Accessibility for Word files

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File structure

Metadata and properties

- Name the file with a clear and understandable name, avoid dashes or slashes if possible.
- Fill in the metadata: title and author are mandatory. If the document was created by multiple authors, you can add more authors.
- Make sure that the file language is correct. Usually, the file language is set to the same language of the operating system.

Headings

- Use heading styles instead of just making text bold or big.
- There can only be one heading 1 in the document, like in a book there is only one title.
- Build a hierarchy with heading styles and don't skip levels.
  Correct example: heading 1, heading 2, heading 3.
  Wrong example: heading 1, heading 3, heading 4.

Structure

- If your document is long, add a table of contents based on headings (in *References* choose *Table of contents*). **Warning**: if you did not used styles the summary will not be created correctly.
- If you put important information in headers and footers, repeat the information also in the main text. This is because the content of headers and footers will be visible in the exported PDF but will not be readable by assistive technologies.
- You can use page numbers in the footer.
- Use Word's built-in tool to create footnotes or endnotes.

Language

- Explain abbreviations and acronyms the first time you use them.

Links

- A link must have a meaningful text that makes the link's purpose clear. For example: "Visit our website" instead of "Click here". Avoid use the full URL path (https://) as the link text.
- Make sure that there is sufficient colour contrast between the link and the background (minimum contrast ratio is 4.5:1).
- Links should look different from surrounding text and be underlined.

Text formatting

Font and paragraph

- Smallest font size: 11pt. Choose Aptos, if it's available in your system.
- Text should be left-aligned (not fully justified).
- Avoid leaving empty paragraphs to space lines of text. Every time you hit the enter key, Word creates an empty paragraph. To create space before or after text, use Space before and Space after option in styles.
- Text should stand out clearly from the background, check the colour contrast with the [Colour Contrast Checker tool](#). The minimum contrast ratio is 4.5:1.
- Pay attention to the colours used in the predefined Word styles for tables and check if they meet the minimum colour contrast ratio.
- Do not rely on text formatting alone (colour, capitalization, bold, italic, underline, strikethrough) to convey critical information.
- Use bold and italics sparingly. Use underlining only for links.
- Add space between paragraphs or use paragraph indent to avoid walls of text. Walls of text make it difficult to read.
- Don't use all capital letters for titles. Long text in all caps is more difficult to read than upper and lower case.

Images

Simple and complex images

- Every important image must have a short description, this description is called alternative text (alt text). Do not include the word image, photograph or graphic in your alt text, assistive technologies already detect and announce the type of object.
- Images should be positioned inline with text.
- Don't describe complex images in the alt text, instead include a full explanation in the running text. The alt text is read by assistive technology in one breath, if there is a lot of information it is very difficult to understand it.

Charts and Graphics

- Charts must be positioned inline with text.
- Charts must have alt text and a full explanation, if possible, in the running text.
- If you insert diagrams or schemas using the *SmartArt* feature, add alternative text.

Features and Objects

- Avoid floating text boxes, keep them inline with text.
- If there are any formulas, it would be best to explain them in the running text.
- Avoid decorative fonts, *Drop cap*, *WordArt* and *Text effects*. These effects make the text very difficult to read.

Tables

Structure

- Use tables only for actual data, not for layout.
- A table must have **only one header** (column or row) and a **title**, just above the table. A header cell cannot be empty.
- Do not use *Merge cell*!
- If a table is very complex, try splitting it into simpler tables.
- Avoid empty cells, always make clear why they are empty: write *Not available* or *No data* if there is no data. Do not use a single dash, it is not always readable by assistive technologies. An accepted solution is to write this information in white text on a white background, because it will still be readable with a screen reader.

Colour and style

- When you have long tables, choose a layout with alternating background colours on the table rows. It improves the readability of long tables.
- If you choose a default design (with a predefined colour palette) for a table, always check the colour contrast ratio.