UNIVERSITEIT VAN AMSTERDAM

Guidelines for accessible documentation
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Checklist: achieving accessible documentation in eight steps

This checklist is a useful tool to help make documentation accessible to students and colleagues with a disability. This document explains why you should take this into account and how to do so.

- ☑ The correct properties have been set for the document.
- ☑ Headings can be used for navigation.
- ☑ Colour is not used as the only means of distinguishing content.
- ☑ The first row of the table has been labelled as the headline.
- ☑ Clickable links are clearly indicated.
- ☑ The correct language has been set.
- ☑ Clear contrast is used.
- ☑ All images contain alternative text.

1. Introduction

Why is accessible documentation important?

The UvA aims to enable people with a disability or chronic illness to study as easily as those without, which means that websites and applications such as Canvas must be accessible for this group. The guiding principle is that websites and applications should meet an international standard: WCAG 2.0, level AA. This standard safeguards online accessibility based on several criteria.

This requirement also applies to documentation such as educational materials, guidelines and emails. All disseminated materials must therefore comply with WCAG 2.0, level AA. According to this guideline, students and employees with a disability should have little trouble reading documentation, such as by using screen readers or braille display.

Creating accessible documentation

The guidelines are to apply to simple documents and emails, without requiring significant expertise. Examples include documents without forms, text boxes or complex tables. These do not require a lot of work, especially if you take accessibility into account from the start. The fact that compliant documentation is often easier to find for a wider audience, as well as easier to search through and to read, is an added bonus.

Using these guidelines, you can make documentation easily accessible, provided it is not very complex. Further guidelines apply for documents with active-field forms or tables. In such cases, it may be necessary to add supplementary XML codes to the PDF document to ensure the document fully conforms to the guidelines. These guidelines do not help with making documentation accessible if this concerns PDF files for which the original Word document is missing.

For a formal assessment of whether a document conforms to WCAG 2.0 guidelines, you can contact the Digital Accessibility Working Group (digitaletoegankelijkheid@uva.nl).

Want to learn more?

You can find more information on the guidelines on the WCAG 2.0 website. In the meantime, new guidelines have been added to the WCAG, which means a WCAG 2.1 assessment will follow shortly.

Training on how to make documents accessible is available via training courses (in Dutch) provided by the Accessibility Foundation.

2. Accessibility guidelines for Word documents

Try to take the following guidelines into account starting from the first version of the Word document. This will save you a lot of time afterwards and improve the document's readability and quality. For [more information on applying the guidelines](#), go to Microsoft's Help page.

2.1 Check the properties

- Check to see whether the properties of the Word document have been filled in correctly (via 'File' > 'Info').
- Be sure to enter at least a title.
- Make sure the properties for 'Author', 'Company' and so on are correct, as mistakes are often made here – especially if a document has been reused or comes from an external source.

2.2 Use headings properly

- Do not create headings by only making the text bold; such headings will lack the navigation function.
- You can use the 'Styles' bar in Word to designate a line of text as a heading. This will also allow you to create a table of contents, providing a convenient overview of the document's structure and allowing people using a technological aid such as reading software to quickly find a specific paragraph.
- The navigation pane under 'View' lets you see whether the resulting structure is appropriate.
- Make sure the hierarchy is correct. In other words, avoid skipping from level 1 to level 3 without having included a level 2 as well.
- Make sure that the heading clearly describes the content of the section or paragraph.

2.3 Avoid using colour as the only means of distinguishing content

Making a portion of the text red, giving one cell in a table a different colour or greying the text of one portion of a process in an instructional document all result in a text being less accessible to a person with a visual impairment.

- You should include additional features, such as underlining, a symbol in a cell or some other distinguishing feature.
As an added benefit, the document will still be usable if someone prints it in black and white.

2.4 Label the first row of the table if it contains headings

- Under 'Table properties', indicate that the first row should be repeated on the following page.

2.5 When inserting links, clearly indicate what you are linking to

- The clickable link should describe where the link will take the reader:
  - Correct: The [architectural principle regarding accessibility](#) is listed on the website.
  - Incorrect: The architectural principle regarding accessibility is listed on the website (click [here](#)).

2.6 Specify the correct language

Especially in documents containing IT terms, Word will sometimes automatically label a text as being written in English.

- It is a good idea to make sure the language setting is correct each time you finish working in a document. With monolingual documents, this is easy: simply use 'Ctrl-A' to select the entire document and adjust the language setting to the correct language. If there are quotes or paragraphs in another language, these must be labelled separately as such.

- For staff and students who use Text-to-Speech software, this will ensure that the text is read aloud in the correct language. Another advantage is that this allows spell check to work more effectively.

2.7 Keep an eye on contrast

There is a compulsory requirement for minimum contrast.

- For standard text, the required contrast ratio is 4.5:1.
- For larger texts (font size 18 regular or 14 bold), 3:1 is also permitted.
- To keep it simple: select a dark colour for text on a light background, and vice versa.
- When in doubt, you can use the [Colour Contrast Analyser](#) program. If you are using a UvA laptop, you can find this program in the Software Centre.

2.8 Describe images in the alt text

- Describe images in such a way that people using reading software can understand the message.
- If the image does not contain relevant content, add a description such as 'illustrative image' or something similar, which makes it clear that a description of the image is not necessary to understand the text.

3. Accessibility guidelines for PDF documents

The easiest way to create an accessible PDF document is to generate one based on an accessible Word document. Using the guidelines from Section 2, it should not be too hard to turn this into an accessible PDF.

3.1 Use the correct settings when exporting to PDF

- Never use the print button to create a PDF file. If you do, many of the adjustments you have made based on the above guidelines will be undone.
- Select 'Save as' instead. There are multiple ways to generate a PDF, depending on the software or add-ons.

Make sure the following settings are correct:

- The PDF file must include navigation options as well.
- Select PDf version 1.4 or later.

3.2 Make sure the proper code is still included

- Check the metadata (via 'File' > 'Properties').
- Check whether the document includes bookmarks (via 'View' > 'Show/hide' > 'Navigation panes' > 'Bookmarks').
- Check to see whether the language setting of the Word document is correct (via 'File' > 'Properties' > 'Advanced').

4. Check whether a document is satisfactory

There are various ways to automatically check whether a document complies with the guidelines. Please note that these methods will not find all mistakes, as the software cannot check all guidelines.

- In Word, you will find a 'Check Accessibility' option under 'File' > 'Info' > 'Check for issues'. For newer versions of Word, you need to go to the 'Review' tab instead.
- Adobe Acrobat Pro features a toolbar with 'Accessibility'. You can add the 'Full Check' button to the standard toolbar for easy access.

5. Guidelines for videos

If a document contains videos, these should be easily accessible as well.

- Add subtitles.
- Ensure that any flashes of light are not closer together than three times a second.
- For texts, diagrams and similar elements in the video, the same guidelines as for regular documents apply in terms of contrast and use of colour, unless the content is provided in an alternative text form.
- If the video uses imagery to communicate a message that is not expressed in the spoken text or via descriptions elsewhere in the document, you should provide an audio description, text transcription or other written alternative.

6. Accessibility guidelines for other document types

Most of the accessibility guidelines in Section 2 can also be applied to Excel sheets, Visio images, MindMaps and presentations such as PowerPoint. The only exceptions are Guideline 2.2 (use of headings) and Guideline 2.4 (the first row of the table). Does the presentation contain a video? If so, follow the guidelines for videos listed above.

7. Any questions about these guidelines?

If you still have questions about the guidelines or digital accessibility after reading this document, or if you have suggestions for improvements, please contact the Digital Accessibility Working Group at digitaletoegankelijkheid@uva.nl.

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