Make Your Documents Accessible from Conception

Trying to remediate a document can be shockingly difficult. The best course of action is to learn how to create documents in Word that will pass accessibility guidelines as a Word document and PDF.

Steps to Take for Accessibility Success

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1. Use Word Styles — Never Manual Formatting

REQUIRED

Use Word's built-in styles **only**:

Purpose	Required Style
Document title	**Heading 1** (used once)
Major sections	**Heading 2**
Subsections	**Heading 3**
Body text	**Normal**
Lists	Built-in bullets or numbering

DO NOT

- Bold text instead of headings
- Change font size to "fake" headings
- Use text boxes for layout
- Paste content as images

If it's visually a heading, it **must** be a heading style.

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2. One Title, Logical Order (No Skipping)

Correct

Heading 1 – Township Master Plan

Heading 2 – Introduction

Heading 2 – Community Profile

Heading 3 – Demographics

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Incorrect (will break PDF tags)

- Heading 1 → Heading 3
- Multiple Heading 1's
- Section titles styled as Normal text

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3. Page Layout Rules (Critical)

REQUIRED

- Use **page breaks**, not extra returns to get to the next page
- Use **Word tables** for tabular data whenever possible. Data from Excel may be copied, but Excel tables must not be pasted directly into the document. (Fixing tables in PDF remediation is time consuming.)
    - There are important steps to take to correctly paste an Excel table into a Word document
- Keep text **in the main document flow**

DO NOT

- Use floating text boxes
- Use WordArt
- Use sidebars or pull quotes
- Overlay text on images
- Add text with "Wrap Text" enabled
- Use multi-column layout unless absolutely required

These features explode into <Span> tags in PDF and make remediation difficult.

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4. Images, Maps, and Figures

Every image must have:

- Alt Text describing **purpose**, not appearance

How to add alt text

- Right-click image → Edit Alt Text
- Write 1–2 sentences

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Maps

Maps alone are not accessible. The good news is that maps are not meant to be read linearly. Therefore, a map may be tagged as a single Figure *if* its information is provided in an accessible alternative format. At least one accessible alternative is needed with a map

1. Text description (most common). A paragraph near the map that explains:
    a. What the map represents
    b. What areas are designated
    c. Any major distinctions a reader needs to know
2. Data table (best for zoning / land use). A table that lists:
    a. Category / designation
    b. Description
    c. Applicable areas
3. **External accessible dataset,** A clearly labeled link to:
    a. An accessible table
    b. A GIS dataset
    c. A text-based appendix

The alternative text is what is *read*.
The map itself is what is *referenced*.

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5. Tables (Very Important)

REQUIRED

- Use **Insert → Table**

- First row must be column headers

- No merged cells unless absolutely required

DO NOT

- Use tabs or spaces to fake tables

- Use tables for page layout

If you want to copy/paste Excel content into your Word document, try:

Pasting Values

1. In Word: Insert → Table
2. Create the correct number of rows/columns
3. Go to Excel:
    a. Copy the data
4. In Word:
    a. Paste **Values** (or Keep Text Only)
5. Format inside Word

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6. Select first row → Table Design → Header Row

What is NEVER allowed

- Paste as object
- Paste with source formatting
- Embed Excel sheets
- Linked Excel tables
- Screenshots of tables

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6. Lists

REQUIRED

- Use Word's bullet or numbering tools

DO NOT

- Type dashes or numbers manually

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7. Table of Contents (Optional but Recommended)

If used:

- Generate it automatically

- Update it before final export

This helps both navigation **and** accessibility.

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8. Track Changes & Comments

Hidden markup can break PDF tagging. Before a document is exported to PDF, all Track Changes must be accepted and all comments removed.

Accept all changes

Use this right before PDF export.

1. Open the document in Microsoft Word

2. Go to the Review tab

3. Click the Accept dropdown

4. Choose Accept All Changes

Remove comments

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9. Final Word Check Before Creating PDF

Before sending the document for PDF creation:

- All headings use Word styles

- Only one Heading 1

- Images have alt text

- Tables are real tables

- No text boxes

- No floating content

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10. PDF Creation (Non-Negotiable)

The PDF **must** be created by:

File → Save As → PDF (not Print to PDF)

This preserves structure and tags.

What Happens If These Rules Are Not Followed

- The PDF will be mostly <Span> tags

- Bookmarks will fail or be meaningless

- Remediation time increases 5–10×

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Word Document Checklist (Before PDF Creation)

Structure

☐ Only one **Heading 1**

☐ Section titles use **Heading 2**

☐ Subsections use **Heading 3**

☐ No skipped heading levels

☐ Navigation Pane shows a logical outline

Layout

☐ No text boxes

☐ No floating text

☐ Page breaks used correctly

☐ No WordArt or decorative shapes for content

Images & Maps

☐ All images have alt text

☐ Maps include text explanations or data tables

Tables

☐ Tables created with Insert → Table

☐ First row is column headers

☐ No tables used for layout

Lists

☐ Bullets and numbering use Word tools

☐ No manually typed lists

Final Steps

☐ Track changes accepted

☐ Comments removed

☐ Saved using **File → Save As → PDF**

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