

Section 508 Tips for Document Creation

Information Gateway references the information on the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) website on [how to make files accessible](#) and the [WCAG 2.0 AA standards](#).

Below are some guidelines in how to produce a 508-compliant Word document that need to be followed before converting the document into a 508-compliant PDF. In general, detailed descriptions of data charts, graphics, or images need to be included in each document so users with visual challenges can understand the document's content. For reference, HHS provides specific Section 508 guidance and tips on their [accessibility page](#). Of note, Information Gateway does not modify or reformat any content in a document.

Headings – Use Microsoft Word built-in style elements to create headings.

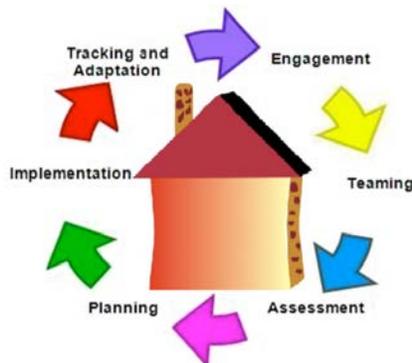
Bullets – Use Microsoft Word built-in list features to create a bullets structure that screen readers can easily identify and use to read content. Do not use Wingdings or manually typed characters (e.g., hyphens, asterisks, numbers, or graphics) for this purpose.

Graphics/Images – Alternative (alt) text is needed to describe any graphic (including images, charts, and diagrams) and needs to mention any text that is part of the graphic. Alt text will be read by a screen reader in a Word file and should remain intact when exporting to PDF. There are two items to remember:

- Decorative images without meaningful content should not have any alt text. Use null in the form of double quotation marks (i.e. "") instead.
- When the document is converted to PDF, all background images or watermarks will not be detected and will not have to be tagged with alt text.

Descriptions – The use of complex diagrams should be limited (i.e. tables, graphs, etc.). However, if they are included, descriptions need to be written for them when the surrounding text/paragraphs in the body of the document do not adequately describe them or their data. The description should include as much detail as possible so users with visual challenges can understand what is being displayed when using a screen reader. These descriptions often require interpretation and input from the document's authors. **If the graphic is sufficiently described in the body of the text**, then using the chart title as alt text will be sufficient. Below is an example of a graphic requiring alt text.

Department of Children's Services Practice Wheel Diagram



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The text in this graphic above is part of the image itself—it's possibly a scanned graphic—and cannot be read by an assistive device. Thus, the image, including the image's text, must be thoroughly described. The title above the graphic, "Department of Children's Services Practice Wheel Diagram," can be read by a screen reader. Since it's not part of the image, it is unnecessary to repeat the title in the image's alt text. However, more descriptive text is required to help users grasp the information that is being presented visually.

Example of alt text or description for the above graphic:

House circled by text and arrows that point in a clockwise direction. Text between arrows reads Engagement, Teaming, Assessment, Planning, Implementation, and Tracking and Adaptation, and then back to Engagement.

Adding a description to an image can be completed in one of two ways. In the first way, the description can be embedded as alt text by right clicking on the image, selecting the option to edit the image's alt text, and filling out the appropriate alt text fields. For the second way, the description can be added directly to the content surrounding the graphic in the body of the document or as a caption. Alt text would still need to be embedded in the image using this second method, but only including the image's title as alt text would be sufficient.

Please note that descriptive text for complex images should be written by the author or subject matter expert. It is advisable to plan for the use of simple graphics, images, and diagrams whenever possible.

Tables – Some guidance to help make tables in Word 508-compliant include the following:

- Put the table's title above the table.
- Use simple tables (data tables with just one level of row/column headers).
- Avoid complex tables (data tables where row headers or column headers have two or more structural levels).
- Avoid merged cells since some screen reader will not be able to read merge cells.
- Avoid blank cells.
- Avoid split cells/text.
- Repeat the table's header at the top of each page.
- Allow row to split across pages.

Of note, do not include an image of a table or objects from other software as tables. If needed, recreate the table in the Word document itself.

Hyperlinks – Use descriptive text/write meaningful link text for hyperlinks. Avoid using text such as "click here" or "learn more."

Color Contrast – Provide sufficient contrast (i.e. use dark text colors on light backgrounds or vice versa and the color contrast ratio between the text and background should not be less than 4.5:1 regardless

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of the text size) and don't use color as the only way to convey important information/content. In general, color should not be used to as the primary means of emphasis.

Use of Style Formatting – Do not use style formatting to emphasize important information in the document's text. Provide an alternative method on the page to highlight it, such as placing it in the page footer.

Signatures – Avoid using actual signatures on the web as it is risky. Insert the appropriate S-signature which uses this notation: `"/s/"`

Watermarks – Avoid using watermarks. If watermarks are used, make sure that the information it contains is also included elsewhere in the document (i.e. such as in the document's header or footer).

No Scanned Documents – Screen readers are unable to read the text in a scanned document. Make sure documents don't include any scanned pages, scanned spreadsheets, or scanned charts.

Tips

- Use Word built-in numbered and bulleted lists.
- Use the Word built-in Heading style elements to format documents.
- Make sure hyperlinks and email addresses are working properly and active.
- Create tables using the Insert Table option under the Insert tab. Do not use tabs or spaces to create a table.
- Provide a [table of contents](#) at the beginning of the document, especially for long documents. It's important to have an intuitive heading structure.
- All edits must be accepted and Track Changes must be turned off.
- All comments must be removed.
- All formatting marks should be turned off and paragraph marks must be hidden.
- Set view to Print Layout.

Additional resources:

- [HHS Guidance for creating an accessible Word document](#)
- [Microsoft guidance for making Word documents accessible](#)
- [HHS Microsoft Office Checklist](#)
- [Color Analyzer Tool](#)