Accessible Documents Checklist

From *Accessible eLearning: WCAG for the Rest of Us* by Rachael Lundin

This checklist applies to: Word, PDF, PowerPoint, Google Docs, plain text files, Rich Text Format files, HTML documents, email, newsletters, forms, digital textbooks, and more.

Items labeled (Best practice) are strongly recommended but aren't WCAG 2.1 AA requirements. Everything else maps to a WCAG success criterion (see Appendix Three in the book).

Mark it up

Print it and write your mark on the line next to each item. Want to fill it in on screen? Use the Word version of this checklist.

Reading the book? ✓ I already know how to do this · ★ I'm curious · ? I've never heard of this

Reviewing a document? ✓ Passes · ★ Working on it · ? Not sure how to do this · N/A Doesn't apply

Pre-Development Considerations (Part Two Introduction)

Assume Readers Will:

- Use screen readers or text-to-speech
- Need to adjust text size and contrast
- Navigate by keyboard
- Require clear document structure
- Access content on various devices
- Print in different formats
- Need to copy/paste content
- Use different viewing modes
- Benefit from multiple format options

Document Structure (Chapter Eleven)

Document Properties

_____ Document properties filled in (title, author, language)

_____ Passages in another language are marked with that language

Headings Are Navigation

_____ Logical heading hierarchy (H1, H2, H3)

_____ Built-in heading styles used

Titles, Tables of Contents, and Page Numbers

_____ Clear, descriptive document title

_____ Table of contents for long documents (Best practice)

_____ Page numbers included (Best practice)

Links and Bookmarks

_____ Meaningful hyperlink text

_____ Bookmarks for navigation in long documents (Best practice)

Logical Reading Order

_____ Content reads in a logical order

Text and Visual Elements (Chapter Twelve)

Fonts and Size

_____ Sans-serif fonts (Arial, Calibri) (Best practice)

_____ Minimum font size as defined per platform (Best practice):

- In Word, email, and Google Docs: 12 point
- In PowerPoint: 14 point (18 for slide titles)

Contrast and Color

_____ Sufficient color contrast. Check with the WebAIM Contrast Checker

- 4.5:1 for normal text (under 18pt)
- 3:1 for large text (18pt or 14pt bold and above)

_____ Color not used alone for meaning

Spacing and Alignment

_____ White space between paragraphs (Best practice)

_____ Left-aligned text, not justified (Best practice - WCAG AAA)

Use Built-In Tools

_____ Lists, spacing, and emphasis created with built-in tools (no manual formatting)

_____ No text boxes used for layout (Best practice)

_____ No blank paragraphs used for spacing (Best practice)

Images, Graphics, Tables, and Lists (Chapter Thirteen)

Alt Text Basics

_____ Meaningful alt text for images
- Learn more at WebAIM: Alternative Text

_____ Decorative images marked as such

_____ Complex images have full text descriptions (caption or separate transcript)

Charts and Infographics

_____ Adequate contrast in diagrams

_____ Charts include data labels

_____ Infographics have text alternatives

Text Wrapping

_____ Text wraps around images in a way that maintains reading order

Tables and Lists

_____ Simple table structure (Best practice)

_____ Header rows identified

_____ No merged cells if possible (Best practice)

_____ Column headers repeat across pages (Best practice)

_____ No empty cells (use “N/A,” “None,” or a dash) (Best practice)

_____ Lists (both bulleted and numbered) use built-in formatting

_____ Nested lists properly structured (use the indent tool, not manual spacing)

Interactive Elements (Chapter Fourteen)

Form Fields

_____ Form fields properly labeled

_____ Required fields clearly marked

_____ Error messages are clear

Tab Order and Keyboard Access

_____ Logical tab order

_____ No timing requirements

_____ Interactive elements keyboard accessible

Instructions

_____ Clear instructions for completion

Testing Interactive Documents

_____ Form tested with a screen reader, keyboard only, and the built-in accessibility checker

Content and Materials (Chapter Fifteen)

Plain Language

_____ Content uses plain, concise language (Best practice)

_____ Terminology and concepts are explained clearly (Best practice)

_____ Instructional steps are easy to follow (Best practice)

_____ Reading level targets lower secondary education (Best practice - WCAG AAA)

Inclusive Language

_____ Use person-first language for inclusive terminology (Best practice)

_____ Apply gender-neutral language throughout content (Best practice)

Before Sending for Review: Testing Your Documents (Chapter Sixteen)

_____ **Start With Automated Checkers:** Use accessibility checkers like Microsoft Accessibility Checker, Adobe Acrobat Pro, or WebAIM's WAVE (Web Accessibility Evaluation) tool to quickly identify technical issues.

_____ **For PDFs, Meet PAC:** Run the free PDF Accessibility Checker (PAC) on every PDF.

_____ **Listen to Your Document:** Navigate the whole document with a screen reader (or Read Aloud).

_____ **Zoom to 200%:** Text reflows and stays readable without horizontal scrolling.

_____ **View in Grayscale:** Meaning doesn't depend on color.

_____ **Test Keyboard Navigation:** Every interactive element can be reached and used without a mouse.

_____ **Try a Different Device:** Check the document on a phone, tablet, or another computer.

_____ **Check Document Properties:** Title, author, and language are filled in.

_____ **Get Fresh Eyes:** Someone unfamiliar with the content reviews it.

Pro tips

- Use tables only for data, not layout
- Test tables with a screen reader

Watch for: common issues

- Missing alternative text
- Improper heading structure
- Inaccessible form fields
- Poor table structure
- Lack of document properties
- Avoid text boxes. Use paragraph styles instead
- Don't use manual spacing or formatting
- Never use blank paragraphs for spacing

Note: This checklist is meant to facilitate compliance with accessibility laws, not replace them.

Download fresh copies of all the checklists at rachaellundin.com/accessibility-resources.

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