

Document Accessibility

Because information is for everyone.

Topics

- What is Digital Accessibility?
- Why do my documents need to be accessible?
- How do I create accessible documents?
- Where can I learn more?

What is Digital Accessibility?

Digital accessibility ensures that all individuals, regardless of ability, can access and interact with the content you create. It's about inclusivity, legal compliance, and making sure ECU's digital spaces are welcoming to everyone. We can create accessible content using the **POUR** principles:

- **P**erceivable
- **O**perable
- **U**nderstandable
- **R**obust

Disability is a Spectrum

	Perceivable		Operable		Understandable	
	 See	 Hear	 Speak	 Touch	 Cognition	 Emotion
Permanent	 Blind	 Deaf	 Non-Speaking	 One Arm	 Neurodivergent	 Clinical Depression
Temporary	 Cataracts	 Ear Ache	 Laryngitis	 Broken Arm	 Head Injury	 Grief
Situational	 Screen Glare	 Noisy Office	 Strong Accent	 Holding Baby	 Distracted	 Stress

Digital Accessibility is a Legal Requirement

- **Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act** – Federal agencies are required to ensure that their electronic and information technology (ICT) is accessible to people with disabilities, ensuring comparable access to information and data for both employees and the public.
- **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)** – Federal civil rights law that prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in various areas of public life, including employment, transportation, public accommodations, and telecommunications.
- **2024 ADA Title II Update** – All website content for state and local governments must be accessible by April 2026 (including password protected content). There are some exceptions for archived web content and preexisting documents. For more information, visit the [ADA Title II Update Fact Sheet](#).

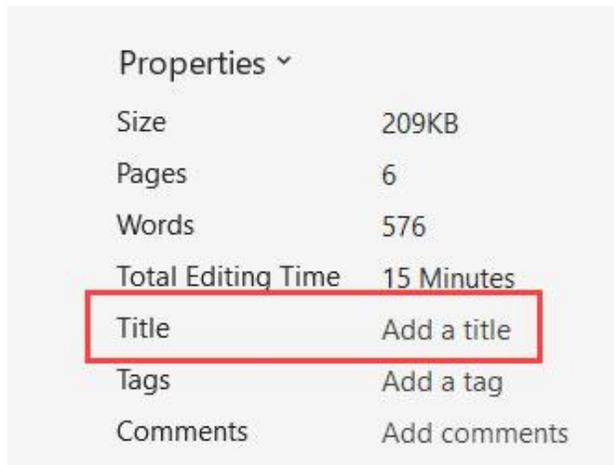
Creating Accessible Documents

- Does it need to be a document? Could it be a webpage?
- Create your document using the appropriate program
- Use accessibility guidelines and best practices while creating
- Check your document for accessibility errors
- Save your document appropriately

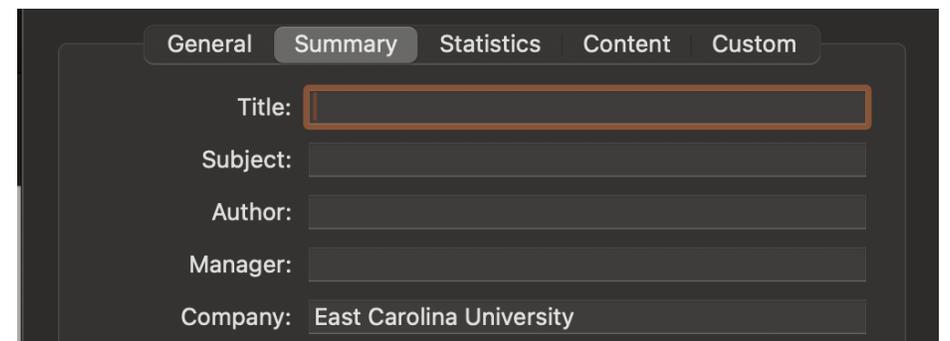
Give Your Document an Accessible Title

Make sure the document title is readable and properly describes the topic of the document.

On a PC, go to File > Info and add the title to the Title field under the Properties section



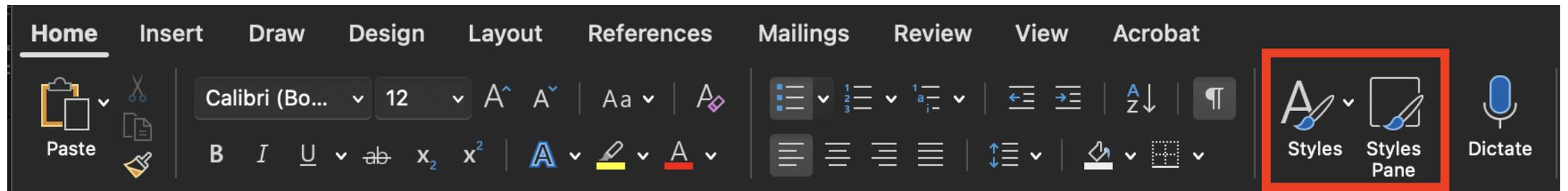
On a Mac, go to File > Properties > Summary and add the title to the Title field



Headings

Use document styles to create headings for structure to help users understand the flow of the content and navigate effectively.

Style with purpose, not just appearance.



Example of Accessible Heading Structure

- H1: Page Title
 - H2: Section title
 - H3: Subsection Title
 - H3: Subsection Title
 - H2: Another Section Title

Alt Text

Alt text helps users who can't see images understand the visual content on the page.

Categories of images:

- Important/descriptive
- Decorative
- Image links

Alt Text ✕

How would you describe this object and its context to someone who is blind or low vision?

- The subject(s) in detail
- The setting
- The actions or interactions
- Other relevant information

(1-2 detailed sentences recommended)

[Generate alt text for me](#)

Mark as decorative

Decorative objects add visual interest but aren't informative (e.g. stylistic borders). People using screen readers will hear these are decorative so they know they aren't missing any important information.

Alt Text for Descriptive Images

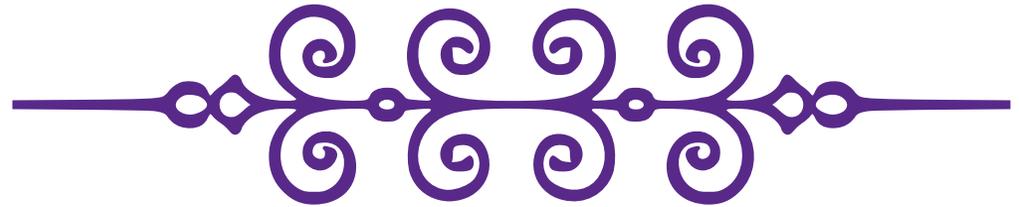
- Include all relevant details in the alt text to ensure all users receive the same information.
- For complex images needing a more detailed description, such as (charts/graphs/maps), a full written description should be provided.
- Alt text should not be identical to the caption. The alt text describes what's in the image, and the caption describes why the image is there (the context).



Example alt text: “Students in a classroom, with a smiling student holding a green bag in the foreground.”

Alt Text for Decorative Images

- If you remove the image from the page, do you lose any information? If not, that image can be considered decorative.
- Images that are decorative should have empty alt text. This allows screen readers to skip over the image.



This graphic is an example of a decorative image that would not need alt text added.

Alt Text for Image Links

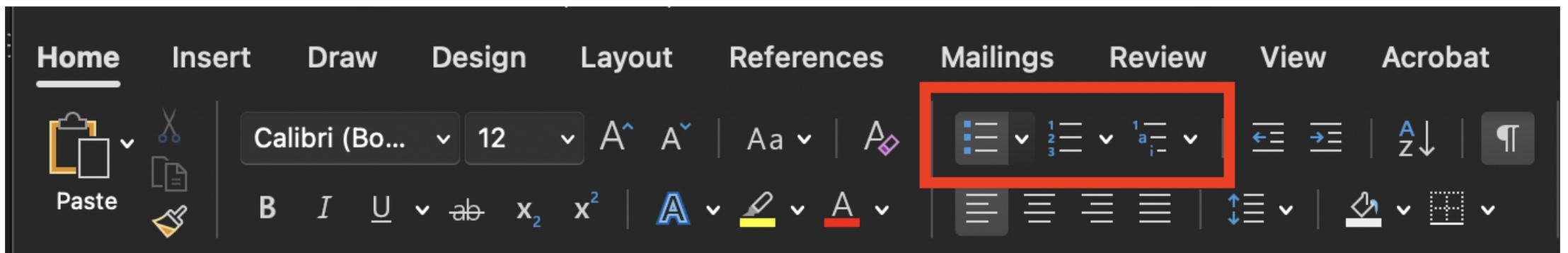
- Images used as links should have alt text added that clearly describes the destination of the link.
- If the image is also descriptive, include the description of the image after the link destination in the alt text.



If this image links to the ECU website, the alt text should be “East Carolina University website”

Lists

- Use proper list markup (unordered or ordered) to structure visual lists.
- Avoid single-item lists to reduce confusion for assistive technologies.
- Format lists of links or dates as unordered lists to maintain consistency and accessibility.



Link Text

- Use descriptive text for links that clearly explains their purpose and destination. Avoid generic phrases like “click here” or “read more,” as these provide no context for users relying on screen readers.
- Screen reader users often navigate through links out of context, so ensure link text is unique and meaningful on its own.
- Avoid using URLs as your link text (<https://www.ecu.edu>). Use the name of the page or site you are linking to instead to help the user understand where the link will take them.

Color Contrast

Ensure that text has sufficient color contrast against its background to be readable by users with visual impairments. Tools like the [TPGi Color Contrast Analyser](#) can help evaluate color contrast.

Passes

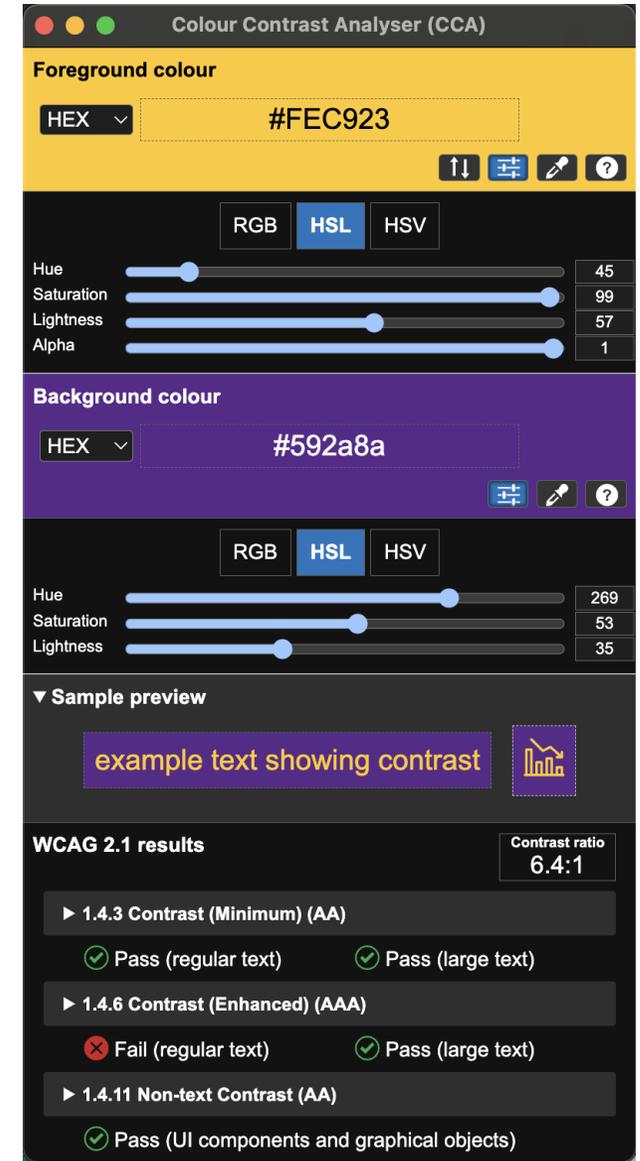


Contrast Ratio
13.09:1

Fails



Contrast Ratio
1.54:1



The screenshot shows the Colour Contrast Analyser (CCA) interface. It features two color selection sections: "Foreground colour" (yellow, #FEC923) and "Background colour" (purple, #592a8a). Each section includes a color picker and sliders for Hue, Saturation, Lightness, and Alpha. Below these are "Sample preview" and "WCAG 2.1 results" sections. The results show a contrast ratio of 6.4:1, with 1.4.3 Contrast (Minimum) (AA) passing for both regular and large text, 1.4.6 Contrast (Enhanced) (AAA) failing for regular text but passing for large text, and 1.4.11 Non-text Contrast (AA) passing.

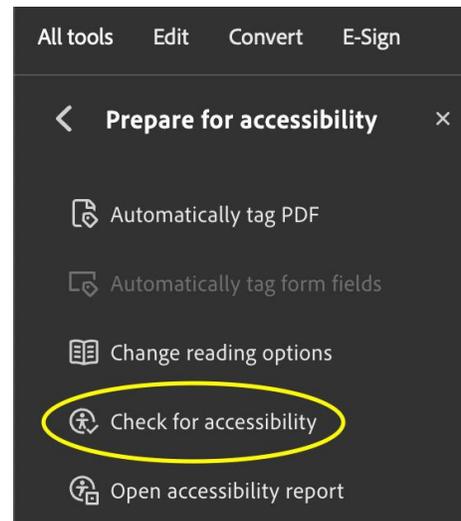
WCAG 2.1 results	Contrast ratio
1.4.3 Contrast (Minimum) (AA)	6.4:1
Pass (regular text)	Pass (large text)
1.4.6 Contrast (Enhanced) (AAA)	
Fail (regular text)	Pass (large text)
1.4.11 Non-text Contrast (AA)	
Pass (UI components and graphical objects)	

Other Best Practices for Accessible Documents

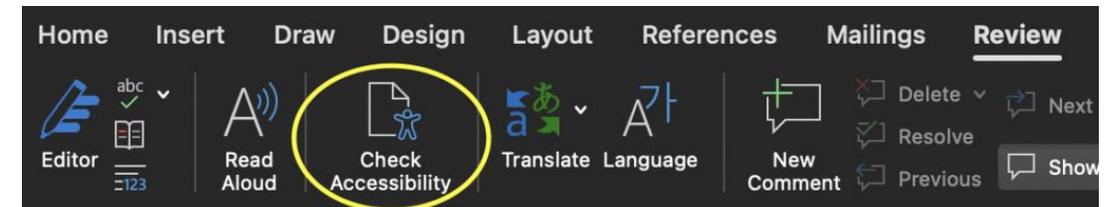
- Underlined text formatting should only be used for links to avoid confusion. Use bold and/or italic formatting for emphasis instead.
- Avoid using all caps text. Screen readers may read the text as an acronym instead of reading the words normally. Use bold and/or italic formatting for emphasis instead.
- Use the space before and space after settings in the Layout ribbon and/or the line spacing settings in the paragraph settings instead of using empty returns to create space.
- Make sure there is not important information in the document header or footer.

Check Your Document for Accessibility

For PDFs, use the built-in checker in Acrobat Pro



For Microsoft products, use the built-in checker on the Review ribbon.



Automated Checkers Can't Catch Everything

- Make sure you add a descriptive document title
- Check your image alt text to make sure it is accurate
- Use the built-in styles to tag headings and lists
- Ensure link text is descriptive
- Check your color contrast – especially for text over images
- In a PDF document, use Acrobat Pro to ensure all elements are tagged appropriately and check the document reading order to make sure it matches the visual reading order

Save Your PDF Appropriately

- **Do not** print to PDF to save your file
- For Microsoft products, Use File > Save As or File > Save a Copy
 - On PC, choose PDF from the file type dropdown, select “More options, select “Options”, select “Document structure tags for accessibility” checkbox, and save the file
 - On Mac, choose PDF as the file format, select “Best for electronic distribution and accessibility”, and save the file

Learn More About Digital Accessibility

Visit ECU's [Digital Accessibility website](https://accessibility.ecu.edu/digital) for more information about creating accessible digital content, links to training, and other accessibility resources.

accessibility.ecu.edu/digital