

Accessibility and style – designer’s guide

Every major company and organisation has a way of presenting itself professionally. Communicating clearly, including consistent style and branding, has a direct impact on reputation.

We are also committed to ensuring that all our residents are able to access our information, regardless of ability, and stricter legislation has been brought in which makes it a legal requirement to do this. Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (known as WCAG 2.1) apply to all digital information. More information can be found at [GOV.UK – Understanding WCAG2.1](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/understanding-wcag-2.1)

As increasing numbers of people use digital communications, we also have a duty to make sure all our communications work both electronically and on paper. As most of the documents we produce could end up online at some point, they must be created to be readable on all digital devices, including mobile phones and tablets.

We commission professional design work for some of our material, so this guide is intended to help designers create accessible documents on our behalf that will reach the maximum number of residents and stop us breaking the law and potentially getting fined.

If you have any questions about any of the points or requirements, please contact Justine Salmon or Julie White in the Communications team.

01284 757632

communications@westsuffolk.gov.uk

An accessible document

Setting up the document in an accessible format from the start is much easier than trying to correct it later.

In Word, for example, there are tools that can help with formatting documents with headings and general (although not all) accessibility including:

- Click on Review, and select Check Accessibility – this will highlight issues such as missing alt text.
- Click on View and tick the Navigation Pane box – this will list headings so that you can check that they make sense.

Columns

Don’t use columns – although a common design feature, they are difficult to scroll through on a mobile device and for people with a visual impairment to follow.

Left align

Left align all text and headings – full justification stretches words and spaces and people with dyslexia tend to see ‘rivers of white’ rather than the words; people with visual impairments find it much easier to follow text that is completely left aligned. The only exceptions to this are:

- tables, where it would look neater to right align or centre the information
- West Suffolk Council logo which is generally right aligned
- other logos and images.

Colour

Please use the West Suffolk Council branding colours when designing documents. Be very careful using colour in sections of text. People with visual impairments may not be able to distinguish between colours. If you do use coloured text, or text on a coloured background, you must make sure the contrast between the text and the background is sufficient.

You can use online tools such as [Contrast Checker](#) or [WebAIM – Contrast Checker](#) to check the contrast.

Black text on a white background is the best contrast of all. Black text on a pastel background is usually ok, and white text on a dark coloured background is usually ok. Avoid colours such as bright yellow on royal blue or white on bright orange – the colours tend to bleed even for those with good vision.

Never emphasise something by colour alone. It is ok to use red for an emergency message, but you should also use bold for emphasis. Some people who are colour blind see red, green and or blue as shades of grey.

Screen readers cannot read colour, so if you use just colour in a table to identify something it will be invisible.

Images, charts and graphs

A person may not be able to see non-text content in a document if they are using a screen reader or have a visual impairment. Screen readers cannot read text in images. This includes charts, shapes and icons too. If the text in an image is important, it also needs to be explained in words. If you want to use a chart or graph to help explain something, it also needs to be written in text so those who cannot see it can still get to the content.

Images must have alternative text (alt text) attached to them – this describes what is in the image (for example, ‘West Suffolk Council logo’) and appears when you hover over them on a webpage.

Make sure images are not too big. On websites, the file size must be less than 1Mb. In documents, although they can be bigger, the bigger they are, the longer it will take to download, especially on a phone.

- Place images to the right of text so they don’t disrupt the beginning of lines and are easier to see
- Never use an image of a table – set it up as a table in the document.

- Don't use clip art – use photos.
- Don't use Emoticons and Emojis – they have accessibility issues and may not be recognised or only partially recognised with some browser and screen reader combinations.

Tables

- Make tables simple and ensure that the data makes sense. Add a description in the surrounding text.
- Be careful copying tables in from Excel. Avoid copying them as images as they cannot be read by screen readers– they must be set up as tables within Word.
- Add alt text to the table to describe the contents.
- Colours in tables do not get picked up by screen readers.
- Check that the table works ok on a phone and tablet screen.
- Check that tables make sense to screen readers. Merging or splitting cells can make a table behave strangely. If it doesn't work, try formatting it differently, using a list instead of a spreadsheet, giving rows and columns meaningful names. Keep it simple.

General formatting and style

- **Corporate font**

Verdana 11pt minimum, black.
All text must be this size (or equivalent).

- **Headings**

Format headings using our corporate heading styles and insert a formatted table of contents where appropriate. Heading styles:

- Heading 1: the title of the document - Verdana 20pt or bigger, bold no underline
- Heading 2: Verdana 16pt, bold, no underline
- Heading 3: Verdana 14pt, bold, no underline
- Heading 4: Verdana 12pt, bold, no underline
- Heading 5: Verdana 11pt, bold, no underline

- **Underline**

Don't underline anything – underline represents a link and hyperlinks are underlined automatically.

- **Emphasis**

Don't use blocks of capital letters, italics or underline – they all make text more difficult to read. Use bold for emphasis or separate the text with sub-headings.

- **One space after full stop**

Insert only one space after every full stop. More than one space can prevent text wrapping.

- **Capital letters**

Only use capital letters for the beginning of sentences and proper nouns (West Suffolk Council, the council, the Equality Act 2010, the act). Our style is to use the council as a single entity (the council or committee is...) and staff as a plural (our staff are...).

- **Dates, times and numbers**

- Date format: 3 January 2020, 3 January, Monday 3 January.
- Time format: 9am, 10.30am, 2.30pm, 11pm, midday, midnight.
- Money format: £3, £3.50, £3,500, £35 million.
- Other numbers: one to nine (first to ninth), then 10 upwards, 'to' rather than a hyphen, per cent rather than %.

- **Abbreviations**

Abbreviations must be written in full the first time they appear

- **Footnotes and endnotes**

Avoid footnotes, endnotes and asterisks – often screen readers cannot pickup footnotes and cannot link an asterisk in text to a note somewhere else on the page. It is complicated to set them up in an accessible way ([Accessible Digital Documents \(ADD\) – Accessible PDF footnotes and endnotes](#)), so if the additional information is important, include it in the text (possibly in brackets) if it is not important consider whether it is really needed.

Bullet points and numbered lists

Bullet points are preferred to numbering, but either one is acceptable providing it is consistent throughout the document. Don't use Latin numbering and put full stops, not brackets, after numbers and letters. Always left align bullets and numbering to where their preceding paragraph or heading begins. Our punctuation style:

- If bullets are the continuation of a sentence:
 - make sure you start with a lower case letter
 - don't put a semi-colon, comma or full stop at the end of each one
 - put a full stop after the last bullet.
- If the bullets are complete sentences, start each one with a capital letter and finish with a full stop.

Links

Make links meaningful and consistent. In a document designed to be printed, use URLs; otherwise, use text for a link. If more than one link goes to the same place, use the same text for each link. If two links go to two different places, use different text for the link.

Instructions

Instructions need to be conveyed in a way that does not rely on somebody's ability to see a document clearly. By all means, use images to help illustrate something, but the text instructions also need to make sense on their own. Check that you're not referring to any instructions in the visual context of the document. For example, 'Find our contact details in the green box below' is not inclusive because it relies on people being able to see colours and shapes. Some people may be colour blind, others may not be able to see at all and will be using a screen reader.

Document properties

Before conversion to PDF, complete the document properties with the document title, subject or description (summary of what the document is about), company and author (generic where possible). You can check what these details should be with the person commissioning the design or with our Communications team.

Screen readers

Check that your document makes sense with screen readers.

- In Word, select Review from the toolbar at the top then Read aloud.
- In Adobe Reader, select View from the top navigation bar and read aloud.