ADA Compliant Word Docs

Checklist

Here is a quick checklist for creating ADA compliant Word documents. You can click on each one for a more detailed description.

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Headers

Headers are the most important part of a document's accessibility. While they are useful to sighted users, they are essential for those who use assistive technology. Assistive technology users will use headers as a table of contents. It will also allow users to jump around the document easily, via the navigation pane. While most users can easily skim a document, headers give that ability to those using assistive technology.

Example of Heading Levels:

To give you a better idea of how headers should be set up, take a look at the image below. What you see is a table of contents taken from a book. I have assigned each listing a heading. Heading 1 will be the title of you document (this should be your only heading 1 in the document). Heading 2 will be the bulk of your primary headings. Heading 3 will be assigned to secondary headings, those that belong under your heading 2s. In more technical documents, you may also have to use headings 4, 5, and 6.

Title of Science Book **(Heading 1)**

Executive Summary **(Heading 2)**

Introduction **(Heading 2)**

- Background **(Heading 3)**
  - Population A **(Heading 4)**
  - Population B **(Heading 4)**
- Health **(Heading 3)**

Materials **(Heading 2)**

Methods **(Heading 2)**

Results **(Heading 2)**

- Experiment 1 **(Heading 3)**
- Experiment 2 **(Heading 3)**

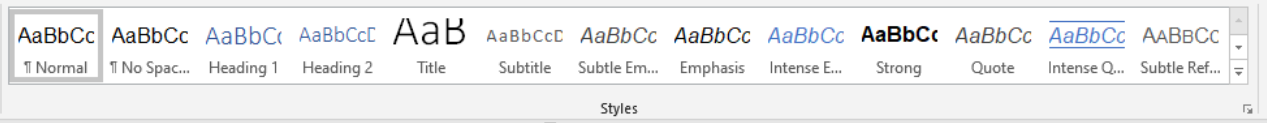
Discussion **(Heading 2)**

Conclusions **(Heading 2)**

References **(Heading 2)**

Styles Section:

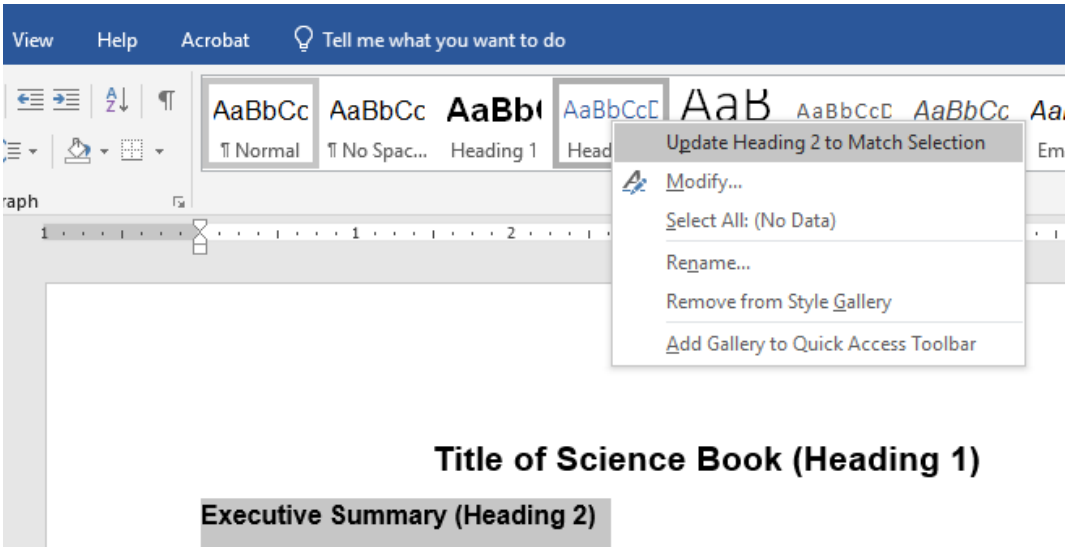
In Word, you can find headers in your Styles section.



Updating to Match Selection Style:

The first time you use a heading, you will want to update it to match your font selection. For this example, we will be assigning a heading 2. To do this, highlight your heading text and then right click the heading 2 choice in your styles tab. From the menu that appears, select “Update heading 2 to match selection.” This will make it so that your heading 2 will keep the exact same font, size, alignment and any other settings that you had attached to the highlighted text. Keep in mind that once you update, this will change ALL heading 2s in your document to match the style of the highlighted selection. If you want some heading 2s centered and some left aligned, you may have to manually change those depending on which heading style you chose to update.

Note: Heading 3, 4, etc... normally do not appear in the styles section until you have assigned a heading 1 and 2.

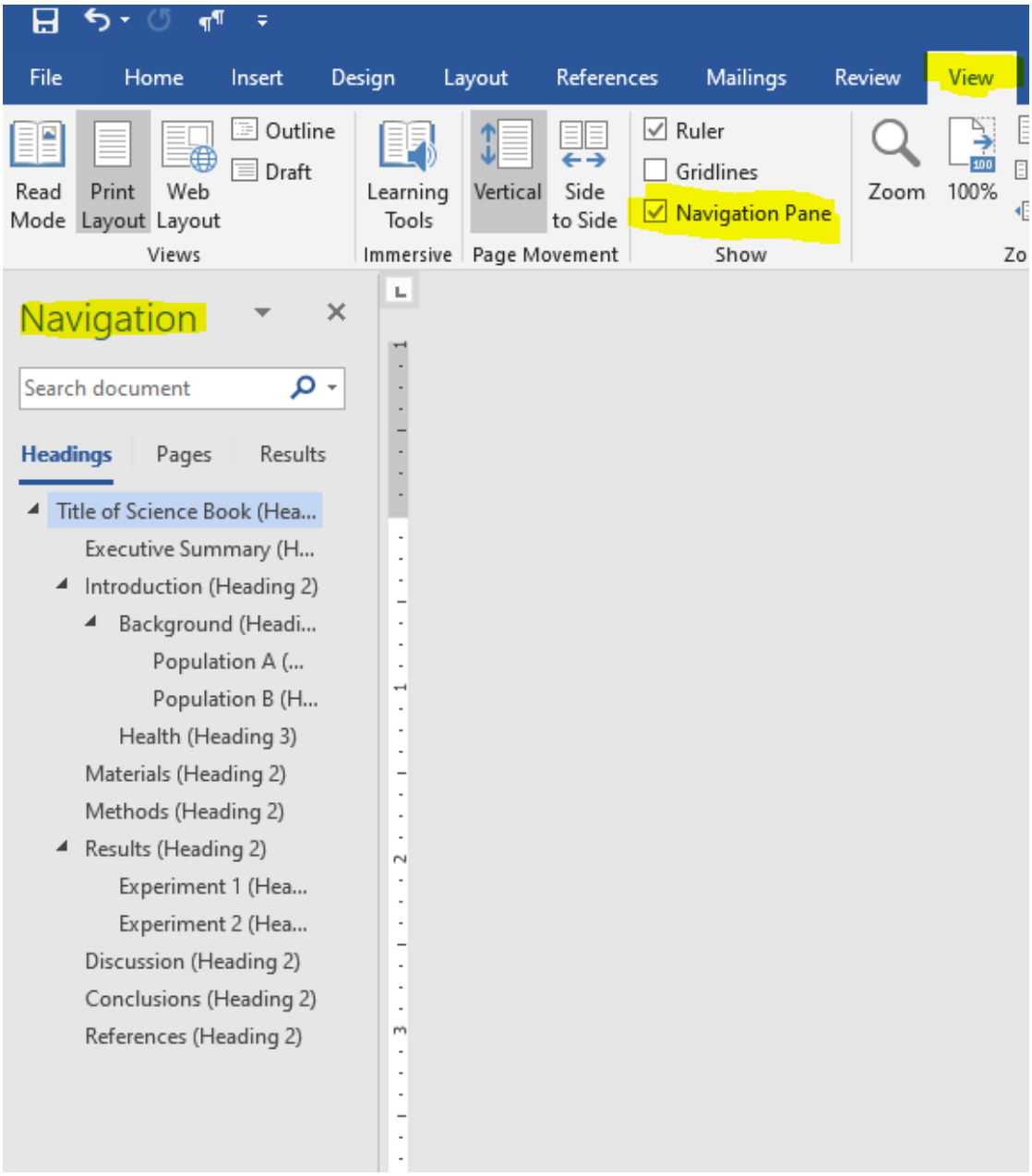


Once you have updated headings to your style choice, you can now simply highlight your next heading text and click your heading level of choice in the styles tab.

Navigation Pane:

Once you have all your headers assigned in your document, you can use the Navigation Pane to check if your headers are present and correctly nested. To access the navigation pane, click “View” on the tool bar and then click the box next to “Navigation Pane.” The pane will pop up in a window on your left. You can see all of your selected headings and the nesting for each one. You can click on these headings and it will take you to where it is in the document.

Note: If you see any blanks in the navigation list, it means that you have a blank line assigned with a heading in your document. Be sure to remove that header by going to the blank line in the document and clicking “normal” in the styles tab.

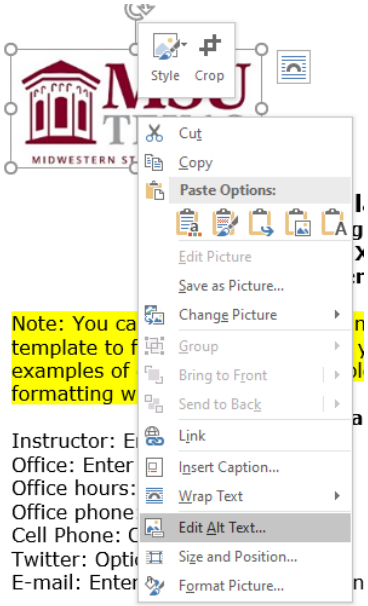


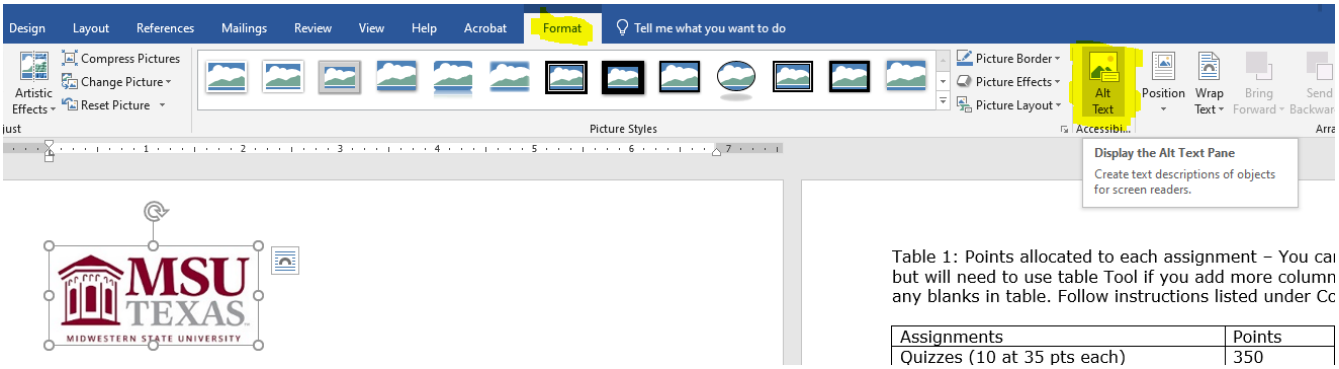
Alternate Text for Images

When thinking about good design, visual elements are always a huge factor. This can cause issues for those using assistive technology. This is where alternate text, also known as “alt text,” comes into play. Alt text is used as a detailed description of an image. You want to describe the image as if you were explaining it to a blind person, pointing out the important and relevant parts of the image. If you are using an image for decoration purpose only and the image has no relevant information, you can use the “Mark as Decorative” option. ***ALL images should have some form of alt text or is marked as decoration**.

<u>Assign Alt Text:</u>

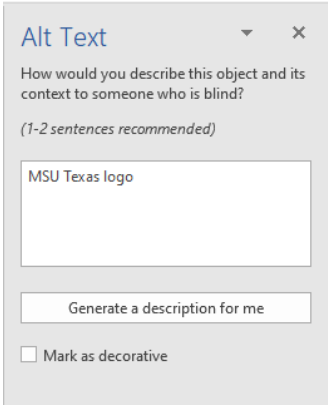
To assign alt text to an image, right click on the image. In the menu that appears, click on “Edit alt text.” Another option is to click on the image, then select the format tab in the tool bar and choose “alt text.”





Alt Text Panel:

A panel will appear on the right side of your Word document. This is where you will enter your alt text or choose the mark as decorative option. There is also the option “Generate a description for me.” I have not had any luck using this feature. If you decide to use this, be sure to edit any description to fully and correctly match your image.



Reminder: Mark as decorative is ***ONLY** for images that convey no information; Images that are only used for a design purpose. If the image has any information that you want the students to have, it ***MUST** have detailed alt text.

Descriptive Hyperlinks

Those that use assistive technology have the option to view a full list of links available in a document. Using descriptive links is important to the user knows where the link is taking them and why. You want to avoid putting in a full URL because a screen reader will read out the “h t t p : / /” and that can be frustrating to the user. Descriptive hyperlinks tell the user what the link is about while also being short and to the point!
***ALL links must be descriptive hyperlinks with the exception of links in the resource section.**

Example Hyperlink

For this example, I want to insert a link to our faculty resource page on the MSUTexas website.

Instead of putting in the URL, which looks like this:

https://msutexas.edu/distance/online-teaching-aids.php

I am going to put it as a descriptive hyperlink, which looks like this:

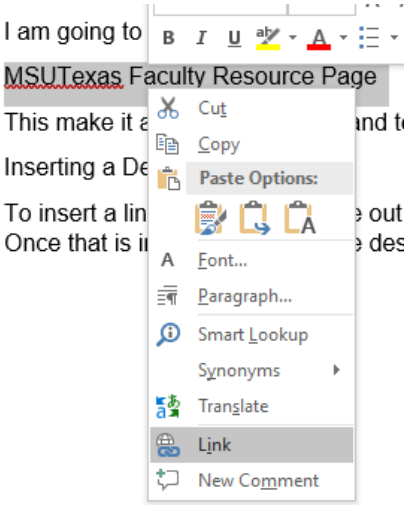
MSUTexas Faculty Resource Page

This makes it a much shorter link and tells me exactly where I am going.

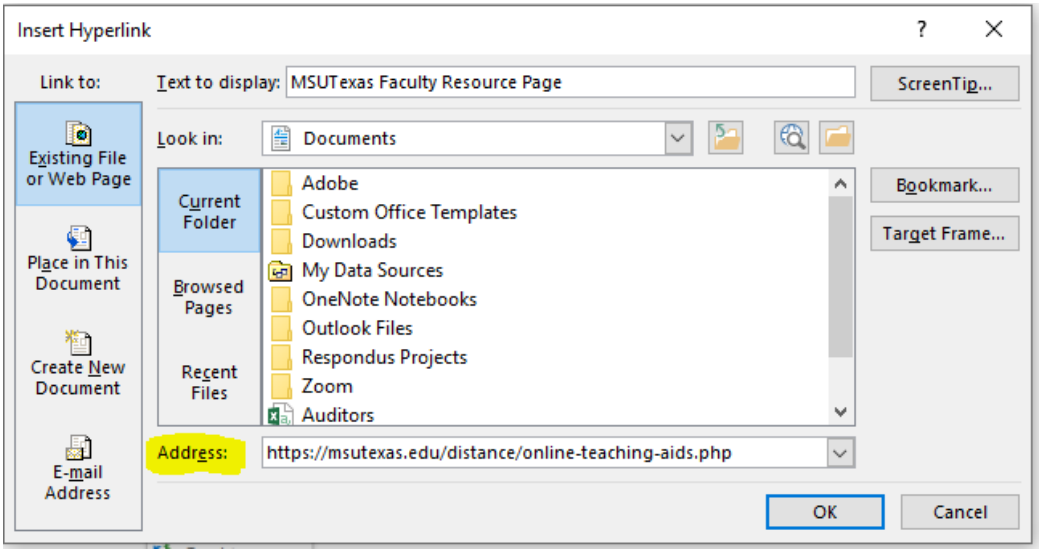
Note: Do not use phrases like “Click here” or “Read More” or “Learn More” as your descriptive link.

Inserting a Descriptive Hyperlink

To insert a link, you’ll want to type out the description that you want the link attached to. Once that is in place, highlight the description and then right click and choose “link.”



A new window will appear. Paste your link into the “address” section and then press okay. Your text will now be a link, appear blue, and underlined.

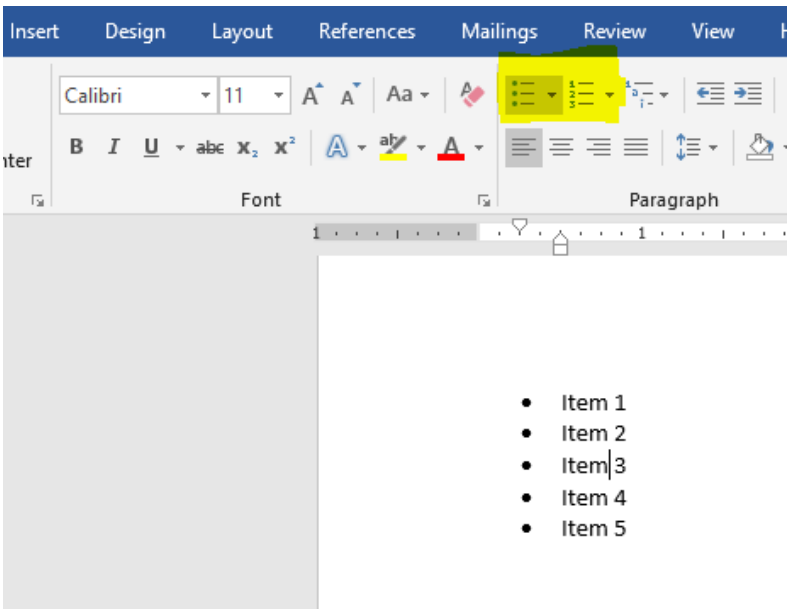


Lists

Lists are extremely helpful for those using assistive technology. It gives the user cues about the beginning of the list and the movement when going from one list item to another. Lists are also extremely valuable for visual learners and great for overall design.

List Styles

To create a list, simply highlight the text of choice and choose one of the two list style options under the Paragraph section on your toolbar. Once the list is created, you can verify that it is a list by clicking anywhere inside of the list and you will see that one of the list styles will be grayed. This means that the list is utilizing that style.

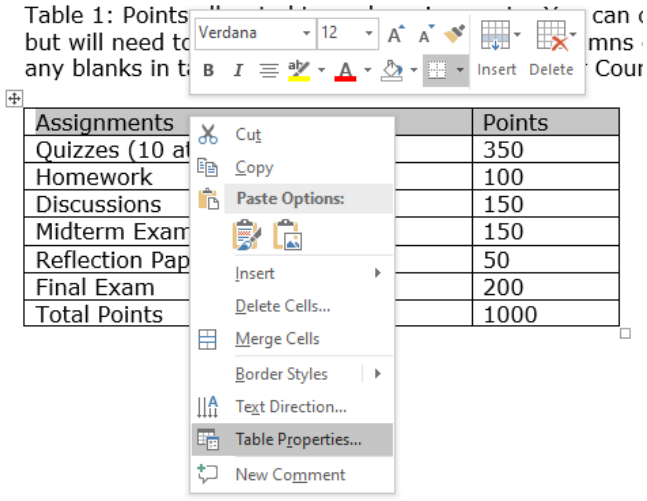


Tables

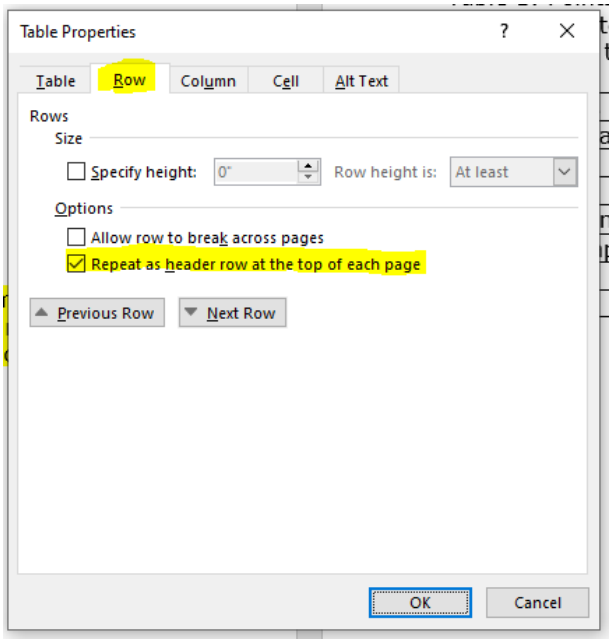
Tables can be extremely challenging to assistive technology users if they are not set up correctly. You want to be as simple as possible when creating a table. Tables need to include a header row, set up so that the row does not break across pages, have a quick alt text, have no merged cells, and have no blank cells unless the table is being used for a student to fill the information in themselves.

Header Row

To assign a header row, highlight the row that includes your headings. Right click the row and choose “Table Properties.”

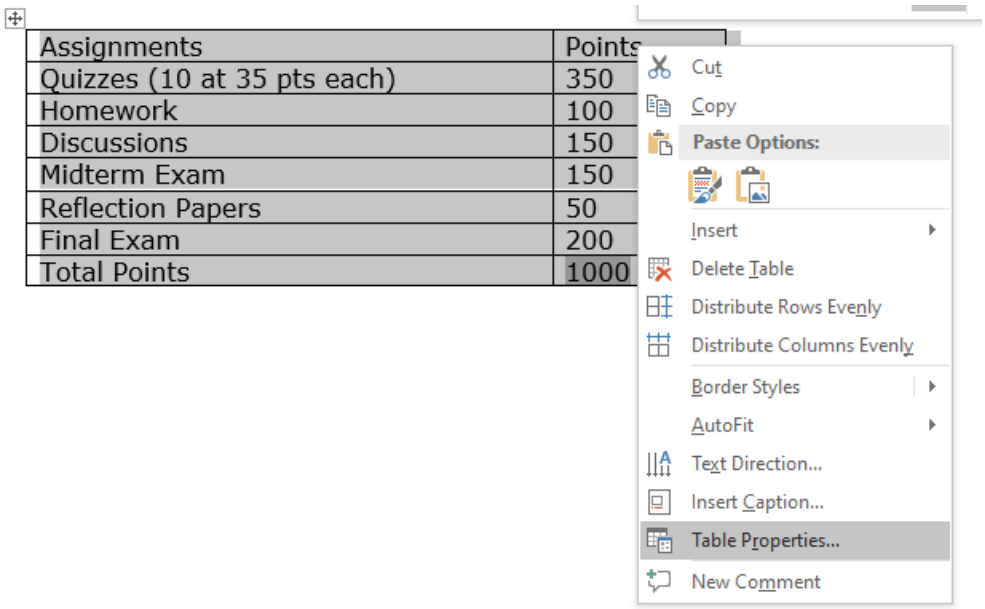


In the Table Properties window, go to the row tab. Put a checkmark next to “Repeat as header row at the top of each page” then press OK.

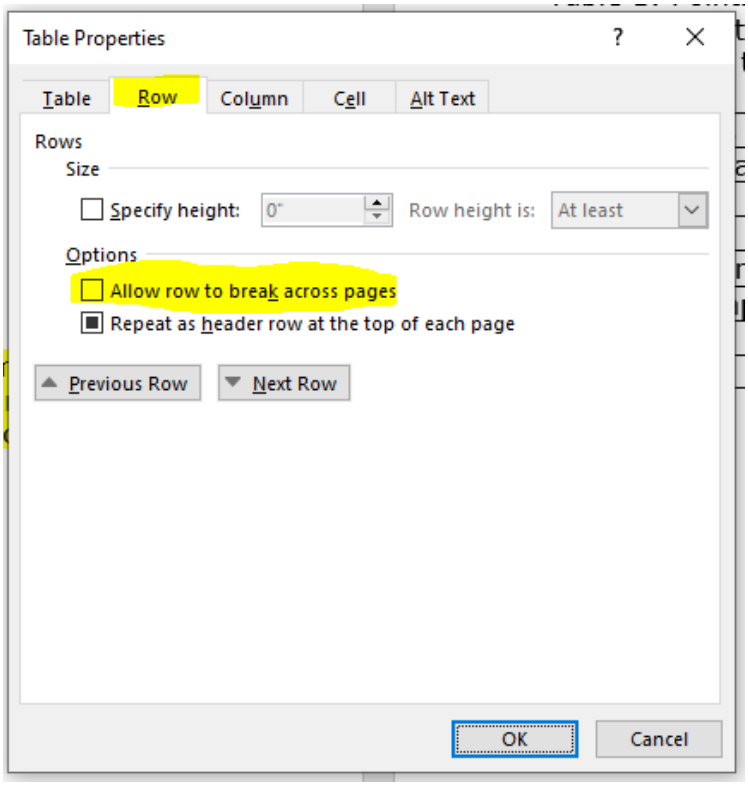


Row Does Not Break Across Page and Alt Text

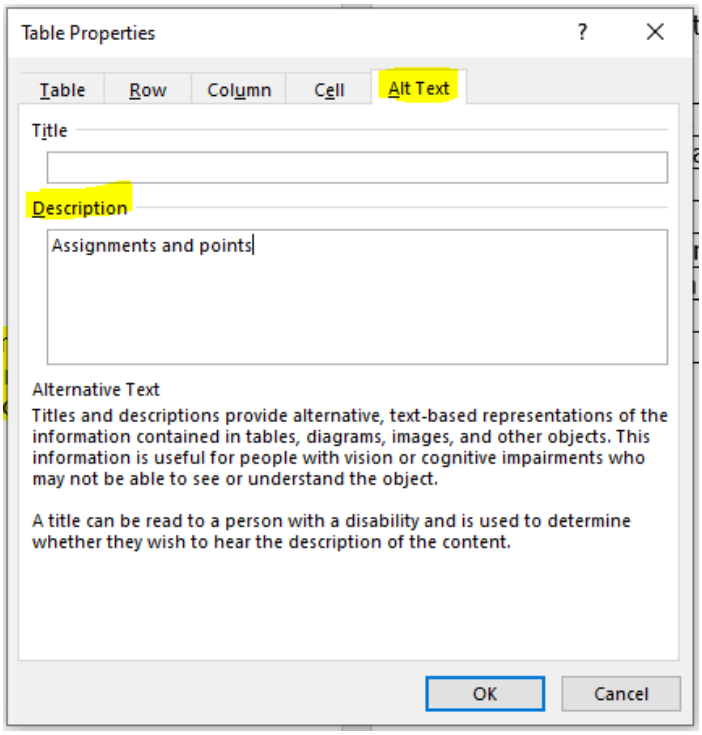
To make sure that rows do not break across pages, highlight your entire table, right click it and select “Table Properties.”



Under the row tab, make sure the box next to “Allow row to break across pages” is blank.



Before you press OK, we can take this time to enter a quick alt text. Go to the Alt Text tab and under “description” put in a short alt text about what the table is for. For example, if you are using a table for your course schedule, the alt text can just say “Course schedule.” This description does not have to be very detailed.



Merged or Blank Cells

Merged cells can cause issues for screen readers when it comes to lining up with the header row. Below is an example of a merged cell. ***Do not use merged cells!**

Week or Module	Activities/Assignments/Exams	Due Date
Week 1	Detailed instructions on the Activities and Assignments	Clearly posted Due Dates
Week 2	Detailed instructions on the Activities and Assignments	Clearly posted Due Dates
THANKSGIVING		
Week 4	Detailed instructions on the Activities and Assignments	Clearly posted Due Dates

Blank cells also cause issues for screen readers. A blank cell can cause confusion and lead to the user losing their place inside of the table. The user would then have to repeat the table to understand why there was a blank space. Best practice for a blank cell is to put either “N/A” or another type of notifier that tells the screen reader that there is nothing in that cell. You can use blank cells if you are creating a table that the student has to fill in information themselves.

Color Contrast

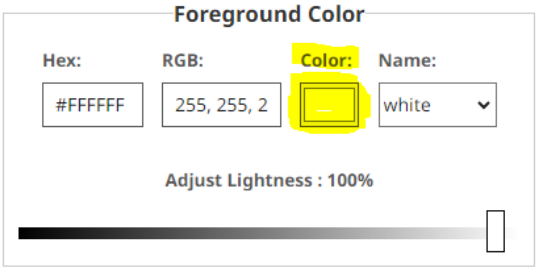
Color can be important to overall design but can cause issues for those with visual impairments or those who are colorblind. If you are using color, be sure to pick colors with high contrast. The rule to meet WCAG AA standards is a contrast of 4.5:1. ***There are ways to check your contrast, which I will describe below, but if you want to avoid having to check each time then focus on having a light color font on a dark background or a dark color font on a light background. The more contrast, the better!**

Checking Contrast

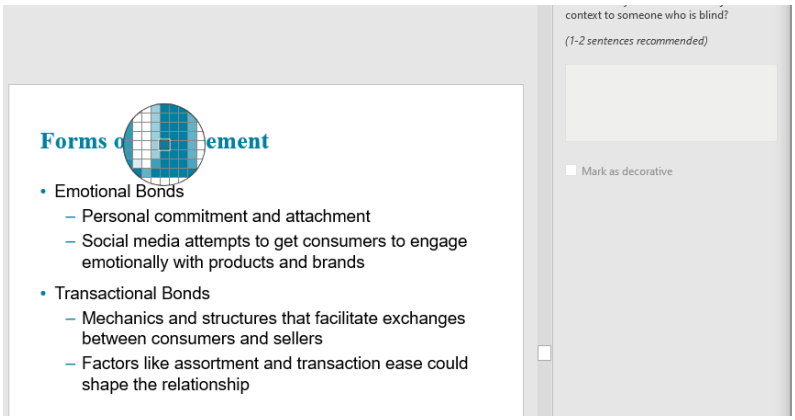
To check the contrast of a color, you will want to use Deque's Color Contrast Analyzer.

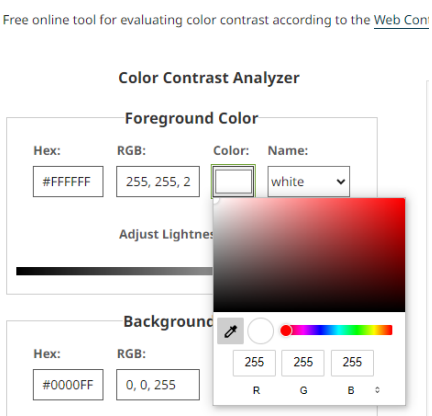
This website has three important areas: the foreground color, the background color, and the results.

To change the color of the foreground and background, click on the box below the words "Color."

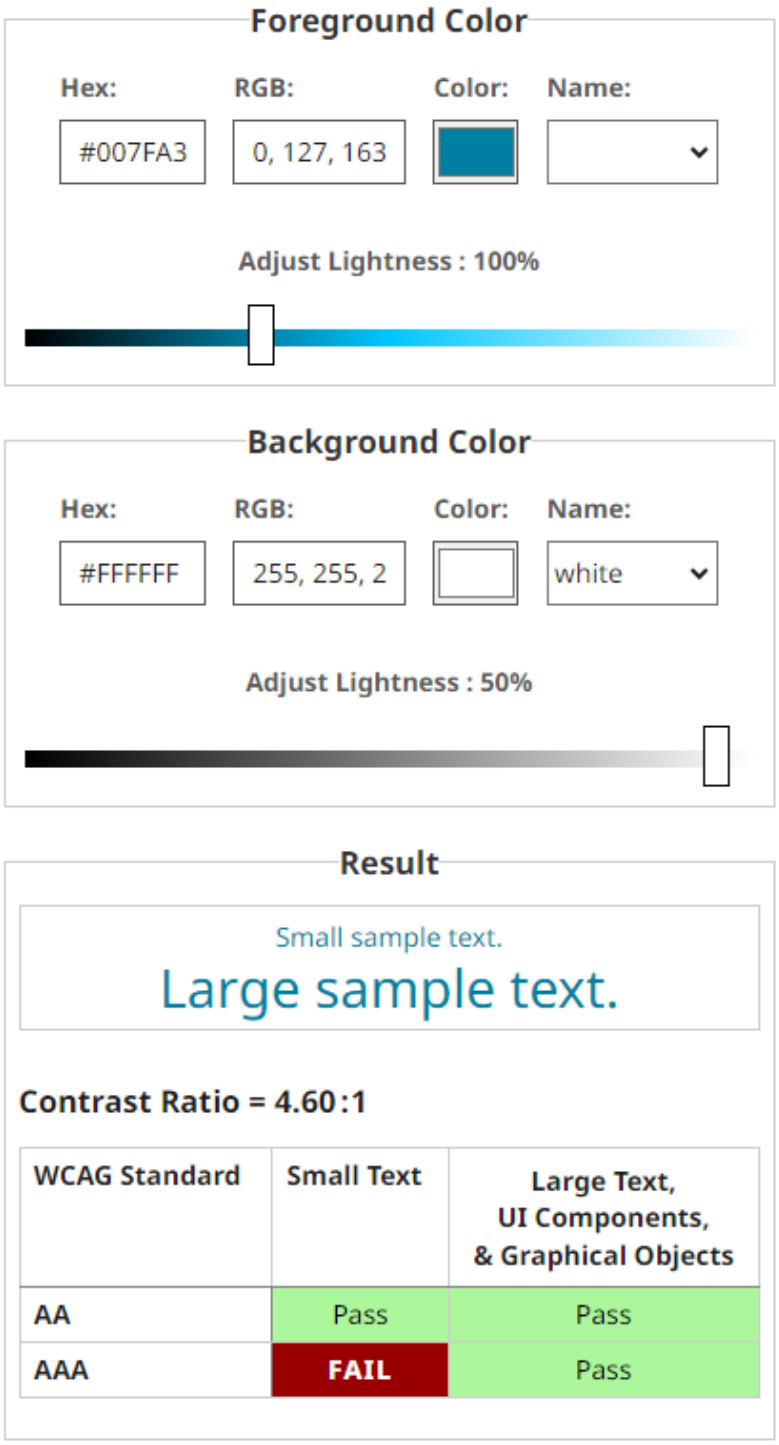


This will open a small window where you can pick your color. Click on the little dropper. This will allow you to use the dropper to select the color in your Word document. It will give you a magnifying circle that you use to hover over the color in your Word doc. You will want to select the darkest color when using the dropper. Repeat this for the background color (which will be white in most cases).





Once you have selected both your foreground and background colors, you will see the results. You goal is to have the ratio be equal to or higher than 4.5:1. In the example below, the color we used has a 4.6:1 ratio, which is compliant. Our goal is to meet AA standards. If your color meets AA but does not meet AAA, it is still compliant.



Important Messages Using Bold, Italic, Underline, Caps, Highlight, or Color

If you are trying to portray an important message to your students using **Bold,** *Italic*, Underline, CAPS, Highlight, or Color screen readers will not pick these up. To help the screen reader know that you are giving out important information, put a * in front of the message. So now it will be ***Bold,** **Italic*, *Underline, *CAPS, *Highlight, or *Color. It is up to your discretion if the message is important enough to earn a * or not.

Here are a couple examples of sentences:

- *ALL homework is due by the end of Friday.
    - This sentence seems very important, it should get a * in front of ALL as it is underlined and in caps.
- There will be **SOME** people who do not want to wake up that early.
    - This sentence is not very important and the word **SOME**, even though it is in caps and bold, was used as a minor emphasis so it does not need a *.
- Messages in color should almost always have a * with it unless the color is the main font of the PowerPoint or document. For example, if I put one sentence in red but all my other font is black then it needs a *. If my entire Word font is in a dark blue, there is no emphasis to be had so it does not need a *.

Descriptive File Name

When a student downloads a PDF from D2L, they either open it in Acrobat viewer or they have it open in a browser window. If it is opened in a browser window, the name of that window will be taken from the file name. Therefore, ADA compliant files need to have descriptive file names. This will help the student recognize which browser window belongs to the file they just opened.

Here is are some examples of good descriptive file names for a course syllabus:

- KNES 9876 Syllabus Fall 2023
- Fall 2023 KNES 9876 Syllabus
- Shanks Syllabus Fall 2023 KNES 9876

Once you are finished with your Word document, save it both as a Word document and as a PDF. Saving this way will also save all compliance. ***Do NOT save it through the "Print" option.**