

Creating Accessible Documents: Tip Sheet

Part I: Print Documents

Planning your document

- What is the timeline and budget?
- What type of formatting will work best for the message?
- Will it be designed in-house or contracted out?
- Prioritize content and organization
- What accessible versions will you provide (large print, accessible PDF etc.)?
- How will accessible versions be made available?

Language

- Use clear language
- Avoid dense paragraphs
- Use bulleted lists to simplify information
- Avoid acronyms and abbreviations

Fonts

- Choose legible and readable fonts
- Avoid using decorative or display fonts
- Sans-serif fonts are considered easier to read
- Minimum point size should be 12 points
- Avoid using condensed or extended fonts
- Avoid italics or uppercase letters
- Use a bold or heavy font for emphasis

Layout

- Use wide margins
- Use columns with sufficient white space between them
- Left-justified text is easier to read
- Use adequate leading between lines of text
- White space guides the readers eye – use it effectively
- Avoid using extra spaces, tabs or character returns. Use styles and formatting tools to create these effects
- It is more accessible to place images to the right of text

Colour and contrast

- Use high-contrast colours for text and background
- Ensure that colours used to differentiate are sufficiently contrasting if printed in grayscale
- Printed material is most readable in black – use colour for headings or emphasis only
- Avoid complicated background designs or watermarks
- Avoid using colour alone to communicate information

Images and graphs

- Always provide concise text alternatives for images and graphics
- If the image is for decorative purposes only, use “” as the text alternative
- Provide a separate long text description for charts and graphs

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Tables

- Use simple table structures (avoid merged cells, nested tables)
- Ensure that headers, rows and columns are properly labelled in tables
- If the table continues on more than one page, ensure that the header rows repeat at the top of the next page
- Include a long description for long or complicated tables
- Do not use blank cells for formatting
- Ensure that the tab order is logical (left to right, top to bottom)
- When creating tables in spreadsheets, give all sheet tables unique names

Hyperlinks

- Ensure that all links to website or email addresses work
- Link text needs to make sense out of context and provide information about the destination – avoid using “click here” or “read more”

Document styles and formatting

- Use styles to format your document (Heading 1, Heading 2 etc.)
- Use heading styles in the correct order

Finishing touches

- Set your document properties (Title, author, subject and language)
- Always “convert to PDF” or “create PDF” in Word 2010 – never “print to PDF”
- Choose a printing surface that minimizes glare, i.e. matte is better than glossy
- Track changes must be accepted or rejected then turned off
- All comments and formatting marks must be turned off
- For long documents, add a table of contents

Resources

Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB)
Clear print Guidelines: www.cnib.ca/en/services/accessibilities/resources/clearprint/

Registered graphics Designers of Ontario
Accessibility handbook: www.rgd-accessibledesign.com/

Vischeck Colour Blindness Simulator: <http://vischeck.com>

