

How to Make Your PowerPoint Presentations Accessible

The very nature of PowerPoint is to add visual components to a live presentation or speech, including animation, graphs, charts, pictures, colors and more. But to make the information accessible to everyone, it's important to make sure that PowerPoint presentations are readable, navigable, and understandable.

Color contrast and font selection are important in making a presentation accessible to people who have low vision or color-blindness. Fonts should be large and easy to read, and there should be high contrast between the background and text.

A few additional steps will also make online or e-mailed PowerPoint presentations accessible to people who use screen reader software, which allows person to listen to the presentation. (This software is typically used by people who are blind or have low vision, or who have a disability related to reading.)

Starting from Scratch – to make a PowerPoint presentation that's accessible (with a screen reader).

- When opening the PowerPoint software, choose the “Blank presentation” option and click “ok.” Select the AutoLayout of your choice and click “ok.” In the lower left corner of your screen, second icon from the left, click on the “outline view” icon. Create the presentation content in outline view. When you choose outline view, the screen will show three pane areas: the outline pane on the far left, which shows your presentation text without any graphics; the slide pane on the upper right, which shows what each individual slide will look like; and the notes pane at the lower right, which shows your notes.
- Avoid serif fonts such as Times New Roman. Use common sans serif fonts such as Arial and Tahoma. Use a good amount of white space.
- Use simple language that users can understand easily. It is important to use punctuation at the end of each bulleted line so the screen reader knows where to pause or stop.
- Choose a template with high contrast between the background and text. (Check this by printing a slide to a black and white printer with the grayscale box unchecked.)
- Non-text images, charts, tables and graphics require alternative text (alt-text), which is text that is attached to the image but hidden from sight. This is typically used to provide a narrative description of the item for people who are blind and use screen readers. For example, the department logo might say “LARA Logo” for the alt-text.

Adding Alt-Text

- To add alt-text, right-click on the non-text object, click on Format, click on the Web Tab and enter the alternative text for this object. This should be a description of the image and should clearly convey what you want the user to get out of the image. If the graphic is purely decorative, you don't necessarily have to mention it.

Additional Tips

- Tables are very difficult content to make accessible. To make sure your document is usable, consider using narrative to deliver information instead of a table. If you do use a table, you must describe its content in a narrative detail.
- For advanced PowerPoint presentations that use multimedia (such as a streaming video), captioned text will be required. If some visual information presented is not described in audio, but is important for understanding the information, it should be described in the captioning. If captioning is not possible, you should provide a text transcript of the video.

Mechanics

1. Type the content of your presentation directly into the outline pane. It will start automatically with the title of the title slide. When you hit Enter, it will create a new slide.
2. Before typing another title, hit the Tab key to create subtitles or text. Hit Shift-Tab to create a new slide and enter the title.
3. Continue in this way until you have entered all the titles and text for your presentation.

Check the Object Order

It is important to note that items on a slide are read by a screen reader in the order they are added to the slide. This is called the "object order." To check the object order, use the Tab key in the slide view. Each press of the Tab key selects the next item in sequence. If your objects are not in the right order, you must use the Draw, then Order, commands to move them forward or backward in the order.