Checklist: Accessibility in Word

Ensuring your Word documents are accessible is an essential step in creating inclusive and equitable content. This checklist guides you through the process, starting with items easily identified by the built-in Accessibility Checker and moving to those that require manual review. Follow these steps to ensure your documents meet accessibility standards.

# Open the Accessibility Checker

* Use the **desktop Word application**, as the web version has limited functionality for accessibility checking.
* Access the Accessibility Checker by clicking the **Accessibility icon** at the bottom of the screen or selecting **Review > Check Accessibility** from the menu bar.

# Accessibility Issues Caught by the Accessibility Checker

* Is the document **editable** and not “read-only”?
* Do all tables have:
  + Titles, headers, and captions (alt text) enabled?
  + Unique column headings?
* Do tables avoid using **merged cells**?

# Accessibility Issues Requiring Additional Review

* Is a **heading structure** used with properly ordered heading levels (no skipped levels)?
  + **Note:** The checker only flags skipped levels but doesn’t verify proper use of headings.
* Do all images include:
  + **Alternative text** (alt text) that is concise and accurate?
  + A **decorative designation** if the image is non-informative?
  + **Note:** The checker doesn’t flag images with inaccurate alt text (e.g., file names), so review all alt text manually.
* Are complex visuals like graphs or infographics accompanied by equivalent alternatives, such as:
  + A short description in the alt text?
  + A longer description in captions, notes, or linked pages?
* Does the document have **sufficient color contrast**?
  + Use online tools like the **WebAIM Contrast Checker** to confirm contrast levels.

# Accessibility Issues Not Detected by the Checker

* Was the document **shared as a Word file** instead of being converted to a PDF?
  + PDFs are difficult to make fully accessible and are not easily editable for users needing adjustments.
* Are all **lists** created with the numbered or bulleted list feature?
* Are all URLs formatted as:
  + **Hyperlinks** embedded in meaningful text (e.g., "Visit the Accessibility Guide" instead of "Click here")?
* Is underlining used **only for hyperlinks** and not for emphasis?
* Are all capital letters used **only for acronyms** and not for emphasis?
* Does the document avoid relying solely on **visual formatting** (e.g., colors or shapes) to convey information?
  + Use bold or italics to emphasize text.
* Is all text presented as **text** and not as an image of text?
  + Replace images of text with actual text whenever possible.
* Are sans serif fonts like **Arial, Verdana, or Calibri** used?
* Are the **indent and alignment buttons** used instead of the Tab key or Spacebar for formatting?
* Are tables used only to **organize data** and not for layout or visual structure?
* Do tables avoid having any **empty data cells**?