

# DCIF Project – Communication Tool 6: Creating Accessible Documents

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## Tags

### Who is this tool for?

#### High Level Priority:

- Direct managers
- Corporate cross-departmental managers

#### Practical Information:

- HR Professionals

### What guidance does this tool provide?

- Core steps to ensure document content is all accessible and user-friendly

### Take home messages

- Numerous communication aids and accommodations are available to enable successful communication. These may include the use of qualified interpreters (sign language, oral or tactile); materials in alternative formats such as large print, audio tape, Braille, screen readers, and assistive listening devices.
- Accessible documents ensure that all learners can follow and understand the information presented. They make your text or presentation clear, readable, and engaging.
- Please review all checklists when creating accessible documents on Word, PDF, PowerPoint, and Infographics

## Communication Aids and Alternate Formats

Numerous communication aids and accommodations are available to enable successful communication. These may include the use of qualified interpreters (sign language, oral or tactile); materials in alternative formats such as large print, audio tape, Braille, screen readers, and assistive listening devices.

### Printed Materials and Alternate Formats

Printed materials can be a significant barrier for people who have vision, learning and cognitive disabilities. Therefore, it is important to have alternative format options available. Alternate format materials (AFM) are an alternate version of traditional print material specifically designed to be accessible to people with disabilities. This typically includes large print, Braille, audio tape, colored papers and other electronic formats.<sup>1</sup>

The following table outlines the benefits to each of these alternative formats. When possible, ask your employee which format they prefer.<sup>2</sup>

<b>Vision</b>	<b>Large Print</b>	<b>Provides access for many employees with low vision</b>
	Braille	Good for complex information, short reference materials (<10 pages), and for information that is referred to repeatedly (eg. meeting agendas)
<b>Vision and Mobility</b>	Audio Recording	Popular format that can be accessed and stored easily and conveniently eliminates the to alter the information
<b>Vision, Mobility, and Hearing</b>	Electronic	Employees can access text through online resources using adaptive devices such as Braille display, speech to text software's, large screen magnification or adaptive keyboard design.

*Alternate formats are highly individualized, and thus each employee's needs, abilities, and preferences must be considered when determining appropriate formats.<sup>1</sup>*

## Creating Accessible Documents

Accessible documents ensure that all learners can follow and understand the information presented. They make your text or presentation clear, readable, and engaging. This helps everyone, not just those who are disabled or who use assistive technology such as screen readers. Making your business materials and other documents accessible from the onset reduces the need to translate them into accessible formats later and saves you time as well.

The following checklist can be used to ensure that all your documents (i.e., word, PDF, PowerPoint, infographics) are accessible<sup>3</sup>:

- ✓ **Use proper headings:** using an appropriate heading structure enables screen readers to identify headings for the listener and allow allows navigation of the document by its headings.

- ✓ **Write in plain language:** use clear, simple language to communicate effectively. This includes using short sentences no more than 3 items of information, using active verbs, avoiding acronyms/jargon, and including bullet points to help break complex information down.
- ✓ **Identify document language:** as screen readers are often multilingual, it is important to ensure that the language of the document is identified or the screen reader to pick the appropriate language profile
- ✓ **Focus on your presentation and layout:** this can make a big difference to reading and comprehension –
  - Choosing a font: recommended fonts include Sans-Serif, Arial, Helvetica, or Verdana. Light or thin fonts should be avoided.
  - Point size: text size of 12 point or higher will benefit most users. However, it is good practice to make 'large print' version of documents available on request. It is also important to remember that print sizes can vary between fonts. For example
    - this is 12-point text in Arial
    - this is 12-point text in Verdana
    - this is 12-point text in Times New Roman
  - Lowercase letters are easier to read. Avoid using capitals for continuous text
  - High contrast makes documents more legible – alternative colour contrasts (including black text on a yellow background) can be beneficial, particularly to readers who are dyslexic or have a learning difficulty
  - Avoid using colour alone to convey meaning - if you use colour to convey information (for example, by formatting certain items in a list in a different colour) then ensure that this is accompanied by alternate text
  - White space makes information easier to read – do not overcrowd the page with text; make sure you leave sufficient space between paragraphs; and consider increasing the space between lines
  - Large and bold font is useful for highlighting and emphasizing text – italics and underlining can make text more difficult to read
  - Numbers from one to nine are easier to read (in normal text) if they are written as words – numbers from 10 upwards should be presented as numerals
  - Justify text to the left – this makes it easier to find the start and end of each line and ensures an even gap between words
  - Do not hyphenate words at the end of lines
- ✓ **Placement of images and alternate text:** using images in a document can help convey complex information. However, the placement of images on the page should be carefully considered as it can interrupt the flow of the text. Consider placing images at the end of paragraphs and allow sufficient space between text and image. Provide **alternative text** for each image to convey its content
- ✓ **Use tables wisely:** tables should not be used to control layout. Try to keep the table simple and clearly identify columns and row headers.
- ✓ **Use meaningful hyperlinks:** including **hyperlinks** to web pages can enhance their usefulness for the reader, but they must make sense as standalone information. It needs to convey clear and accurate information about it links to (i.e., full title of destination page). Avoid restyling links to remove the underline, as this may make the difficult to distinguish as links for users.

## Accessible Word Documents<sup>4</sup>

A good heading structure is crucial in creating accessible Word documents. Headings will allow screen reader users to navigate through the page easily. When creating a heading many people simply change the font, enlarge the font size, or make it bold. If this is done, the document has no real structure that a screen reader can recognize. Therefore, you should design your document by using “Styles” menu, rather than by applying formats to the text directly.

For paragraph formatting, avoid using the “Enter” or “Return” key to create space between paragraphs. To change the spacing, select the paragraphs and change their spacing-before and spacing-after settings. If not, screen readers will not be able to distinguish between page breaks.

Other specific considerations related to accessibility in Word documents include:

- The space between lines of text and should be at least 25 to 30 per cent of the point size. Use normal or expanded character spacing, rather than condensed spacing.
- Do not use tabs or the spacebar to create columns of text with space between them. To create multi-column documents, always use Word’s “Columns” layout feature.
- Number your pages.
- Provide a table of contents, especially for long documents.
- Reduce distractions by not using watermarks or complicated background
- Avoid using text boxes. Screen readers cannot see inside them so the user of the reader would miss the information conveyed in a text box.
- Use true numbered and bulleted lists
- Save file formats to “docx.”
- Utilize the Accessibility Checker

For more information, please follow <https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/office/make-your-word-documents-accessible-to-people-with-disabilities-d9bf3683-87ac-47ea-b91a-78dcacb3c66d>

## Accessible PDF Documents<sup>5</sup>

PDF stands for Portable Document Format. It preserves the original look of the document on the screen and in print regardless of the software program or computer system are used. Accessible PDF file refers to “tagged” PDF files. Tagging creates an additional layer of information that allows screen readers to navigate the file, identify images, headings, and paragraphs, among other items. Tags exist for accessibility purposes and have no visible effect on the PDF file. In general, a document is created in another program such as Microsoft Word, and then converted to PDF. This means, the first step in creating accessible PDF is to make sure the original document is accessible. Many of the PDF files are created in Microsoft Word. Therefore, the focus of this section is on converting Word document to a properly tagged PDF and checking the PDF’s accessibility.

PDF remediation is a process of adding tags and functionality into a PDF document to ensure content is accessible to all individuals regardless of their disability. Consider the following:

- Add/Auto tag: review and edit tags
- Review and correct the tag/order panel
- Add bookmarks
- Add file properties (i.e., Security, Initial View settings)

- Do multiple accessibility checks until it passes
- Remember:
  - Do not delete a tag unless, you are sure!
  - Be precise when moving tags
  - Concentration is key
  - Save often, and limit the undo's

For more information, please follow <https://www.adobe.com/accessibility/pdf/pdf-accessibility-overview.html>

### Accessible PowerPoint<sup>6</sup>

Microsoft PowerPoint is a popular tool for creating slide show presentations. It is used to organize and present key points in a meeting, conference, or in any other setting. All employees can benefit from a well-organized, clear, and concise PowerPoint presentation.

The outline and the notes panels can be used to enhance accessibility. The outline panel contains a text outline of the content that appears in your slides. Reviewing this panel can help ensure the content on the slides is logically sequenced, that slide titles are unique and meaningful and that reading order is appropriate. The notes panel allows the speaker to add notes and information that are not on the slides. However, please keep in mind that placing image or chart descriptions in this area is not reliable and should be avoided.

Other specific considerations related to accessibility in PowerPoints include:

- Ensure that the font size is large enough to read easily. If your presentation will be viewed via projector, the font size should be larger than on printed handouts
- Make sure there is a high contrast between the background and the text. If your presentation will be viewed via projector, the contrast needs to be even more pronounced.
- Do not use color as the only way to convey content. Make sure the content can be interpreted in grey scale.
- Use titles on each slide, so the flow of the presentation is easy to navigate.
- Don't make your slides too busy. Three to seven bullet points per slide is a good rule of thumb.
- If your slides contain animations, make sure they are brief and do not distract from the important points.
- Avoid automatic slide transitions. Use simple slide transitions. Complex transitions can be distracting.
- If you embed audio, make sure a transcript is available. If you have embedded video, ensure that the video is captioned, and that the player controls (start, pause and stop buttons) are accessible.

For more information, please follow [https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/office/make-your-powerpoint-presentations-accessible-to-people-with-disabilities-6f772b2-2f33-4bd2-8ca7-dae3b2b3ef25#bkmk\\_bestwin](https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/office/make-your-powerpoint-presentations-accessible-to-people-with-disabilities-6f772b2-2f33-4bd2-8ca7-dae3b2b3ef25#bkmk_bestwin)

## Accessible Infographics<sup>7</sup>

Infographics are content assets that convey information in a visual way. While visualizing your content has multiple benefits – from making information easier to grasp and remember to encouraging people to share that information, infographics can also make content inaccessible. Where infographics can lack is in making the visualized information accessible to all, i.e., people with visual disabilities.

Therefore, infographic designers must include the accessibility factor into their design process to ensure the content is:

- Easy to see for people with visual difficulties, such as color blindness
- Recognizable to screen readers
- Possible to understand to people with cognitive disabilities

Use this checklist to assess if your flyer/infographic meets all the accessibility standards and best practices. Select each checkbox that applies to your flyer/infographic.<sup>8</sup>

## Reference

- <sup>1</sup> RRC Polytech. (n.d.). *Alternate Format Print Material* [https://www.rrc.ca/accessibility/assistive-technology/alternate-format/#:~:text=Alternate%20format%20material%20\(AFM\)%20is,disabilities%20that%20impact%20motor%20control](https://www.rrc.ca/accessibility/assistive-technology/alternate-format/#:~:text=Alternate%20format%20material%20(AFM)%20is,disabilities%20that%20impact%20motor%20control)).
- <sup>2</sup> Communication Disabilities Across Canada. (2022). *Communication Access and Social Justice for people who have disabilities that affect communication*. <https://www.cdacanada.com/>
- <sup>3</sup> Ability Net. (2022). *Creating Accessible Documents*. <https://abilitynet.org.uk/factsheets/creating-accessible-documents-0#simple-table-of-contents-1>
- <sup>4</sup> Microsoft. (n.d.). *Make your Word documents accessible to people with disabilities*. Office Accessibility. <https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/office/make-your-word-documents-accessible-to-people-with-disabilities-d9bf3683-87ac-47ea-b91a-78dcacb3c66d>
- <sup>5</sup> Accessible Services Canada. (2022). *Creating Accessible Acrobat Content*. Accessibility Canada.
- <sup>6</sup> Microsoft. (n.d.). *Make your PowerPoint presentations accessible to people with disabilities*. Office Accessibility. <https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/office/make-your-powerpoint-presentations-accessible-to-people-with-disabilities-6f7772b2-2f33-4bd2-8ca7-dae3b2b3ef25>
- <sup>7</sup> Smarty, A. (2020, February 4). *How to Create Accessible Infographics with Venngage*. Venngage. <https://venngage.com/blog/accessible-infographics/>
- <sup>8</sup> Universal Design Center (n.d.). *Accessible Infographics and Flyers*. <https://www.csun.edu/universal-design-center/accessible-infographics-and-flyers-checklist>