# Tips to improve the accessibility of Word documents

This document summarises the tips shared during the ‘Making Word documents as accessible as possible’ session CDIO’s Digital Inclusion, Standards and Culture team ran as part of Global Accessibility Awareness Day 2020.

As part of the session there were demonstrations on how to do things mention. outside of the session you can find out how to do things using the Help facility within Word. Press F1, or Fn button + F1 to open Help then use the search.

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## General tips on font and font size

### Font

Use a font such as Arial or Calibri - don’t use Times New Roman.

### Font size

Have your main text no smaller than 12pt.

## Formatting your paragraphs of text

### Text alignment

Don’t justify your text – align your text to the left.

### Headings

Use headings to give your content structure and use formal heading styles to identify the structure.

Headings must be used in order so that they correctly show the outline of your document – as you would expect to see in a table of contents or the index of a book. For example

Heading 1 [the main heading and only used once in a document]

Heading 2

Heading 3

Heading 2

Heading 3

Heading 2

### Line and Paragraph spacing

Use the facility to add space before and after paragraphs rather than adding blank lines. Avoiding dense blocks of text is important for users who may have dyslexia or low concentration, and not using blank lines and spaces to layout your text means there is less information for a screen reader to read out meaning less clutter/noise for the person listening.

### Page breaks

If you want to ensure text starts on a new page insert a page break – don’t insert lots of blank lines.

## Tables

Don’t use tables to make your content layout nice. Table are only to be used for a table of data when it is appropriate to know there are columns and cells of data.

### Inappropriate use of a table

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Good points** | **Things to improve** |
| * Coming up with ideas * Making unexpected connections * Storytelling | * Being tidy * Staying on task |

The information in this table does not need to be shown in columns and rows – it would be much clearer and easier to understand presented as two bullet lists – a list of good points, and a list of things to improve.

Users of screen reading software are informed that information is in a table, and for something like this they would be informed that there was a table, 2 columns and 2 rows. Row 1 column 1 Good points; row 1 column 2 Things to improve. Row 2 column 1 Coming up with ideas and so on. There is a lot more information given to the user and using a table when it is not needed is making following and understanding the information a more complicated experience than it needs to be.

### Good use of a table

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Tax regime** | **Tax received** |
| Income Tax | £170 billion |
| National Insurance contributions | £150 billion |
| Corporation Tax | $48 billion |

### Formatting your table of data

* Give the table a title or have some introductory text before the table so the context of the information in the table is clear
* Always have the column headings marked as a header row
* Always have the column headings marked to repeat so that if the table is split over more than one page the heading will always be shown
* Make tables a suitable width depending on their contents. It is more difficult to scan rows in a table that are wider than they need to be
* Align the content in tables to the top of the cell. This makes the information easier to scan and immediately visible.

## Colour and contrast

### Don’t use just colour to convey a meaning

The meaning will be lost for users with colour blindness, or who rely on screen reading software.

**Poor example**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Risk title** | **Risk status** |
| Risk 1 |  |
| Risk 2 |  |
| Risk 3 |  |

**Good example**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Risk title** | **Risk status** |
| Risk 1 | **Red** |
| Risk 2 | **Green** |
| Risk 3 | **Red** |

The addition of information that does not rely on colour perception, in this example the words Red and Green, makes the information much more accessible. There is still that visual at a glance feel for the colour but now also have the word to help those for whom colour is not a good indicator of meaning.

### Colour and contrast

Always make sure there is a clear contrast between text colour and background colour.

Not everyone can read your text if there is not a sufficient contrast, such as light grey text on a light background.

## Images

For some images and pictures can make your information hard to use – but for others it is a great way to convey information. Just means there are a few things to think about to make sure it works for everyone.

If an image is more than decorative be sure what it is conveying is part of your text. If you are unsure if your image is purely decorative or not, try this test. Delete the image from your content. Does your content still make sense, and does it still put across the message you wish to convey? If the answer is no your use of the image must be accompanied by text in your page of content.

All images must have an alt tag or be marked as decorative. It is the alt tag that gives the image context to a user of screen reading software.

## screenshot of the show/hide button on the Home menu tabAnd finally… always check your document

1. Use the show/hide button on the Home menu tab to see how your text has been aligned and check if there is any tidying up needed.
2. Use the option Navigation Pane (under View) to easily see the heading structure of your document
3. Follow the correct style guide
   1. [HMRC style guide](https://intranet.prod.dop.corp.hmrc.gov.uk/section/business-area/communications/how-we-write-hmrc-style-guide) for internal documents and content
   2. [GOV.UK style guide](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/style-guide/a-to-z-of-gov-uk-style) for content published on GOV.UK
4. Check the spelling, grammar and readability of your content. Use the readability tools in Word (Review > Spelling & Grammar) or if you are able to access it paste text into the [Hemingway app (web)](http://hemingwayapp.com)
5. Use the accessibility check facility (Review > Check Accessibility)  
   see also the [advice on creating documents using Office 365 products from Microsoft (web)](https://support.office.com/en-us/article/make-your-content-accessible-to-everyone-38059c2d-45ef-4830-9797-618f0e96f3ab)