508 Compliance and Accessibility

What is 508 Compliance?

Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act is a set of standards that requires federal agencies and those that do business with a federal agency to make Information and Communication Technology (ICT) accessible to employees and members of the public. It was enacted to eliminate barriers in ICT making opportunities available for people with disabilities and encourage development of various assistive technologies. 508 compliance speaks to multiple means of disseminating information including computers, software, and electronic office equipment to the extent that it does not pose an "undue burden".

There are several laws related to Section 508. For our purposes, the two most relevant are:

- **Section 255 of the Communications Act**: requiring telecommunications to be accessible to people with disabilities.
- **21st Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act of 2010**: requiring communications services and products to be accessible by people with disabilities.

While these laws do explicitly mention individuals with disabilities, 508 compliance is important to ensure that everyone of all learning types have the tools and supports needed in order to be successful. Learning styles within a classroom and needs within the education community can vary wildly and in order to ensure a cohesive message reaches all involved, it is important to take the steps needed to get the information and communication out in ways that are accessible for all involved.

Who does 508 compliance apply to?

As mentioned above, 508 compliance doesn't just apply to federal agencies. It also impacts any company or entity that does business with a federal agency. This includes but is not limited to private contractors, healthcare, and education.

Becoming 508 compliant can be a complex and complicated process as many people within an organization are responsible for documents and communications that fall under Section 508. Having an understanding of the importance and developing skills on how to accurately apply these standards is essential in providing accessible materials to your entire audience. Everyone can make a difference in improving accessibility options for all. Some examples of 508 compliance steps include:

- Creating documents such as presentations and reports that are accessible so people with all abilities can use them.
- Ensuring websites and webpages are accessible to people with all abilities.
- Procuring software and hardware intended to help those with a range of abilities and/or disabilities.

Why is 508 compliance important?

The importance of reaching 508 compliance cannot be understated. In order to ensure everyone has a fair and level playing field and move closer to equitable education, barriers preventing someone with a disability from being hired, preventing an employee or student from completing his or her tasks, or preventing someone in the community from knowing about or receiving vitally important information about services and supports necessary for Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). Similar to how differentiated instruction is used to meet the needs of individual students and their specific learning needs, 508 compliance is important in ensuring the needs of everyone are met in regard to accessibility of resources, supports, communication, and information.

For a more in-depth training on Section 508, the federal government has provided [Section 508: What It Is and Why It's Important?](#) This short module provides more information on the basics and the responsibilities involved in 508 compliance.

What is Accessibility?

The term "accessibility" describes how successfully a person with a disability or unique need can perceive, operate, and understand information they want or need. This is where assistive technology comes into play. Assistive Technology helps persons with disabilities to perform tasks that might otherwise be difficult or impossible.

Some examples of accessibility include:

- Utilizing the keyboard instead of a mouse to navigate a screen.
- Utilizing a screen reader.
- Video captions or subtitles.
- Text-to-speech options.
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Accessibility Tools

Here are few links to some short videos about how to use some of the built-in accessibility tools available to those with Office.

Word:
[Link for word "accessibility checker"](#) length 1 minute 10 seconds
[Link for word "alt text"](#) length 2 minutes 7 seconds
[Link for word "heading styles"](#) length 1 minute 25 seconds

PowerPoint:
[Link for PowerPoint "accessible slides"](#) length 2 minutes 29 seconds
[Link for PowerPoint "image accessibility"](#) length 1 minute 38 seconds
[Link for PowerPoint "Live Captions"](#) length 1 minute 7 seconds

Division for Special Education Services and Supports

Microsoft Word - Making An Accessible Document

Always check for Accessibility

Accessibility Checker

MS word has an Accessibility Checker built into the ribbon for easy access. The checker classifies the issues into three area:

Errors: Makes the document almost impossible for people with disabilities to read or access.
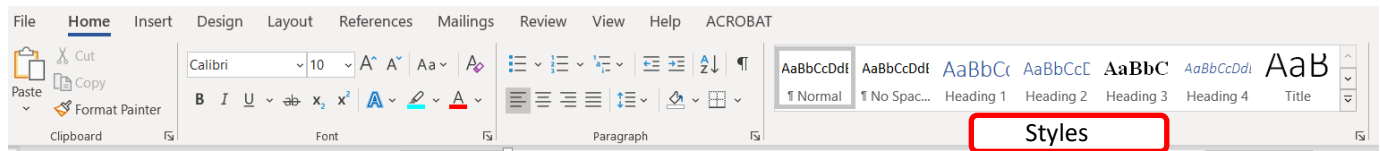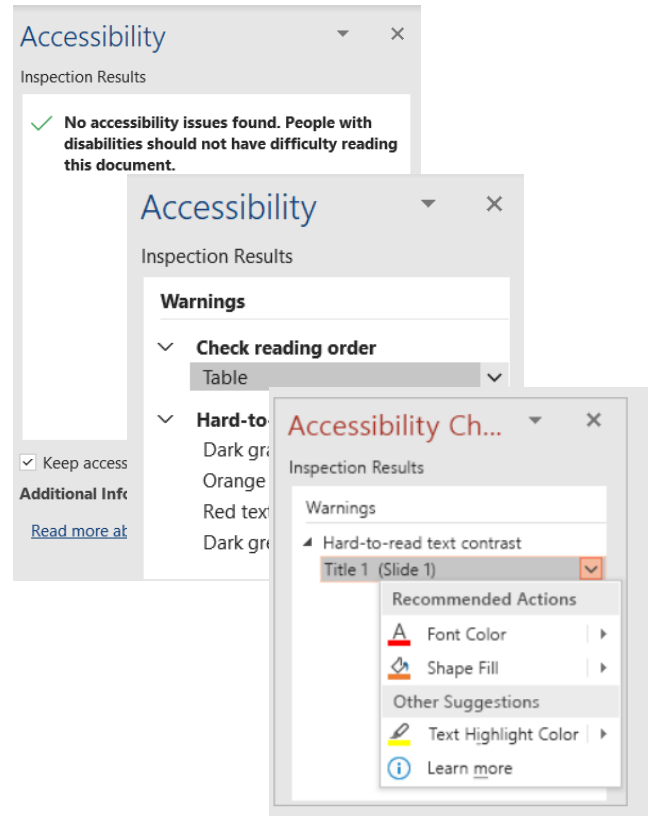
Warnings: Makes the document content difficult for people with disabilities to read or access.

Tips: The document can be accessed but it could be better organized.
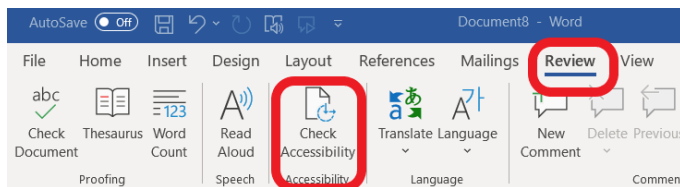
Clicking an item in the results section will display additional information.

[Link for MS word video "accessibility checker"](#)

Headings

The document is arranged in a logical order, the use of heading/style creates a structure that can be used for building a table of contents and as well as giving screen readers quick access to the structure.
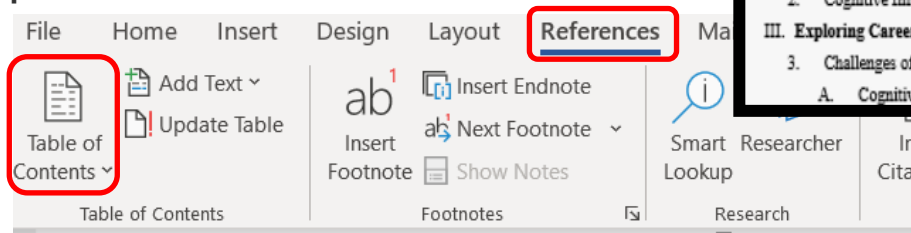
## Microsoft Word - Making An Accessible Document

Alternative Text for Images

The use of Alternative Text (Alt Text) in a document provides a non-visual representation of an image (the content or function of the image) to a reader that may not be able to see the image.

Alternative text can be added to:

pictures,

illustrations,

images of text,

shapes,

charts,

SmartArt,

and embedded objects.

Images can not be read by screen readers, if images are important enough to be in the document then the writer needs to be sure that Alternative text (Alt text) is included so individuals using a screen reader has access to these images.
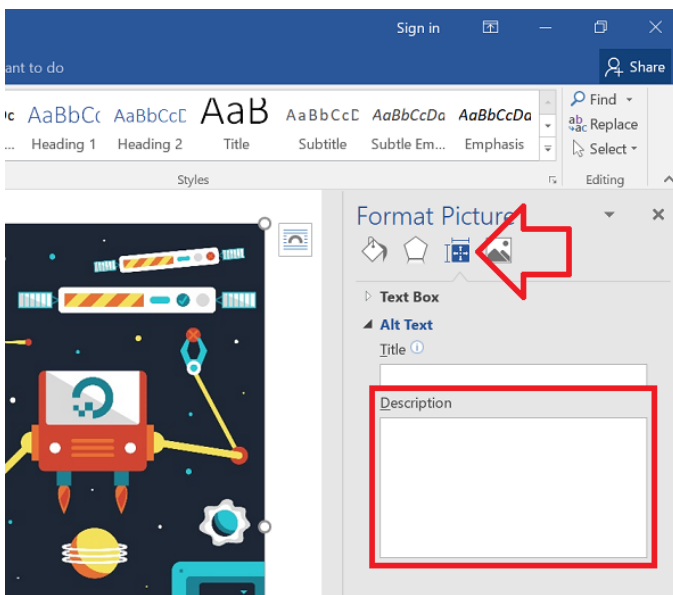
Right click the image, format picture.

Why Images and objects are important!

Division for Special Education Services and Supports

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Program Specialist
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Assistive Technology

Any item, piece of equipment or product system, whether acquired commercially off the shelf, modified, or customized, that is used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of children with disabilities.

The term does not include a medical device that is surgically implanted, or the replacement of such device.

Accessibility Tools
Here are few links to some short videos about how to use some of the built-in accessibility tools.

Word:

MS word video "accessibility checker" 1 minute 10 seconds

MS word video "alt text" 2 minutes 7 seconds

MS word video "heading styles" 1 minute 25 seconds

PowerPoint:

PowerPoint video "accessible slides" 2 minutes 29 seconds

PowerPoint video "image accessibility" 1 minute 38 seconds

PowerPoint video "Live Captions" 1 minute 7 seconds

Microsoft PowerPoint - Making An Accessible Document

### Always check for Accessibility

Accessibility Checker

MS PowerPoint has an Accessibility Checker built into the ribbon for easy access. The checker classifies the issues into three area:

Errors: Makes the document almost impossible for people with disabilities to read or access.

Warnings: Makes the document content difficult for people with disabilities to read or access.

Tips: The document can be accessed but it could be better organized.

Clicking an item in the results section will display additional information.
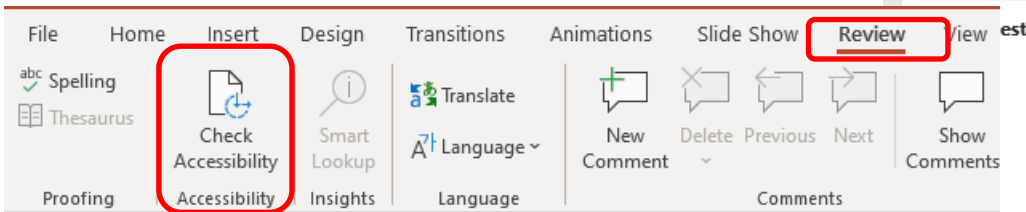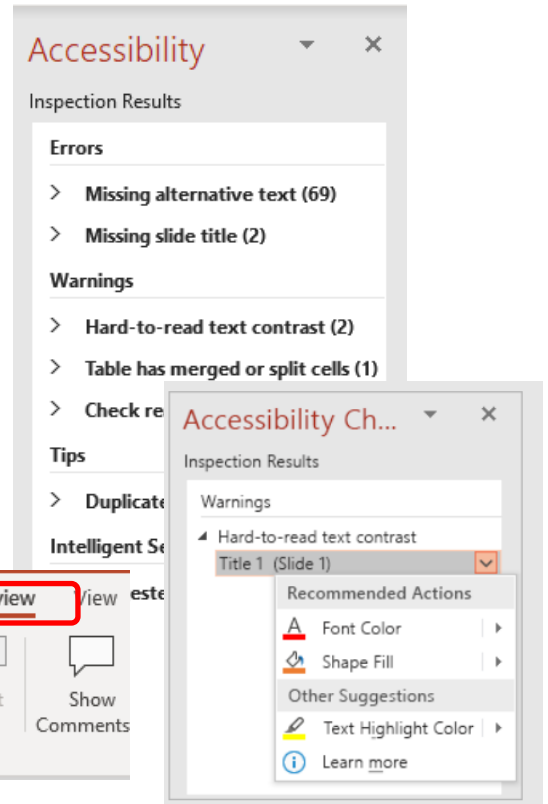
Reading Order

Visually we can read slides because we can see the logical order that it flows. Screen reading software needs a reading order defined so it reads it in the appropriate order. The best way to do this is to use pre-existing slides that are available in PowerPoint.

If you need a custom slide, or maybe you have already moved things around, you can adjust the reading order in PowerPoint.

The following video will discuss the importance of the reading order and how to adjust the reading order if needed.

PowerPoint video "accessible slides"
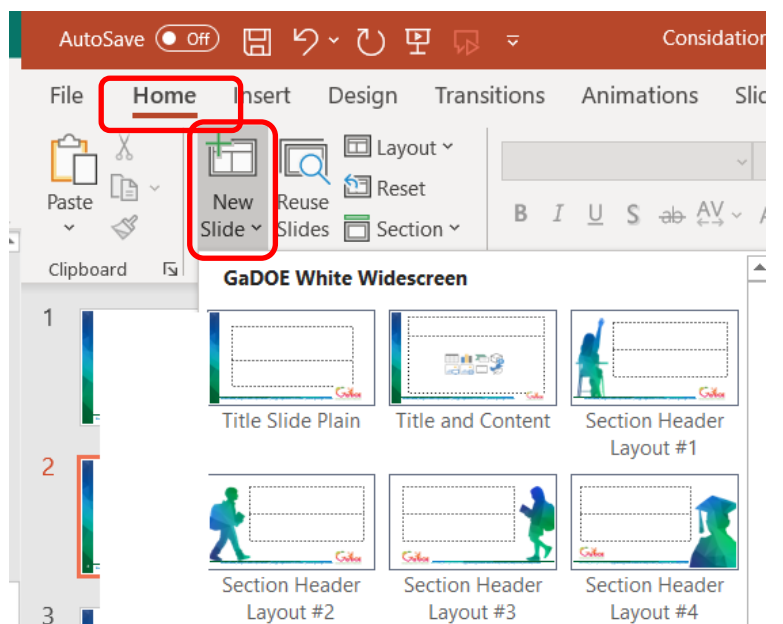
Microsoft PowerPoint - Making An Accessible Document

Font Size

To be sure that the presentation is accessible always use sans serif font (sans serif fonts are made up of mostly of straight lines) for text and headings of more than one line.

- Main Titles, font size 40 and Bold
- Subtitles, font size 28
- Sentences, font size 24

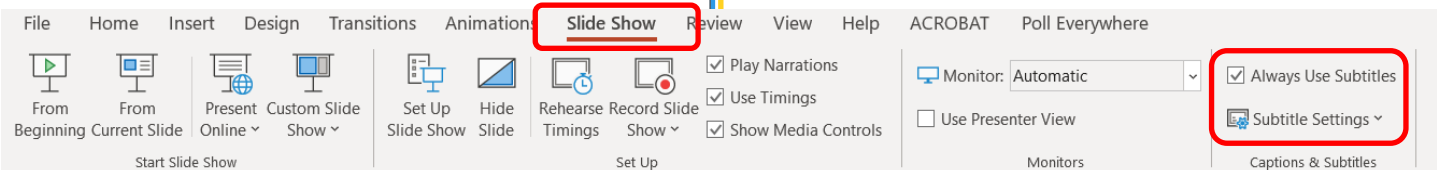No more than 3 bullet points per slide

Color Contrast

A high level of contrast between the background and the foreground helps more people to better see the content. It is good practice to use opposite ends of the color spectrum.

Alt text

Alt text helps individuals that can't see the screen to understand what's important in the image on the presentation slide. The Alt text allows the screen reader to read the descriptive text that is associated with the image.

Right click the image, Edit Alt Text

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PowerPoint with automatic captions/subtitles

(Requires Windows 10)

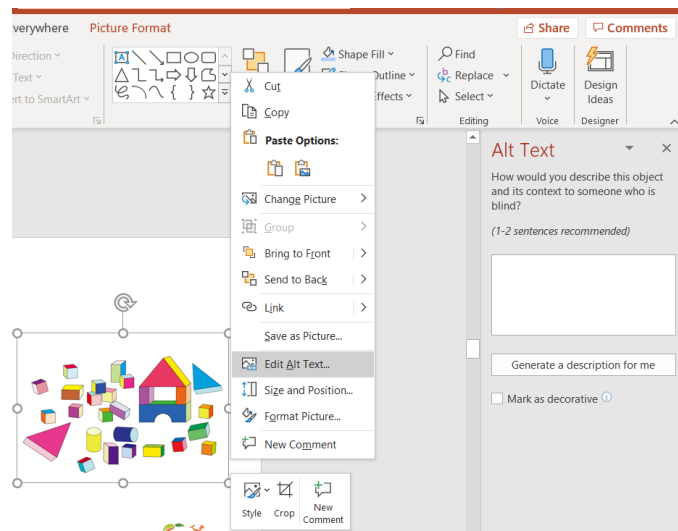PowerPoint can add captions/subtitles to a presentation and display them on the screen as you present.

Slide Show, Subtitle Settings

On screen captions can be in the language you are speaking or translated into another language. This ca help individuals that may be deaf or hard of hearing or if the audience are more familiar with another language.

Accessibility Tools

Here are few links to some short videos about how to use some of the built-in accessibility tools.

Word:

MS word video "accessibility checker" 1:10

MS word video "alt text" 2:07

MS word video "heading styles" 1:25

PowerPoint:

PowerPoint video "accessible slides" 2:29

PowerPoint video "image accessibility" 1:38

PowerPoint video "Live Captions" 1:07