# How to: Create an Accessible PowerPoint Presentation

Like Microsoft Word, PowerPoints also need to be accessible and includes characteristics that allow it to be can be successfully accessed by a user without a mouse using keyboard commands and using a screen reader (read aloud software). There are five basic characteristics of accessible PowerPoints:

1. A template and slide layouts must be used.
2. Text is formatted within the slide layout.
3. Objects (images, charts, graphs) include Alt Text.
4. Tables include Header Rows.
5. Hyperlinks are constructed with clear text.

Templates and Themes

The first step in creating a PowerPoint presentation is choosing a slide theme or template. The Design tab contains many built-in Themes and color Variants that can be used to change the look of a presentation, as well as the ability to create custom themes. Be sure to choose a theme with good contrast and with simple backgrounds.
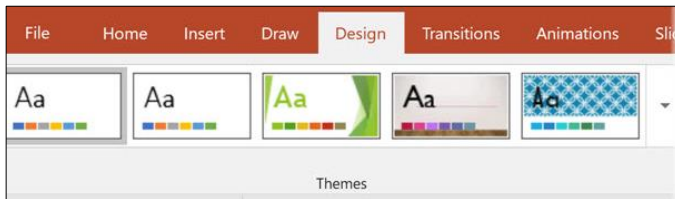
Slide Layouts

The most important part of PowerPoint accessibility is the use of slide "layouts." Used correctly, these will ensure information on the slides have the correct heading structure and reading order.

Most slide layouts include a slide "title," usually at the top of the slide. They also typically contain one or more "placeholder" areas where you add content like lists, images, and tables to each slide. The title will be presented as a heading to screen reader users, and will be the first thing read on each slide. If each slide has a descriptive title, this will make it much easier for screen reader users to read and navigate the presentation.
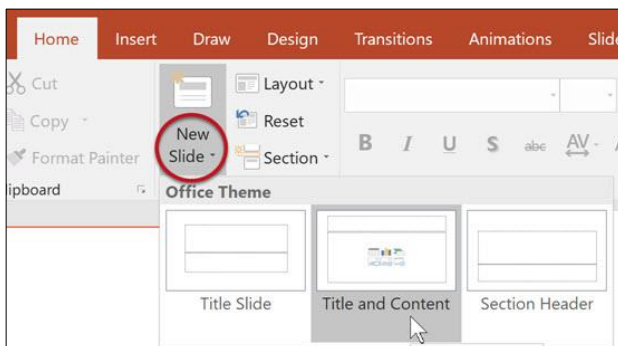
Slide Reading Order

Although it is best to use slide layouts when possible, there may be times when you need to add content to a slide when it would be impractical to create a new slide layout. By default, a screen reader will read the slide title first, followed by other content in elements defined in the slide layout. Then it will read any additional content on the side in the order it was added to the slide. If you add content with this principle in mind, it should be presented to screen reader users in a logical order.

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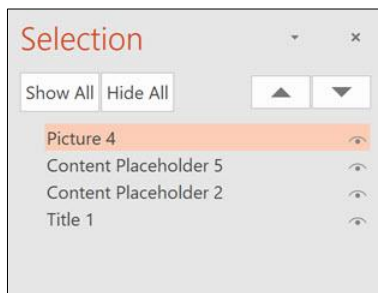

The pane will show every object on the slide. Highlighting an object in the pane will also highlight it in the slide. The reading order for the elements in this page is *bottom to top*. At first this may seem illogical, but it helps to think of these objects as layers on a slide. **The first object on the slide will be read first.** If another object is added to the page on top of the 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. PowerPoint for Windows also has up/down arrow buttons that can be used to reorder items.

Alternative Text for Images

PowerPoint presentations usually include images. Images need equivalent [alternative text](#). To add alternative text to an image:

1. Right-click on the image and choose Format Picture.
2. In the Format Picture sidebar, Select the Size & Properties icon and choose Alt Text.
3. Enter appropriate alternative text in the Description field only (not necessarily the Title field).
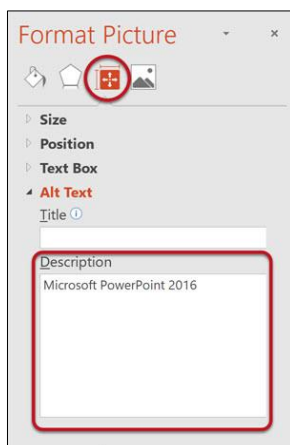
Tables

In HTML, there are ways to identify row and column headers in a [data table](#) that make the contents of the table much more accessible to screen reader users. 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 the Design tab (called Table Design on Mac)should be open .
2. If the top row of the table contains headers for each column (most tables 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.
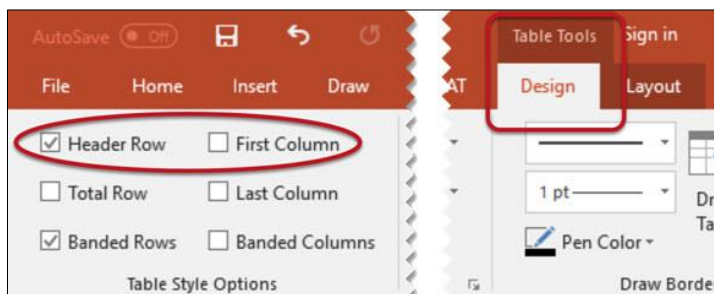
In the Table Styles section, select a style where the table headers are clearly identified visually. Make sure the style has good contrast.


Most screen readers will not identify table headers in PowerPoint, but we still recommend going through this process. It is important to identify headers visually, and support for table headers in Microsoft Office is improving constantly. Plus, these headers will identified when saving to PDF in the most up-to-date versions of PowerPoint.

Links

PowerPoint automatically creates a hyperlink when a user pastes a full URL onto a slide and presses Enter or Space. Raw URLs may not make sense to screen reader users or others, so make the link text descriptive.

To change the link text right-click the link and select Edit Hyperlink. On Mac, right-click the link and select Hyperlink > Edit Hyperlink. A dialog will appear. Click in the Text to Display field at the top of the dialog and enter descriptive link text.
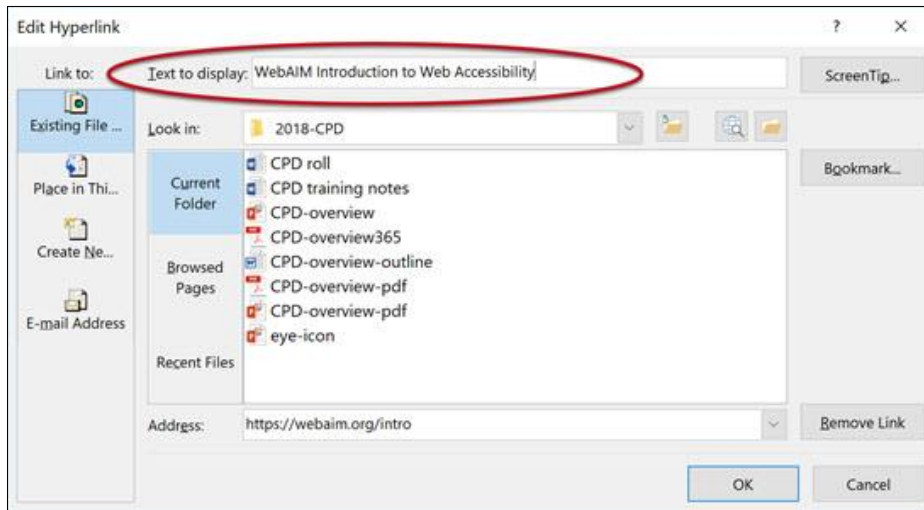

Note

If you are creating a presentation that is intended to be displayed electronically and in a printout, you may want to include the URL and a description in the link text - "WebAIM Introduction to Web Accessibility (webaim.org/)."
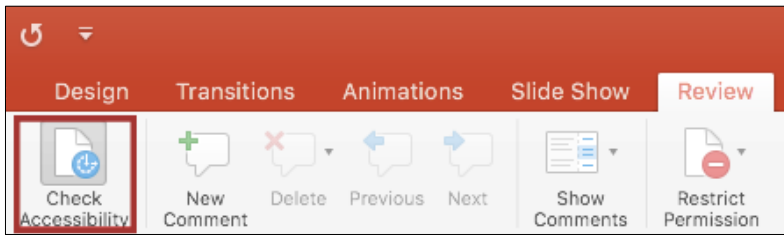
Check Accessibility

PowerPoint includes a tool that will identify many common accessibility issues. The accessibility checker is basically the same in Windows and Mac, but the steps to start the check are different.

To run the accessibility checker in Windows, select File > Info. Select the Check for Issues button and choose Check Accessibility.
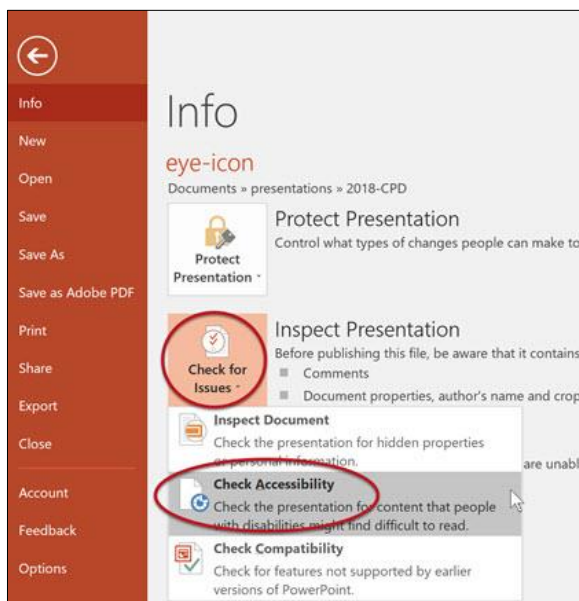
To start the accessibility checker in Mac, select the Review tab, then choose Check Accessibility.

In Windows and Mac, the Accessibility Checker sidebar will appear to 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. See the image on the next page.
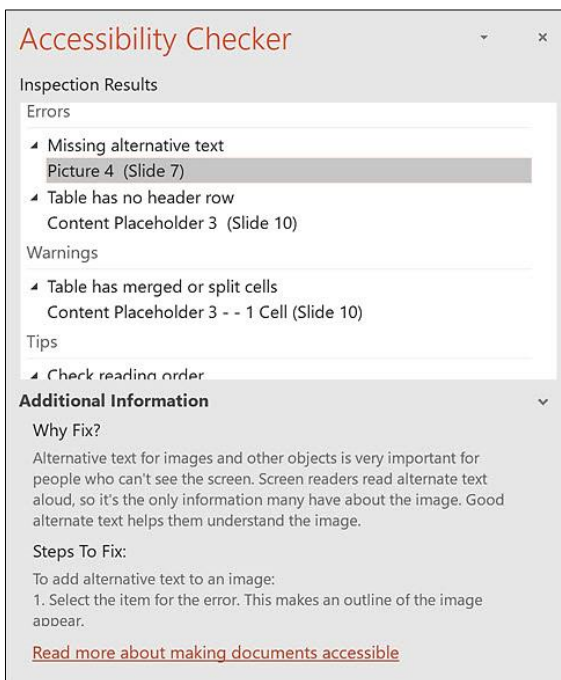
When the issue is addressed, it will disappear from the report automatically.

Other Accessibility Principles

- Make sure text is not too small, especially if the presentation will be viewed on a projector.
- Do not use color as the only way to convey information.
- Transitions and animations should be simple.
- Complex or automatic transitions and animations can be distracting.
- Use clear and simple language. If you have embedded video, ensure the video is captioned.
- If you have embedded audio, include a transcript.