Introduction

Google Docs is the widely used word processing application available via Google Drive.

Google Docs is missing some key accessibility functions, but the methods in this tutorial will increase the accessibility of documents produced through Google Docs.

Use Google Docs with caution as source materials made available via Google Docs cannot be made as accessible as source materials produced via Microsoft Word.

In this tutorial, the accessibility of Google Docs will be explored through:

Heading Images Color Contrast Lists Legibility Table of Contents Creating an Accessible template

Headings

Paragraph headings provide context and a way to navigate quickly for users of assistive technologies like screen readers. Such technologies ignore text size and emphasis (bold, italic, underline) unless certain paragraph styles such as Headings, are used. As an added benefit, 'headings' can be used to automatically generate a Table of Contents or bookmarks in a document. Additionally, styles modify the formatting of all occurrences in a document, so you can quickly change the format of all Headings of a particular level (you can still override global settings by changing the format of an individual piece of text, regardless of style assignment).

Headings should be selected based on their hierarchy in the document. Start the page with a heading that describes overall document content (Heading 1). Follow it with sub-headings (Heading 2) and sub sub-headings (Heading 3), etc.. Items of equal importance should be afforded equal level headings, and heading levels should not be skipped (i.e., a Heading 3 can't be the first heading after Heading 1; Heading 2 can't be skipped).

To assign a heading value to a piece of text, select the text, then select the Styles drop-down menu, located to the left of the font drop-down menu and then select the appropriate heading value.
Change from Normal Text to Heading 1, Heading 2, or Heading 3, using the appropriate heading levels depending on your content structure (as described above).

Any of the three heading styles can be used to help a screen reader navigate through the Google Docs page. Heading 1 should be used as the page title, and Headings 2 and 3 should be used as subsections and sub-subsections respectively.

Images

Images can play significant roles in Google Docs. The way to make them accessible is to add Alternative Text, or Alt Text, to the image. Alternative text for images, charts, graphs, and tables is vital to ensuring that users with visual impairments have access to information included in these visuals. This descriptive text should be limited to 120 characters for simple images, while the alternative text for graphs, tables, and complex images (such as detailed maps and diagrams) should give a brief summary of the included information. Alternative text should provide sufficient information so that users who are unable to see them are still able to understand what they convey. Images used for purely decorative purposes (i.e., those that do not provide any meaningful information) should not have alternative text. If the body of the document already contains a sufficiently detailed description in close proximity to the image, the alternative text can simply identify the image so that the reader knows when it is being referred to.

While there are no hard and fast rules for determining what alternative text should say (it depends on the image, its context, the intent of the author, etc.), one simple trick is to imagine describing the image to someone over the phone. The more important an image's content is, the more descriptive the alternative text should be.

For ABC institution's logo for instance, alt text of 'ABC Logo' would be appropriate for most documents.

A graphic design document describing the different ways in which the ABC Logo can and should be used in promotional materials might require a more detailed description, particularly if the specific formatting, positioning and size of the logo is an important design consideration for example.

For charts and graphs, chart type (i.e., bar, pie, line, etc.), data type or axes, overall trends or patterns, and relevant data points should be described as fully as possible.

1. Upload and embed the image
2. Click the image file
3. Format > Alt Text
4. In the Alt Text window, enter your alternative text in the Description field

Color

Color plays an important role in any document. The color scheme itself should have contrast
between light and dark without going to the extreme. Certain color combinations, such as bright colors, can cause headaches and make it uncomfortable to read what has been laid out.

Contrast

It is essential that appropriate contrast exist between text and the background. Too little or too much contrast can make the document difficult to read for those who are colorblind or with low vision. In general, lightly colored text should have a darker background and darkly colored text should have a light background.

Lists

Like headings, using the list tools to create bulleted and numbered lists ensures that screen readers can effectively read list items. Manually inserting any of the list items will not help. Any numbered list that has multiply layers should use a different numbering scheme for each level.

Use the Insert List icon on the Formatting toolbar to create a list.

Legibility

Ensure your document is easy to read, not only for those with assistive technologies, but also those that don’t use them. Sans-serif fonts are considered more legible fonts for monitors than serif fonts.

Table of Contents

To improve quality of navigation for assistive technologies, it is recommended to add a table of contents. Throughout the document you must designate headings, because these are what used to generate the table of contents section. Using headings is also an accessibility best practice within documents. Doing so also provides other advantages for the author including the ability to rapidly modify the overall document style without having to change each individual header.

Select Insert > Table of Contents

Creating an Accessible Template

Google Docs has an extensive collection of templates, and they should be treated with caution. Some of the templates are accessible, but it is also possible to create an accessible template from scratch.

To start:

1. Create a new document, either from the default or an existing template
2. Set up accessibility techniques.
3. Save your template
4. File > New > From Template
5. Select My Templates
6. Select Submit a template
7. Select Choose from your Google Docs the template you have created for accessibility
8. Fill in everything that is needed
9. Select Submit Template

Source URL: https://ars.unc.edu/resources/making-accessible-google-doc-faculty