

How-To: PowerPoint Accessibility

There's a lot of information out there about how to "do accessibility" correctly. We compiled some of the best "how-to" practices, tips, and links into one document. You can refer back to this document when you are trying to ensure your business' communications practices are as accessible as possible. In following these steps, you can ensure your slides are accessible for staff or customers who have vision-related disabilities, including those with low vision or who use screen readers.

Accessible structure is key

The key to accessible structure is to build placeholders in the Master slides. To add a new text object, do NOT add a text box on a slide.

Instead: View → Slide Master → Insert Placeholders → Choose "Text only" or "Content" (to allow other types of content).

Use list tools to create numbered (ordered) and bulleted (unordered) lists.

Give each slide a unique title, as Titles are Headings for screen readers. If you don't want a title visually on the slide, you can position it 'off stage.'

- If you've accidentally deleted your title, use Home → Slides → Reset option to reset layout.

Tip: Use Columns, avoid floating objects, and test/correct reading order.

Tip: If Accessibility Checker says an entire slide is missing an alt tag:

View → Slide Master → Arrange → Selection Pane → Selection and Visibility → select Hide icon on a Freeform object that covers the entire slide.

Add Alt Text to images and visual elements

To add alternative text ("alt text") to non-decorative elements: right click and select "alt text." Enter alt text in the Description field, ignoring the Title field.

Tip: Avoid going over 150 characters.

Ensure there is alt text for tables, charts, etc. as well as images and photos.

Alt text for Charts, Shapes, and Smart Art can be accessed via Format Chart → Size and Properties → Alt text.

For shapes or a drawing with multiple pieces, you can first group together, and then add one alt text to the grouping.

- Ex. For a chart: "Computer Sales at Microsoft: 1st quarter 40%, 2nd quarter 30%, 3rd quarter 25%, 4th quarter 5%."

For infographics, maps, or other complex images, put longer descriptions. Then put additional details, including links to alternatives like tables with the same information, in the Notes.

Tip: If an image/element is decorative, check the "decorative" box. Do not use the "generate alt text" function, as it will generate incorrect information almost always.

Tip: Still have questions about alt text? Microsoft has [a comprehensive page](#) with examples.

Start with the Slide Master

Select the View tab → Slide Master

The first slide in the sidebar is the Master Layout. Changes made to the Master will usually be applied to every slide in the presentation. Below that slide are the different individual layouts—changes made to one of these is applied to every slide that uses that particular layout.

Tip: To create a new slide layout, select Insert Layout, then rename it to give it a descriptive name. This will keep it from getting too confusing if you have a variety of types of slides!

Slide Reading Order can be used, too

Although it is best to use slide layouts when possible, there may be times when you need to add content to a slide, and it would be impractical to create a new slide layout. Maybe you're in a rush, or maybe you forgot to start with the Slide Master.

You can check or change this reading order by selecting Home → Arrange → Selection Pane. The Selection Pane will appear in the right-hand sidebar.

The pane will show every object on the slide. Highlighting an object in the pane will also highlight it in the slide.

Important: The reading order for the elements is *bottom to top*.

At first this may not make sense, but it helps to think of these objects as layers on a slide. (Similar to if you use another program, like Photoshop).

The first object on the slide will be read first. If another object is added to the page on top of the this first object, it will be read next by a screen reader (and will also cover the first object visually).

To reorder an item, simply click and drag. The tab order matches the reading order.

Colour Contrast is very important

Use text with contrast that equals at least 4:1; and 3:1 for larger text and graphics.

Avoid placing text over a complex or busy background. You can use opacity to increase the contrast as well.

Tip: Test with a contrast analysis tool. One great tool is [WebAIM's Contrast Checker](#).

Links can be messy for screen readers

URLS may not make sense via a screen reader (a screen reader reads out every letter—which would be very annoying with a long URL with random letters and numbers!) Therefore, the link text needs to be descriptive.

- Do not write “click here: with a hyperlink” spelt out.
- Instead, an example would be, “As I mentioned, we posted a Success Story from this company.” You would hyperlink the words “Success Story.”

To change the link text, right-click the link and select Hyperlink → Edit Hyperlink.

Click the “Text to Display” field to enter descriptive link text (aka, what is the link?) In the Address field, enter the hyperlink.

Always use headers in your tables

PowerPoint allows you to identify a single row of column headers and a single column of row headers.

To identify the headers in a table:

1. Click inside the table. The Table Tools options should become visible, and the Design tab (called Table Design on Mac) should be open.
2. If the top row of the table contains headers for each column (as most do), make sure the Header Row checkbox is checked.
3. If the first column of the table contains headers for each row, make sure the First Column checkbox is checked.

In the Table Styles section, select a style where the table headers are clearly identified visually.

Make sure the style has good contrast, again no less than 4:1.

Accessibility Check can help

To start the accessibility checker in Mac and Windows, select the Review tab, then Check Accessibility. The Accessibility Checker sidebar will then appear on the right.

The checker presents accessibility errors (e.g. images with no alternative text), warnings (e.g., unclear link text) and tips (e.g. check slide reading order for slides with custom content).

Selecting an item in the report will highlight the issue within the slide. Information about the issue, and instructions on how to repair it, will also appear at the bottom of the sidebar.

Other Tips for Accessible PowerPoints

- Avoid slide animation, flashing, transitions, and automatic advancement between slides.
- Text 18 pt or larger is recommended.
- Any audio or visual material should include captions.
- You can use the [Live Caption](#) feature in your presentation as an accessibility feature for those who will be viewing it/listening to your presentation.

This can be saved within the PowerPoint itself, for those viewing and listening to the presentation later on.

- Use the Notes area of Slide 1 for an accessible description of the template slide design.
 - For Example: "Presidents Group slideshow with a blue background. The template has a top section separated from the rest by a white line."

Sources

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