

# Accessibility Standards for Documents Submitted to the South Carolina Department of Education

Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act and Section 255 of the Communications Act are in place to ensure consistency and increase accessibility to information for people with disabilities. The South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) has adopted accessibility standards for all digital documents which will be publicly available, uploaded to the SCDE website, or which may be requested under the Freedom of Information Act. As such, all documents submitted to SCDE by educator preparation providers must be made accessible by the provider.

Due to its wide availability and enhanced accessibility functionality, the preferred digital file format is the Portable Document Format (PDF). All documents submitted as part of an approval process (such as program approval or Read to Succeed pre-service approval) must be submitted as an accessible PDF file. If users do not have access to the Adobe Acrobat program for creating accessible PDF files, they may instead submit a Microsoft Word file that follows all advisement provided in this document.

## Creating Documents with Accessibility in Mind

While it is possible to make any PDF document accessible through extensive manipulation of its metadata (the background information within a document), it is almost always more simple and less difficult to create the document in Microsoft Word and convert to PDF using Adobe Reader or Adobe Acrobat. The following list includes general advisement for creating an accessible document in Microsoft Word:

- Use clear, consistent structure and organization throughout a document.
- Follow a natural reading order (top-to-bottom, left-to-right).
- Use at least 12pt font size and avoid font styles with excessive hooks or slants.
  - Times New Roman is recommended; Arial and Verdana are also acceptable.
  - Avoid using italics for blocks of text; the slanting and the thinning of fonts increasing the likelihood that users will have trouble reading the text.
- Write out the first instance of any abbreviations.
  - Example: South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE). Assistive technology will read SCDE as “scadee,” which may confuse listeners if they have not been explicitly told what that means previously.
- Do not use directional phrases, such as “See the below.”
  - If referencing an image, table or chart that is not in immediate proximity to the text, use references. Example: “See Figure 2-C: Table of Important Information.”
- Include headings throughout the document using the “Styles” tool.
  - You must use the styles tool to label headings; just making them visually appear as headings is not enough. Labeling heading with the styles tool allows users to skip between sections of a document using assistive technology.
  - Sections and subsections should include headings.
  - Titles of documents, tables, charts, or graphs should be headings.

- Heading levels should not skip down, but can skip up.
    - Example: H1 > H1 > H2 > H3 > H4 > H2 > H3 > H1 > H1 is acceptable.
- Use the built-in tools to create lists, tables, columns, margins, and aesthetic spaces.
  - Do not use multiple carriage returns, tabs, or spaces to align text or suggest the appearance of a list, table, column, margin, or aesthetic spaces. These visually appear to be the same, but will not register correctly to assistive technology.
- Add alternative text to all images, word-art, text boxes, or scanned documents.
  - Alternative text can be added by selecting “Format Picture” or “Properties”
  - Alternative text should not repeat content included in surrounding/body text.
  - Do not include phrases such as “A picture of...” or “A table depicting...”
  - Try to be as succinct as possible while capturing all vital information.
  - Typing “” into the alternative text denotes a decorative image that should be skipped by assistive technology. This should only be used to mark decorations or to skip images for which summarizing/explanatory text is provided immediately afterwards in the document’s reading order.
- Ensure that all tables, charts, and graphs have descriptive text placed immediately before or after them. A title is generally sufficient, but complex examples should include explanatory text for all users.
- Hyperlink entire, descriptive phrases that describe the destination or content of any included hyperlinks.
  - Do not use hyperlinks for phrases such as “[Click Here.](#)”
  - Do not use hyperlinks for long or non-descriptive URL such as <https://www.college.com/fjkdls;ajfklds;jfklds;jkhuiopuioen;cojlfjlkds>.
  - Examples of good hyperlinks: Learn More About Accessibility (PDF), [ed.sc.gov](http://ed.sc.gov), or South Carolina Department of Education.
  - It is acceptable to write out a URL if stating a reference.
- Do not use of color alone to convey meaning or provide emphasis.
  - If using color, ensure sufficient contrast. Use dark colors on white backgrounds.
  - If using color or images, review a print preview in greyscale to check for contrast.
- Do not underline text unless it is a hyperlink.

## Creating Accessible Tables

Tables present additional accessibility challenges that must be considered. As an example, imagine that you are using a screen reader. You go to a web site to find the location for Biology 205, and on the web page that has that information you hear:

Table with 10 columns and 7 rows. Department Code, Class Number, Section, Max Enrollment, Current Enrollment, Room Number, Days, Start Time, End Time, Instructor, BIO, 100, 1, 15, 13, 5, Mon, Wed, Fri, 10:00, 11:00, Smith, 100, 2, 15, 7, 5, Tue, Thu, 11:00, 12:30, Miller, 205, 1, 15, 9, 6, Tue, Thu, 09:00, 10:30, Smith, 315, 1, 12, 3, 6, Mon, Wed, Fri, 13:00, 14:00, Miller, BUS, 150, 1, 15, 15, 13, Mon, Wed, Fri, 09:00, 10:00, Roberts, 210, 1, 10, 9, 13, Mon, Wed, Fri, 08:00, 09:00, Smith.

After listening to this information, do you know where Biology 205 is supposed to be held? When using assistive technology to read tables, this type of information can be quite confusing.

The larger the table, the more information the table creator is expecting the end user to hold in their memory for processing (Webaim, 2017). By using proper row and column headings, users of assistive technology can navigate through the information to find the class section and room number fairly easily. Considering what users need to know and how to best present that information in a simple and focused way will make the information more navigable and more easily understood by all users. The following list includes general advisement for creating an accessible table in Microsoft Word:

- Consider whether you need a table to convey the information; tables should be used to present information that references various variables, not for aesthetics.
  - Example: don't make a table with one column. That could just as easily be a list.
- Use the "Insert > Table" command to create tables.
  - Using pictures and drawing lines to recreate the aesthetic of a table will lead to accessibility errors.
- Tables should not include any images.
- Every row should have the same number of cells as each other; every column should have the same number of cells as each other.
  - Use simple table structures that do not use merged, split, or nested cells; they create extensive accessibility errors.
  - Do not include the table's title within the table itself; it should be located just before the table's location in the document.
- Do not use blank rows or columns (cells) to divide tables into sections.
  - If a column includes blank cells for users to write or type into, include a column name that suggests this in the heading, such as "Notes" or "Feedback."
- Highlight the top table row and right-click; *Table Tools > Layout > Repeat Header Rows* **must be checked**. This sets the top row as a heading row.
- Select entire table; *Table Tools > Layout > Properties > Row > Allow rows to break across pages* **must be un-checked**.

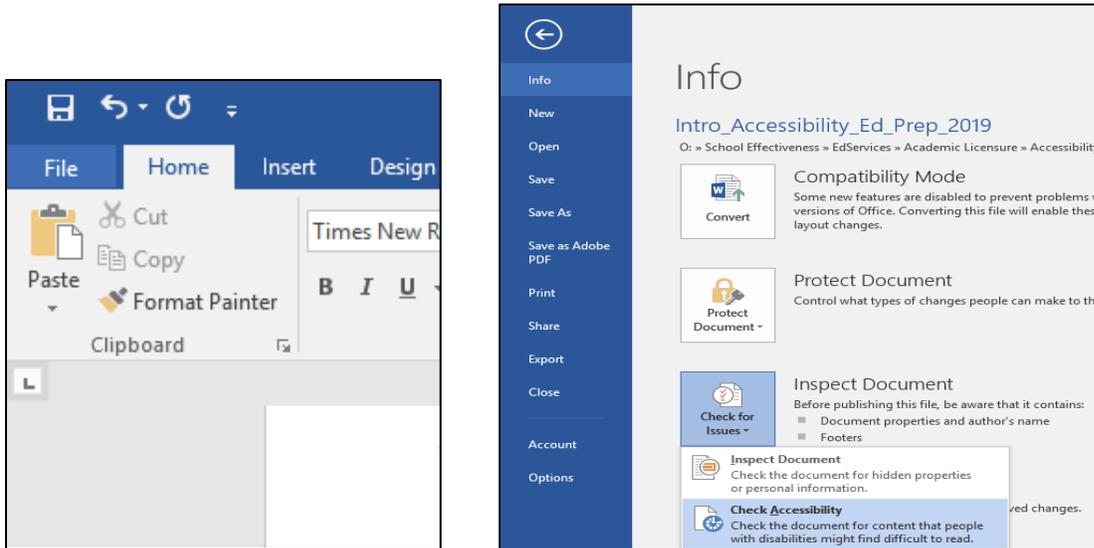
## Microsoft Office Accessibility Checkers

Microsoft Office programs all have a built-in accessibility checker tool. This feature is handy for catching minor or obvious accessibility errors, but cannot guarantee full accessibility compliance. Errors must be corrected and warnings should be reviewed for consideration.

- Accessibility checkers are not able to detect all accessibility errors; manual review is required even after resolving all errors and warnings detected by accessibility checkers.
  - Different versions of the Microsoft Office programs detect different errors and warnings. It is important to follow the advisement given for content creation in this document to ensure all errors, detected or otherwise, are avoided.
  - Some advisement provided in this document does not affect the accessibility of the Microsoft Office document, but does improve accessibility in the PDF document which the provider or the SCDE will convert to.
- Warnings regarding insufficient headings should be addressed.
- For text wrapping on images, the "Objects not Inline" warning may be ignored if all displaced text has the same left-hand alignment. Sentences or paragraphs that visually

wrap around the inserted image will cause reading order accessibility errors when converted to PDF format.

To open the accessibility checker in Microsoft Office programs (including Word, Excel, and PowerPoint), go to the “File” tab, select “Check for Issues,” and choose the “Check Accessibility” option.



## Submitting Accessible Documents

Once all advisement provided in this document is considered and the accessibility checker shows no remaining errors, program providers may submit the accessible Microsoft Word document for review and conversion to the PDF format. **Word documents must be submitted at least two weeks in advance of any deadline requirements**, to allow time for SCDE personnel to provide assistance with PDF conversion and accessibility corrections.

If providers have access to the Adobe Acrobat program for correcting PDF document accessibility, they may submit accessible PDF documents to the SCDE without prior notice and in accordance with any deadline requirements.

**Submissions with excessive accessibility errors or which do not follow the advisement provided in this document will not be corrected by the SCDE and may be denied approval.**

## References

Webaim.org. (2017). *Creating accessible tables*. Retrieved from <http://webaim.org/techniques/tables/>