

Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 ensures that millions of Americans with disabilities have equivalent access to information regardless of how they access it. Electronic documents must meet certain guidelines and requirements in order to be compliant with Section 508. Compliance is more than meeting government regulations, at its heart, it's about ensuring all Americans have the opportunity to fully engage and contribute to society.

So, how do we make Microsoft Word Documents 508 compliant? Well, we start at the very beginning, with a properly named and formatted document. The document's file name should be clear, concise, and under 30 characters, avoiding spaces and special characters. Document properties should also be filled out correctly. To do this, go to File, and under Info and Properties, click on "Show All Properties."

Fill out the Title, Tags (keywords), Subject, and Author (which should be IHS and the Department or Organization). It is important to use recommended, non-decorative fonts. Times New Roman, Arial, and Helvetica are recommended over Old English or a script, even for headers and titles. Documents must not have background images or watermarks and must use automatic page numbering fields. Word has many built in templates to help create a properly formatted document.

If the document needs a table of contents, use Microsoft Word's Table of Contents feature. To do this, first apply styles to the text in the document, such as Headers, that will appear in the Table of Contents by clicking the Home tab and selecting a Style. Use the same styles throughout the document to create a clear, easy-to-follow hierarchical structure. Next, click where the table of contents should go.

Then, click the References tab, Table of Contents, and choose Automatic Table from the gallery of styles. This allows assistive technologies to better understand the document and how its different sections relate to the whole. When writing the actual content, it is important to follow a few rules. Create Footnotes using the Footnotes linking tool. Use the automatic bullet lists available in the application.

Do not manually type lists preceded by special characters, such as hyphens, asterisks, or wingdings. Provide an alternative method of emphasizing text, do not use color alone. A reader who is color blind may not be able to see the emphasis. Utilize tabs instead of repeated spacing, paragraph spacing instead of hard returns, and page breaks instead of hard returns. To include URLs in your content, make sure hyperlinks contain the full and correct URL, including <http://> or <https://>.

When linking text avoid using something like "Click here," use more descriptive text. If someone is using assistive technology to find hyperlinks in the document (like quickly scanning the document for blue and an underline), the phrase "Click Here" will not tell them anything useful about the link. And also note: please reserve underlines only for hyperlinks, this will help curtail any visual confusion. When using data tables in a document there are a few important rules to follow: Avoid using merged cells and keep tables as simple as possible.

All tables should have a descriptive caption. Select the table, click References in the ribbon, and then Insert Caption. Row and header columns must be identified starting with the first left hand column. Tables that span multiple pages of a document must have those headings repeated on each page. In the Table Properties under the Row tab "Allow row to break across pages" must be unchecked. Tables must follow a standard, logical reading order: left to right, top to bottom. Don't use tabs or spaces to create table-like structures.

It is important that there is alternative, meaningful text provided for each image. Why is this important? Let's look at the following image in a document. An assistive screen reader would read this part of the document as: "Motivational speakers can help motivate your staff. Let's get motivated!"

Some meaning is lost without the image. So let's add alternate text that will be read by the screen reader. Do this by right clicking on the image and selecting Format Picture and then the Alt Text tab. What you add here is important. Using the file name for the image or repeating the text around the image isn't helpful. The screen reader will read "Motivational speakers can help motivate your staff. Let's get motivated! Let's get motivated!"

Let's try something else. Let's use one word, "meeting" in the alt text. Now it reads "Motivational speakers can help motivate your staff. Meeting let's get motivated!" "Meeting" is a little bit more descriptive, but the lack of punctuation makes the reader read the sentences incorrectly. One more change, add a descriptive phrase and the document reads: "Motivational speakers can help motivate your staff. A meeting of people getting excited by a speaker. Let's get motivated!" The alternate text now supplies an equivalent experience for the image to a user using assistive technology. Repeat these steps for all other images.

Before adding alternative text, make sure all parts of a vector graphic are grouped. Hold control and select all the related images and then, under the Format Tab, in the Arrange group, click the Group icon.

In addition to using alternate text for images, avoid using any animated, blinking images for text. Complex images (like charts and graphs) must have descriptive text immediately after the image. Image Layout must be set "In Line with Text" for all images. Do not use floating text boxes for graphics or text. View the document in Print Preview and check to see if it flows correctly from page to page. Look out for image placement, table format, and stray/orphaned lines or characters. Finally, make sure that any comments or edits have been deleted or committed to the document. If there is no way to make the document, as is, compliant, create an alternate document that is compliant.

The IHS Web Document Specialist will review documents for compliancy as a final check before it goes online. Thanks for watching. Please review the Web Services page for more about Section 508 compliance and IHS Web standards.