WORD AND PDFS

WHY ARE PDFS A PROBLEM?

Many PDF documents are not actually text, but rather an *image* of text, which is inaccessible to most assistive technology. Even "accessible" PDFs may still have problems, especially if it is complex with columns, images, margin notes, etc.

HOW DO I KNOW IF MY PDFS ARE ACCESSIBLE?

Open the document and try to highlight some text using the computer mouse. If you cannot highlight text, the document is not accessible. If you can highlight text, there may still be things you can do to improve its usability.

OPEN THE DOCUMENT IN MICROSOFT WORD

Of course, this is easiest if you are creating the document yourself. If you are scanning in another document, such as a magazine article, it will take a little more work, as you need to convert the image of text into actual text using an OCR program. How to do this is beyond the scope of this document.

TAG THE DOCUMENT

When formatting your title and headings, use the styles built into Microsoft Word instead of bold, italics, underlines or different fonts. Assistive technology will recognize the text as a title or header and communicate that information to the student.

First, select the "Home" tab across the top of the screen. You should see a section on the toolbar called "Styles". There will be boxes with labels such as "Normal", "Heading 1", "Heading 2", "Title", etc. The exact options will vary depending on the style you have chosen.

Next, highlight the text you want to tag, such as the title. Click on the box from the Style menu that says "Title". You should notice that the appearance of the title changes. If you don't like the way the title appears, just leave it for now. You will be able to change it later.

Now highlight a section heading in your document and click "Heading 1" from the Style bar. If you have subheadings, do the same thing, but select "Heading 2". If you have text that you want to emphasize, try the "Emphasis" or "Strong" options. The goal is to use the Style buttons to format your text instead of manually changing the font or using bold, italics, underlines, etc.

If you don't like the general look of the document, after you have finished tagging, click on "Change Styles" in the upper right hand corner, then mouse over "Style Set". As you choose different style sets, notice that the format of your document changes. Because you have identified the headings and so forth, you can easily change the look of your document. You can tweak the layout even more by changing colors, fonts, etc. Do not change the names of the styles (i.e., Heading 1, Heading 2, etc.).

TABLES AND COLUMNS

If you need to use tables or columns in your document, use the appropriate Microsoft Word tools instead of using the space bar or TAB to line up your text. Where appropriate, include headings for your columns or rows. Do not use tables just for layout.

TEXT BOXES

Don't use them unless absolutely unavoidable. Most screen readers will skip over them.

IMAGES

If you have pictures or graphics in your document, use Alt Text to provide a description of the picture for those who cannot see it. Right click on the image and choose "size". There will be a tab for alt text. Type your descriptive text in this area.

SAVE AS PDF

At this point, you can save the document as a Word file and have an accessible and easily navigable Word document. If you want to save it as a PDF, go to the Office Button in the upper left corner and choose "Save As". If PDF is not an option, you will need to download the "Save as PDF" plug-in from the Microsoft website. If you have Adobe Acrobat installed on your computer, you can also use the "Save as Adobe PDF" option. Other ways of creating PDFs, such as programs that let you print to PDF are not guaranteed to save the tags.

NOTES

This is a simple way to create accessible PDFs for relatively simple documents that requires only Microsoft Word. If you have a complex document, such as a text book, which has lots of columns, notes in the margins, many graphics with captions, etc., you will want to use Adobe Acrobat and its more advanced accessibility features.