

Creating Accessible Documents & Emails

Clear and Concise Language

Keep sentences short, ideally under 20 words

Use present tense and active voice

Avoid jargon or acronyms

Aim for an eighth-grade reading level

Use a conversational tone

Define the language of your document and any text in another language

Test readability with a tool like HemingwayApp

Structure your Document with Headings

Use built-in heading styles

Don't create headings by just changing font size or colour

Heading levels should show the document structure

Don't skip heading levels

Start with Heading 1 for main sections, Heading 2 for subsections, Heading 3 for smaller subsections

H1
Heading 1 {

Guide to Text Tags

H2
Heading 2 {

What constitutes a heading?

P
(Paragraph) [

Headings are words or text that indicate a specific section of content in a document or on a webpage. Generally, headings are a level "lower" than a document title. The title indicates the content of the entire document; the headings are specific to each section of content within the document.

H3
Heading 2 {

Heading Hierarchy

P
(Paragraph) [

Make navigating your document even easier for readings by using **different levels of headings in your document** to subdivide content. This helps break up long paragraphs into more digestible pieces of information.

Hyperlinks

Use descriptive text that makes sense on its own

Avoid generic text like “click here” or “read more”

Don’t include “link to” in the text

Avoid long URLs

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Rick Hanse Foundation Website

Click Here



Read More

<https://www.rickhansen.com/>

Lists & Columns

Don't create lists or columns manually with tabs or spaces

Use built-in bullets, numbering, and column tools

Fonts and Readability

Avoid fonts with uneven line weight or tight spacing

Use sans serif fonts like Arial, Verdana, or Calibri

Minimum 14-point font size

Avoid ALL CAPS

Avoid underlining and italics

Layout and Spacing

Left-align text

Keep paragraphs short — no more than 5 sentences

Use proper spacing: letters spaced about 35% of their width, words spaced about 3.5x letter spacing

Don't use tables for page layout

Add Alt-Text to Visuals

Alt-text should be:

- Accurate
- Short
- Don't write "image of" or "graphic of"
- If the image has text, include that text in the description
- Don't rely on auto-generated alt text
- Think: "What information does this image convey?"

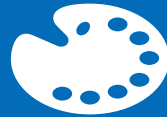
Colour Contrast



Use automatic
black text on a
white background.



Ensure a **4.5:1
contrast ratio**.



Don't rely on
colour alone to
convey meaning.



Use asterisks (*)
to highlight
important info..



Text with poor color
contrast can be
inaccessible to many
users, especially those
with visual
impairments.

**If you need to use
color in your designs
or documents, follow
these principles:**

Email Accessibility

Limit the use of emojis

Avoid image-based signatures

Use short signatures in email threads.

Avoid changing original message formatting.

Avoid indentation or vertical lines for replies



Emails can be inaccessible due to various factors such as lack of clear and concise language, absence of alternative text for images, and reliance on color alone to convey meaning.

When sending an email, follow these principles.

[Watch this Demo Video to Learn More](#)

Plain Text Considerations

Plain text is screen-reader friendly

less accessible for people with low vision who use
magnification



Plain text is screen-reader friendly.

However, it is less accessible for people who are low-vision and rely on magnification software.

[Watch this Demo Video to Learn More](#)

Questions?

Email us at Info@RickHansen.com

Making Documents Accessible: A Step-by-Step Guide

This step-by-step guide will help you create documents that are both readable and accessible to everyone, including assistive technology users.

Use the Styles Pane to format your document.....	2
Headings	3
Accessible Font Attributes	4
Informative Hyperlinks	5
Format Lists	5
Accessible Tables	6
Alt Text and Captions for Visuals	7
Define the Language of Your Document and/or Chunks of Text	8
Microsoft Word Accessibility Checker	9

Use the Styles Pane to format your document

The Styles Pane provides a set of formatting options you can apply to text, tables, and lists. It helps ensure consistent structure and accessibility throughout your document.

How to access the styles options:

Microsoft Word:

- Select the “Styles Pane” from the “Home” ribbon. This opens a column on the right side of your document.
- This column displays “recommended” styles you can apply.

Google Docs:

- Use the “Styles” dropdown menu in the top toolbar.

Apple Pages:

- In the formatting options on the right side of the page, find the “Paragraph Styles” dropdown menu.

Headings

Headings are short phrases that describe the content of the section that follows. Think of them as titles for each section. Headings are essential for accessibility—they're the primary way screen readers navigate through a document.

To ensure accessibility, always add headings using the Styles Pane or style dropdown in your word processor.

How to Add Headings to your Document:

Microsoft Word:

- In the Styles Pane > select a Heading level.

Google Docs:

- In the Styles dropdown menu in the toolbar > select a Heading level.

Apple Pages:

- In the Paragraph Styles dropdown menu > Heading level

Accessible Font Attributes

Font attributes are visual styles applied to text. These include:

Font size (e.g., 14-point)
Font colour (e.g., black)
Font type (e.g., Arial)
Bold / Italics / Underline / Strikethrough
Line spacing (e.g., single, double)
And more...

While font attributes help with visual emphasis, they can also affect accessibility. For example, small fonts, tight spacing, or poor colour contrast can make text difficult to read.

How do you add font attributes to your document?

Microsoft Word:

- To bold/italicize text: Home Toolbar > Click “Styles Pane” > Select “strong” or “emphasis” to style a small chunk of text.
- To change font size, type, colour, etc., for all text associated with a style tag:
- Select a style (e.g., “Normal” or “Heading 1”) > Click “Modify Style” > Use the popup to adjust font settings.

Google Docs:

- Use the main toolbar to select font attributes (type, size, bold, spacing, colour, etc.) and format the text.

Apple Pages:

- In the formatting sidebar > Select the dropdown menu “Character Styles” > Choose “Emphasis” to bold, “Italic” to italicize, or “Underline” to underline the font.
- To change the font type, size, colour, spacing, etc., use the corresponding options in the formatting sidebar.

Informative Hyperlinks

Hyperlinks should clearly describe their destination. Avoid vague phrases like “Click here.” Instead, use descriptive text such as “Click here to read about accessible hyperlinks.”

Informative links are especially helpful for screen reader users, who often navigate documents by jumping between links. Descriptive link text improves usability and comprehension.

Here are the three main methods to add hyperlinks to your text:

1. Highlight the text > Insert > Hyperlink
2. Highlight the text > Right-click > Hyperlink
3. Highlight the text > Use Ctrl + K (PC) or Command + K (Mac)

Format Lists

Lists should be created using built-in formatting tools—not manually typed characters like dashes, numbers, or asterisks. This ensures screen readers can interpret them correctly.

How to Create Accessible Lists:

Microsoft Word:

- In the Home toolbar > Select “Bullets,” “Numbering,” or “Multilevel Lists.”

Google Docs:

- In the main toolbar > Select “Bullet lists” or “Numbered lists.”

Apple Pages:

- In the formatting sidebar > Select an option from the “Bullets & Lists” dropdown menu.

Accessible Tables

Tables should only be used for tabular data—information that’s best understood in rows and columns. Accessible tables follow a logical reading order and are properly formatted for screen readers.

Microsoft Word:

There are two ways to insert a table:

- Select “Insert” from the main menu > “Table” > Format your table in the popup dialogue box.
- In the top “Insert” toolbar > Click “Table” > Use the grid to define the number of columns and rows.

After creating the table:

- Ensure “Header Row” is selected.
- To add a caption: Select the table using the top-left “four arrow” icon > Right-click > “Insert Caption.”
- To add a title and alt text/long description: Select the table > Right-click > “Table Properties” > “Alt Text” tab.

Apple Pages:

There are two options you can use to add a table in Pages:

- Select “Insert” from the main menu > “Table” > “Headers,” “Basic,” or “Sums.”
- Click on the “Table” option (in the toolbar at the top of the window) and choose an option.
- The “Headers,” “Basic,” or “Sums” options already have headers associated with the table columns.
- The table option “Plain” does not have headers.
- You can then add a title and caption to the table from the toolbar on the right side of the page – tick the “Title” and “Captions” checkboxes located beneath the “Table Options.”

Alt Text and Captions for Visuals

Alt text provides a written description of images, charts, and other visuals. Screen readers use alt text to describe visuals to users who cannot see them.

If your document includes captions, use your word processor's built-in caption tools to ensure they're styled accessibly.

How to add alt text to your visuals:

Microsoft Word:

- Right-click the image > Select "View Alt Text..."
- A column opens on the right—enter your alt text in the textbox.
- To add a caption: Right-click the image > Select "Insert Caption."

Note: Word may auto-generate alt text, but it's best to write your own.

Google Docs:

- Right-click the image > Select "Alt Text" > Add your description.

Apple Pages:

- Add the alt text into the description text box, located (once you have added an image) in the right column beneath the "Image" tab.

Define the Language of Your Document and/or Chunks of Text

Setting the correct language helps screen readers pronounce words accurately. This is especially important for documents containing multiple languages.

If the language isn't properly defined, screen readers may mispronounce or misinterpret the content.

How to define the language:

Microsoft Word:

- Highlight the text you want to define.
- Option 1: Select "Tools" > "Language" > Choose the language.
- Option 2: Click the current language (e.g., "French") at the bottom border of Word > Choose the language.

Google Docs:

- To change the language of the full document: Select "File" > "Language" > Choose the language.

Apple Pages:

- To change the language of the full document > select "File" > "Advanced" > "Language & Region" > select the language you would like to format your document in.

Microsoft Word Accessibility Checker

Microsoft Word includes an Accessibility Checker that identifies issues and suggests fixes. It's a quick way to improve your document's accessibility.

To use the Accessibility Checker:

- Select the "Review" toolbar > Click "Check Accessibility."
- The "Accessibility Inspection Results" will appear in a column on the right.
- Click on any issue to open the Recommended Actions list.
- Apply a one-click fix or use the arrow button for more options.