

Creating accessible Word documents

Formatting Guide



Contents

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| Document set-up | 3 |
| Style samples | 5 |
| Content creation | 6 |

Figures

| | |
|--|---|
| Figure 1: Document properties in Word | 3 |
| Figure 2: Accessibility checker in Word | 3 |
| Figure 3: Styles panel in Word | 6 |
| Figure 4: Direct formatting controls in Word | 6 |
| Figure 5: Paragraph settings dialogue box | 7 |
| Figure 6: Language selector dialogue box | 8 |
| Figure 7: Table Properties dialogue box with the Row tab displayed | 9 |

Creating accessible Word documents

This document is intended to be used as a reference tool to help ensure that your Word documents are accessible. It may also be used as a document template as it already contains the settings outlined below. Questions may be directed to [Evelyn Elliot](#).

Document set-up

1. **Properties** – add meaningful information to your document's properties (File > Info).

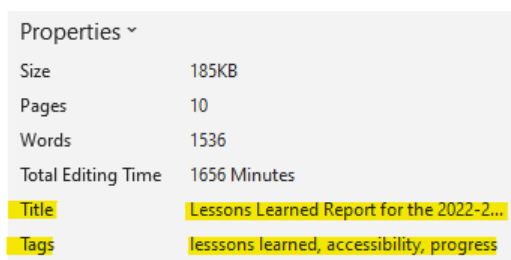


Figure 1: Document properties in Word

- a. Populate the **Title** field with a meaningful title rather than the file name.
 - b. Populate the **Tags** field with keywords that are relevant to your document.
2. **Accessibility checker** – ensure that the accessibility checker in Word is running (Review > Check Accessibility), and that the **Keep accessibility checker running while I work** checkbox is selected.

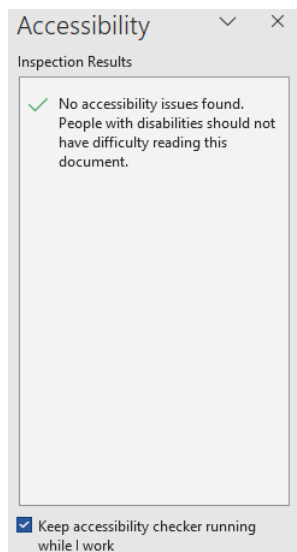


Figure 2: Accessibility checker in Word

3. **Margins** – set margins to **Normal** with a 1-inch space at the top, bottom, left and right of the page (Layout > Margins > Normal).
4. **Styles** – use the Styles panel to set the font family in your document.
 - a. Set the **Normal** style to **Arial (Body)** font type, **12-point** font size, and **Automatic** font colour.
 - b. Set the **Heading 1**, **Heading 2** and **Heading 3** styles to **Arial (Headings)** font type and **Automatic** font colour.
 - c. Set the **Strong** and **List Paragraph** styles to **Arial (Body)** font type and **Automatic** font colour.
5. **Language** – set the proofing language to **English (Canada)** or **French (Canada)** as appropriate (Review > Language > Proofing Language...).
6. **Page numbering** – place page numbers in the bottom right of the footer and use the **Page X of Y** format (Insert > Page Number > Bottom of Page > Bold Numbers 3).

Style samples

The following style samples can be applied to text in other documents by using the **Format Painter** feature in Word.

Title

Subtitle

Heading 1

Heading 2

Heading 3

Normal

Strong

Emphasis

1. List Paragraph

Caption

[Hyperlink](#)

Content creation

1. **Formatting** – make formatting changes (if necessary) within the style settings. Do not use direct formatting as it overwrites the style settings. (**Note:** An exception to this rule is numbered and bulleted lists, which use both style and direct formatting settings. Refer to [step 8](#) below for more information.)

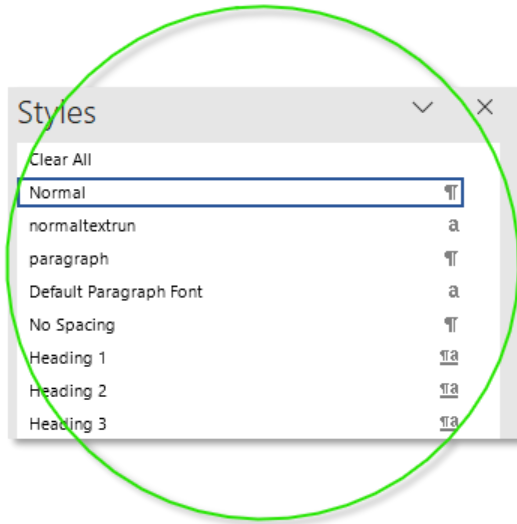


Figure 3: Styles panel in Word

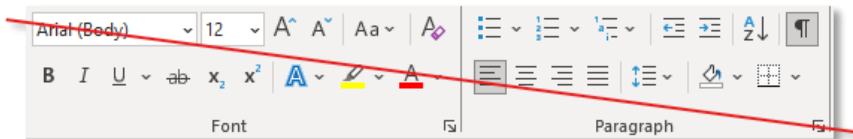


Figure 4: Direct formatting controls in Word

2. **Headings** – use the **Heading 1**, **Heading 2**, and **Heading 3** styles as appropriate to your content. Do not skip headings in your document (e.g., going from Heading 1 to Heading 3, omitting Heading 2). Use the **Navigation** pane (View > select Navigation Pane in the Show area) to validate the correct structure.
3. **Text alignment** – use **Align Left** and avoid using **Center** and **Justify**.
4. **Spacing** – avoid using the **Enter** key to add space between paragraphs and between list items. Instead, add space to the style using the **Paragraph** settings dialogue box. As a general rule, add 12 points between paragraphs, and six points between bullets.

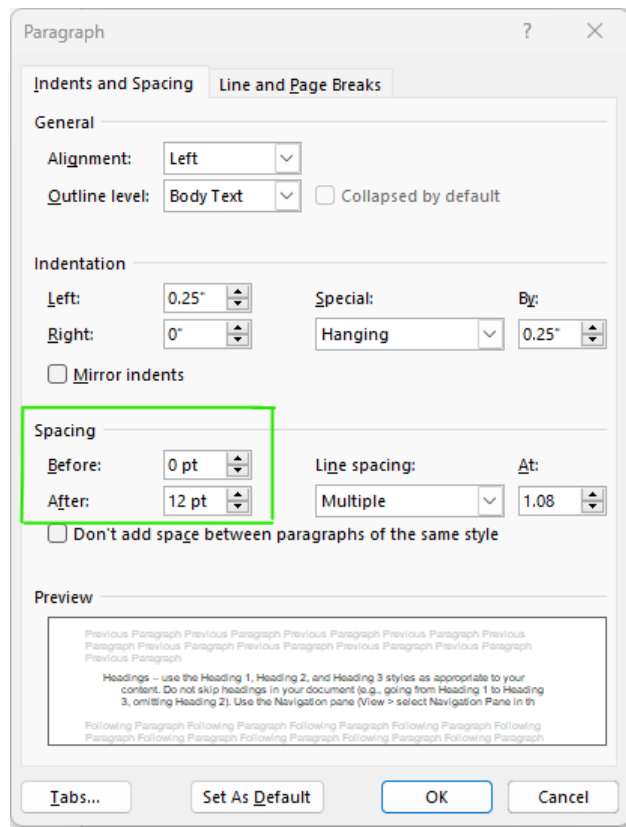


Figure 5: Paragraph settings dialogue box

5. **Pagination** – use page breaks (Insert > Page Break) to bump content to the next page. Do not use the **Enter** key.
6. **Bolding** – use the **Strong** style to bold text. Do not use direct formatting.
7. **Italics** – avoid using *italics* in general, but if italics are required (e.g., for the full name of an Act, such as the *Accessible Canada Act*) use the **Emphasis** style.
8. **Lists** – first select the **List Paragraph** style, then use direct formatting for numbers or bullets. Use the built-in settings for first-level (•), second-level (○), and third-level (▪) bullets and numbered lists (e.g., 1, a, i...).
9. **Bilingual content** – have separate French and English documents whenever possible. An exception is bilingual email messages. In those instances, select the text in the other language, click the language in the status bar at the bottom left of the window, and select the language that you want in the **Language** selector dialogue box.

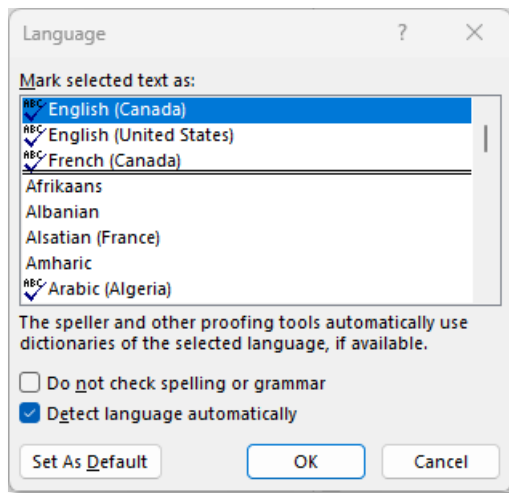


Figure 6: Language selector dialogue box

10. **Hyperlinks** – use meaningful text (not “learn more” or “click here”) and always indicate where the link goes in parenthesis at the end of the link [e.g. [Accessibility \(MySSC+\)](#)]. Rarely use a full URL. Exceptions are email addresses and in print-only documents.
11. **Image captions** – add captions to images and graphs to provide at-a-glance context.
 - a. Right-click on the image and select **Insert Caption**. Type your caption.
 - b. In the **Caption** style, change the font colour to **Automatic**, and deselect **Italics**.
12. **Images and Alt Text** – add alternative text to images to briefly describe them (Review > Check Accessibility > Alt Text).
 - a. Use proper punctuation.
 - b. Use 140 characters maximum for English, and 170 characters maximum for French.
 - c. Ensure that the description is relevant to the context of your document.
 - d. Do not select the **Mark as decorative** checkbox in the **Alt Text** panel. Instead, type “Decorative” in the description field.
13. **Complex images and long descriptions** – Use long descriptions for complex images and graphs in addition to Alt Text.
 - a. Use proper punctuation.
 - b. No character limit.

- c. Place the descriptive text under the complex image or graph. (**Note:** Long descriptions are not required if a description is already provided in the narrative of the text that precedes the image.)
- 14. **Graphs** – use texture in addition to colour to convey meaning. For pie graphs, separate slices, and place values outside the graph.
- 15. **Colour contrast** – use the Accessibility Checker to identify and resolve colour contrast issues. Correct any instances of “hard to read” by changing the font colour to **Automatic**.
- 16. **Tables** – tables are effective for conveying information, but they must be formatted in a straightforward way to be accessible.
 - a. Create tables using the **Insert Table** drag and drop feature or **Insert Table** dialog box (Insert > Table > ...). Do not use the **Draw Table** feature.
 - b. Place the title of the table above the table.
 - c. Do not merge cells.
 - d. For tables that span more than a page, select the top row and enable the **Repeat as header row at the top of each page** feature (select table and right-click > Table Properties... > Row tab).

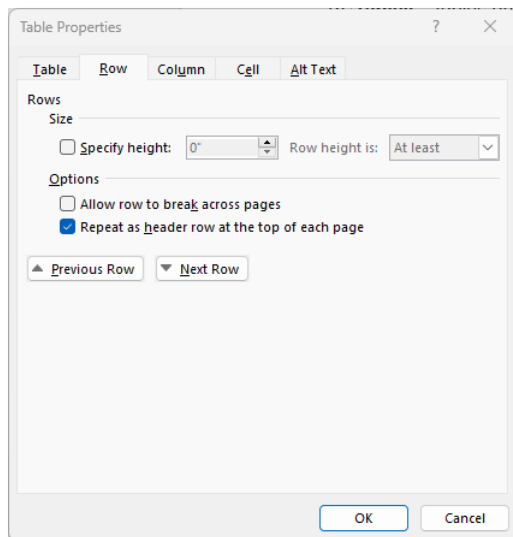


Figure 7: Table Properties dialogue box with the Row tab displayed

- e. Use a table design with high contrast.

17. **Plain language** – plain language is a key factor in making your documents accessible.

- a. Use short sentences (20 words or less), simple words over complex words, and active voice instead of passive voice.
- b. Use the **Editor** feature (Home > Editor > Corrections) to identify and correct spelling, punctuation, and grammar issues.
- c. Aim for a grade 8 reading level (Home > Editor > Insights > Document stats).

18. **Abbreviations** – use sparingly and avoid for regular words.

19. **Acronyms** – use the full term on the first instance and place the acronym in brackets after the term (e.g., The Accessibility Strategy and Engagement (ASE) unit is responsible for...).