# Improving Accessibility for Office Documents

This guide can help you improve the accessibility of Word documents and PowerPoint presentations for viewers with vision impairment.

Add Alternative Text

A person with vision impairment may not be able to see a picture or diagram. A screen reader can read text aloud, but it cannot describe what a picture looks like unless the author of the document adds this description, called **alternative text** or **alt text**. To add alt text:

1. Right-click an image
2. Select **Format Picture > Layout & Properties**
3. Select **Alt Text**
4. Type a description and a title
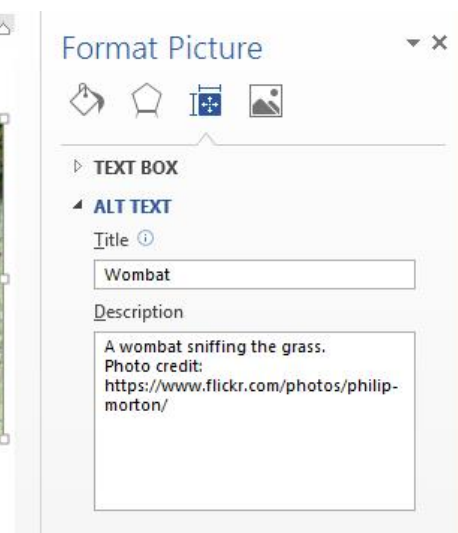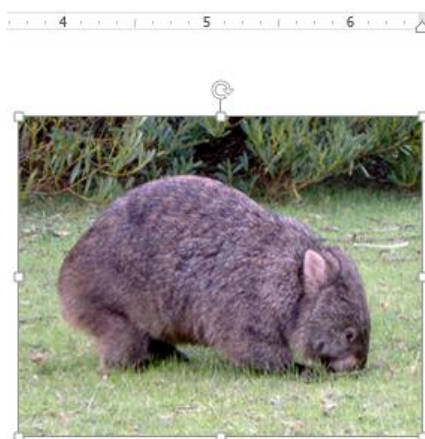
The same technique can be used to add alt text to shapes, charts, and other graphics.

Use Meaningful Links

Hyperlinks to other files or web addresses can be embedded in a document. Unfortunately, if the text of a link is **Click Here** or similar non-descriptive text, little information is conveyed about the link. Following a link is onerous for someone using a screen reader, particularly if the linked document is itself not formatted in an accessible way.

Make sure that the displayed text is a concise summary of the document you are linking to.

Format Your Document Logically

When people format a Word document, their primary concern is often aesthetics. However, documents have structure as well. If you use the styles such as **Normal**, **Title**, **Heading 1**, **Heading 2**, and others in the **Styles** section of the **Home** tab, you are marking the *function* of each piece of text. Although these styles may not initially appear with the color, size, or font you wish to use, the appearance of each style can easily be changed. Using styles allows you to structure your document in a way that allows better navigation with a screen reader. In addition, consistent use of styles can allow a document to be globally reformatted by redefining styles instead of changing each heading individually.

Bulleted and ordered lists also give a document structure that a screen reader can follow. Larger documents should include section breaks.

Maintain High Contrast between Text and its Background

Text should always contrast strongly against its background to maximize visibility. The default foreground and background colors provided should normally have a high contrast level, but custom colors you add may not.

Avoid Color as the Only Way to Convey Information

Color is a useful way to mark text or images, but around 8% of the male population and around 0.5% of the female population have some form of color blindness. Although red-green color blindness is the most common, some people cannot distinguish any colors. When differentiating content with colors, also differentiate in some other way, such as shape.

Find Problems You Might Have Missed

The Accessibility Checker can automatically find some problems with your document, such as images without alt text. To run the Accessibility Checker, go to the **File** tab. Under **Info**, click **Check for Issues** and select **Check Accessibility**.

The Accessibility Checker cannot check everything, but it may catch some issues you have missed.

Other Resources

This guide focuses primarily on Word documents, but the same ideas are applicable to other Microsoft Office documents, including PowerPoint presentations. For PowerPoint presentations, it is also important to title each slide clearly and to use a font size large enough that even students with some vision impairment will be able to read the content.

Below are links to other guides for improving the accessibility of Microsoft Office documents:

- Microsoft's guide to making Word documents accessible: https://support.office.com/en-gb/article/Make-your-Word-documents-accessible-d9bf3683-87ac-47ea-b91a-78dcacb3c66d
- Microsoft's guide to making PowerPoint presentations accessible: https://support.office.com/en-gb/article/Make-your-PowerPoint-presentations-accessible-6f7772b2-2f33-4bd2-8ca7-dae3b2b3ef25
- Social Security Administration's guide to authoring accessible documents: https://www.ssa.gov/accessibility/files/The_Social_Security_Administration_Accessible_Document_Authoring_Guide_2.1.2.pdf
- State of California's guide to creating accessible Word documents: http://www.dor.ca.gov/DisabilityAccessInfo/DAS-Docs/Seven-Steps-to-Creating-an-Accessible-Word-document-rev-062016.pdf
- State of California's guide to creating accessible PowerPoint presentations: https://www.dor.ca.gov/DisabilityAccessInfo/DAS-Docs/Seven-Steps-to-Creating-an-Accessible-PowerPoint-Slideshow-rev-062016.pdf
- WebAIM's guide to accessible Word documents: http://webaim.org/techniques/word/