Excel Accessibility Guide

Objectives

By following the guide, you will be able to:

Part 1: Add alt-text to images and SmartArt.

Part 2: Provide meaningful display text for each web-based link.

Part 3: Format tables to be accessible to users.

Part 4: Use appropriate fonts and settings in a document.

Part 5: Create an overall accessible spreadsheet.

Part 6: Recognize challenges with integrated checker.

Part 1: Add alt-text to images and SmartArt.

Check: Do all images and SmartArt have effective alt-text?

Why is this important?

1. Screen readers read Alt-Text out loud.
2. For users with visual impairments, Alt Text is their only information about an image or diagram – such as how something works or the key data it presents.

To add alt-text to images and SmartArt, follow these steps:

1. Insert the image or SmartArt into the document.
   a. For images, go to **Picture Format** tab then select Accessibility group. (For Macs, Alt Text is not in a designated group but just appears in the ribbon).
   b. For SmartArt, select the **Format** tab, then select the Accessibility group. (For Macs, you may need to "right-click" the SmartArt and choose Edit Alt Text from the menu).
2. In the right-side pane, there are simple directions and a textbox. If an alt-text is generated by an AI-assistant, review the accuracy and update as needed.
3. Write 1-2 sentences to clearly describe the content to a vision impaired user.
4. Alternatively, if the image or SmartText is decorative and not enhancing the text provided, you can select **Mark as Decorative.** (see below)

Alt Text

How would you describe this object and its context to someone who is blind or low vision?
- The subject(s) in detail
- The setting
- The actions or interactions
- Other relevant information

(1-2 detailed sentences recommended)

A group of people standing in front of a red and white diagram

AI-generated content may be incorrect.

☐ Approve alt text ⓘ
☐ Mark as decorative ⓘ

# Part 2: Provide meaningful display text for each web-based link.

Check: Are there URLs without descriptions in the document?

Why is this important?

1. Without meaningful display text, screen readers read a link's URL character by character, making it hard to follow.
2. If using phrases like "Click Here", add context: "Click here to view assignment 1 details"
3. When possible, use the site's title as the link text.

To create a descriptive hyperlink, follow these steps:

1. Select the text that you want to function as a hyperlink.
2. On the ribbon **Insert** tab, select the **Link** button from the Links group.
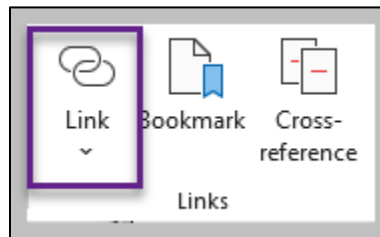
3. Select the **Link** option at the bottom of the menu of options.
4. n the pop-up window, input the link manually or copy the URL from the webpage and paste it into the **Address Field**.
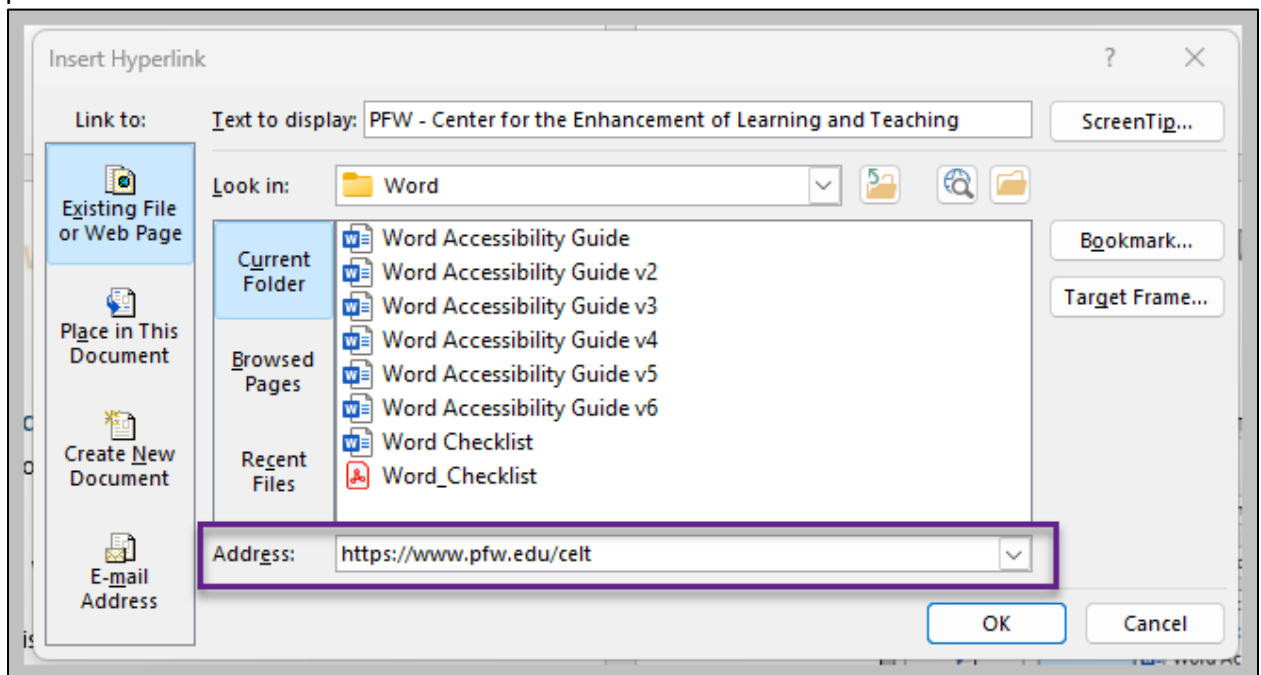
5. Select **OK** when finished.

Part 3: Format tables to be accessible to users.

Check:

1. Does the spreadsheet have clear labels in row and column headers?
2. Do all tables have a Header Row that describes the contents?
3. Tables do not have merged cells.

Why is this important?

1. People using assistive technology rely on headings for navigation, and subheadings provide clear structure for everyone.
2. Headings:
    a. Serve as cognitive signposts for memory and understanding.
    b. Group related content into sections
    c. Help readers skim, focus, or revisit specific parts of the document.
3. Screen readers and text-to-speech tools understand table structure when built-in features are used.
4. Some screen readers can repeat column labels which help with large data tables.
5. Merged cells disrupt the count, making it hard for screen readers to give useful information.

To set up a header row, follow these steps:

1. Select the data/text you want to use as a heading.
2. On the **Home** tab in Excel, navigate to the **Format as a Table** button in the Styles group.
3. Select a style.
4. A pop-up will appear and select the checkbox for **My table has headers**.
5. Select **OK.** The top row in your selected content will be formatted as a header.

To unmerge cells, follow these steps:

1. Select the cells that are merged.
2. Navigate to the Home tab and the Alignment group.
3. Select the icon for Merge & Center.
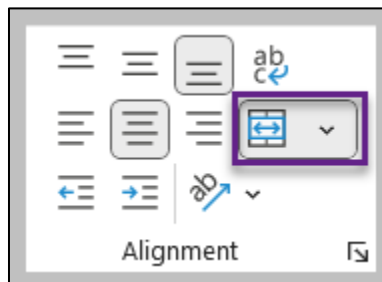
4. Select the **Unmerge Cells.**

Part 4: Use appropriate fonts and settings in a document.

Check:

1. Does the document use clear, readable fonts, preferably sans serif?
2. Does the document avoid excessive use of italics, bold, and underlining for emphasis?
3. Does the document avoid using color alone to convey meaning?

Why is this important?

1. Sans serif fonts, without decorative strokes, are easier to read for users with visual impairments.
   - Note: Well-designed serif fonts like George, Cambria, and Palatino Linotype can also be accessible if used at sufficient sizes and contrast. Avoid hard to read fonts like Times New Roman, Garamond, Comic Sans, and decorative or script styles.
2. Use character formatting sparingly; reserve underlining for hyperlinks to limit confusion for users. Use bold sparingly for emphasis or headings; use italics carefully as it may reduce visibility for some users.
3. Text should have a contrast ratio of at least 4.5:1 for normal text and 3:1 for large text (such as 18pt or 14pt bold). Use tools like the WebAIM Contrast Checker to test.

To set appropriate fonts, follow these steps:

1. Select the text in the document.
2. Navigate to the **Home** tab and **Font** group. Select the dropdown menu to adjust the font to one of the sans serif fonts. Most popular sans serif fonts include: Arial, Calibri, Helvetica, Verdana, Tahoma, Open Sans, Roboto and Century Gothic.

Part 5: Create an overall accessible spreadsheet.
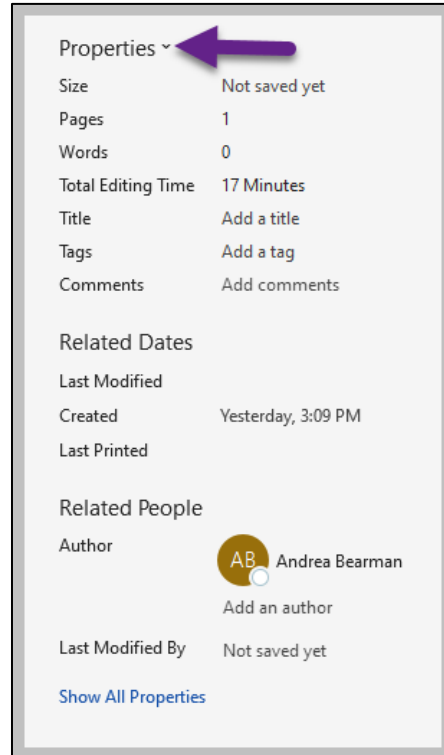
Check:

1. Does the file have a meaningful name?
2. Do the document properties have the document title, language, and relevant tags (key search terms)?
3. Are there blank worksheets?

Why is this important?

1. Meaningful file names help users find information; this is recommended, not required.
2. Removing blank sheets from Excel files improves clarity, reduces confusion, and makes navigation easier, especially for users relying on assistive technologies. It also presents a more professional, well-maintained file.

## To set the Title for a document follow these steps:

1. Select the **File** tab.
2. Select **Info** from the list of options. (For Macs, choose **Properties**).
3. Select the downward arrow on the right side pane of properties.

Properties ⌄

Size	Not saved yet
Pages	1
Words	0
Total Editing Time	17 Minutes
Title	Add a title
Tags	Add a tag
Comments	Add comments

Related Dates

Last Modified	
Created	Yesterday, 3:09 PM
Last Printed	

Related People

Author   AB Andrea Bearman

Add an author

Last Modified By   Not saved yet

Show All Properties

4. In the **Properties** pop-up, enter a meaningful title on the **Summary** tab.
5. Select **OK.**

To set the Language for a document, follow these steps:

1. Select the **File** tab.
2. Select **Info** from the list of options.
3. Select the downward arrow on the right side pane of properties.
4. In the **Properties** pop-up, navigate to the **Custom** tab.
5. Select **Language** from the list of options.
6. Input the language of the document in the **Value** box.
7. Select **Add.**
8. Select **OK.**
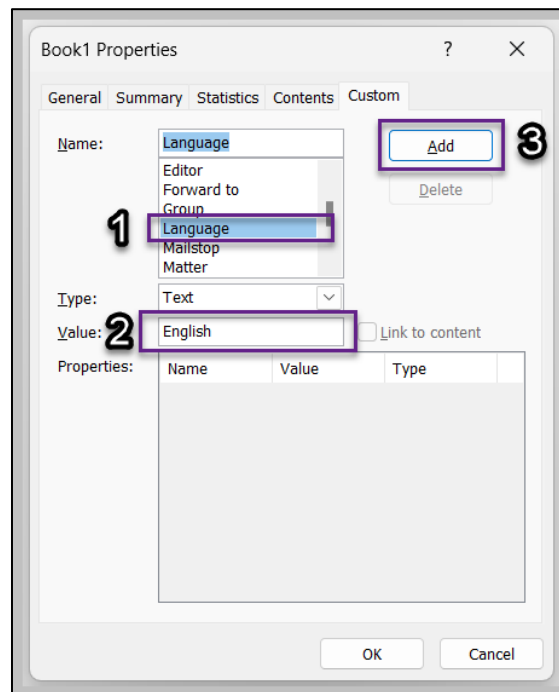
To delete a blank worksheet, follow these steps:

1. Right-click the tab you want to delete.
2. From the menu, select delete.

Part 6: Recognize challenges with integrated checker.

The integrated accessibility tool in Microsoft products can be a helpful start in updating documents to be accessible. However, this tool should not be the only way of reviewing a document as it is not completely reliable on its own. Once you have completed a review of the document using the integrated accessibility tool, you should still manually check your document.

To use the Microsoft Accessibility Checker, follow these steps:

1. Select the Review tab on the ribbon.
2. Select the Check Accessibility button.
3. From the drop-down menu, select Check Accessibility. This will provide information about what is not accessible and how to update it. Or it will tell you the document looks great, and no updates are needed.