Why and How to Create a Universally Designed Microsoft Word Document

## Accessibility:

Accessibility is a measure of how simply a person can participate in an activity. Accessibility continues to become more and more relevant to all of us. We use assistive devices without even thinking about it. For example, using handrails when going up and down stairs, holding on to a bar when taking transit, or using an automatic door opener when trying to carry multiple items through a door. While most forms of accessibility typically provide ways for most individuals to function in an environment, they often create separation between people who need accessibility features and those who do not. Universal design for learning (UDL) removes this separation and provides an environment that all people can use freely and without barriers. UDL is a framework to improve and optimize teaching and learning for all people based on scientific insights into how humans learn.

## Purpose:

UDL documents have a clearly defined structure and are easier to navigate. They follow guidelines designed to improve readability and comprehension. They easily convert to other file formats, like PDF and HTML, while preserving all of the accessibility and usability features.

## General Tips to Improve Readability:

Simple changes can have a large impact. If UDLbest practices are followed when creating a Word document, usability of the document for all learners becomes much greater. The following practices will help your documents meet UDL guidelines:

* Use fonts that are legible and not overly ornate. The easiest fonts to read are Times New Roman, Arial, or Calibri.
* Use a font size that is large enough for easy reading, 12 point or higher is recommended.
* Pick a text color and background combination that offers high contrast, black text with light background is one of the best choices, to check for contrast, <https://webaim.org/resources/contrastchecker/?fcolor=ffff00&bcolor=075290>
* Define acronyms upon first usage, and avoid using slang, jargon, or ambiguous terms that limit universal understanding (example use Highland Community College instead of HCC at first).
* Explain any background context that might be crucial to understanding (picture should explain the importance such as polar bear in the Arctic struggling with environmental changes due to global warming).
* Hyperlinks to websites should clearly convey where they will send the user and, ideally, what the user will find there (example Highland Community College website rather than click here and/or https://highland.edu/).
* Layout should be clear, simple, and logical. Break up large amounts of information into small blocks by using subheadings similar to this document.
* Choose left aligned text. Center text and justified text create additional spaces. A screen reader will read those spaces as space, space, space which is difficult to follow.

For a great quick reference with image guidance click on the link below:

<https://webaim.org/techniques/word/word2013>

<https://webaim.org/techniques/word/word2016win>

**Before sharing your document with your students, use Word’s built in Accessibility Checker to check the document for any accessibility issues. Follow the steps below:**

* Click on File in the top left hand corner.
* Click the “Check for Issues” box
* Click check accessibility
* If issues are noted in the dialog box, edit as stated, run accessibility checker again. If there are no issues, great!

## Presenting Information in Multiple Ways

Images, tables, and graphs can convey information more readily than text, especially if UDL principles are followed.

### ****Images:****

Images convey information quickly and powerfully – assuming they can been seen and understood. It is important to make sure the information the image contains is available textually as well as visually. This can be done by:

* Describing the image in the text of the document
* Adding a caption
* Adding an alternative text description

### **Tables:**

Tables can be difficult to interpret for people who cannot see them. To ensure that your tabular information remains understandable to all readers, do the following:

* Keep tables as simple as possible – use two tables rather than one very complicated able whenever possible.
* Design tables so that they make sense when linearized (i.e, when read strictly from left to right, top to bottom).
* Give the table a simple, clear title
* If you add a caption to the table, summarize the table’s significant information concisely but clearly.
* Make use of table headers, order them logically, and name them clearly.

## Styles:

Word’s Styles apply structure to text, placing elements into categories such as headings and lists. Styles also control the appearance of page elements. Some benefits of using styles are:

* Document navigation becomes easier for both reader and author alike.
* Document takes on a consistent appearance, with elements like headings standing out clearly.
* Helps maintain consistent formatting throughout your document.
* Design changes are dramatically faster, especially in large documents.
* When combined with Word’s built-in headings, styles allow you to automatically add a table of contents to your documents, complete with dynamically updated page numbers.
* Styled documents allow for easier conversion to other formats, such as PDF and HTML.

## References

Colorado State University, ACCESS to Postsecondary Education through Universal Design for Learning, <http://accessproject.colostate.edu/udl/modules/word/mod_word.php?display=pg_7>.

National Center for Disability and Access to Education, [*http://ncdae.org/resources/cheatsheets/*](http://ncdae.org/resources/cheatsheets/)

PennState Accessibility Microsoft Word Tips, <http://accessibility.psu.edu/microsoftoffice/microsoftword/>