

Guidelines for creating accessible documents

Preparing a Word document

Restrict your font usage by pre-setting styles (selecting **Styles and formatting** from the **Format** menu in Word), for instance:

- Heading 1 = Verdana 21.5pt
- Heading 2 = Verdana 18pt
- Heading 3 = Verdana 14pt
- Normal = Verdana 12pt

You can amend the default stylings to suit your document by right-clicking on a format and selecting **Modify**.

Simple, non-serif fonts such as Arial, Helvetica and Verdana are preferable from an accessibility perspective, and 12pt should be considered to be the minimum text size. Italic text should be avoided.

Screen reader software packages use headings to help the user navigate around the document. Headings should therefore be used in a structured fashion with only one Heading 1 at the top of your document, Heading 2 for sub-headings and Heading 3 for sub-sub-headings. If you wish to draw attention to a particular piece of text, for instance and introductory paragraph, use bold text.

Your paragraphs should always be left-aligned. Don't justify text – uneven spacing between words can be distracting.

Hyperlinks should be [blue and underlined](#), and wherever a document is intended for reading on a screen (as opposed to printing) the wording of the link should be a description of the page that is being linked to, not the actual URL.

Images should always have alt text tags, describing the content clearly and concisely. You can edit alt tags by right-clicking on an image, selecting **Format picture** and then clicking on the **Web** tab.

When a document is intended to be read on a screen consider using a cream background. This will make black text easier to read as a cream background produces less glare than white.

The document's language must be specified. To specify a language in Word:

- Go to **File > Properties**
- Click on the **Custom** tab
- Select **Language** from the list under **Name**
- Type **English** in the value field
- Click **Add**, then **OK**

Creating a PDF file

Adobe Acrobat offers a series of features relating to accessibility, including an auditing tool that identifies problems with your document and guidance on how to rectify any problems. It is often the case that formatting information provided in the Word document doesn't translate properly to the PDF so a degree of re-work may be necessary.

Open your PDF in Acrobat, then conduct an accessibility check by selecting **Advanced > Accessibility > Full Check**. Ensure that all checkboxes are ticked except for 'Create comments in document', and click **Start Checking**.

A report will appear on the left of your screen detailing any issues, with links to both the object at fault and help files on how to correct the problem.

A few common issues:

- Language information is not preserved in the translation to PDF. You can specify the language of your PDF document in **File > Properties**. Click on the **Advanced** tab and amend the **Language** tab in the **Reading Options** section.
- Occasionally an image's alt tag will be lost in the translation to PDF. You can replace it using the **Touch up object** tool in the **Tools > Advanced Editing** menu.
- The reading order that is defined in Word by the use of Heading and Paragraph formatting is often not preserved correctly when a document is exported as a PDF. You should always check and correct the reading order of your PDF using the **Touch up reading order** tool in the **Tools > Advanced Editing** menu. This allows you to highlight sections of your document and specify which are headings and body text.
- Acrobat will point out images that do not have content associated with them. This is only a problem if the image is essential for the document to be understood. If the image is simply intended to add visual interest it should be marked as an **artefact**, since artefacts are skipped by screen readers. Images can be marked as artefacts using the **Touch up reading order** tool: first highlight the images in question, then click **Background**.

Once you have corrected as many issues as possible, run another Full Check to ensure that the document is ready for distribution.