Making Documents Accessible

These are tips to assist you in building accessible documents. By implementing these ideas, you are building accessibility and usability into your documents and making digital information that can be accessed in a variety of ways by people of all abilities, including people with disabilities who may be using assistive technology devices.

- ***Word Styles and Structure:*** Use styles in Word to denote structure. Styles enable quick navigation of a document by a screen reader and other assistive technology devices which search for headings, paragraphs, lists and links. Large, bold text may *visually* look like a heading, but until it has a heading style, such as H1, to assistive technology it is indistinguishable from plain text. Font selection, size and appearance can be modified using the styles.

    - **YouAbility by EASI:** This helpful video demonstrates how to use styles: (Easy Access to Software and Information) This YouTube site has a variety of accessible videos on a variety of topics that may be helpful to you. http://www.youtube.com/user/youability#p/a/u/2/xR7ccc7olL4

    - **WebAIM**: Things that can be done to make content created in Word more accessible: http://www.webaim.org/techniques/word/

    - **"Introduction to the Screen Reader"** with Neal Ewers of the Trace Research Center is a short 6 minute video demonstrating how screen readers assist people who are blind navigate the web, access the electronic page, and more. http://www.doit.wisc.edu/accessibility/video/intro.asp

- ***Link Text:*** Use link text that makes sense out of context. A screen reader user may search a document from a list of links. "*Read more*" and "*Click here*" are meaningless, whereas "*Building Accessible Documents*" tells the reader what content they can expect at that link destination.

- ***Title:*** Use a clear and meaningful title for the document. If the title is long, consider condensing it for the document's digital filename. For example, this document, "*Survey of Personal Preparedness Planning of Texans with Disabilities in a Pandemic Influenza Event*" may have this filename "panflu_survey."

- ***Keyboard Friendly:*** Making your documents accessible means making them keyboard friendly. Can you navigate the document using only the keyboard TAB key and ENTER key? Keyboard accessibility is a crucial element in accessible document design.

- ***Color:*** Do not convey important information by color **only.** Eight percent of men and 0.5 percent of women have some form of color blindness. Underlining links makes them visible to people with different types of color blindness and makes them easier to read for everyone.

- ***Contrast:*** Be sure there is sufficient contrast between the text color and the background color of the page. The greater the contrast, the easier the page is to read. When using background images, be especially aware of contrast and size of text on the image.

- ***Alt Text:*** Be sure to add alternative text for any important non-text items in the document, such as images, diagrams, graphs and charts. A short, meaningful description may be added to an image in a Word document by right clicking on the image, select Format Picture, and then select the Alt Text tab. If the image is complex, such as a graph or chart, consider adding that textual information to the document itself. This additional information enhances usability for everyone.

- ***Reading Order:*** Screen readers read tables row by row, across the columns. Keep reading order in mind for any data tables used in Word documents. Avoid tables if possible; consider using a bulleted or numbered list if applicable. Data tables online are easier to read in HTML or accessible PDF.

- ***Layout Tables:*** Avoid using tables for layout. Documents created in this manor are very difficult to make accessible because of issues with reading order.

- ***Readable Fonts:*** For enhanced readability of digital documents, consider using these fonts: Arial, Courier, Calibri and Verdana. Serif fonts, such as Times New Roman and Georgia, make printed documents easier to read.

- ***Readable Content:*** A bulleted list is easier to read than a dense paragraph. Consider the audience and the type of information in the document when deciding what structure to use.

- ***Plain Language:*** Use plain language, which means use the simplest, most straightforward way of expressing an idea.

  - **Learn more about using Plain Language** to improve communication: http://www.plainlanguage.gov/index.cfm

- ***Front-loading:*** Place distinguishing information at the beginning of headings, paragraphs and lists. This is called "front-loading" and is especially helpful for people accessing information serially.

  - **Learn more about front-loading** at the WCAG web site: http://www.w3.org/WAI/wcag-curric/sam110-0.htm

- ***Table of Contents:*** If the document is especially long, consider building a Table of Contents. When you use headings, Word will easily build a TOC made of navigable links to the headings.

Other Resources

- o Converting MSWord to **Accessible PDF** (pdf format): http://governor.state.tx.us/files/disabilities/accessible_word_to_pdf.pdf

This resource*, "Making Documents Accessible,"* is developed by the Texas Governor's Committee on People with Disabilities.

About the Committee:

The Texas Governor's Committee on People with Disabilities (GCPD) works toward a state where people with disabilities have the opportunity to enjoy full and equal access to lives of independence, productivity, and self-determination. The Governor appoints twelve members to serve on the Committee, seven of whom must be people with disabilities. Representatives from six state agencies serve as ex officio or advisory members. The Committee makes recommendations to the Governor and Legislature on disability issues; promotes compliance with disability-related laws; promotes a network of local communities/committees doing similar work; and recognizes employers and media for employing and positively depicting Texans with disabilities. The members and staff also provide technical assistance, information and referral services to citizens of Texas on issues affecting Texans with disabilities.   Members of the Committee work on issues related to access, communication, education, emergency management, health, housing, recreation, transportation, veterans and workforce. The Committee's enabling law is outlined in the Human Resources Code, Chapter 115.

Phone: (512) 463-5739
Email: GCPD@governor.state.tx.us
Fax: (512) 463-5745
For relay services dial 711 or your relay provider of choice
Address: 1100 San Jacinto, Austin, Texas 78701