# Accessibility Process for Word Documents

System Office employees must do the following to comply with accessibility standards before sharing a Word document with audiences via SharePoint or a website. Although following these steps may not necessarily guarantee a completely accessible document, following these steps should minimize accessibility issues and make your content more accessible. Visit our website for [more information on System Accessibility](https://go.illinois.edu/SystemAccessibility).

To make your Word documents more accessible:

1. Use Headings
2. Use Lists
3. Add Alternate Text
4. Use Meaningful Links
5. Run Accessibility Checker
6. Mark Document as Final
7. Restrict Editing (Optional)

## Use Headings

Organizing the document with headings helps users understand how the document is hierarchically organized and structured. Assistive technology users can efficiently navigate between headings.

1. Type the text you want as your header.
2. Highlight the text.
3. Click the **Home** tab on the ribbon.
4. Select the heading you want in the **Styles** section.
   1. **NOTE:** Only use Heading 1 to 6. Do not use Title or any other heading.
   2. Use Heading 1 for the title of the document.
   3. Use Heading 2 for a major section heading.
   4. Use Heading 3 for a sub-section under Heading 2.
5. To see a more comprehensive list of text styles and edit formatting details for each style, click the arrow pointing southeast in the bottom right-hand corner of the **Styles** section.

## Use Lists

Using Word’s formatting tools to create ordered and unordered lists can allow for assistive technology to detect and inform users about the presence of a list, how many items are in the list, and the list structure for easy navigation.

1. Highlight the text that you want numbered or bulleted.
2. Click the **Home** tab on the ribbon.
3. Select **Bullets** or **Numbering** in the **Paragraph** section.

## Add Alternate Text

Alternate (Alt) text can be read by screen readers and helps users identify what images and other objects are in the document. You can add alt text to objects, such as pictures, clip art, charts, tables, shapes, SmartArt, embedded objects, and audio or video objects.

1. To open the Alt Text pane, do one of the following:
   1. Right-click the object and select **Edit Alt Text....** or
   2. Select the object. Then select the **Picture** **Format** tab on the ribbon and select **Alt Text**.
2. Type a detailed description of the image in the field.
   1. **NOTE:** The description should explain why the image is important. Since assistive technology does not read words within images, if there is text within your image, include that text in the alt text description.
      1. It is helpful to write a description as though you are describing this image to someone on the phone and explaining its purpose.
3. If your image does not contribute to the learning or deliver an important message, then check the **Mark as decorative** box.
   1. **NOTE:** The screen reader will not read this image out loud.

## Use Meaningful Links

Meaningful links help users quickly navigate the documents using assistive technology; therefore, it is important for the link text to be concise but descriptive enough to inform users of the purpose and destination of the link.

1. Paste the destination URL link.
   1. **NOTE:** Having a long destination URL link causes challenges for someone using a screen reader because each character will be read aloud at a time, which is difficult to understand.
2. Highlight the whole destination URL, including the "http" at the beginning and the domain at the end.
3. Right-click on the highlighted destination URL.
4. Select **Edit** **Hyperlink**.
5. In the **Text to display** field, type in a descriptive text (a word or phrase) unique to that link.
   1. **NOTE:** This descriptive text should be a concise label that informs the reader where the link is sending them.
   2. Avoid using generic link text and phrases like “Click here” or “Learn more.”
6. Click **OK**.

## Run Accessibility Checker

The Accessibility Checker feature finds accessibility problems and provides suggestions on how to fix them. Following these steps should result in an adequately accessible document, but more changes may be needed based on a user’s needs, or more work may be needed to make it fully accessible. Automatic checkers are imperfect and cannot catch everything but can help guide you in creating more equitable content.

1. Click the **Review** tab on the ribbon.
2. Click **Check** **Accessibility** inthe **Accessibility** section.
3. Review your results.
   1. **NOTE:** You will see a list of errors, warnings, and tips with how-to-fix recommendations.

## Mark Document as Final

Microsoft Word Documents are much more accessible than PDFs; therefore, we encourage marking documents as final to indicate that editing is complete and that this is the final version of the document. The Mark as Final command makes the documents read-only. The status property is set to “Final” and typing editing commands, and proofing marks are turned off. You can recognize that a document is marked as final when the Mark as Final icon displays in the status bar.

There are ways to edit a read-only document, but this can just as easily be done on a PDF. Therefore, a PDF is inherently no more secure than a read-only Word Document.

1. Click the **File** tab on the ribbon.
2. Click **Info** on the left menu.
3. Click **Protect Document**.
4. Select **Mark as Final**.
5. Click **OK**.

## Restrict Editing (Optional)

If you want to increase protection on your document, you can restrict editing and formatting by adding a password.

1. Click the **Review** tab on the ribbon.
2. Click **Restrict Editing** in the **Protect** section.
3. Under **Editing** **restrictions**, check **Allow only this type of editing in the document**.
4. Make sure **No changes (Read only)** is selected in the drop-down menu.
5. Click **Yes, Start Enforcing Protection**.
6. The Password protection method is automatically selected.
   1. **NOTE:** If you enter a password, only users who know the assigned password can remove editing restrictions from the document and start editing.
7. Click **OK**.