Accessibility and Plain Language in Government

PLAIN Meeting, March 2021

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What We'll Cover

- Accessibility in the Federal Government
  - Section 508 Standards
  - Kinds of Disabilities

- Accessibility and Plain Language
  - Word Choice
  - Typography and Layout
  - Headings, Lists, and Tables
  - Graphics

- For Future Reference
  - Resources
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Accessibility in the Federal Government

To Whom and What Does Section 508 Apply?

- Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act pertains to anyone with a disability who is trying to access agency information

- It applies to information and communication technologies (ICT) that agencies
  - Develop
  - Procure
  - Maintain
  - Use

Section 508 Standards

- Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0, A and AA
- Functional Criteria
  - Without vision, with limited vision, without perception of color
  - Without hearing, with limited hearing, without speech
  - With limited manipulation, with limited reach and strength
  - With limited language, cognitive, and learning abilities

Other Considerations in Categorizing Disabilities

- Permanent
  - From birth
  - Acquired (recently or long ago, abruptly or over time)
- Temporary
  - Short term
  - Long term
- Situational
- Single or multiple

Accessibility and Plain Language

We Have a Lot in Common!

- Goal: make it possible for everyone to understand and act on content
  - Cognitive function decreases when you're in a hurry, distracted, tired, or anxious
  - Design, write, and organize content for your users and audience
  - Be consistent
- Consider accessibility and plain language from the beginning and throughout the development and writing process
- We need to work with other communities

Word Choice

- Use descriptive link language (WCAG 2.4.4)
- Be consistent
    - Don't use the same word to mean different things (WCAG 3.2.4)
    - Don't use different words to mean the same thing
    - Style lists and tables consistently
- Consider your use of abbreviations carefully
- Populate your document's properties carefully
    - Title
    - Author
    - Subject
    - Keywords

Typography and Layout

- Consult your agency's experts
- Good typography and layout increase readability and decrease cognitive load
- Minimize distractions
- Provide whitespace
- Left justify text
- Pay attention to color contrast (WCAG 1.4.3)
- Use ALL CAPS for acronyms and initialisms, not emphasis or headings. NO ANGRY WRITING!!!
- Use italics sparingly
- Underline text only in links
- Use CamelCase for filenames (avoid "%20")

Headings, Lists, and Tables

- Help readers get a sense of a document or webpage at a glance

- Break up long content, giving the eyes and brain a break

- Must be created properly "behind the scenes" for people with certain disabilities to access and understand them (WCAG 1.3.1)

Tips for Headings, Lists, and Tables

- Design your headings to form a useful outline (WCAG 2.4.6) and keep sections short
- Use styles in Word! Heading levels must be visually and programmatically distinct
- Usually don't repeat headings (exception: parallel structure)
- Use built-in features, not asterisks, tabs, or spaces, to create lists and tables
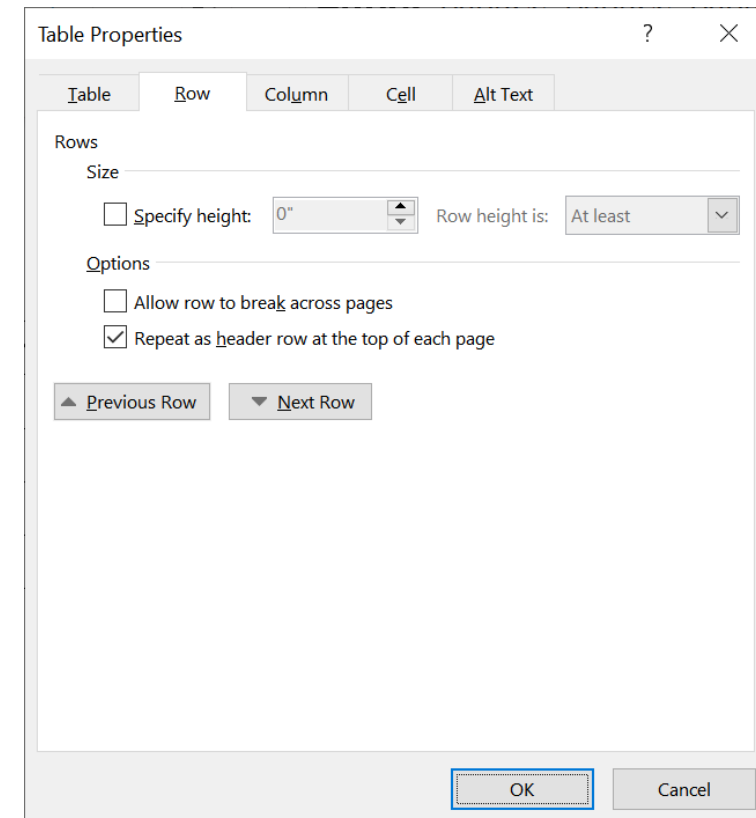- For tables, repeat the header row and don't allow to break across pages

Table Row Properties

Set Header Row to Repeat

1. Select only the header row

2. Open the context menu (shift-F10 or right click)

3. Choose Table Properties and then the Row Tab

4. Select "repeat as header row"

Do Not Allow Rows to Break Across Pages

1. Select the entire table

2. Navigate to the Row Tab

3. Deselect "allow row to break across pages"

Table Properties dialog box:

Tabs: Table | Row | Column | Cell | Alt Text

Rows

Size
- ☐ Specify height: 0" Row height is: At least

Options
- ☐ Allow row to break across pages
- ☑ Repeat as header row at the top of each page

▲ Previous Row   ▼ Next Row

OK   Cancel

Graphics

- For complex graphs, provide the data in a table too

- Don't repeat an image's caption or surrounding text in alt text

- In alt text, don't say "image of," include URLs, or use formatting

- Write concise alt text

- Mark decorative images as such (WCAG 1.1.1)

- Don't use sensory characteristics as the only way to convey meaning (WCAG 1.3.3, 1.4.1)

For Future Reference

Resources

- [Section 508](#) of the Rehabilitation Act, as amended (29 U.S.C§ 794 (d))
- [Section 508 Standards](#)
- [Section508.gov](#)
  - [Create Accessible Digital Products](#)
  - [Find Your 508 Program Manager](#)
  - [Accessibility Training](#)
- [Social Security Administration's Alt Text Guide](#)
- [WCAG Quick Reference](#)
- [Colour Contrast Analyser](#) (downloadable with eyedropper)
- [Contrast Checker](#) (online)

Contact

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