Biotext

Making online content and documents accessible

Web accessibility means that online content is available to anyone who wants to access it, including people with disabilities, or people with limited or mobile technology. Creating accessible content benefits everyone, as it makes content easier to read and understand. Making your content accessible is also critical to making your content visible to AI models, to ensure it is included and presented accurately in AI responses.

Headings

Screen readers and AI models use headings to navigate through text. Your headings should be no more than one line long, so that screen readers can parse them quickly.

Infrequent headings make a document harder to navigate. You can add more headings by separating content within an existing section, or by adding another heading level.

Use styles to tag content (rather than manually applying bold, italics, etc), including Heading 1 (used for section or chapter names), Headings 2 to 5 (used for subsections) and Normal (used for the main body text).

Don't skip heading levels (e.g. Heading 2 must be followed by Heading 3; don't skip straight to Heading 4). Check this in Outline view or the Word navigation pane.

Images

Images must be correctly described and identified for a screen reader to read them.

Provide alt text for all meaningful nontext elements (e.g. figures, maps, photos) by right clicking the image and selecting 'View alt text', then adding a short description of the image. Some devices will create alt text for you, but you must check the draft text for accuracy.

Alt text should provide an overall description of the contents and message of the picture. For example, if describing a graph, describe the overall trend of the data:

> Pie sales increased rapidly from 2008, reaching 4,000 per year in 2022
>
> not
>
> Pie sales were 1,000 per year in 2008, 1,100 per year in 2010, 1,500 per year in 2011 …

If the image contains text, reproduce this text exactly in the alt text.

If the image is a flowchart of a process with multiple points of divergence, include in the alt text the decision points and options at each point.

If a long description is needed (e.g. for complex charts), include the long description in the text as a table or figure note, or in an appendix, and add a short description as alt text that directs the reader to the longer description.

Don't leave alt text blank. If the information is already in the document, use the alt text to point the user to where it is (e.g. main text, caption). If the image is decorative, simply check the box 'Mark as decorative'.

Tables

Enter your table as a table, not tabbed text, text frames or an image.

Position tables in line with text (not floating).

Specify column header rows (select header rows, go to the Table Layout menu, and select Repeat Header Rows).

As much as possible, avoid merging or splitting cells. Don't include subheadings as rows; convert to a new column or break the table into several tables.

Don't leave cells blank – use text or numbers to indicate meaning:

> Use nil, not applicable, 0

Make sure lists (e.g. abbreviations list, glossary) are not formatted as tables.

You don't need to include alt text to make a table accessible, but a short summary inserted as alt text can be useful.

Colour

Use contrasting colours. Colour contrast refers to the difference between foreground and background colours. Low-contrast colours may not stand out enough from each other and may be hard for people with low vision or colour blindness to see.

Free online tools, such as Colour Contrast Analyser, can tell you whether your text and background colours contrast appropriately.

Don't rely on colour to indicate meaning. Any information conveyed by colour differences must also be available as text.

In charts, ensure that different series are distinguished by patterns as well as, or instead of, colours.

Spaces

Don't leave blank spaces. Don't use multiple line returns. Screen readers will announce each individual space and return, so multiple line returns can make a document harder to read and navigate.

If you need to create space, use formatting styles, or add a line or page break.

You can see the spaces and returns in your document by clicking the '¶' button in the 'Paragraph' tab.

Links

Ensure that hyperlinks are visually distinct, and that the hyperlink text is meaningful (describes the link destination, rather than spelling out the URL). For example:

> Visit the Biotext website
>
> not https://www.biotext.com.au
>
> or https://www.biotext.com.au

If a URL is spelled out, screen readers will attempt to read it. Describing the contents of a hyperlink will allow the user to navigate more easily.

Linking directly to a PDF can cause a search engine to return a dead link if the PDF is removed. If this can't be avoided, include the file type and size as part of the link text (e.g. PDF 75KB).

Document properties

Document properties, also known as metadata, tell a reader what a document is and who wrote it, as well as what is inside. They are important for search engine and AI optimisation.

Fill in the document's properties in Word by going to File > Info > Properties > Advanced Properties.