

Creating Accessible Word Documents and PDF Files

Online Accessibility Series

Overview: If first created with accessibility in mind, Word documents can be one of the most accessible file formats for individuals who are blind or have low-vision. You can also use Microsoft Word to create PDF files that are accessible.

While the instructions given here are for the Office 2013 version of Word, it is possible to accomplish everything here in older versions of Microsoft Word, though the specific steps may be slightly different. If you need help with an older version of Microsoft Word, please contact Beth Case (beth.case@louisville.edu or 502-852-7689).

This document will cover four areas that will make your Word files accessible and easy to use by individuals with disabilities:

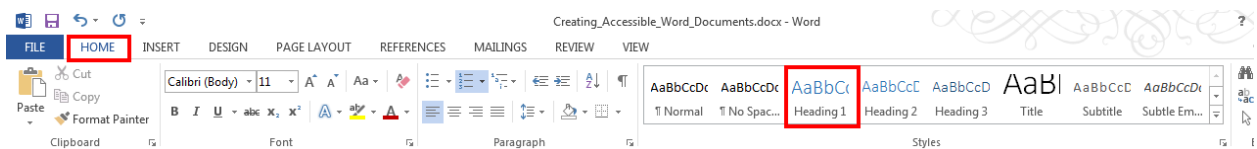
- 1) Styles
- 2) Alt Text
- 3) Tables
- 4) Descriptive Links

1) Styles

The **Styles** tool applies pre-determined formatting to parts of your document text, such as the title, headings, and subheadings. In addition to affecting the appearance of the text, **Styles** creates hidden code behind the text that screenreaders can use to help blind users navigate the document.

To apply a style:

- 1) Highlight the text you want to apply the style to.



- 2) Choose the *Home* tab.
- 3) Choose the **Style** you want to apply. In the above example, it's the **Heading 1** style.



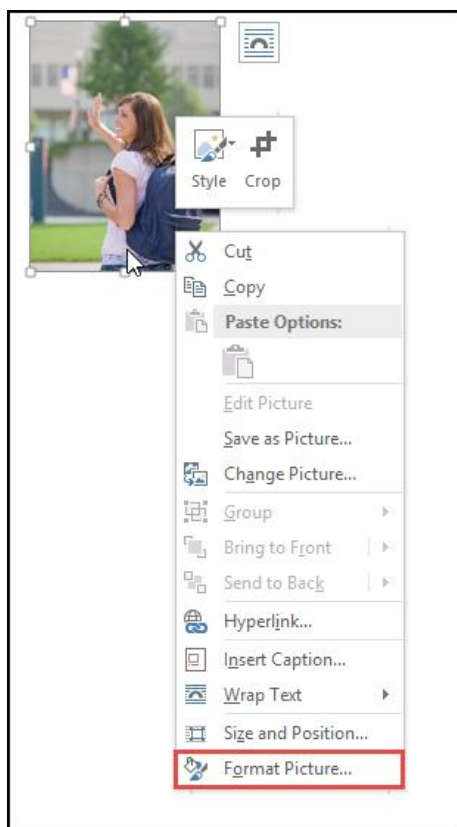
- 4) There are a number of pre-formatted **Styles** you can use to change the appearance of your document. To see them, choose the *Design* tab.

- 5) You can also customize a style to your own specifications. For more information on how to do this and other features of **Styles**, see <http://blogs.office.com/2012/09/06/changing-your-style-in-the-new-word/>.
- 6) If you have any questions, Beth Case (beth.case@louisville.edu or 502-852-7689) is available for assistance.

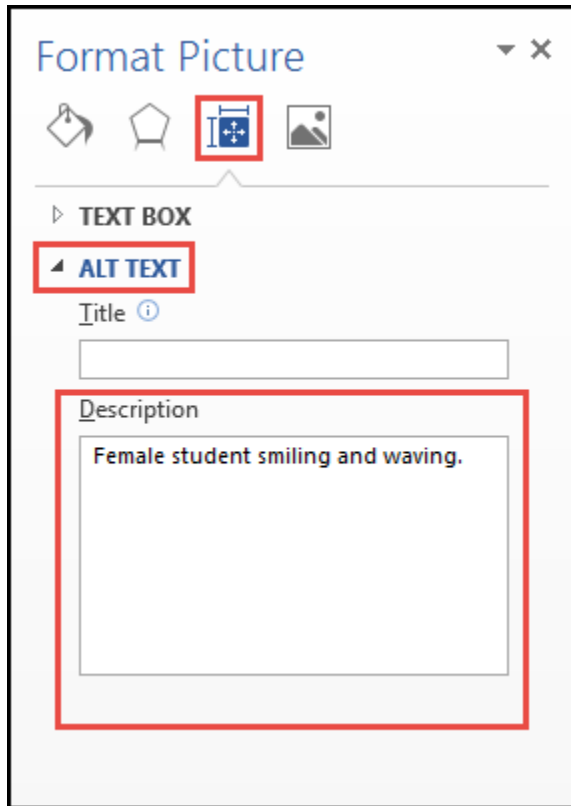
2) Alt (Alternative) Text

Because users who are blind cannot see pictures and images, the information provided in those images must be conveyed in a different way. Alt text (short for *alternative text*) is a short description of an image that is hidden from view but can be read aloud by screenreaders, software which reads text on a computer out loud for individuals with vision loss. Writing a useful alt text description takes some practice and is covered in another document, **Writing Effective Alt Text**. Here you will see how to add it to your document, once it's written.

- 1) Insert the image.



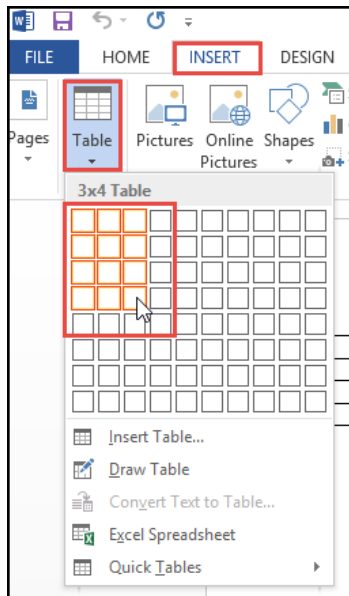
- 2) Right click on the image and choose **Format Picture**.



- 3) Choose **Layout & Properties** (looks like a blue box with arrows).
- 4) Choose **Alt Text**.
- 5) Type the Alt Text into the **Description** box.
- 6) If you have any questions, Beth Case (beth.case@louisville.edu or 502-852-7689) is available for assistance.

3) Tables

Whenever you have columnar information to present, use the **Tables** tool in Word instead of the Tab key or spacebar. Similar to **Styles**, the **Tables** tool contains code that helps the screenreader accurately convey information contained in a table to the user.



- 1) Click *Insert* tab.
- 2) Click **Table**.
- 3) Highlight the number of rows and columns you think you will need. Don't worry, you can add or remove rows and columns later.
- 4) Left click in the bottom right box.

Week	Readings	Assignment
Week 1	Chapters 1 and 2	Opinion paper 1
Week 2	Chapters 3 and 4	Discussion board post
Week 3	Chapters 5 and 6	Quiz 1

- 5) Enter the information into the cells.
- 6) Make sure to have a header row, column, or both as appropriate.
- 7) If you have any questions, Beth Case (beth.case@louisville.edu or 502-852-7689) is available for assistance.

4) Descriptive Links

Students who use screenreaders can have the computer read all the links on the page. It will only read the words that are linked, therefore having links that describe where they go is most helpful. For example:

- 1) Example of what to avoid:

Click [here](#) to go to Blackboard. ("Here" doesn't say where the link goes.)

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2) Acceptable example:

Click <http://blackboard.louisville.edu/> to go to Blackboard. (The link is long and it may or may not be clear where it goes.)

3) Best example:

Go to [Blackboard](#). (“Blackboard” clearly says where the link leads to.)

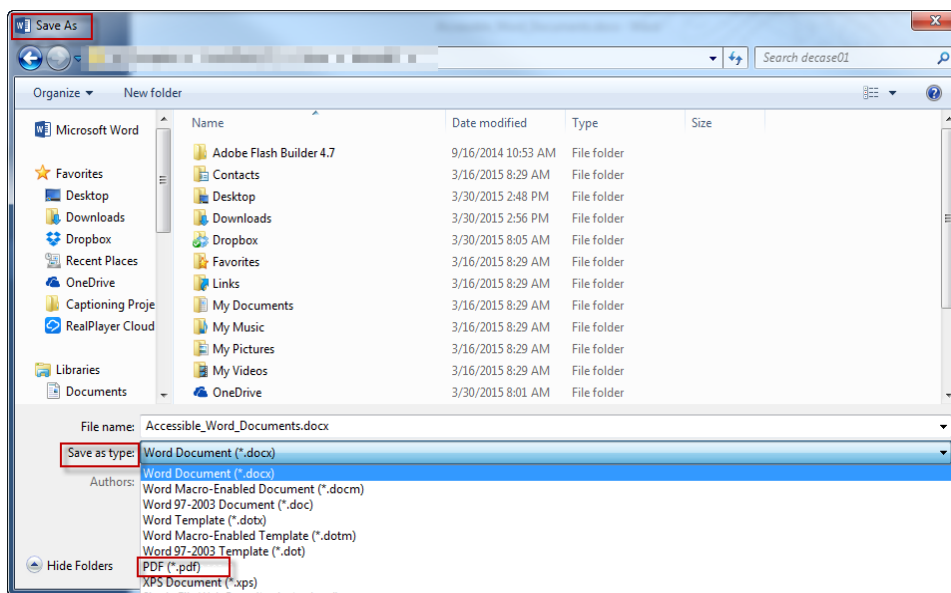
4) If you want, you can include the URL like this:

Go to [Blackboard](#) (<http://blackboard.louisville.edu/>). (The link, “Blackboard”, clearly says where the link goes, but the unlinked URL is there for reference when the document is printed.)

Saving as an Accessible PDF

If you would like to save your document as a PDF:

- 1) Choose the *File* tab.
- 2) Choose **Save As**.
- 3) Navigate to where you want to save your file.



- 4) Chose **PDF (*.pdf)** from the **Save as Type** drop down menu and click **Save**.
- 5) **DO NOT** use Print to PDF
- 6) This only works on Windows computers. If you are using a Mac, you will need to take your file to a Windows computer to save it as an accessible PDF.

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