

# Scottish Accessible Information Forum

## Creating Accessible Documents

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### 1. Using Styles in Microsoft Word

Using Styles and Formatting in a Word document helps make it more accessible if it is to be distributed via the web, intranet or email. In Word 2007 you can find the Styles task pane when you click on the Home tab.

In earlier versions, the Styles and Formatting Toolbar may be placed under the menu bar, or you can access the Styles and Formatting task pane, by going to Format in the menu bar and then to Styles and Formatting.

#### **Basic styles**

There are four styles types in Word. Knowing about them will help you understand what you are looking at in the task pane, what your options are for creating new styles and what impact a style will have on the text in your document.

#### **Paragraph styles**

Paragraph styles include not just font type and size, but also formatting for a whole paragraph's text positioning and spacing. A paragraph style can be applied to one or more paragraphs.

A paragraph style's formatting will be applied to all the text within the end paragraph mark of where your pointer is positioned.

#### **Character styles**

These are applied at the character level – to blocks of words and letters – rather than the paragraph level. An example would be an “emphasis” style that applies, say, both an underline and italic type.

You can apply character styles along with the paragraph style. So, if the paragraph style is Normal, using Arial as the font, and you applied the “emphasis” style to a word, you would still have Arial as the font, but it would also have italic and underline formatting.

## **List styles and table styles**

These two other types of styles provide a consistent look to tables and lists.

## **Typical styles**

The typical style list for a new, blank document in the Styles task pane includes:

- Three heading styles
- The default paragraph style, called Normal

The list of styles you see initially is the typical list shown for a new blank document.

The Normal style is selected in the pane to reflect how text is styled at the position of your pointer in the document. All the text in a new document is styled with Normal by default.

You have many additional styles to choose from, they are just not shown in the default view.

## **More styles**

You can see all styles available or only the styles used in the document if you click on the arrow at the right hand side at the bottom of the styles pane to show the styles window, then click “options” at the bottom of the list and select “styles to show” as “all styles”.

## **Applying styles**

1. Click within the paragraph you want the style to apply to
2. Click the style you want in the styles drop down box
3. The style gets applied to all the text in that paragraph or line

Depending on the type of style you are applying, you select areas of your document or click within them, and then you click a style in the task pane to apply it.

The great thing about a style is that you can click it and apply it in multiple places at once. For example, you could select three different lines of text that you want to have the same heading style, and then just click the style, such as **Heading 1**, once, to apply it in all three places.

## **Modifying styles**

In the styles section, when you hold the cursor over a type of style, a pop up tooltip displays information about that specific style. If you right click on the style and select **Modify Style** another box opens up.

Here you can modify the style with changes to font, font size, alignment, indents, line returns, paragraph styles and more.

If you check the box “Automatically update”, all instances of that style within the document will be updated. You do not need to go back and apply this manually.

If you select new documents based on this template, the changed style will be available for future documents.

## 2. Meta information or properties for documents

### **Meta information is information about the document**

For example, meta information contains information about what the document is called, when it was created, who created it and in which department. Information such as the title and author can be made visible to other users, but does not have to be. Even if you can't read the information in the document it still exists and can be interpreted and displayed by other computers and assistive technology.

### **Carrying out searches**

Meta information can include a description of your document and keywords you would use to identify it. This information is used by search engines to categorise documents. Page ranking for a search will depend on how the Meta information (title, content, alternative text to images) you have entered correlates with search information.

Therefore, adding good clear Meta information about your document increases its chance of being found (accessed) by all users.

- Some search engines show the Meta title and description of the document as the post for the search result.
- A well chosen Meta title and description will make it easier for users to decide if your document is the right one or not in a search result.

### **Inserting Meta Tags**

In most software programs you will find a Document Properties box where you can enter Meta information.

In Microsoft Word 2007, use the Office button at the very top left, then click on Prepare, then Properties.

### **Inserting Meta information – Good Practice**

It is good practice to include Meta information in all documents published on the internet. This will increase the accessibility and usability of the document. During searches the document description will allow users to decide quickly and easily if it is the document they need.

Basic Meta information to provide should include:

- The Title (this can be the same as the title in the document itself). A Meta title should not be more than 65 characters long, otherwise it can throw up an error in accessibility checks.
- The Author
- Keywords (no more than 25 keywords and relevant to the document)
- A Description (a well written description can make the difference between someone opening the document or not. Usually no more than 25 words are displayed when a search has been carried out).

### 3. Alternative text for images

Providing an alternative text for an image is helpful for people using assistive technology. For example, a screen reader will read out the alt text to the user. This is especially important if the image is conveying information not included in the text.

When a document is changed into another format, for example a PDF file, or incorporated into a webpage, the alt text will also be transferred and ensure better accessibility.

The text should be an alternative to the image.

#### **Images with text**

With any images that consist of text, the alt text should be just the text as it is or if it is an acronym or abbreviation, spelled out. For example, this can be a logo or a brand name.

#### **Photos and illustrations**

For photos and illustrations, be imaginative and try to write what the photo is trying to convey. Write “a boy is eating a large hamburger dripping in sauce” if the image displays that. Writing suitable alt attributes for photographs can be tricky but be imaginative.

#### **Graphs and charts**

Images as graphs and charts display information. Try to summarise any trends and developments in the alt text. For example, “the sales rates rose from 5% in January to 7% in March”.

#### **Decorative and spacing images**

Images that are purely for the visual layout of a document should not be read by assistive technology. Therefore these alt text should be left with a null attribute “ ” so that a text screenreader will ignore the image.

#### **Applying alt text**

Right click on the image or graphic, select format picture and click on the alt text tab. In the alt text box, type in your description of the image.