Make Your PowerPoint Presentations Accessible

This document gives you step-by-step instructions to make your PowerPoint presentations accessible to people with different abilities.

MS PowerPoint 2010, installed on Windows PCs at the University of St. Thomas, has many built-in features that help people with different abilities to read and author documents. More recent versions of PowerPoint have similar or enhanced features. Among these features is the Accessibility Checker, which locates elements that might cause problems for people with disabilities.

The screenshots and instructions in most of this document refer to MS PowerPoint 2010. The equivalent screenshots and instructions for more recent versions of PowerPoint may not be exactly the same, but are somewhat similar.

Using the Accessibility Checker

The easiest way to find ways to improve a document’s accessibility is the built-in Accessibility Checker feature. This tool is especially useful for large and complex documents that include graphics and tables. It examines various elements of a document and detects where accessibility elements are lacking, such as alt text, heading styles, and table headers.

To launch the Accessibility Checker:

1. Click the File ribbon.
2. On the Info tab, click the Check for Issues button.
3. Select Check Accessibility from the menu.

To learn more about how the Accessibility Checker works, see Rules for the Accessibility Checker.
**Best practices for making PowerPoint presentations accessible**

Best practices for creating PowerPoint presentations can also help you make your presentations accessible to people with disabilities. This document describes why you should use these best practices and gives you step-by-step instructions for following them.

PowerPoint presentations tend to be highly visual, and people who with limited vision can understand them more easily if you create slides with accessibility in mind.

The following table includes key best practices for creating PowerPoint presentations that are accessible to people with disabilities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What to fix</th>
<th>How to find it</th>
<th>Why fix it</th>
<th>How to fix it</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alt Text</td>
<td>To find missing alternative text, use the Accessibility Checker. (See instructions above.)</td>
<td>Alt text helps people who can’t see the screen to understand what’s important in images and other visuals.</td>
<td>Add alt text to • images • SmartArt graphics • shapes • charts • tables</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Visual content includes pictures, clip art, SmartArt graphics, shapes, groups, charts, embedded objects, ink, and videos.</td>
<td>Avoid using text in images as the sole method of conveying important information. If you must use an image with text in it, repeat that text in the document. In alt text, briefly describe the image and mention the existence of the text and its intent.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reading Order</td>
<td>You can use the Accessibility Checker to find slides that have possible problems with reading order.</td>
<td>When someone who can see reads a slide, they usually read elements, such as text or a picture, top to bottom and left to right. In contrast, a screen reader reads the elements of a slide in the order they were added to the slide, which might be very different from the order in which things appear.</td>
<td>Set the reading order of slide contents via the Selection and Visibility pane. This pane is available from the <strong>Arrange</strong> button menu on the Home ribbon.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Make sure slide contents can be read in the order that you intend</td>
<td>To make sure everyone reads the contents in the order you intend, it is important to check the reading order.</td>
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<td>What to fix</td>
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<td><strong>Slide Layouts</strong></td>
<td>This tip applies to a new slide that you add to a presentation.</td>
<td>PowerPoint contains built-in slide layouts that you can apply to any slide. When you use them with a new slide, these layouts automatically make sure that the reading order works for everyone.</td>
<td>Use the <strong>Slide Layout</strong> button menu on the Home ribbon to select a built-in layout to assure inclusive reading order.</td>
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<tr>
<td>If designing a new slide, use a built-in slide layout</td>
<td><strong>Hyperlinks and ScreenTips</strong></td>
<td>To determine whether hyperlink text makes sense as standalone information and whether it gives readers accurate information about the destination target, visually scan the slides in your presentation.</td>
<td>People who use screen readers sometimes scan a list of links. Links should convey clear and accurate information about the destination. For example, instead of using generic text such as <strong>Click here</strong>, include the full title of the destination page. <strong>Tip:</strong> You can also add ScreenTips that appear when your cursor hovers over text or images that include a hyperlink. Add hyperlink text and ScreenTips: Use the <strong>Hyperlink</strong> button on the Insert ribbon; or right-click objects or selected text, and select <strong>Hyperlink</strong> from the contextual menu.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Add meaningful hyperlink text and ScreenTips.</td>
<td><strong>Slide Titles</strong></td>
<td>To find slides that do not have titles, use the Accessibility Checker.</td>
<td>People who are blind, have low vision, or a reading disability rely on slide titles to navigate. For example, by skimming or using a screen reader, they can quickly scan through a list of slide titles and go right to the slide they want. Type unique or distinct slide titles. Hide any unnecessary or repetitious slide titles via the Selection and Visibility pane.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give every slide a distinctive and meaningful title.</td>
<td><strong>Color-Coding</strong></td>
<td>To find instances of color-coding, visually scan the slides in your presentation.</td>
<td>People who are blind, have low vision, or are colorblind might miss out on the meaning conveyed by particular colors. Use the color schemes found with the <strong>Themes</strong> palette on the Design ribbon, or devise your own.</td>
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<td><strong>NOTE:</strong> When multiple slides cover the same topic, titles can be repeated. Where appropriate, add (continued), (part 2), or something similar.</td>
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<td><strong>Color Contrast</strong></td>
<td>To find insufficient color contrast, look for slide text that is hard to read or to distinguish from the background.</td>
<td>Make sure there is strong contrast between text and background, so people with low vision can see it well. Use dark text on a white or off-white background, or reverse it and use white text on a dark background. White and black schemes also make it easier for people who are colorblind to distinguish text and shapes.</td>
<td>Use an accessible slide design, such as those found on the Themes palette on the Design ribbon.</td>
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<td>Use sufficient contrast for text and background colors.</td>
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<td><strong>Table Headings and Structure</strong></td>
<td>To ensure that tables don't contain split cells, merged cells, nested tables, or completely blank rows or columns, use the Accessibility Checker.</td>
<td>Screen readers keep track of their location in a table by counting table cells. If a table is nested within another table or if a cell is merged or split, the screen reader loses count and can't provide helpful information about the table after that point. Blank cells in a table could also mislead someone using a screen reader into thinking that there is nothing more in the table. Screen readers also use header information to identify rows and columns.</td>
<td>Use column headers to indicate what sort of data each column of a table contains. Click inside the top row of a table; on the Table Tools Design ribbon, make sure the <strong>Header Row</strong> checkbox is checked.</td>
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<td>Use a simple table structure, and specify column header information.</td>
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<td>PowerPoint allows the creation of complex and nested tables, but they look awful and confuse screen reader programs.</td>
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| **Enhance Legibility of Text**          | To find potential issues related to fonts or white space, review your slides for areas that look crowded or illegible. | People who have dyslexia describe seeing text “swim together” on a page (the compressing of one line of text into the line below). They often see text merge or distort. For people who have dyslexia or have low vision, reduce the reading load. For example, they may benefit from familiar sans-serif fonts, such as Arial or Calibri. Avoid using all capital letters and excessive italics or underlines. Include ample white space between sentences and paragraphs. | Use an accessible slide design. Format text for accessibility:  
- Large font sizes, even larger for titles.  
- Make (only) titles and headers bold.  
- Separate text on text-heavy slides into two or more slides.  
- Use the Paragraph dialog box (Paragraph group on the Home ribbon) to adjust spacing between detail paragraphs. |
| **Embedded Media**                      | Subtitles typically contain a transcription (or translation) of the dialogue. Closed captions typically also describe audio cues such as music or sound effects that occur off-screen. Video description means audio-narrated descriptions of a video's key visual elements. These descriptions are inserted into natural pauses in the program's dialogue. Video description makes video more accessible to individuals who are blind or visually impaired. | Use captions, subtitles, and alternative audio tracks in videos. | |
**Add alt text to visuals and tables**

The following procedures describe how to add alt text to visuals and tables in your PowerPoint presentations. The procedure usually involves right-clicking the element and selecting the **Format [element]** command, and then selecting the **Alt Text** tab of the dialog box that appears.

**Note:** If the Alt Text tab of the Format dialog box contains a Title field, we recommend leaving the Title field blank and putting text in the Description field only. This will provide the best experience with most major screen readers, including Narrator. For audio and video content, in addition to alt text, include closed captioning for people who are deaf or have limited hearing.

![Alt Text dialog box](image)

**Tip:** Include the most important information in the first line, and be as concise as possible.

**Add alt text to graphical elements**

Add alt text to images, such as pictures, clip art, SmartArt graphics, and shapes, so that screen readers can read the text to describe the image to users who can’t see the image.

Beginning in March of 2017, PowerPoint for PC in Office 365 automatically generates alt text for photographs by using intelligent services in the cloud. **Note:** This feature is only available to Office 365 subscribers who have joined the Office Insider program. If you are an Office 365 subscriber, make sure you have the latest version of Office.
PowerPoint 2010, found on UST computers, does not have the automatic alt text feature for photographs. PowerPoint does not yet generate alt text for drawn images, such as clip art, diagrams, or icons.

The standard procedure for adding alt text is as follows:

1. Right-click a graphical element.
2. Select Format [object].
3. Click the Alt Text tab of the dialog box.
4. Type a Description and, if necessary, a Title.
5. Click Close.

Add alt text to charts

1. Right-click a chart.
2. Select Format Chart Area.
3. In the right pane, select Alt Text.
4. Type a description and a title.
5. Click Close.
Add alt text to tables

1. Right-click a table.
2. Select **Format Shape**.
3. Select the **Alt Text** tab in the dialog box.
4. Type a Description and, if necessary, a Title
5. Click **Close**.

![Format Shape dialog box](image)

**Make hyperlinks, text, and tables accessible**

The following procedures describe how to make the hyperlinks, text, and tables in your PowerPoint presentations accessible.

**Add hyperlink text and ScreenTips**

Each hyperlink—whether to slides with the presentation, another Office file, or an external website—should contain a descriptive reference to what the user will find at the destination. “Click here” has never been sufficiently descriptive for any user, regardless of abilities.

If thoroughly descriptive hyperlink text is too long or complex for a PowerPoint slide, you can add a ScreenTip that displays when a user points the mouse at the hyperlink.

To add hyperlinks and ScreenTips:
1. Select the text to which you want to add the hyperlink, and then right-click.
2. Select **Hyperlink**.
3. The text you selected displays in the **Text to display** box. This is the hyperlink text.
4. If necessary, change the hyperlink text to make it more descriptive.
5. In the **Address** box, type or paste the address for the hyperlink.
6. If necessary, click the **ScreenTip** button
7. In the **ScreenTip text** box, type a ScreenTip.
8. Click **OK** once or twice to close any dialog boxes.

**Tip:** If the title on the hyperlink's destination page gives an accurate summary of what's on the page, use it for the hyperlink text. For example, this hyperlink text matches the title on the destination page: Undergraduate Admissions.

**Use an accessible slide design**

For visually impaired users, the most accessible presentation template built into PowerPoint is the Office Theme. This template is not the most visually appealing, but it does provide excellent color contrast for users who need it. It is also designed so that screen readers can more easily read slide content.
1. Open an existing presentation, or create a new blank presentation.
2. On the **Design** ribbon, in the **Themes** group, select **Office Theme** (usually among the first themes listed).

**Use table headers**

1. Position the cursor anywhere in a table.
2. On the **Table Tools Design** ribbon, in the **Table Style Options** group, check the **Header Row** check box. When this box is checked, the top row should display in a different color from the data rows.
3. Type column headings into the top row as needed.

![Table Headers Screenshot](image)

**Format text for accessibility**

For users with limited vision, large font sizes and sans-serif fonts (such as Arial) are the most readable. This does not imply that all text should be 72-point: Use 30- to 36-point text and bold for slide titles, 24- to 28-point regular for other content.

1. Select a block of text.
2. On the **Home** ribbon, in the **Font** group, select the appropriate font face, size, style, and color.

![Font Format Screenshot](image)
**Make slides accessible**

Beyond alt text, meaningful hyperlinks, table headers, and text formatting, there are ways to maintain accessibility of individual slides. Probably the most important of these is assuring that screen readers can describe slides the way sighted people read them: top to bottom, left to right.

Screen readers typically read the contents of placeholders in the order in which they were added to the slide. You can test this order by selecting the topmost placeholder and pressing the Tab key to cycle through all the others. Also, use the Selection and Visibility pane to see the order in which a screen reader would present the information. If the placement of placeholders has changed drastically, use the Selection and Visibility pane to change their order.

The following procedures describe how to make the slides in your PowerPoint presentations accessible.

**Set the reading order of slide contents**

1. On the **Home** tab, in the **Drawing** group, select **Arrange**, and then choose **Selection Pane**.
   
   The Selection pane lists the objects on the slide in reverse order. When the screen reader reads this slide, it reads the objects in the reverse order listed in the Selection pane.
2. To change the reading order, drag items to the location that you want or select the item and then select the **Bring Forward** or **Send Backward** button.

![Selection Pane](image)

**Hide a slide title**

You can make a title invisible on the slide for users with good vision, but still voiced by screen readers for those with visual impairments.

1. On the **Home** tab, in the **Drawing** group, select **Arrange**, and then choose **Selection Pane**.
2. Select the **Home** tab.
3. In the **Selection** pane, next to the **Title** text box, click the eye icon.
Use built-in slide layouts for inclusive reading order

PowerPoint has built-in slide layouts that contain placeholders for text, videos, pictures, clip art, and more. They also contain all the formatting, such as theme colors, fonts, and effects. To make sure that your slides are accessible, built-in layouts are designed so that the reading order is the same for people who see and people who use technology such as screen readers.

To apply a slide layout, follow these steps:

1. On the **Home** tab, click **Normal**.
2. In the **Thumbnail** pane, locate the place where you want to add the new slide. Right-click, and select **New Slide**. Click the new slide to select it.
3. On the **Home** tab, click **Layout** to open the gallery, and select the slide layout that you want. PowerPoint automatically applies this layout to the new slide.
4. Go to the new slide, and add the title and content that you want.

Use distinctive slide titles

Not every slide has to have its own unique title in order to be accessible. However, if the same topic appears on multiple consecutive slides, you may wish to add a number to designate the sequence.

In presentations you have created or inherited, you may find slides without titles or even title placeholders. In order to restore the title placeholder, use the **Reset** button on the Home ribbon.
1. To restore all placeholders for the selected slide, on the Home tab, in the Slides group, select Reset.
2. On the slide, in the Title box, type a unique name.

Use captions, subtitles, and alternative audio tracks in videos

PowerPoint supports the playback of video with multiple audio tracks. It also supports closed captions and subtitles that are embedded in video files.

Currently, only PowerPoint for Windows supports insertion and playback of closed captions or subtitles that are stored in files separate from the video. For all other editions of PowerPoint (such as PowerPoint for Mac or for mobile editions), closed captions or subtitles must be encoded into the video before it is inserted into PowerPoint.

Supported video formats for captions and subtitles vary depending on the operating system that you are using. Each operating system has settings you can use to adjust how the closed captions or subtitles are displayed.

Closed captions, subtitles, and alternate audio tracks are not preserved when you use the Compress Media or Optimize Media Compatibility features. Also, when saving your presentation as a video, closed captions, subtitles, or alternate audio tracks in the embedded videos are not included in the video that is saved.

When you use the Save Media as command on a selected video, closed captions, subtitles, and multiple audio tracks embedded in the video are preserved in the video file that is saved.

To make your PowerPoint presentations accessible, ensure the following:

- Videos include an audio track with video descriptions, if needed, for users who are blind or visually impaired.
- Videos that include dialogue also include closed captions or subtitles in a supported format for users with auditory impairments.

Learn more

Use Accessibility Checker rules to help ensure your Office documents, spreadsheets, and presentations are accessible. Microsoft has help topics for using the Accessibility Checker in Office 2016 on its support site; the instructions in early versions of Office are differ only slightly.
Acknowledgments

This document was adapted from a similar document provided by Mary Donna Piazza of the Carol and Odis Peavy School of Nursing at the University of St. Thomas.