

Creating Accessible Docs

“Let’s be sure everyone can read our stuff”

Structure

Headings and Document styles are your friend –

- Use at least the main style options: Title, Heading (with numbered levels), and Normal.
- Make sure you identify your headings in the correct order. This helps to create an easy-to-understand system for somebody navigating your text. For example, you can assign your paper title the **Title** style, use the **Heading 1** style for your main section headings, use **Heading 2** for your subsection headings, and so on.
- Make sure that you don't skip heading levels. Nest your headings so that their Style numbers correspond to their hierarchy (i.e. don't go from 1 to 3 or use 3 for your main title and 1 for your subtitles).
- You can customize how your Styles look without affecting accessibility. Feel free to change fonts, sizes, and colors (within reason). Just make sure that each heading or piece of text is “tagged” with the right Style label so that screen readers can identify it.
- For longer documents, consider using Word's built-in Table of Contents feature. This automatically uses your headings to create a linked Table of Contents that can make navigating your document easier.

Alt Text

Alt Text, Alt Text, Alt Text—

People with visual impairments may lose out if you use a lot of images, shapes, photographs, or clipart in your documents. This doesn't mean you have to skip those features – you just have to add some alternative (or “alt”) text or captions to explain what they are. Screen reading software will read Alt text or captions aloud to make sure users with visual impairments don't miss out.

- To add alt text, start by right clicking on your image (if you want to go over keyboard steps, we can work one on one). Go to Format Picture and then Alt Text. Write a simple but complete description of the image or other visual feature in the title and/or description box (depending on its length) and select OK.

Tables

Picnic, Coffee, Pub? No silly –

Tables are great for organizing data and information, but when they're read by a screen reader, they can be confusing. Keeping these principles in mind can make them more accessible:

- Use clear and designated column headings. Just like you use Style headings throughout your text, use column headers to make your tables consistent and easy to navigate. Make sure that under Table Options, you select Header Row so that screen readers will identify the top row as column headings.
- Make tables as simple and logical as possible. If possible, avoid having merged or split cells only in certain columns or rows, because this will be confusing when the contents is read aloud. Stick to a standard, evenly laid out format.
- Try to make your tables read logically from left to right and top to bottom. To get a better idea of how a screen reader will navigate your table, use the tab key on your keyboard to check the order that the cursor goes through your columns and rows.
- Using alt text for tables, as well as images and charts, can also help.

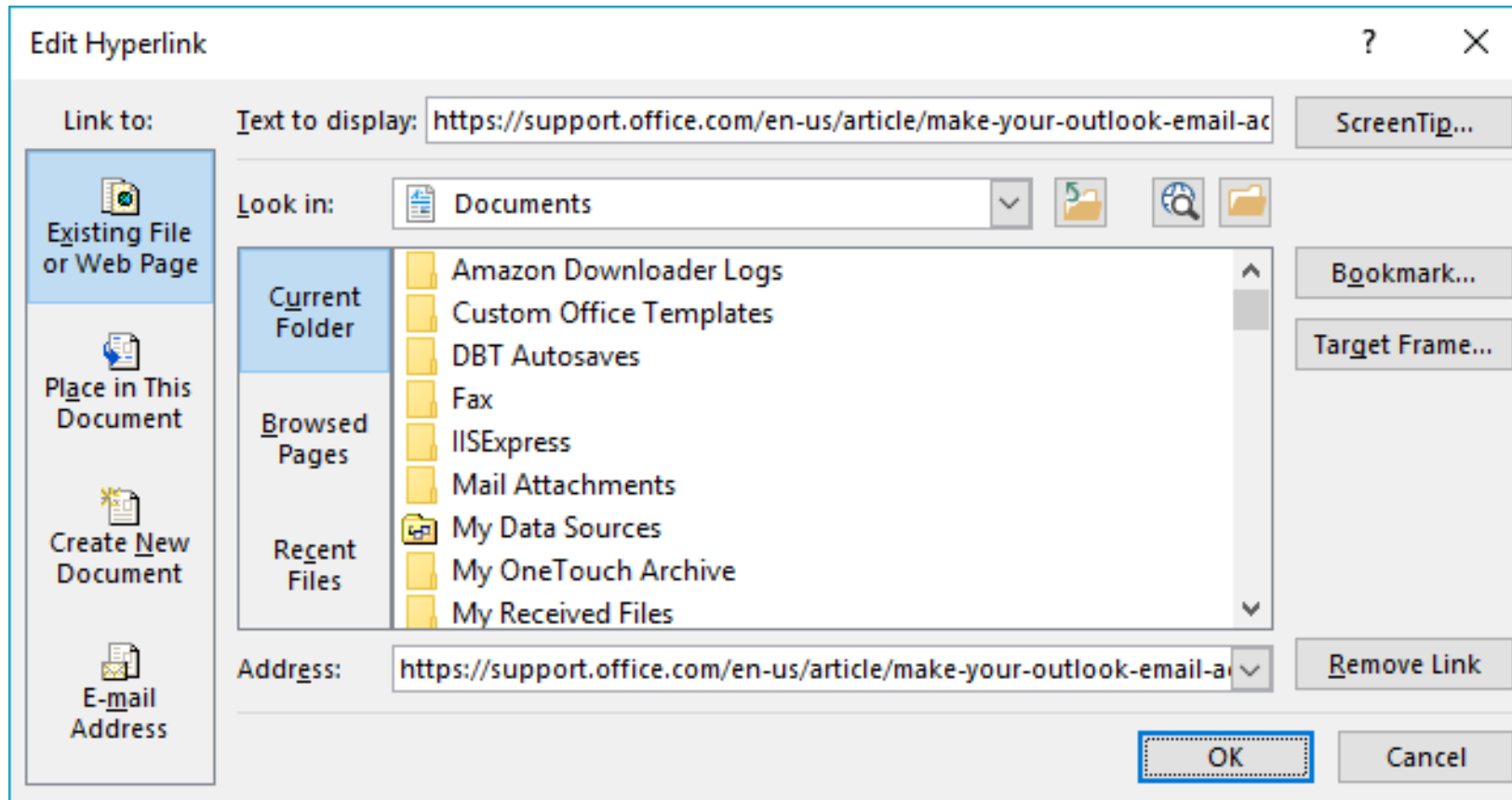
Hyperlinks

Click here, read more –

- Use meaningful hyperlink text. If you just copy and paste a long URL into your document, the screen reader will try to read out each letter – which can be a pain. A better approach involves using meaningful hyperlink text.
- Make the link meaningful – do NOT use words like click here or read more. If a screen reader is searching for links on a page, reading click here multiple times means nothing.
- To create a hyperlink in Word, either right click where you want the link and select Hyperlink (alt N, I), copy or type the URL into the address bar and under text to display include a simple but meaningful description (This will be what is displayed on the screen)

Hyperlinks – pg 2

[Click here, read more –](#)



Screen Tip option gives a simple way of explaining where/why you may want to select the link

Extra Extra

Yes, there's more –

Avoid using blank spaces or lines to create formatting or space. If you tend to hit "Tab" or "Enter" over and over again to create formatting you want, try to kick the habit. Hearing a bunch of white space (identified by a screen reader as “blank”) can be annoying and might give users the impression that the document has ended.

- Instead, use document formatting. Rely on indentations, line spacing, and Styles to create the effect you want.
- To create extra space after lines without pressing enter, right click and go to Paragraph. Under Spacing (Alt G, PS, C), adjust the before, after, and line spacing options as desired to get the layout you want.
- One way to check how your document might “look” to a screen reader is to select the option to show all non-printing characters so that you can see the paragraph symbol that appears every time you hit the enter key and the dot that appears every time you hit the space bar. Ideally, these should only appear when you truly are stopping an old word or paragraph and starting a new one. They shouldn't be there when you just want to create extra space. The option is on the Home menu and looks like a paragraph symbol (¶). You can also press Alt H, 8.

And More

Audio, Video—

If you have audio clips or videos that may be inaccessible to people who are deaf, try to provide closed captions or transcripts to make sure they can access that content, too.

Colors, Contrast, Lengthy words -

Write and design with all kinds of users in mind, depending on your audience. Some users may have cognitive impairments and benefit from clear language. Some may have color blindness or other visual impairments that make low-contrast text difficult to separate from the background. Some users who rely on screen readers will have to listen to every part of your document, sometimes over and over again. If you've got unnecessary contents, try to weed it out. Be thorough with your contents, but if possible, stay simple in your approach.

Continued

Fonts, Colors and what not—

Can you read this? *How about this?* How about now?

- Keep titles short, especially if they appear often.
- If you're using color, avoid putting very similar colors on top of one another. Contrast makes text easier to read for everybody, especially those with visual impairments.
- Don't rely on color-coding alone. For users who can't perceive color or are using screen readers, make sure that information is conveyed in multiple ways, not just through color of the text. For example, avoid a long list of items where red text signifies one thing and blue another.
- Watch your font and font color selections

Finally

Test your document for accessibility – File, Check for Issues, Check Accessibility

- Keep your audience in mind
- The accessibility checker may not catch everything – double check it yourself
- Ask someone to check it for you if you want it posted on the web
- Be aware that anything you create should be accessible – email, word, excel, pdf's, forms and more.
- Questions?