

Accessibility Guidelines for Authors

Introduction

All newly submitted content to Purdue e-Pubs is required to be accessible, in accordance with [American with Disabilities Act \(ADA\) Title II](#) and the [Purdue University's Electronic Information, Communication and Technology Accessibility policy](#).

Creating accessible documents ensures that scholarly research can be consumed by all audiences, including individuals with disabilities. Accessible manuscripts enable a wider dissemination of knowledge and support diversity and inclusion in scholarly communication. Additionally, various legal requirements mandate accessible content for public and academic institutions.

The Purdue e-Pubs team has recognized this need for content to be accessible and incorporated accessibility standards in postings since 2019, but the size and age of the collection means not all content is currently accessible. Purdue e-Pubs is working to remediate documents and update records to better ensure they work with assistive technologies.

Rationale for Accessible Documents

Accessible documents are essential for:

1. **Inclusivity:** Making content available to individuals using assistive technologies like screen readers.
2. **Compliance:** Adhering to federal mandates, such as the [Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\) Title II](#) and [Section 508](#) of the Rehabilitation Act in the U.S., as well as the [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\) 2.1 Level AA](#) internationally.
3. **Research Impact:** Increasing the reach and citation of your work by making it accessible to a larger, more diverse audience.

How to Make a Document Accessible

1. **Use Proper Headings**
 - Use built-in heading styles (e.g., Heading 1, Heading 2) to organize your document hierarchically. This enables users with screen readers to navigate the content easily.
 - Avoid creating headings manually by enlarging or bolding text.
2. **Provide Alternative Text for Figures**
 - Every image, figure, or graph should ideally have **descriptive alternative text (alt text)** that explains the content and context of the image, especially if the image provides further information that is not discussed in the text body. This ensures that users relying on screen readers can understand the visuals.

- Figures must have a descriptive caption.
 - For complex figures, provide a longer description within the body text or figure caption to explain critical data points.
- 3. Ensure Sufficient Color Contrast**
- Make sure there is a **high contrast** between text and background (e.g., dark text on a light background). WCAG recommends a contrast ratio of at least 4.5:1 for normal text.
 - Do not use **color alone** to convey meaning (e.g., using only red text to indicate an error). Supplement it with labels, patterns, or symbols.
- 4. Use Lists Correctly**
- Use the list functions in your document creation software (bullets or numbers) instead of manually inserting characters like asterisks (*) or hyphens (-). This ensures that assistive technologies can properly interpret the list structure.
 - Clearly differentiate between ordered (numbered) and unordered (bulleted) lists based on context.
- 5. Create Accessible Tables**
- Use the built-in table functionality of your document creation software to create tables rather than pasting screenshots or images of tables or using tabs or spaces to simulate columns and rows.
 - Include **table headers** (e.g., <th> tags in HTML or marked rows in word processors) to help users understand the structure of the table.
 - Wherever possible, keep tables simple and avoid merging cells, as this can confuse screen readers.
 - Do not use vertical text. Text in both header and data cells should be horizontal and read from left to right.
- 6. Use Descriptive Hyperlinks**
- Instead of using generic phrases like “click here” for hyperlinks, use **descriptive link text** that indicates where the link will take the reader (e.g., “For more information, see the [accessibility guidelines on WCAG 2.1](#)”).
 - Descriptive links improve the experience for users of assistive technology.
- 7. Use Plain Language Where Possible**
- Although technical content is necessary in academic work, providing **plain language summaries** helps make the content more accessible to a general audience, including those with cognitive disabilities.
- 8. Include Captions for Multimedia Content**
- If your submission includes videos or audio, ensure that **captions** are provided for all spoken content. Audio must be professionally captioned.
 - For audio content, **transcripts** are required that include both speech and important audio descriptions.

When Delivering Content to Purdue e-Pubs

Test Document Accessibility

Most document creation software, including Microsoft Word, PowerPoint, and Adobe Acrobat, have **built-in accessibility checkers**. Use these tools to evaluate your document before submission and correct any flagged issues.

Deliver Documents in Original File Formats Whenever Possible

- Send documents to Purdue e-Pubs in the original file formats (e.g. .docx, .doc, .pptx), rather than PDF.
- This allows our team to make adjustments, as necessary.

If Sending PDFs, Ensure Accessible Document Export

- When exporting to PDF, ensure that it is a **tagged PDF**, which helps structure the document for assistive technologies.
- **Export as a Tagged PDF:**
 - After ensuring the document is accessible, go to the **File** menu and select **Save As**.
 - In the dialog box, under **Save as type**, select **PDF**.
 - Click the **Options** button in the Save As dialog box.
 - In the **Options** window, check the box for **Document structure tags for accessibility**. This ensures that the document's structure, including headings, lists, and tables, is preserved in the exported PDF.
 - Click **OK** and then save your PDF file.
- Avoid scanned images of text unless Optical Character Recognition (OCR) has been applied to make the text selectable and searchable.

Timeline for Publication to Purdue e-Pubs

- **Priority will be given to fully accessible PDFs** accompanied by the Adobe Accessibility Reports.
- Next in priority are **documents in their original file formats (e.g. .docx or .pptx) that are fully accessible** in the respective document creation software's accessibility checker.
- For documents which are not accessible, whether in original file format or PDF, **we may return them to authors and editors with recommendations** on how to make the document accessible. Documents must be made accessible before they are published.

Revisions to Published Content

Revisions to published content must also be fully accessible before they will be published to Purdue e-Pubs.

Conclusion

By following these guidelines, you ensure that your document is accessible to a broader audience, including those with disabilities. Accessibility not only complies with legal standards but also increases the reach and impact of your research, and accessibility should be considered from the beginning of document creation to streamline the publication process.

Resources

Purdue Libraries' [Digital Accessibility Skills LibGuide](#) provides additional guidance on building accessible documents.

[The National Center on Disability and Access to Education Cheatsheets](#) provide further information on creating accessible files in Microsoft Word, PowerPoint, Excel, and Adobe.