

Guidance on making accessible documents

Supporting the conduct of high-priority randomised SWATs of participant recruitment and retention strategies

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Introduction: The PRESS Project

This guidance was created as part of the [PRESS project](#)¹, which stands for Protocol and Resources Development for Prioritised Recruitment and Retention Strategies. The project was funded by the UK Medical Research Council - National Institute for Health Research Trial Methodology Research Partnership (MRC-NIHR TMRP) and the Health Research Board Trials Methodology Research Network (HRB-TMRN) Ireland.

PRESS developed template Study Within A Trial (SWAT) protocols and resources to help researchers test and repeat high-priority SWATs across different trials. This helps build stronger evidence on the best ways to recruit and retain trial participants.

You can access the PRESS protocols and resources [here](#).

About this guidance

This guidance is designed to help you create documents that are accessible to people with a variety of impairments. The guidance has been developed with the help of the [Digital Accessibility Unit](#) at The University of York, UK. Much of the content is modified from the [UK government website on publishing accessible documents](#) under an [Open Government Licence](#).

General Guidance

1. Keep the language simple

- Use clear and simple language. The Plain English Campaign website [How to write in plain English](#) can help.
- Keep sentences and paragraphs short. Aim for 25 words or less per sentence.
- Use a readability test to check your text such as [The First Word Readability test](#).
- Where you use technical terms, abbreviations or acronyms (which are abbreviations made up of the first letters of words) explain what they mean the first time you use them.

2. Choose a program to create and save your document in an accessible format

Microsoft Word and PowerPoint

These programs can be used to make accessible documents, such as participant newsletters.

To save accessible copies of Word and PowerPoint resources:

- When you are in your Word or PowerPoint document go to the 'File' tab and choose 'Export' from the list.
- You will get prompts to save it in an accessible format, for example as an accessible PDF/XPS.

- Ensure that 'Document properties' and 'Document structure tags for accessibility' options are ticked so that screen readers can read the document. You may find these by clicking on the 'Options' button.

Microsoft Publisher

Advice on [accessibility for Microsoft Publisher](#) is available from the website of the Illinois Department of Innovation and Technology.

Google Programs

[Making Google documents, presentations, sheets and videos more accessible](#) may be helpful.

3. Give the document a structure

- Give the document a meaningful title.
- Break up your document to make it more readable. Use bullet points, numbered steps and meaningful subheadings.
- Do not use bold to mark-up subheadings. Use styles to create a hierarchy of headings: 'heading 1', 'heading 2' and so on.
- In PowerPoint you can show the order for items to be read. Use the 'Review' tab and choose 'Check Accessibility' and order the items.
- Use styles for tables and bullet lists. That way, a screen reader will recognise the formatting and read out the content correctly.
- If you are doing multiple editions, for example a quarterly newsletter, put sections in a similar place in each edition.

4. Make the text accessible

- Use a sans serif font (one without tails on the letters) like Arial, Helvetica or Calibri.
- Use a minimum size of 12 points.
- Use sentence case. Avoid all capitals text and italics.
- Make sure the text is left aligned, not justified.
- Avoid underlining, except for links.
- Make sure link text clearly describes where the link goes. It should also be understandable on its own, even if read out of context.
- Avoid black text on a white background, as it can cause glare. Instead, use off-white or pale pastel backgrounds for better readability.
- Use a good level of contrast of text on the background colour. A contrast checker such as the [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines Colour Contrast Checker](#) can help.
- Having a high contrast is key. Avoid putting text on a background image or across changes in background colours. Instead, use high-contrast text and backgrounds or add overlays and shapes to improve clarity.
- Use single continuous columns of text which are more accessible than multiple columns on the same page, which is more complex.

5. Make images and graphics accessible

- If you're using images or charts, think about how you'll make the content accessible to people with a visual impairment. Two options are to:

- Make the same point in the text of the document, so people with visual impairments get the information they need.
- Provide [alternative text \(alt text\)](#) for the image or chart (an explanation of what is shown). This can be inserted by right clicking on the item. Screen reading software reads this aloud, helping people with visual impairments understand the content.
- Aim for a minimum font size of 16 pixels
- Choose colour combinations with high contrast to help users distinguish between foreground and background elements more easily.
- Think about how a screen reader will interpret the layout of your content.
- Ensure that the text and images are arranged in a logical order that makes sense to a user reading the content sequentially.
- Use headings to create a clear hierarchy of information and make it easier for screen reader users to navigate the content.
- Use lists to present information in a structured way.
- Avoid using tables for layout purposes, as they can be difficult for screen readers to interpret.

6. Further help

Your Information Technology (IT) department may also be able to advise on how to make resources accessible that are created with programs available in your institution.

The following websites provide some helpful advice on how to produce resources that are accessible to people with a range of impairments.

The [UK government guidance on publishing accessible documents](#) provides some useful general advice.

The [University of York Guide to Accessibility](#) includes information on making documents, presentations and Web content accessible.

Resources Checklist

- Is the structure straight forward?
- Is the language simple and well explained?
- Has an appropriate font type and size been used?
- Does all text avoid being over an image or change in background?
- Do the colours used have sufficient contrast without clashing?
- Would an electronic version be easily accessed using a screen reader?

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