



# Template guidelines

To ensure content is accessible by people of all abilities, there are some key best practices for creating documents in Word and other Microsoft programs.

In brief, you should:

* use built-in headings and style, and keep styling simple (reduce italics, all caps, etc.)
* create a table of contents for longer documents
* minimise use of columns
* avoid tables where possible and present the data in another way; keep tables simple and structured if they must be used
* minimise use of purely decorative images and provide a text alternative (alt text) for all visual content, including images, graphs and tables
* not rely on colour alone to convey meaning
* provide sufficient contrast between text and background.

## Plain English

Presenting your information in plain language improves accessibility for everyone and is a requirement across the department. You should:

* clearly explain technical terms and avoid jargon
* keep text to a minimum to convey your meaning
* lead with key messages
* use headings and subheadings in logical order to break up information
* use short sentences and dot points for easy reading.

## Formatting documents and styles

Use built-in headings, formatting and styles for a consistent visual look and logical structure (do not skip heading levels). This makes it easier for assistive technology to navigate the content.

Styles have been added to this document. See below for names and how they display.

# Heading 1 style

## Heading 2 style

### Heading 3 style

Body copy – use ‘Normal’ style

* List Bullet
* List Bullet

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Default table style | No Spacing style |
| No spacing style |  |
|  |  |

Table – Department of Primary Industries-default

Caption style

### Columns

Minimise the use of multiple columns as they may be harder to navigate. Long columns also require online users to scroll up and down to read. Use the columns tool (Page Layout > Columns) rather than the tab key or spacebar, as these can cause issues with a screen reader.

### Page breaks

Use the page break function (Insert > Page Break) rather than pressing the enter key multiple times to start a new page. Repeated blank characters/returns are inaccessible.

### Text boxes

Avoid using text boxes as the content they contain is not accessible.

### Visuals (images, graphs, illustrations, etc.)

Alt text must be included with all visuals, including charts and graphs. This alternative text description provides meaning or purpose to people who can’t see the screen. Images of text are not adjustable and if you must use an image with text in it, repeat the text in the document.

Clearly describe the visual to convey information and do not repeat the caption to avoid users hearing the same information twice. Charts and graphs may require longer descriptions for understanding but keep alt text as concise as possible – you don’t need to describe every aspect of the image.

Right click on image > Format Picture > Alt text (under Layout & Properties). Only add alt text in the main ‘Description’ box. Never start with ‘Image of…’ – assistive technologies know it is an image.

If alt text is not needed for an image (if the image is purely decorative or has a text description in the document), ‘null’ the alt text so assistive technologies know to ignore it or remove the image entirely. To null the alt text, place two double quotation marks with no spaces in the ‘Description’ field (that is = “”).



Image – Caption

### Tables

If you must use a table, keep the structure simple. Ensure it isn’t a fixed width and doesn’t contain split or merged cells or nested tables. Use table headers and avoid completely blank rows or columns.

To apply the correct table style, click in the table, select the Table Design tab and choose the ‘Department of Primary Industries-default’ selection in the table grid.

For headings at the top of columns, click in the table, select the Table Design tab and click the ‘Header row’ checkbox. If your table spans more than one page, right click in the table and choose Table Properties > Row and select the option ‘repeat as header row at the top of each page’.

To add alt text to your table, right click on the table and choose Table Properties > Alt Text tab, and insert into ‘Description’ area.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Header row |  |  |
| Use ‘No Spacing’ style | ­ |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |

Table : Select: ‘References > Insert Caption’

### Colour and contrast

Do not rely on colour alone to convey meaning; people who are visually impaired might miss out on information conveyed by particular colours. This is important with charts and other illustrations but also applies when using shading (e.g. red, amber or green to signify progress of a project). Symbols, borders or patterns in addition to colour can distinguish information.

It is also important to use a high level of contrast between text and background for easy reading. We encourage care with the use of background colour, not only for readability of text but also as it adds to the cost of printing. Download Vision Australia’s free [Colour Contrast Analyser](https://www.visionaustralia.org/business-consulting/digital-access/resources/colour-contrast-analyser) to determine whether the colour combination you are using passes the recommended accessibility level AA.

### Hyperlinks

Avoid URLs and instead add meaningful hyperlink text that provides clear and accurate information about the destination – unclear information like ‘click here’ or ‘learn more’ provides no context to a person using assistive technology.

Screen readers can provide users with a list of links that can be scanned (ignoring the rest of the content). Link descriptions that are as meaningful as possible helps users choose from these lists.

## Accessibility checker in Microsoft Word

Many Microsoft products have an accessibility checker – a tool that reviews content, flags accessibility issues and suggests how you can resolve these. However, it does not pick up everything so it should only be used as a backup.

The checker runs in the background and places reminders in the status bar, but for manual launch, select Review > Check Accessibility.

The Microsoft website has more information on [making your Word documents accessible](https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/office/make-your-word-documents-accessible-to-people-with-disabilities-d9bf3683-87ac-47ea-b91a-78dcacb3c66d?ctt=3&correlationid=b3c40249-a7fa-4300-9c12-5d0f79242a78&ui=en-us&rs=en-us&ad=us) to people with disability.

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