Accessibility in Microsoft Office

Accessibility Basics Tutorial Series

Contents

Microsoft Office has some of the best built-in accessibility features. If you have a choice about what program to compose a resource in and what format to distribute it in, prefer Microsoft Office.

Accessibility Checker

All Microsoft Office products have a built-in Accessibility Checker. This includes Outlook. It is always a good idea to run this Checker before you share a file or hit send on an email, especially if you are sharing with the public or an audience with unknown access needs.

The Accessibility Checker is designed to require no background knowledge or expertise. It reports on three kinds of issues:

1. Errors (must fix)
2. Warnings (should fix)

3. Tips (better to fix)

Clicking on each issue in the report opens a section with information about why to fix the issue and how to fix the issue. After following these instructions, you can run the Checker again to see if the issue disappears.

The Accessibility Checker focuses mainly on issues that affect audience members using assistive technology. However, there is overlap between accessibility practices designed with assistive technology users in mind and accessibility practices that benefit other audience members with disabilities, like neurodivergent folks. With that said, there are some accessibility issues that require a manual check, like most text formatting issues.

Exporting to PDF

When you need to create an accessible PDF, start from a Microsoft Office file. Note that there are multiple ways to export a document to PDF, and not all of them preserve the accessibility information that exists in the Microsoft Office file. To preserve accessibility information:

- Export using "File > Save As."
- Under "Save As > Options," ensure "Document Structure Tags for Accessibility" is checked.

- When exporting a multi-page file, under "Save As > Options, ensure "Create bookmarks using > Headings" is checked.

- Do **not** use "File > Export" or "File > Print > Print to File (PDF)."