



## MAKING MICROSOFT WORD DOCUMENTS ACCESSIBLE

### The Essentials

To make a document accessible, you should follow these basic rules:

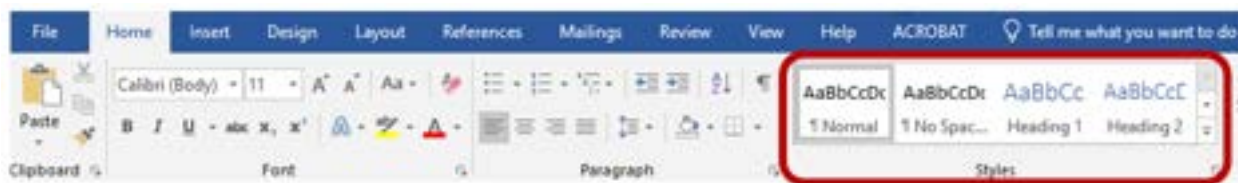
- Use headings
- Use lists bulleted/numbered lists
- Provide alternate text for images
- Create meaningful hyperlinks
- Identify table header rows
- Identify the document's language

*It's also important not to use color as the only way to convey information.*

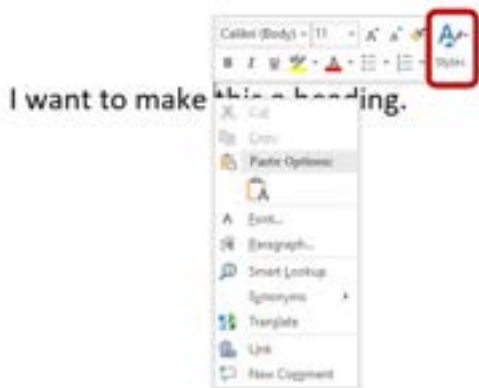
### Using Headings

Headers provide a navigable structure to your documents. Both screen readers and Braille translators give readers the ability to jump between headings. Therefore, headings should be hierarchical.

Microsoft Word makes headings available on the **Home** ribbon in the **Styles** menu. To start or change text into a heading, simply place your cursor on the text and click on the style you need.

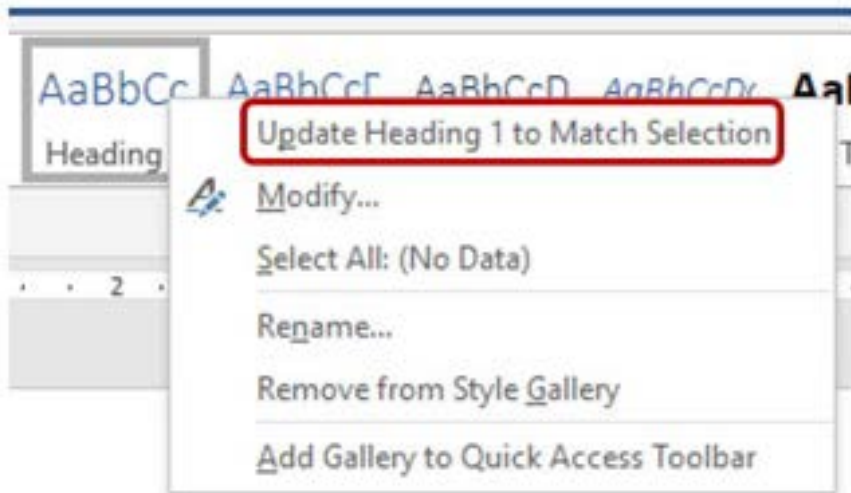


You can also right click on text to open the editing menus quickly. Just click on the **Styles** icon and select the appropriate style.



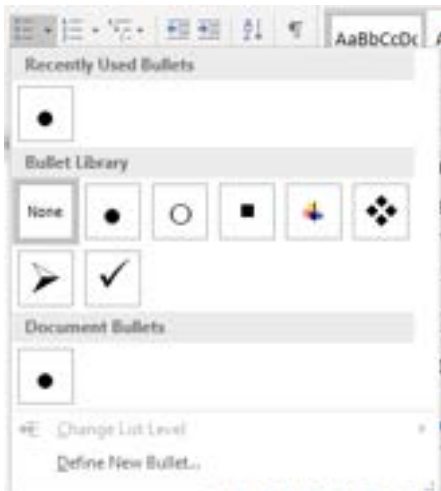
### But What If I Want to Maintain Current Formatting?

Sometimes, we like the way we've formatted a document. Luckily, it's easy to create accessible headings without changing formatting. Begin by placing your cursor where you want to change some text into a heading. Then, right click on the style you want in the **Styles** menu. Select **Update to Match Selection**. Within that document, that formatting will then be used for that style. However, you need to make sure that you change all such places where you want that heading, simply by placing your cursor on the text then selecting that style.



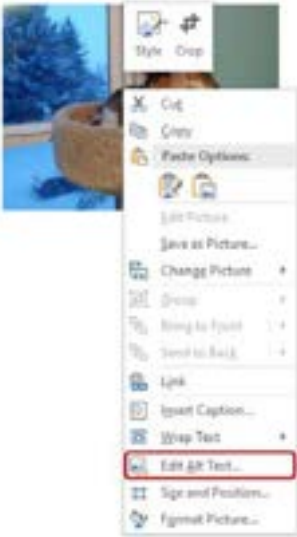
### Use Bulleted & Numbered Lists

Make sure to use Microsoft's built-in tools to create lists. Use bullets to create an unordered list and numbers to create an ordered/chronological list. Without using such tools, you haven't really formatted a list, so a screen reader will not identify it as such. Note that the customizable list options (available by clicking on the dropdown menus) also create accessible lists.



## Provide Alternative Text for Images

In general, the rule is that if an image provides information for a sighted reader, you need to provide “alternative text” or “alt text” for those using assistive technology. The easiest way to do so is simply right click on the picture and select **Edit Alt Text**.



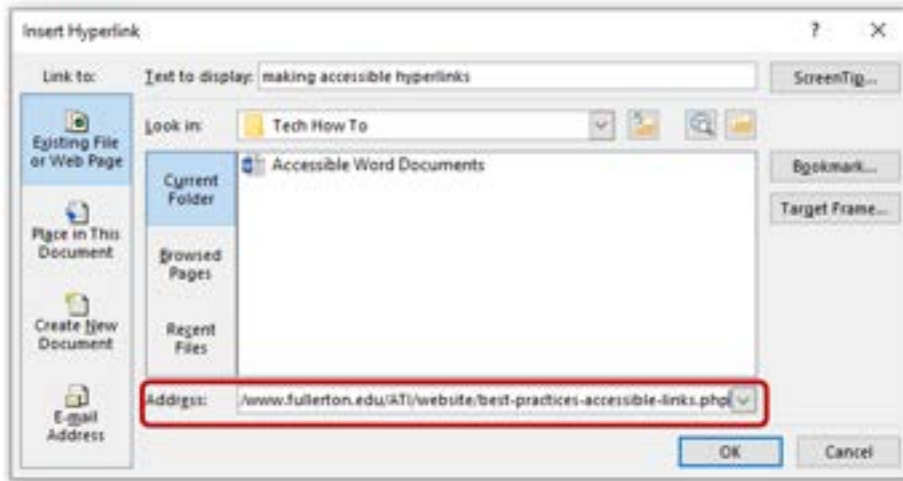
On the right side of the screen, the **Alt Text** dialog box will open. In the text box, provide a brief description of the picture. Keep it short, but you should provide the same information that a sighted person would be able to gather from the image. If the image does not add any significant information, you can simply check the **Mark as decorative** box.



## Create Meaningful Hyperlinks

In most cases, you want to use a small segment of plain text in your document's content and that text should make sense as to where they link will take someone who clicks on it. Unless, you are providing the actual internet address for URL for reference purposes, do not use a URL as a hyperlink.

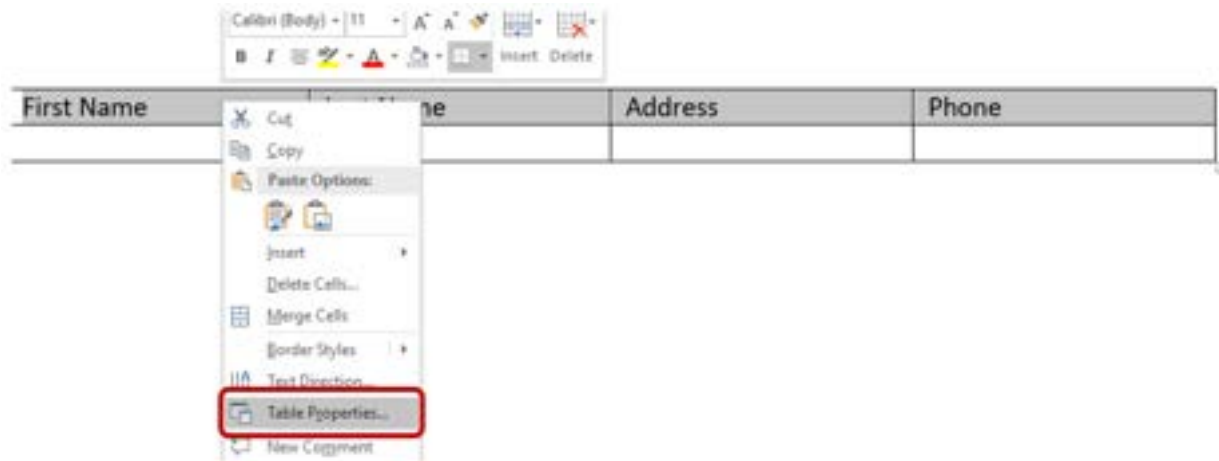
To make that hyperlink, simply highlight the text you wish to turn into a link, right click, and select **Link**. In the dialogue box that opens, paste the URL you want in the **Address** field. Then click **OK**.



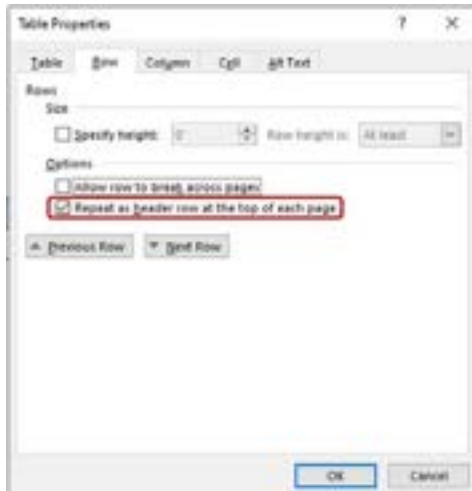
For more tips, you can read about [making accessible hyperlinks](#).

## Identify Table Row Headers

Screen readers need to be able to inform users about the purpose of a column in a table. To do so, you must identify the header row when adding a table. To begin, highlight the row at top that will serve as your table header. Right click and select **Table Properties**.



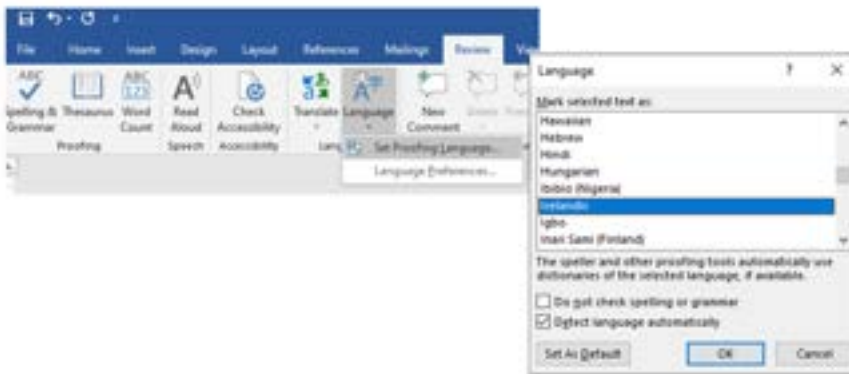
In the **Table Properties** dialogue box, open the **Row** tab. Under Options, click the box for **Repeat as header row at the top of each page**. Then click **OK**.



Also, do not merge cells because that makes it nearly impossible for assistive technologies to read. Instead, break up a complex table into several simpler ones, each with its own label.

### Identify the Document's Language

Assistive Technologies need to know what language is used in a document's text. Generally, most versions of Word on campus will default to United States English. However, if you need to use a different language for all or part of a document, you need to define that language. To do so, highlight the text you need to identify as a different language. Open the **Review** ribbon, then click on the dropdown menu for **Language** to select **Set proofing language**. In the Language dialogue box, choose the language that you need, make sure that **Detect language automatically** is checked, and click **OK**.



### Running an Accessibility Checker

Microsoft Products have built-in accessibility checkers. They provide errors if you have significant accessibility issues, such as missing alternative text. To run an accessibility check, open the **Review** ribbon and simply click on **Check Accessibility**. On the right side of the screen, Word will list errors and warnings by type; clicking on a specific error will take you to that object so that you can fix it.



### One Problem the Checker Won't Catch

If you've used bold or underline text to create headings but have not identified them as headings using the Style menu, Word will not identify that as an error. Make sure that you have used the Style menu to correctly identify headings for assistive technologies.

### Two Problems that Might Appear in an Accessibility Check

When running an accessibility check, Word might highlight two issues that aren't "essential" but can disrupt someone using a screen reader. It's good to know how to quickly fix those issues.

### The "Image or Object Not Inline" Error

Assistive technologies rely on a document's "reading order" to read a document in the correctly. It's takes some special behind-the-scenes work to correctly set a reading order for images not in line with the text. Therefore, it's simply easiest to right click on the image or object, hover over the **Wrap Text** option and select **In Line with Text**.



### The "Repeated Blank Characters" Warning

When you hit the Enter key multiple times to add vertical blank space, a screen reader will say, "Enter" as many times as you hit the Enter key. When you need to add vertical space between elements, it's best to put your cursor where you want that extra white space. Open the **Paragraph** menu from the **Home** ribbon. In the **Spacing** options, increase the **Before** number if you want the vertical space above your cursor; increase the **After** number if you want the vertical space below your cursor.

