Creating Accessible Content 101

This is a working document. Stay tuned for updates.

Why Accessibility Matters

- It's the right thing to do. The United Church is working to be more inclusive and accessible content is a contributing factor.
- It's the law. Ontario has the [Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)](). As an organization in Ontario with more than 1 employee, the United Church is required to comply in a variety of ways – everything from customer service to how our mass emails, website, documents, and presentations are designed. Several other provinces also have similar though generally less strict laws.
- Accessible content is easier to use by everyone. If your content is accessible, it reaches a wider audience of people. Why wouldn't you want your content to be read, and generally understood, by more people? Why create barriers that don't need to be there? Plus as a writer of the content, it makes tools like automatic table of contents, headers, footers, etc. easy to implement.
- Accessible content is GREAT for Search Engine Optimization (SEO). Well structured content can be better understood and analyzed by search engines and AI like Google and Bing, and even built-in search like those included in Outlook and SharePoint. That means when searching, both you and others are more likely to find what you are looking for and faster.

Document Preparation

Document Properties and Information

Documents contain metadata information that provide context to search engines as well as assistive devices. Things like title, subject, author, etc. can be added to documents so various digital devices can locate and sort the document.

Where to access this information differs depending on the type of document, but can usually be located by opening the File menu. A few examples are below.

- Microsoft Word: File > Info > Properties
- Adobe PDF: File > Properties
- Microsoft Excel: File > Info > Properties

Plain Language

The content of your document should be clear and easy to understand by anyone who is reading it. Do not assume that someone reading the document has any background knowledge or history.

- Use clear and non-ableist language.
- Avoid "insider lingo" like GCO, UCRD, RCO, etc.
- Avoid terms like "to the right" or "to the left." The document layout may change depending on the type and size of device being used, making these kinds of instructions irrelevant and confusing.

Document Structure and Formatting

Use Headings (Heading 1, 2, 3) in hierarchical order to create structure in your document. This makes your document easy to read by both sighted and visually impaired persons using assistive devices. Think of headings like chapters in a book: they are used to create structure, not style.

- Generally, the document title is a Heading 1, and subsequent headings decrease accordingly. Never use headings out of order (H2, H4, H3) as it creates improper document structure. Note that the default "Title" and "Subtitle" styles in Word are not proper headings.
- If the design (colour, spacing, etc.) is not visually appealing, change the style of your headings, not the heading you use.

Other helpful tips:

- Avoid use of italics and all caps, especially for sentences or large blocks of text. Italics can be useful for emphasis or noting proper titles but is more difficult to read, especially on screen. The same goes for all caps.
- Use proper bulleted or numbered lists for lists of content: People, places, things, etc.
- Avoid use of underlines for non-linked text. Underlined text is assumed to be clickable. It also makes reading text more difficult - especially for those with dyslexia.
- Avoid use of tables for non-tabular data (tabular data most often means numbers).

🎥Launch video: [How screen readers use headings](#).

Links and Context

Language and context are very important. Your content needs to be clear, concise and explain what is happening, even when you're asking someone to follow a link. The website visitor needs to know where they are landing when they follow a link and what to expect when they get there.

Many people, but especially those using assistive devices, often skip quickly between links on a page. If your page contains a lot of links but no context is provided, the website visitor will not know where they are landing or how the link is different from the next one on the page.

🎥Launch video: [How screen readers use links](#).

Context in links is also important for SEO. Search engines use the text in links to understand context for pages, improving search accuracy. The more context you provide, the more likely visitors are to find your content in a Google or website search.

Some tips on creating useful links on a page:

- Use descriptive links that make it clear where you are taking someone, and the content they should expect to find there:
  - Example:
    - "Learn more about [why the sky is blue](#)." is better than:
    - "[Learn more](#) about why the sky is blue." and much better than
    - Learn why the sky is blue: https://spaceplace.nasa.gov/blue-sky/

- Never use "Click here" as link text. Since the advent of touch devices like smartphones and tablets, the idea of a click is no longer relevant. It is also ableist, as there are various assistive devices and technologies that don't "click."
- Avoid linking generic words like "learn more" and "website." There is not enough context to inform the website visitor where they are going to land.
  - Example:
    - "Visit UCRDstore to browse a selection of Indigenous books." is better than:
    - "Click here for Indigenous resources."

Presentation Tools/Tips

- Alt text won't work if you're presenting via Zoom or in person. In these cases, it is even more important to ensure high contrast, large font sizes, and simple concepts.
- Consider providing captions, or inform your attendees how to enable live captions (if supported) using the platform itself. Note: Zoom, Teams, Chrome, and even PowerPoint online all support automatic live captions – see the Accessibility settings in each application for details.
- If presenting visual information, remember to describe your slides so everyone can understand what you're talking about.

Designing Images

- Avoid overlaying text on images. Text over an image can create a contrast issue, making it difficult for persons with visual impairments, like colour blindness, to read what's on the image.
  - If using an image with text is required, always ensure you include "alt" text that describes the image and any text contained therein.
  - If presenting in a webinar, etc. ensure there is always very high contrast if you must overlay text on an image, and that the image isn't highly textured or distracts from your text.
  - Too much text on images shared on social media can often result in lower audience reach.

Tools

- Office/M365 Accessibility Checker: Built into Word, PowerPoint, and more this handy, simple tool found under the "Review" ribbon is a good place to start. It's not very strict, but still helpful. Further, Word Online can now check for reading levels and flag for other more complex issues.
- WebAIM: Contrast Checker or Colour Contrast Analyzer: Use these to ensure the contrast between colours (text and background colour, for instance) meet accessibility criteria. WCAG AA compliance is required. This applies to both digital (PowerPoint, web, email, etc.) and analog (printed, apparel, etc.)
- Screen Reader: A Google Chrome browser extension that mimics how assistive devices read content on a website. Another simpler solution that doesn't require a plug-in is the "Read Aloud" tool in Microsoft Edge.
- Accessible Documents - Accessibility - Ryerson University: Step by step instructions for creating accessible documents.

Learn More

- Microsoft Inclusive Design

- [Inclusive Design for Accessible Presentations](#)
- [Present with real-time, automatic captions or subtitles in PowerPoint - Office Support (microsoft.com)](#)