

Making Accessible MS Word Documents

When creating a MS Word document, it does not require a lot of extra effort to make the document accessible to people with disabilities. This article gives instructions on a few key things that will make documents much more accessible to people with disabilities using assistive software.

For additional ways to make Word documents more accessible, please view the article published by Microsoft on [Creating Accessible Word Documents](#).

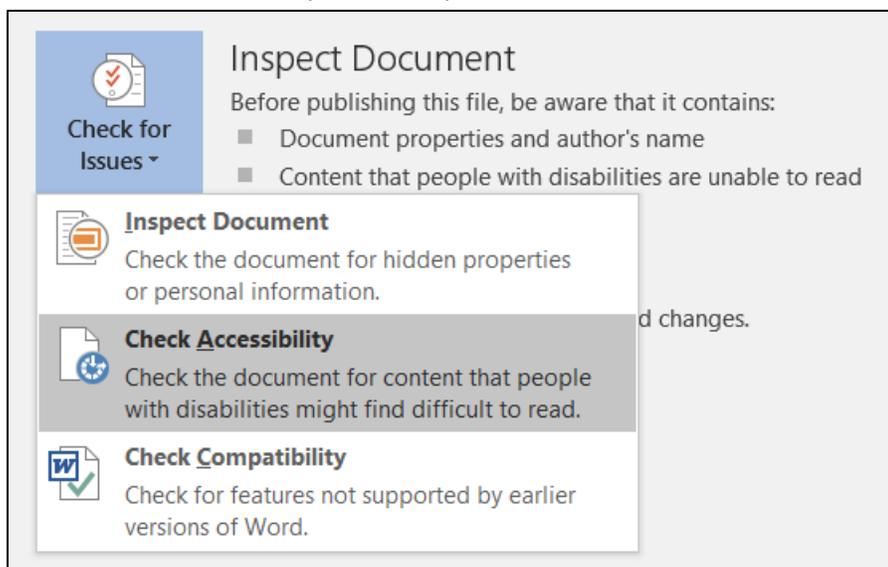
Accessibility Checker

The Microsoft Office products have a built in accessibility checker that will check the document for elements that are considered inaccessible. Elements that are found to be inaccessible will be flagged and a description of the problem will be provided along with steps for fixing the problem. The Microsoft article for the accessibility checker can be viewed here: [Microsoft Accessibility Checker](#).

Open Accessibility Checker

The Accessibility Checker can be opened by doing the following steps:

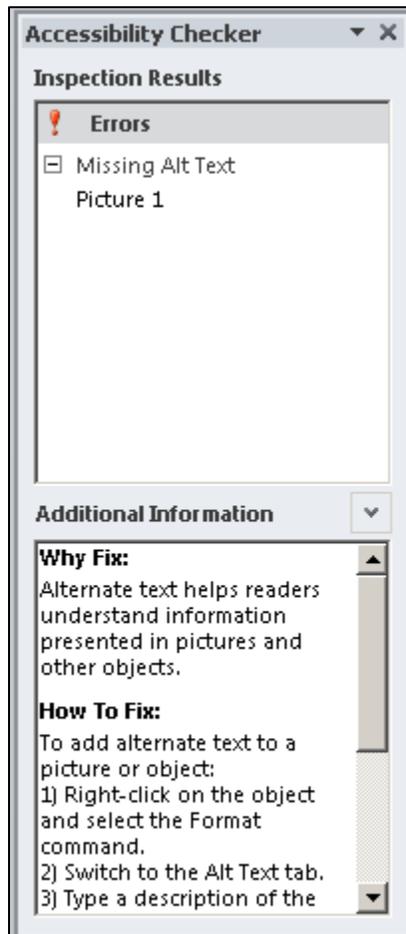
1. Click on the **File** tab
2. Click on the button labeled *Check for Issues*
3. Click on *Check Accessibility* in the drop down



How to Use the Accessibility Checker

The Accessibility Checker has two parts. The top part is *Inspection Results*, which lists all of the accessibility errors and warnings contained within the document. *Errors* are items that make the document unreadable or very difficult to navigate for someone using assistive technology.

Warnings are style and formatting choices within the document that can make the document difficult to read or navigate for a user with disabilities. Warnings are less severe than errors but should still be corrected if possible.



In the example pictured above, a picture without Alt Text is flagged as an error. Without the Alt Text any user that is unable to see the image would not know what it contains. Double clicking on the item identified (*Picture 1* in the screen shot) will move the document to that location.

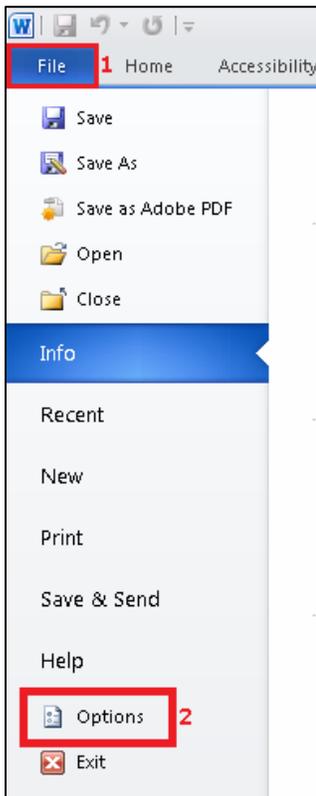
The bottom part to the Accessibility Checker provides additional information on why the particular error or warning is an issue, and steps to fix it. Once the steps are followed and the error is resolved, it will disappear from the list automatically.

Add Accessibility Checker to the Ribbon

The Accessibility Checker can be added to the Ribbon by doing the following steps:

1. Click on the **File** tab

2. Click on **Options**

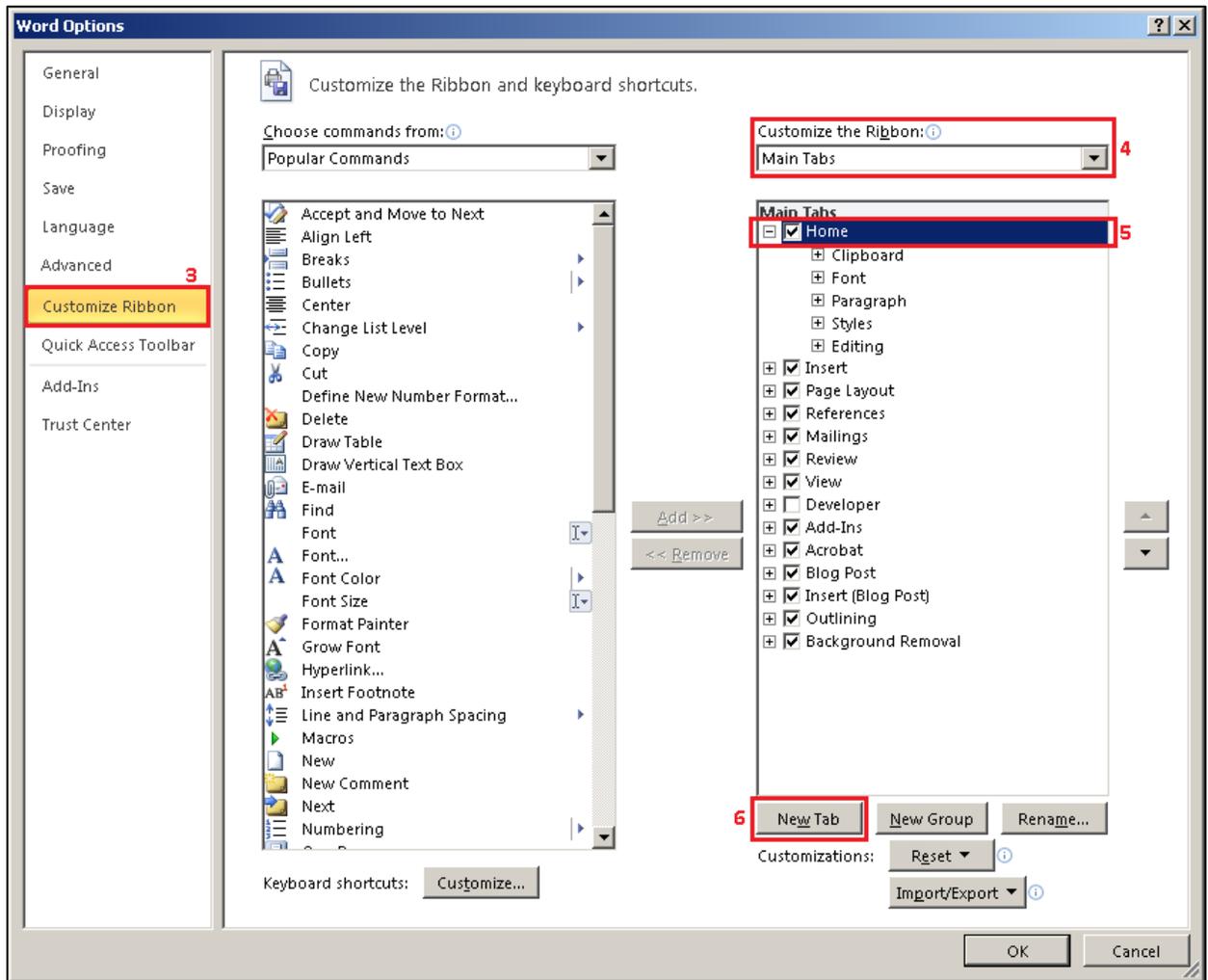


3. Click on **Customize Ribbon**

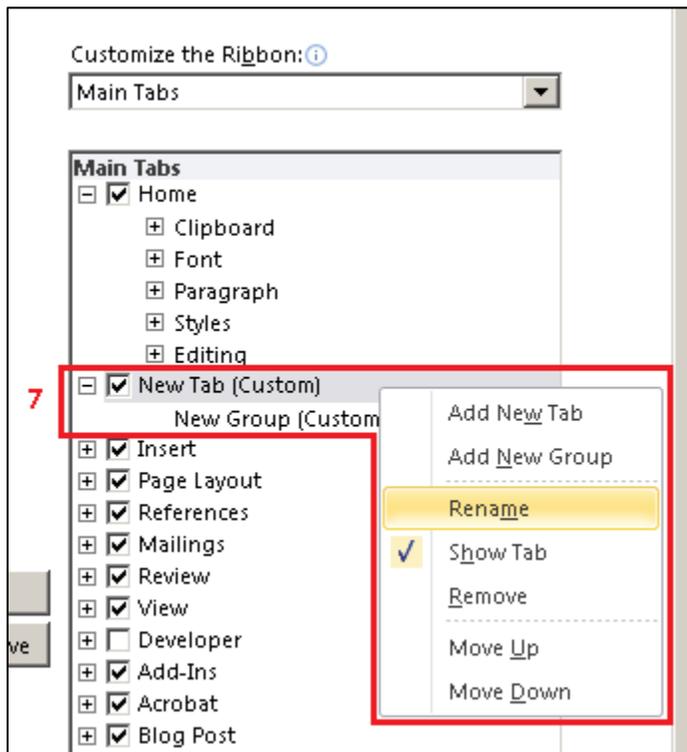
4. In the *Customize the Ribbon* drop down (on the right side of the dialog), select **Main Tabs**

5. Find and click on the **Home** tab in the list of tabs on the right

6. Click on the button **New Tab**

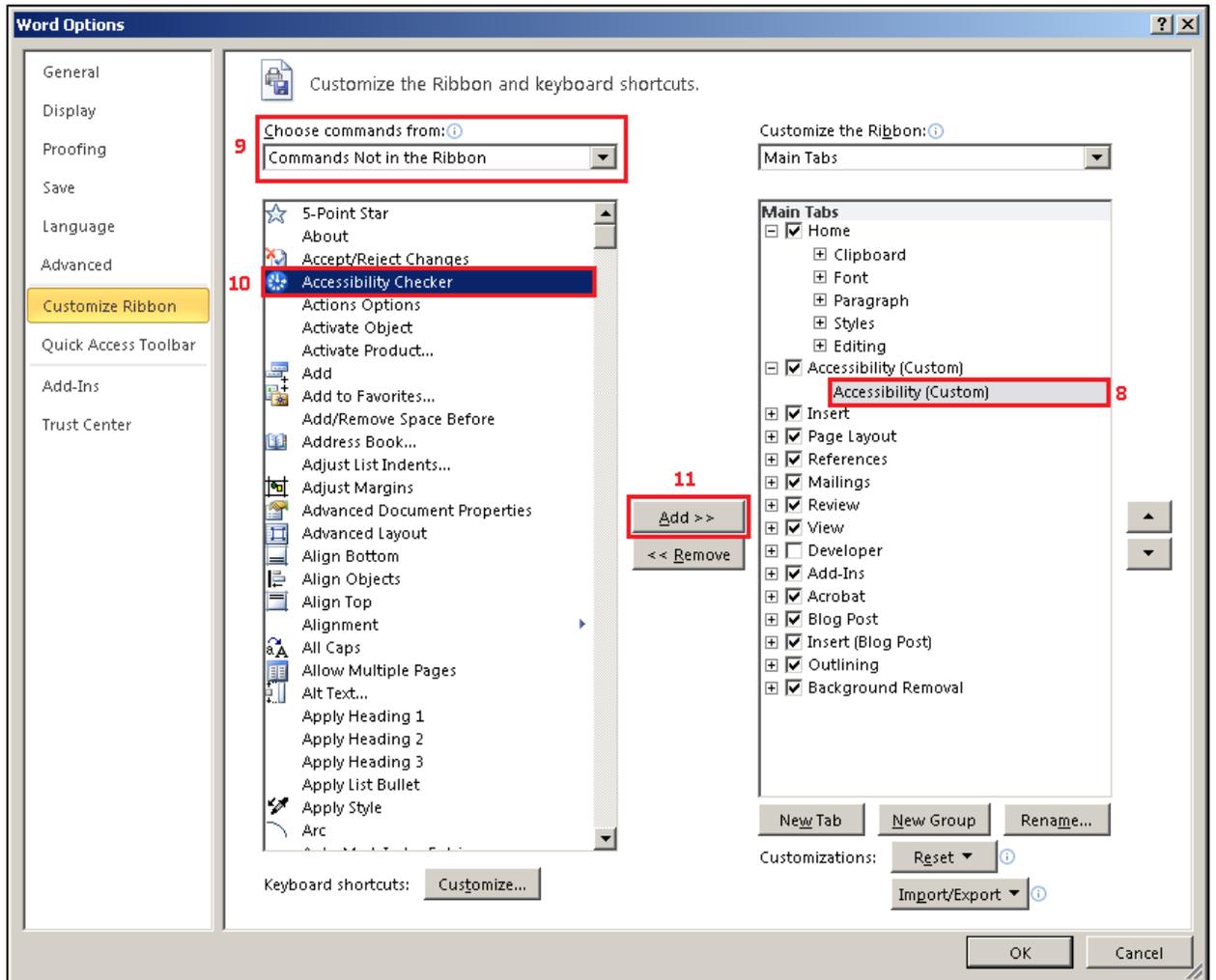


7. Right click on the newly created *New Tab* and rename it to “Accessibility”, do the same for *New Group*

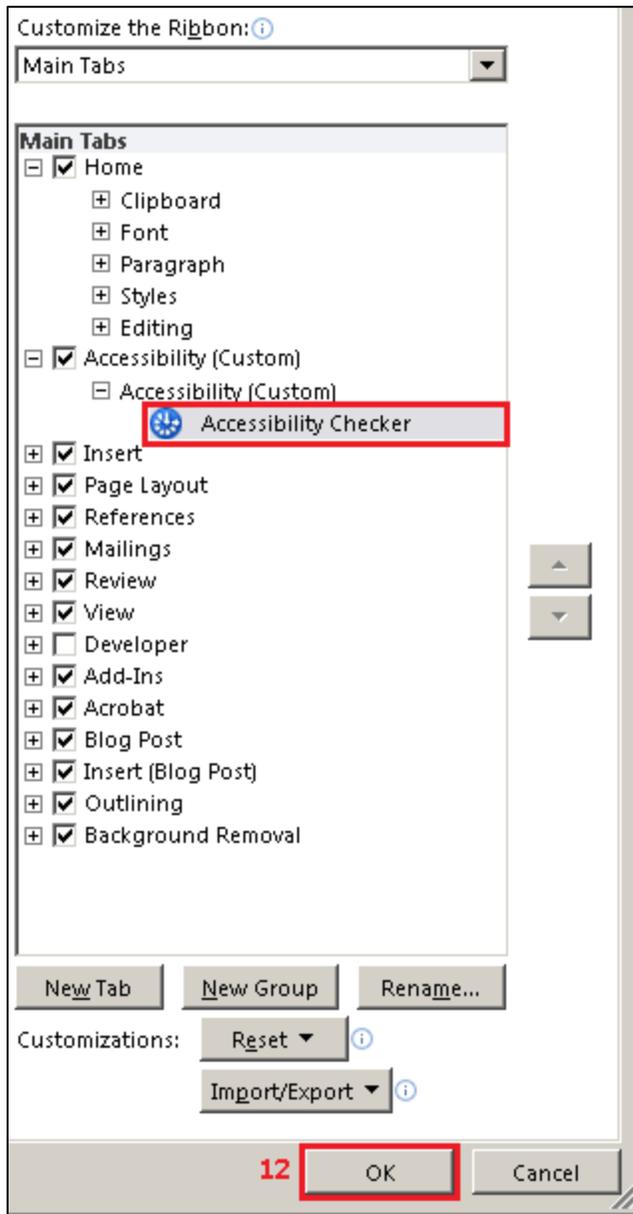


8. Click on the Accessibility group.
9. In the *Choose commands from* drop down, select **Commands not in the ribbon**
10. Click on **Accessibility Checker** from the command list

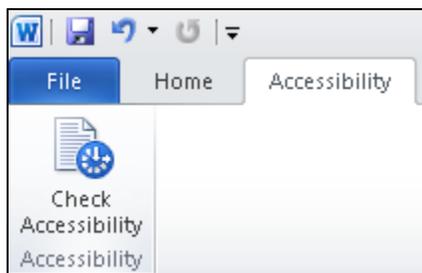
11. Click on the **Add>>** button to add the Accessibility checker to the Accessibility group of the Accessibility tab



12. Click OK



13. Go to the new Accessibility Tab and click on the “Check Accessibility” button. This will open a sidebar that will list out any potential issues with accessibility.



Alternative Text (Alt Text)

Alt Text is a text description given to an image or graphic to allow people with visual disabilities to understand what image is about. When assistive technology comes across an image it will speak any Alt Text to the user. If there is no Alt Text for an image the assistive technology will attempt to read any information that is available, such as the image file name, or skip it completely.

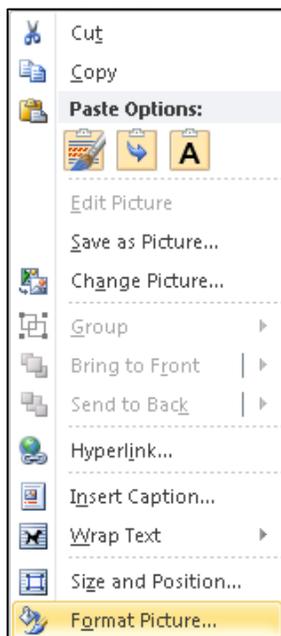
In the Microsoft Office products there are two components to Alt Text: Title and Description. The Title is typically only a few words naming the image and is not required to be used. The Description is required and is a brief description of the image.

To make Alt Text understandable to the user and to work best with a variety of accessibility software, follow these guidelines in when writing Alt Text descriptions:

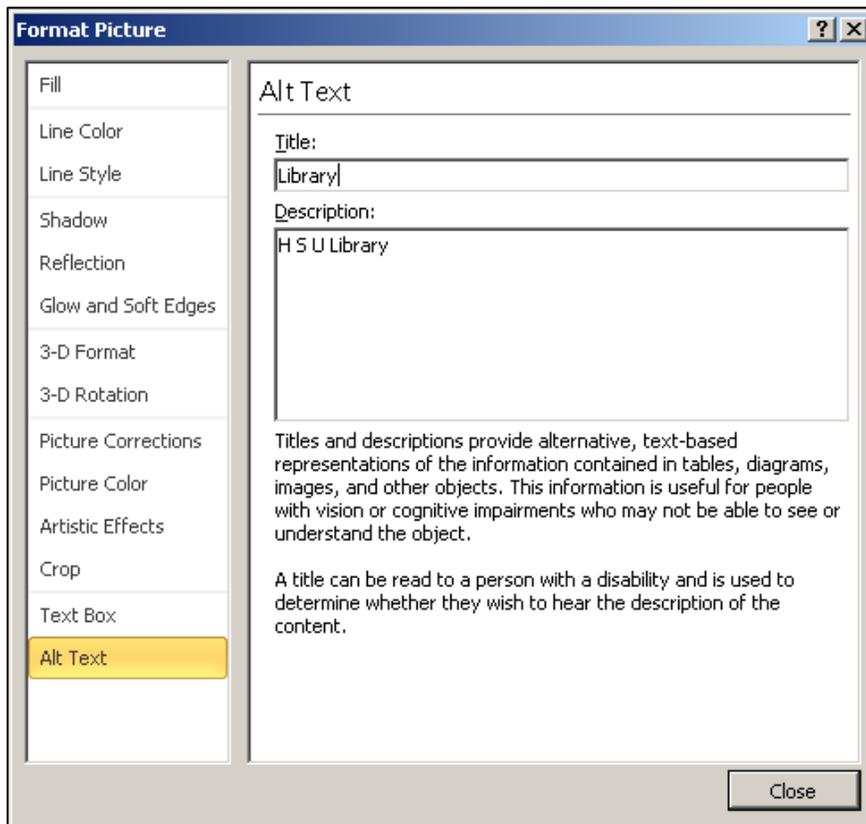
1. Keep the image context in mind. Avoid duplicating information already presented in the text.
2. Be as succinct as possible, use 125 characters or less. Longer alt text is allowed but shorter alt text is easier to understand.
3. Acronyms should be written with a space between the letters. For example, the Alt Text “HSU Library” could be vocalized as “Sue Library.” Putting a space between acronym letters, “H S U Library,” will force the letters to be vocalized.
4. Descriptors such as “Image of” or “Picture of” are generally unnecessary and should be left off.
5. If a Title is used, it should be very brief: only a few words at most.
6. If the image performs an action, such as linking to an outside document or web page, that should be mentioned in the description.

Adding Alt Text: MS Word 2010

1. Right Click on the image object
2. In the popup menu, left click on *Format Picture*

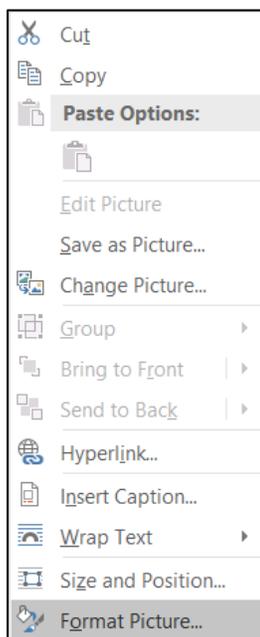


3. The Format Picture dialog box will open. Click on *Alt Text*, and enter a description (entering a title is optional).

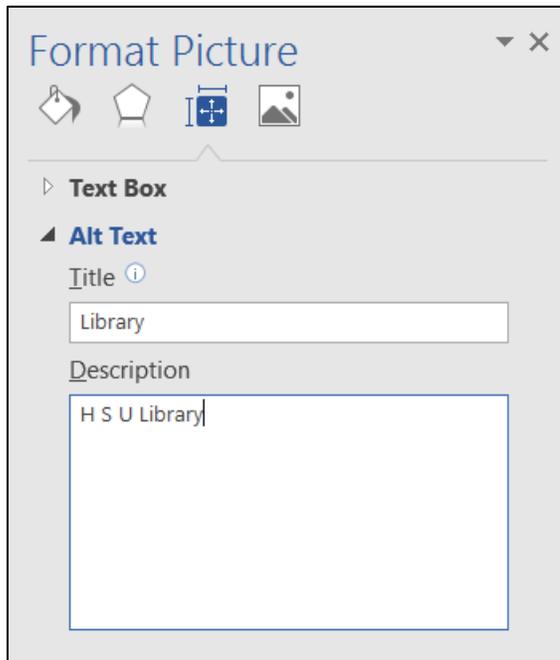


Adding Alt Text: MS Word 2013 and 2016

1. Right Click on the image object
2. In the popup menu, left click on *Format Picture*



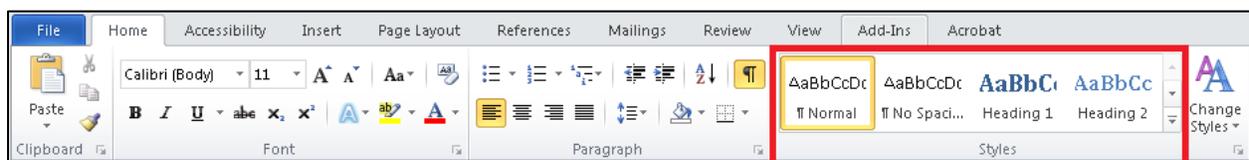
3. The Format Picture panel will open. Click on the *Layout & Properties* icon (third from the left, under the Format Picture text)
4. Click on *Alt Text* and enter a description (entering a title is optional).
5. The Format Picture panel can be left open, allowing you to click on other images and easily add Alt Text to more images.



Use Built in Styles

The built in MS Word styles are very useful to many different people. To an author, styles represent a way to change and control the formatting of entire sections or the entire documents with minimal effort. To a sighted reader, styles are a way to visually organize a document for easier reading.

For readers with disabilities, styles also help with navigation but in a different way. Headers of various levels (such as Header 1, Header 2, etc.) are used by assistive technology for navigation. The assistive technology is able to read through the document and pick out the header styles, present them to the user in an accessible format (such as audio), and provide a means for the user to navigate directly to a desired section. If an author manually creates headers by directly changing the font size and formatting of each header instead of using built in styles, the ability to use assistive technology to easily navigate a document's header sections is lost.



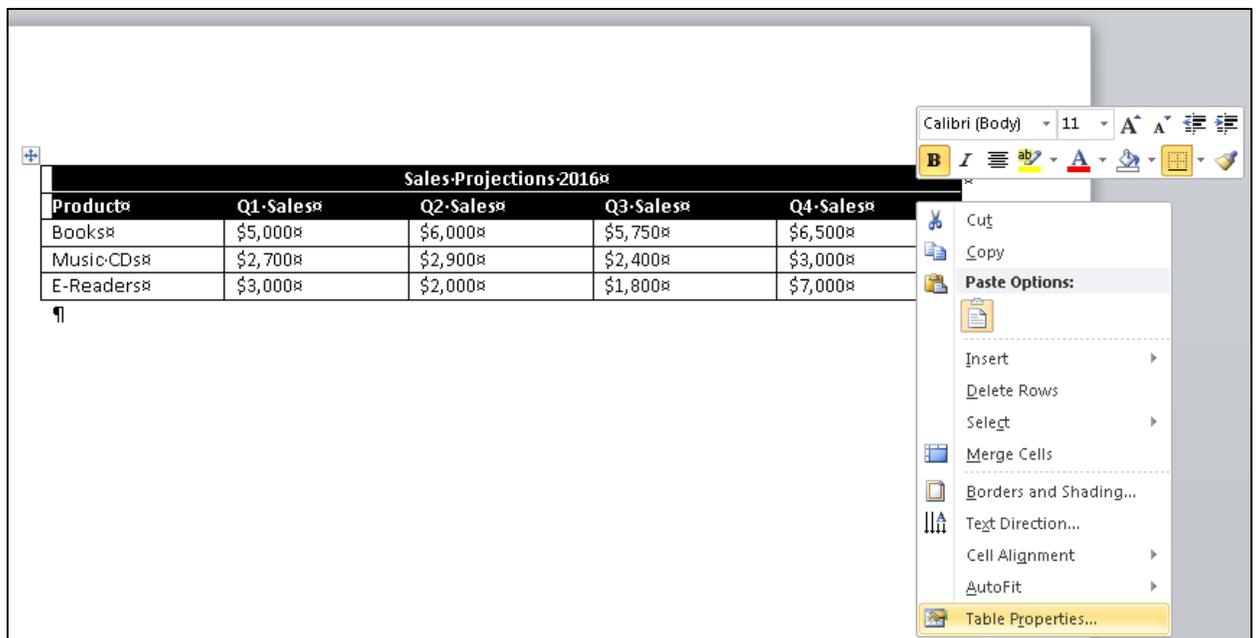
Styles are found on the Home Ribbon in the section named *Styles*. Making use of the built in styles is all that is needed to make a document more accessible. Use the built in style *Normal* for body text and *Heading 1* for section titles. Doing just this will make a document more navigable by students using assistive technology.

Tables

Tables are often used to organize data or information into an easy to read format. For a sighted reader, all that needs to happen is the table information lines up in the correct rows and columns, with a header to inform the reader about what each column and row means. But for a visually impaired reader relying on a screen reader, a table can be a nightmare of jumbled information if it's not setup properly.

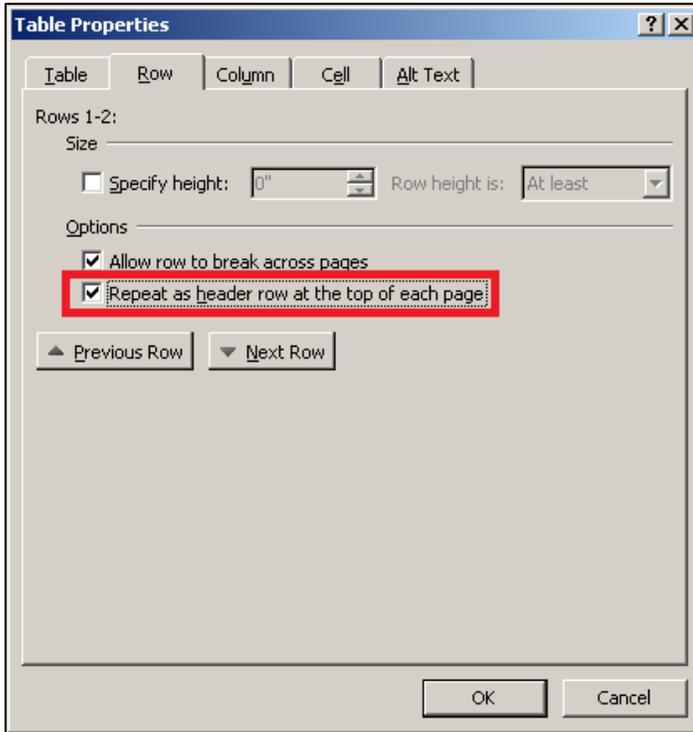
For tables, having a designated header row with column titles is essential. Having Alt Text is also helpful because it will describe what the table is about. Do the following to make tables accessible:

1. In the table, select the rows to be used as the header rows and right click on them (if it's only going to be the first row, just right click somewhere on the first row)
2. Left click on table properties



3. Click on the Row tab, ensure that the rows identified are the ones you want to become the header row.

4. Check the box marker “Repeat as header row at the top of each page”



5. Click on the Alt Text tab and fill in the Title and Description boxes for the table

6. Click OK

