



Your guide to  
accessible information

# What do we mean by ‘access for all’?

**NHS Health Scotland is committed to making all of our publications (whether webpages, PDFs, Word files, Excel charts or anything else) accessible to all users, particularly those with some form of disability.**

## Why is it important?

**Discrimination:** The Office for National Statistics tells us that 11 million people in the UK have some form of disability. If we produce content that is inaccessible, we are discriminating against this group of users.

**Risk:** Inaccessible content risks falling short of legal obligations provided by the Equality Act 2010.

## What are the benefits of accessibility?

**Inclusion:** We are removing any obstacles to our content and making it accessible to all.

**Compatibility:** Accessible content works better across a wide range of platforms and devices.

**Efficient indexing:** Search engines (like Google) index accessible content more efficiently and return a more favourable ranking.

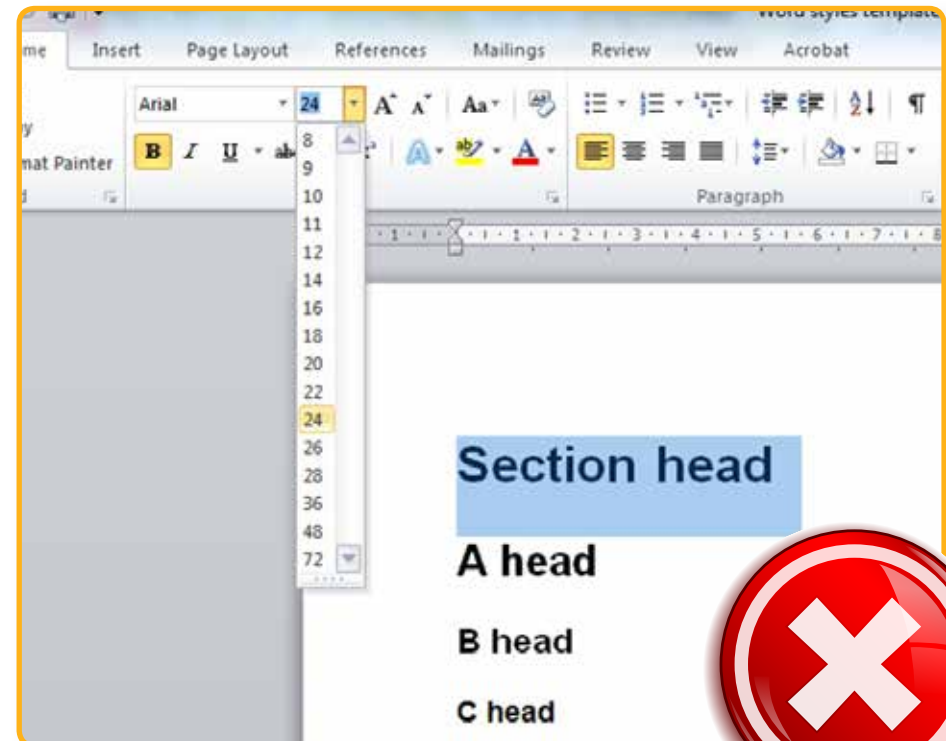
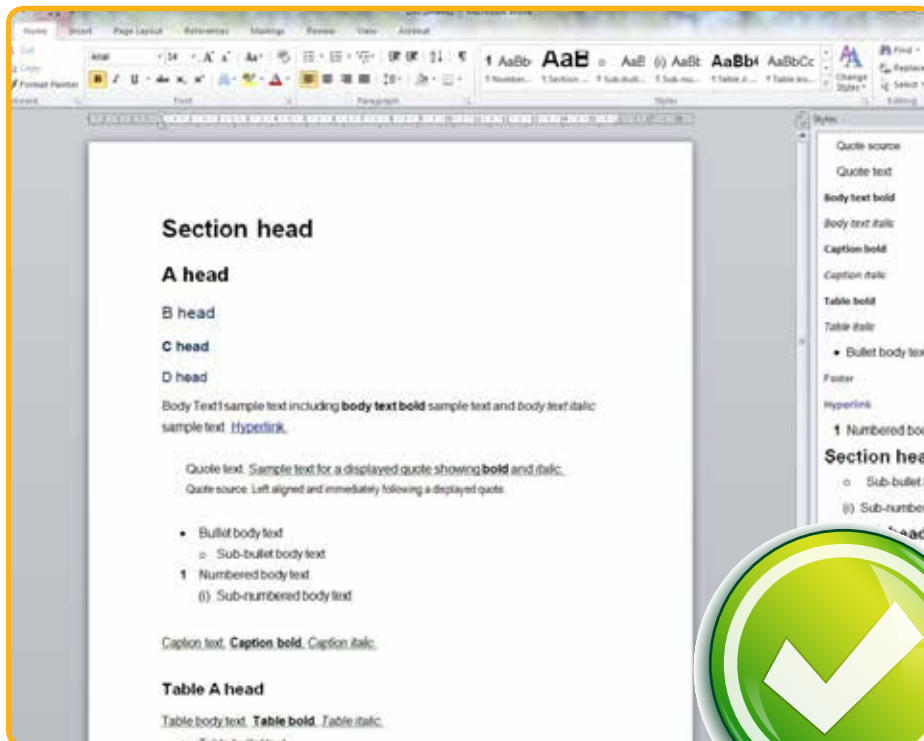
# Setting up a document in Word

## Styles

Use styles in Word to format your document and create a robust and consistent heading hierarchy. Styles describe and 'tag' content. Screenreaders and other assistive technologies will use these tags to navigate your document.

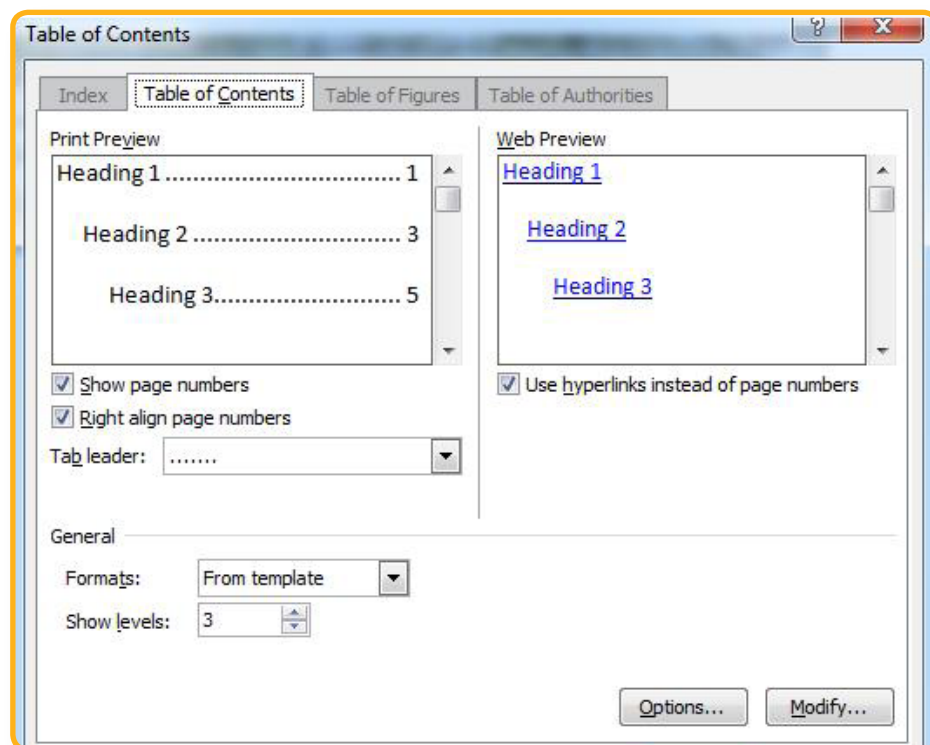
NHS Health Scotland has its own style that has been developed with accessible fonts. It can be found in the Styles menu.

Making text bold or increasing the font size using the Font or Paragraph menus does not create a heading tag and does nothing to assist with accessibility.



## Tables of contents

Tables of contents make it easy to skip to the relevant part of the document. They are easy to create if styles have been used to format the document. The option to add a table of contents is available in the References menu.



## Alternative text

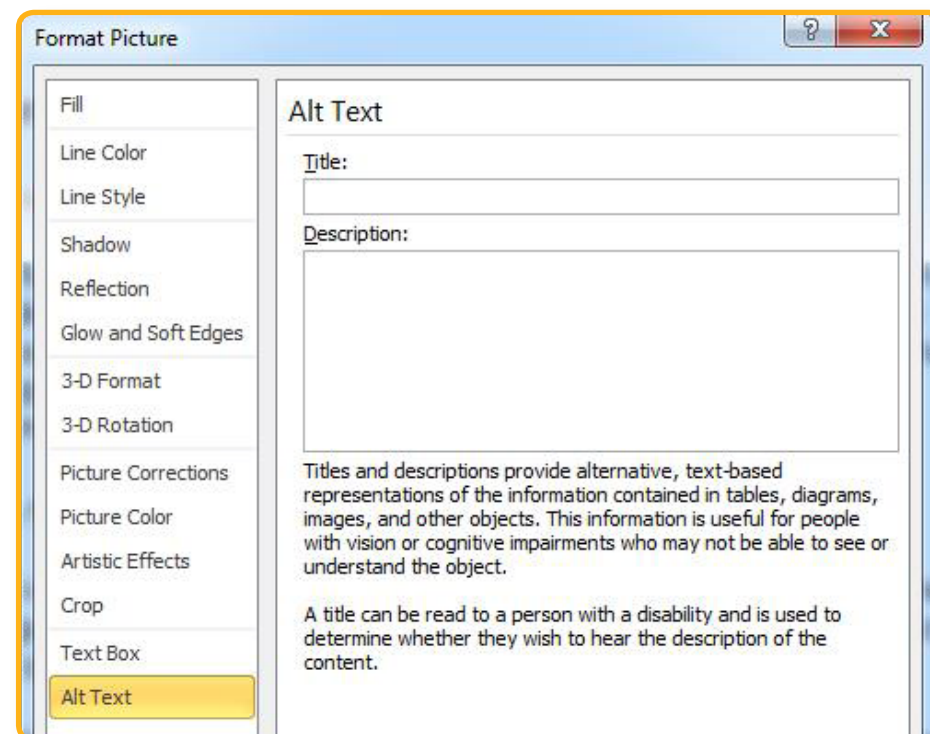
If you include images, charts, tables and graphs in your document you must provide alternative text so a screenreader can convey this information to the user.

### How to add alt text

For an **image**, right click and select 'Format Picture'. Then select 'Alt Text' from the menu. The window that opens up allows you to write a title and also a brief description of the picture.

For a **table**, right click and select 'Table Properties' and then 'Alt Text' for the same window to open.

For a **graph**, right click and select 'Format Chart Area' and then 'Alt Text' for the same window to open.



## What to include in alt text

The title and description should be clear and simple to understand for anybody who can't see the image. Alt text should enhance the text in the main document.

Give a short title to the image along with any figure or reference numbers – this should act like a caption. In the description, explain in more detail what the image conveys:

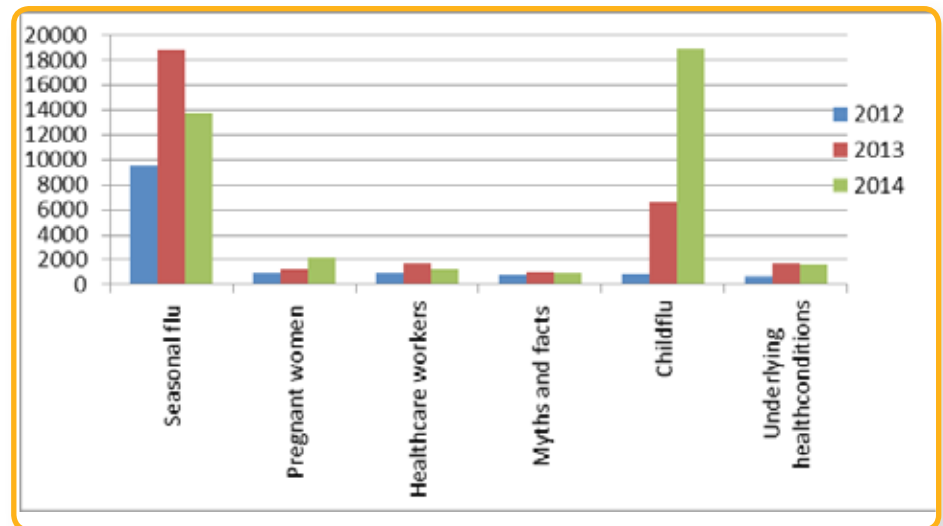
- For an **image**, include information about the people, setting, objects or context.
- For a **table, graph or chart**, give an overview of the data that it contains. Describe any patterns the chart or graph shows that will be apparent to a sighted reader. If there is no pattern, say this too.
- For a **graph**, the description should also include the details of what each axis shows and note any potential trends or notable statistics.

There is no save option, just click 'Close' when you are finished adding your alt text. This information will then be carried over when the document is converted to PDF.

## Example

**Title:** A graph showing the number of visits to webpages about flu 2012–2014

**Description:** The x axis presents the names of each page within the website (seasonal flu, child flu, flu for people in target high-risk groups and myths and facts). The y axis shows the number of visitors to each page within the website. A key indicates which year these visitors came to site (2012, 2013 or 2014). The graph indicates that the number of visitors to the page about seasonal flu peaked in 2013, whilst for child flu there was considerably higher traffic to in 2014. This is in line with the level of media campaigning on seasonal and child flu in these years.



## When not to use alt text

If there is an image that adds no value to the text within the main document, there is no need to supply alt text. In the example below, the photo of the child's foot provides no further information and does not enhance meaning or context. Alt text could be given for this decorative image if desired, but it would not aid understanding of the information on this page.

**Tip:** If you're not sure what to put as alt text, imagine you are reading the document to someone over the phone. How would you describe that image, chart, table or graph? What are the key points they would need to know?

Screening identifies babies who are genetic carriers of the altered haemoglobins that cause SCDs. They are healthy and unaffected by the condition but, as carriers, may pass the gene on to the next generation.

If your baby is identified as a carrier, the health professional looking after you will give you

Although the purpose of the blood test is to look for SCDs, sometimes other unusual blood disorders are found by the test. If this happens, the health professional looking after you will arrange for you to see a haematologist who will arrange further tests for your baby.

### Blood spot test results

#### Why are repeat tests sometimes needed?

Occasionally it is necessary to repeat the newborn blood spot test because:

- there was not enough blood or information on the card for testing
- the blood spot card was damaged
- one of the results was unclear and needs to be repeated.

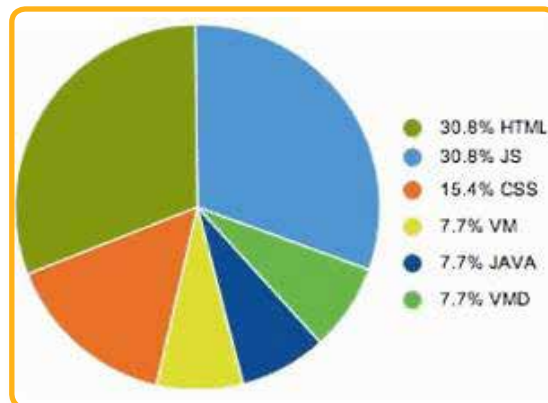




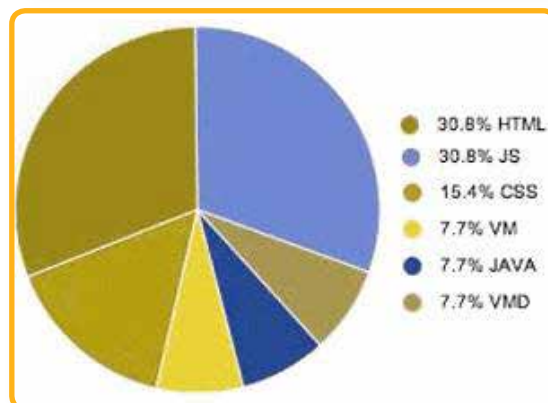
# Colour

The choices we make in how we use colour in our documents affect how visually impaired and colour-blind users access our content. Using colour to distinguish information can cause problems.

It's also important to give information in a key in the same order as the sectors appear on a chart.



**Viewed with  
'normal' vision**



**Viewed with  
colour blindness**

- Use colours that provide good contrast between foreground and background.



- Use a single colour for your text and avoid 'Word Art' effects.



- Never rely on colour alone to convey information or meaning.



# Accessible tables

Screenreaders and other assistive technologies often rely on being able to 'tab' through the cells of a table. From any cell, the corresponding row or column heading can also be 'read'. To create an accessible table, the structure needs to enable easy tabbing.

- Tables are read from left to right, a single row at a time.

	Column 1	Column 2	Column 3
Row 1	a	b	c
Row 2	d	e	f
Row 3	g	h	i
Row 4	j	k	l

- Avoid merged cells and headings that span rows and columns.
- Try breaking down complex tables into two or more smaller, simpler tables.
- Text in cells should be formatted simply, e.g. bullet points can cause structure problems.
- Avoid creating tables that break across pages.
- Link to complex tables in an Excel file rather than including them in a document.
- Use tables for tabular data only, not for layout.

Fruit eaten by my children (daily)					
		Oranges		Apples	
		Fruit	Juice	Fruit	Juice
Sarah	Mon-Fri	1	3	1	
	Sat-Sun	0	3	0	
Samuel	Mon-Fri	1	0	0	
	Sat-Sun	2	0	0	
Charlie	Mon-Fri	1	0	1	
	Sat-Sun	0	1	1	

Fruit eaten by Sarah (daily)				
	Orange	Orange juice	Apple	Apple juice
Mon - Fri	1	3	1	
Sat - Sun	0	3	0	

Fruit eaten by Samuel (daily)				
	Orange	Orange juice	Apple	Apple juice
Mon - Fri	1	0	0	
Sat - Sun	0	2	0	

Fruit eaten by Charlie (daily)				
	Orange	Orange juice	Apple	Apple juice
Mon - Fri	1	0	1	
Sat - Sun	0	1	2	



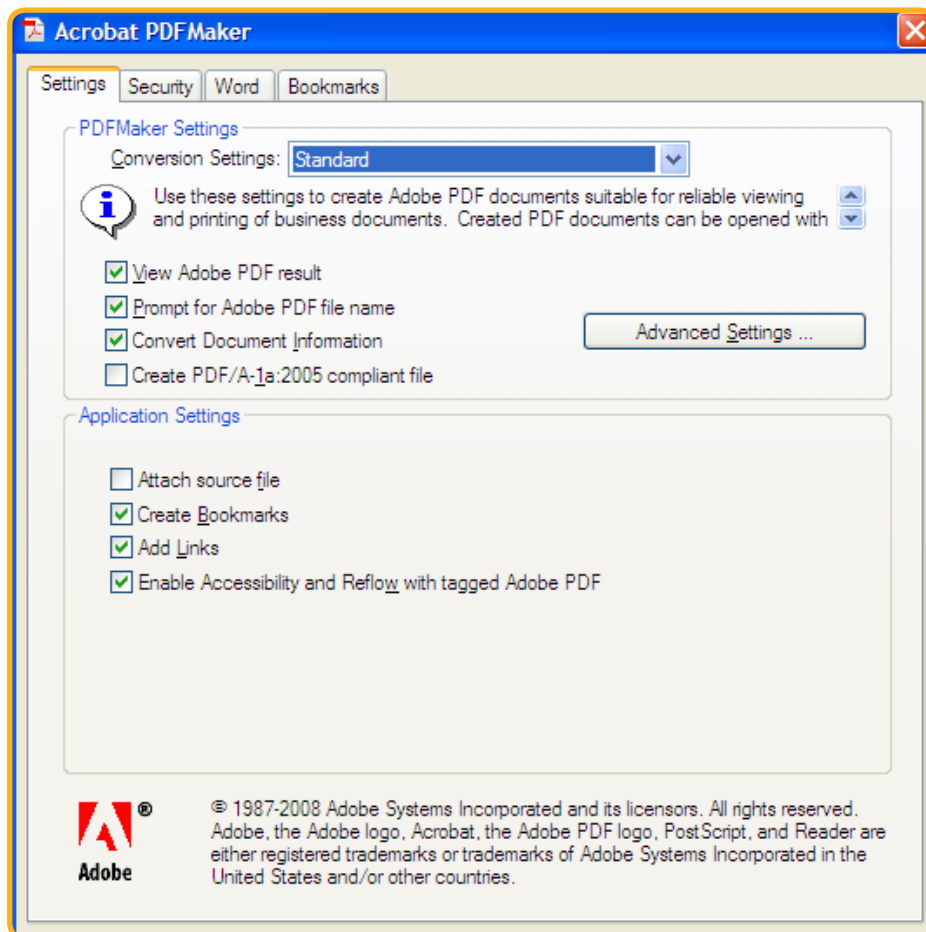
## Tips to format your text in Word accessibly

- Use Styles to add your formatting. Don't use return/tab/space to force layout changes – the spacing option with the Styles menu can be used to produce similar results.
- Always left-align text and have 'ragged' paragraphs – justified text is harder to read and can be distorted in the PDF.
- Underlining should only be used to indicate a hyperlink. Don't underline text for emphasis.
- Italicised text can be difficult to read on screen. Avoid italics.
- Use a single space after a full stop rather than a double space. Extra spaces can be misinterpreted by browsers and screenreaders.
- Incorporate footnote text into your main document. Hyperlinked footnotes (created using the References menu) will disrupt the reading order of your document.
- Always punctuate your bulleted lists and be consistent within that list. Otherwise a screen reader may read the list as continuous text.
- Provide a table of contents to make your document easier to navigate.
- Screenreaders can't pick up information inside text boxes so it's best to avoid these where possible as you won't be able to give alt text to them.
- No important information should ever be presented in an image alone – they should be used to illustrate information from within the text in the main document.

# Converting a Word document to a PDF

PDF creation will vary depending on the software used. Make sure the options highlighted in the following screenshot are ticked in the Word PDF conversion settings.

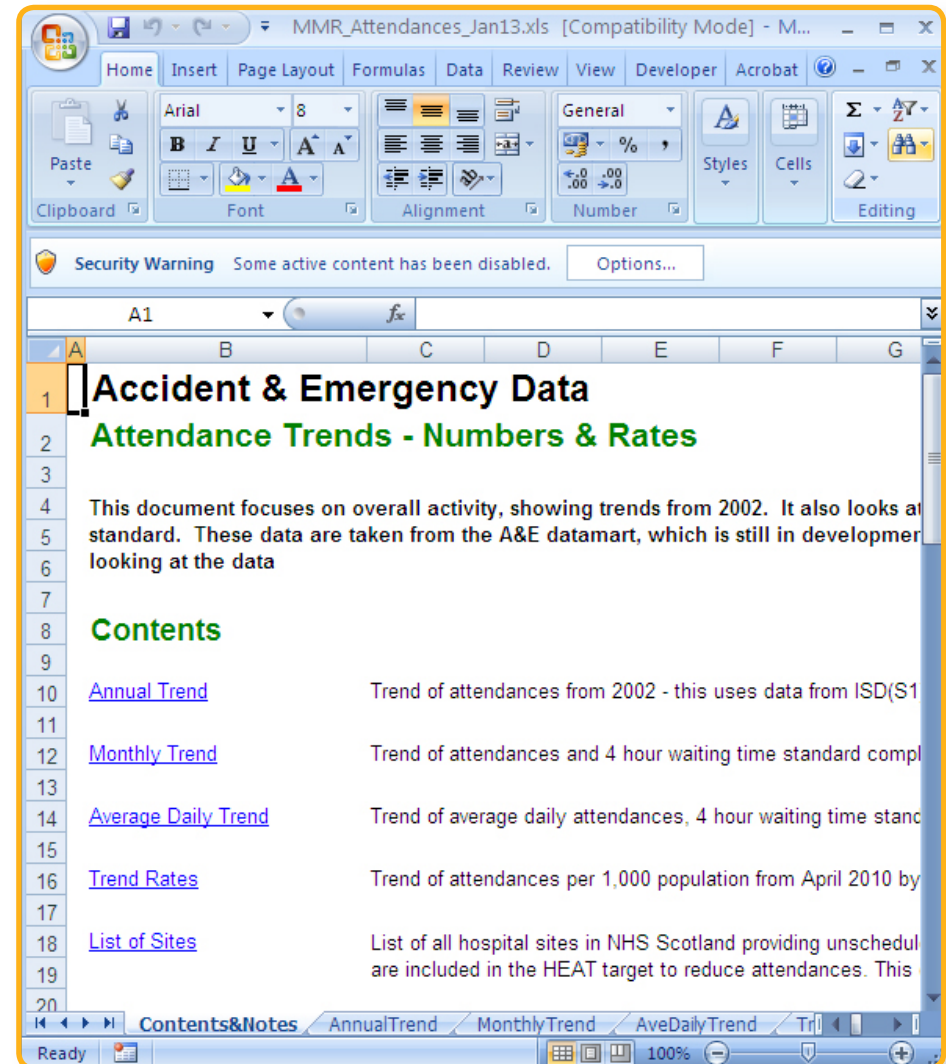
If you have any questions about converting a document to a PDF (or back again), speak to an editor.



# Setting up an Excel document

Apply the same ideas about accessible design to your Excel spreadsheets.

- If multiple sheets are being used, make the first sheet a hyperlinked index sheet – similar to a table of contents
- Define row and column titles to help with navigation.
- Where possible, avoid macros and formulae. The effectiveness of such features can vary depending on users' settings.
- When creating charts, think ahead to when they may be resized and placed in a document. Make sure the font size will remain adequate.
- Provide contact details for users who may wish to request the content in a different format.



# Accessibility in emails

Emails should be written with the same principles of accessibility as Word documents, which means keeping the styles and formatting simple and using a clear font at a minimum of 12pt.

NHS Health Scotland has a standard email signature that has been formatted with accessibility in mind. It uses a 12pt Arial font and includes the following information:

Name

Job title

NHS Health Scotland

Telephone number (and mobile if applicable)

Email address

[www.healthscotland.com](http://www.healthscotland.com)

Reducing health inequalities for a fairer, healthier Scotland

A guide to setting up this signature is available on **The Source** and should be used by all staff to ensure consistency and accessibility.

Don't add any extra information to your signature as this will clutter your key contact information and may cause confusion.

Don't change colours or fonts and don't add attachments with images, which may take up space.

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**[www.healthscotland.com](http://www.healthscotland.com)**  
**Reducing health inequalities for a fairer, healthier Scotland**

# Accessibility in PowerPoint slides

Templates for corporate presentations are available on **The Source**.

The minimum recommended font size is 28pt and you should use a clear font, such as Arial.

Aim for no more than five words per line and no more than five lines per slide. Make sure you give your audience plenty of time to read each slide before you move on to the next.

Use strong colours that give a good contrast between words, images and the background. If possible, check the presentation in the room you'll be using in advance to make sure the colours work well with the lighting there.

Only use charts and graphs that are easy to understand and don't overwhelm the audience with too many numbers. If you have detailed information to present, consider providing this in a handout or emailing extra information out afterwards to follow-up the event.

Allow plenty of margin space – 'breathing space' creates an uncluttered, professional slide that is easy for your audience to follow.

Don't use sound effects, animation or flashing effects, these can be distracting.

Send your slides to anyone with a visual impairment beforehand and don't refer to any slides during your presentation without explaining what is on them.





## Do you want to know more about accessibility?

There is lots of information about accessibility on the internet.

- **www.rnib.org.uk** provides much useful information on visual impairments and ways of overcoming them.
- Search 'accessibility' at **www.bbc.co.uk** and to find out how the BBC upholds accessibility online.
- Search 'creating accessible word documents' at **www.office.microsoft.com**
- Search 'colour contrast' at **www.google.com** for links to many tools which will help you be confident with contrast levels in your document.
- **www.plainenglish.co.uk** has lots of advice and exercises in writing in a style that is accessible.
- NHS Health Scotland also runs plain English training. Contact **nhs.HealthScotland-Publications@nhs.net** if you would like to attend a session.

You can also contact the Publishing Services and Digital Services teams to ask for more information on a specific query, or to discuss any training needs your team might have when using this guide.

**Print accessibility:** [nhs.HealthScotland-Publications@nhs.net](mailto:nhs.HealthScotland-Publications@nhs.net)

**Digital accessibility:** [nhs.HealthScotland-Webmaster@nhs.net](mailto:nhs.HealthScotland-Webmaster@nhs.net)