



Accessible Word Documents: Good Design for Everyone

The Tip: Use the “STYLES and FORMATTING” feature in the “FORMAT” drop down list for Accessibility, Consistency, Ease, and Efficiency!

Skimming the Headers

Most readers approach text by skimming to see all of the headers before reading the full content.

- For the person with a disability, the styles feature provides for this same navigation when the reader is using assistive technology (AT). It allows the reader with AT to jump from heading to heading, so that they can read just the headings before getting into the meat of the document.

When creating long documents, changing a style in one place changes everywhere that style is used. With manual formatting, you have to change each one individually, with the risk of not making the change to all, and accidentally promoting or demoting a topic.

Customizing the Organization

A well structured, professional looking document includes consistent organization. You can copy styles between documents or templates to "tag" or identify parts of a document (e.g. a heading, a footnote, a hyperlink, or body text). Customizing word-processed documents by choosing different font types, sizes or colors demonstrates emphasis to the sighted reader.

- The reader using AT cannot see the emphasis on the page, but can find a section of the text without having to read through the whole document.

Styles can be used to generate a table of contents quickly.

Some helpful information:

Read an excellent 6-minute video about screen readers by an individual who uses them at <http://www.doit.wisc.edu/accessibility/video> (TRACE Center, University of Wisconsin-Madison).

Two other very good on-line tutorials for learning to use styles:

1. The Center on Education and Work at the University of Wisconsin-Madison offers several choices. A short but excellent overview text tutorial, *Creating Accessible Microsoft Word & Word Perfect Documents by Using Markup* is found at <http://www.cew.wisc.edu/accessibility/tutorials/structuralmarkuptutorial.htm>. It explains the importance of using styles and formatting for electronic document accessibility. “Markup” is the word that is commonly used for this process when working with HTML documents.

2. Check out Microsoft’s training on styles at <http://office.microsoft.com/training/Training.aspx?AssetID=RC011039261033&CTT=6&Origin=RC011039261033> or at <http://www.addbalance.com/usersguide/styles.htm>, a law office tutorial that is copyrighted by Microsoft.

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