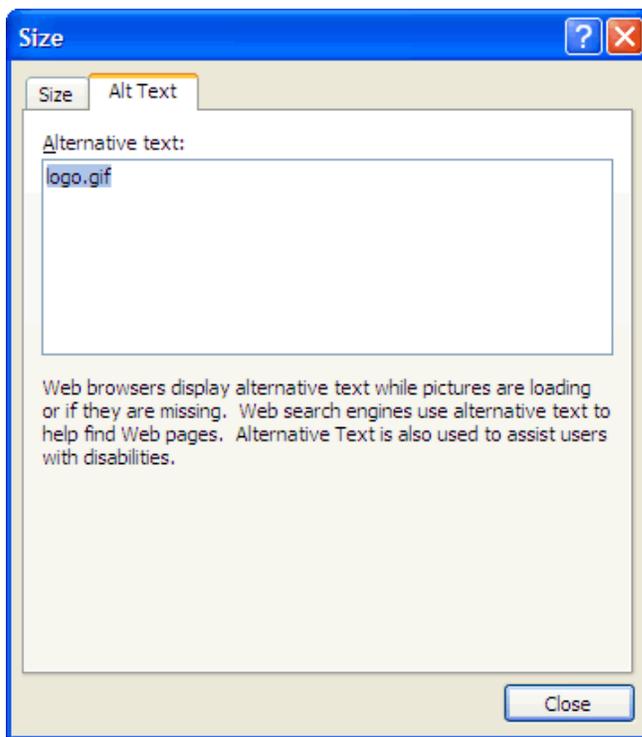
A dialog box will appear. Select the web tab and then add the appropriate alternative text.

Word 2007

Adding alt text to images is less intuitive in Word 2007. To add alternative text, right-click on the picture and select size.



A dialog box will appear. Select the Alt Text tab. You will notice that the image filename is entered into the field by default. The filename is never appropriate alternative text. This functionality will almost certainly result in misuse of the alt attribute.

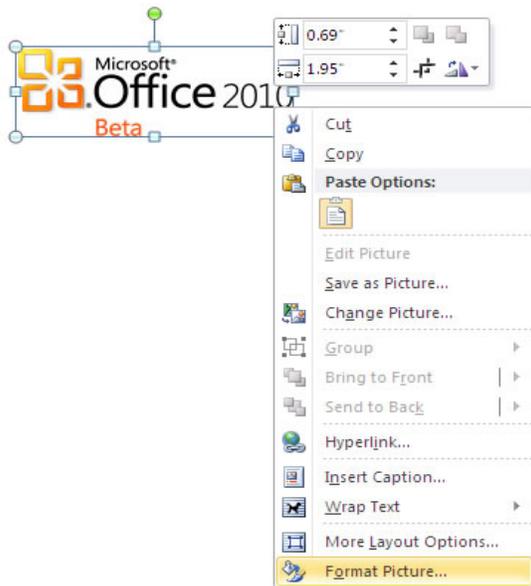


Replace the filename with appropriate alternative text. For this image, an

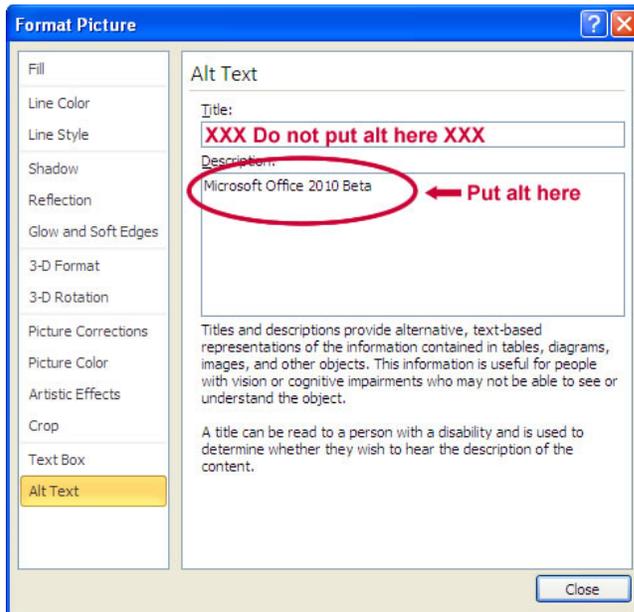
example would be something like "WebAIM - Web Accessibility in Mind".

Word 2010

Word 2010 moved the alt text field back to an intuitive place, but made things even more confusing by creating two fields for alt text. To add alt text to an image, Select the Format Picture option.



With the Format Picture menu open, select the option for Alt Text in the sidebar. Two fields will appear, one labeled Title and one labeled Description. For best results, add appropriate alt text to the Description field, not the Title field. Information in the Title field will not be saved as alt text when the file is saved as HTML.



If you want to be extra safe, you can duplicate the alt text in both the Title and Description fields.

Data tables and accessibility issues

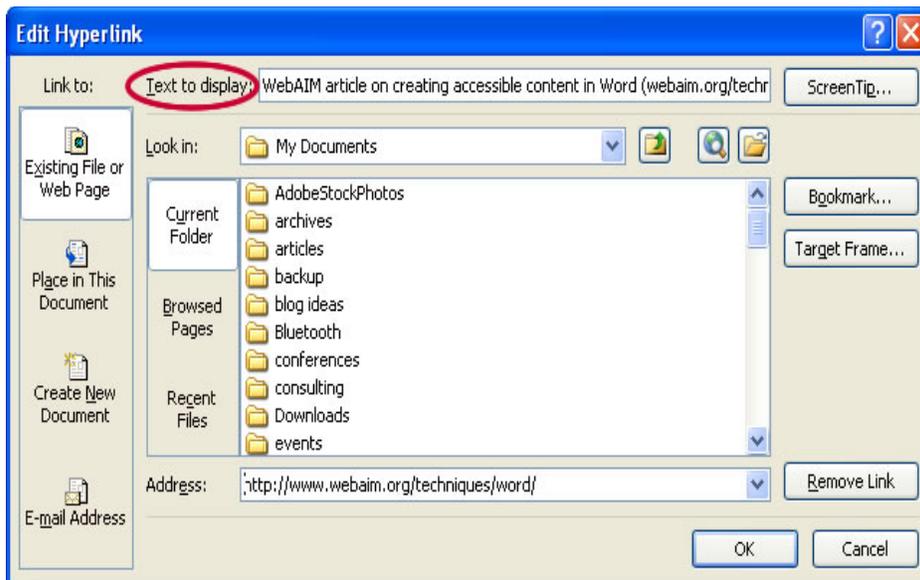
There is no way to assign table headers or <th> elements to a table created in Word. You can indicate that a row should repeat as header on the top of each page; in the Table Properties menu.

When saved as PDF, the cells in the first row are detected as table headers, though the headers are not maintained if the file is saved as HTML. Instead, the cells will all be contained in a <thead> element. The <thead>, <tfoot>, and <tbody> are used to divide the tables into the three main parts of a data table. While the inclusion of the <thead> element poses no problems, it does not replace the need for the <th> elements for all table headers. There is no way to add row headers (headers across the side of a table) in Word.

Links

Hyperlinks are usually created in Word by pasting the full URL into a page (e.g., <http://webaim.org/techniques/word/>) and hitting space, enter, or some other key.

This automatically creates a link. It's simple, but the URL may not make sense to the reader. To change the hyperlink text, select a link, right click and select Edit Hyperlink, or select Ctrl + K (Cmd + K on a Mac). Change the URL in the Text to display field to something more descriptive.



If you are creating a Word document that may be both printed and read electronically, you may want to include the URL and a description in the link text.

Other principles

In addition to the principles addressed above, most web accessibility principles can also be applied to files created in Word. The following is a list of a few other important accessibility principles:

- Use true numbered and bulleted lists.
- Ensure that font size is sufficient, usually around 12 points or more.
- Provide sufficient contrast.
- Don't use color as the only way to convey content.
- Use true columns, not tables or columns created by hand with the Tab key.
- Provide a table of contents, especially for long documents. If you have a good heading structure, creating a table of contents is easy.
- Use simple language.

Source: <http://webaim.org/techniques/word/>