

Word Document Accessibility Checklist

Use this checklist every time you create or review a Word document for accessibility.

1 — DOCUMENT STRUCTURE

- Use built-in Heading styles (Heading 1, 2, 3) — never fake headings with bold text

Home → Styles panel → select the correct heading level

- Document has one Heading 1 only — the document title

- Headings follow a logical hierarchy — no skipped levels (e.g. H1 → H3)

- Body text uses the Normal style — not a manually formatted paragraph

- No content is conveyed through colour alone

If colour is used to highlight something, add a label or symbol too

- Colour contrast is sufficient — text is readable on its background

Use the free WebAIM Contrast Checker at webaim.org/resources/contrastchecker

- Font size is at least 11pt for body text

- No full-caps text blocks — use sentence case instead

2 — IMAGES & TABLES

- Every image has alt text that describes its content or purpose

Right-click image → Edit Alt Text → write a clear description

- Decorative images are marked as decorative

Right-click → Edit Alt Text → check 'Mark as decorative'

- Alt text does not start with 'Image of' or 'Picture of'

- Charts and graphs have alt text that describes the key data insight

- Tables are used for data only — not for page layout

- Tables have a designated header row

Click table → Table Design tab → check 'Header Row'

- Tables do not have merged or split cells where avoidable

- No nested tables

3 — LINKS & LANGUAGE

- All hyperlinks use descriptive text — never 'click here' or a bare URL

e.g. 'Read the Accessible Canada Act' not 'click here' or 'https://...'

- Link text makes sense out of context — it works when read alone

- Document language is set correctly

File → Info → Properties → Advanced Properties → Summary tab → Language field

- If the document switches language mid-text, those sections are tagged

Select text → Review → Language → Set Proofing Language

4 — ACCESSIBILITY CHECKER & EXPORT

- Run the built-in Accessibility Checker before saving

Review tab → Check Accessibility → resolve all Errors and Warnings

- Document title is set in the file properties

File → Info → Properties → Title field

- Document has no blank paragraphs used for spacing — use paragraph spacing instead

Format → Paragraph → Space Before / Space After

- No floating text boxes or shapes that aren't inline with text

- If exporting to PDF: use Save As → PDF → Options → check 'Document structure tags for accessibility'

Do not use Print to PDF — it strips accessibility tags

- Verify the exported PDF in Adobe Acrobat's Accessibility Checker or PAC 2024