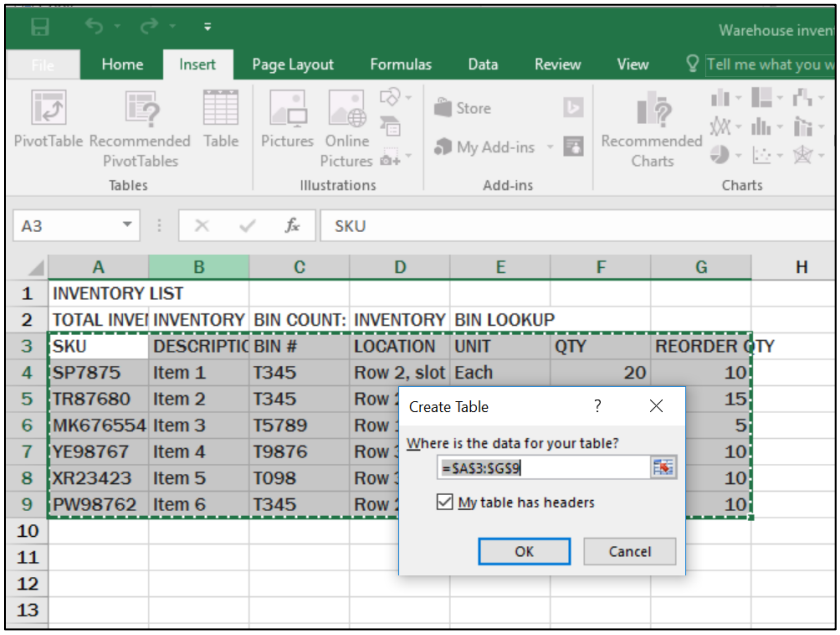
Making Your Excel Spreadsheets Accessible

Montclair State University is committed to making our digital content accessible to people with disabilities (required by Section 508). This document will discuss the best practices for making Excel spreadsheets accessible. Information is based off Microsoft Excel versions 2013 and 2016.

Table Headers

Use simple table structure with column header information. Header information is used to identify rows and columns for those using assistive technology.

1. Select the cells you wish to include in the table
2. Click the **Insert** tab and click **Table**
3. Select **My table has headers** and click **OK**



Add a Title to a Table

Add a table title in the first cell of the first column of the worksheet so those using assistive technologies can find it easily. (If you number your table titles, type a period or colon after the table number, followed by one space and then a description of the table content.)

For example:

Table 1. Sales and Commission per Sales Person and Region

Sales Person	Region	Sales Amount	% Commission	Commission Amount
Joe	North	260	10%	
Robert	South	660	15%	
Michelle	East	940	15%	
Erich	West	410	12%	
Dafna	North	800	15%	
Rob	South	900	15%	

Things to Consider When Creating Your Spreadsheet

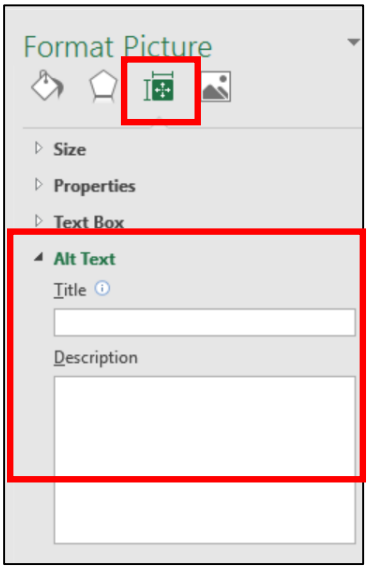
- Screen readers start in the first cell (A1) so consider placing important information about the sheet here.
- Do not merge cells
- Do not have blank cells within the data. If you need blank cells, mark them with a minus sign, a zero or N/A for not applicable.
- Break down complex data sets into logical tables ideally with their own worksheets. New tables should be created on separate worksheets to aid navigation and understanding.
- Avoid using visual devices such as color, shading, patterns and borders to divide up data regions.
- Give sheet tabs unique names and remove blank sheets
- Do not use color alone to convey information
- Use the same font consistently throughout the spreadsheet, recommended fonts are Times New Roman, Verdana, Ariel, Tahoma, Helvetica, or Calibri.
- Do not use text boxes
- Every chart (e.g., bar graph, pie chart) must have a title, a legend, and axis labels (if applicable).

Include Alternate Text to All Visual Content

Visual content in Excel includes pictures, clipart, SmartArt graphics, shapes, charts, videos, etc. In order for content to be accessible, alternate text must be added.

Adding Alternative Text to Visual Content:

1. **Right-click** on the content and select **Format Picture** or **Format Shape** (depending on the type of content)
2. Under **Format Picture/Shape**, click on **Size & Properties**
3. Click on **Alt Text**
4. Enter the descriptive text about the content under **Description**. It is best to keep alt text under 150 characters.



Making Videos/Audio Accessible

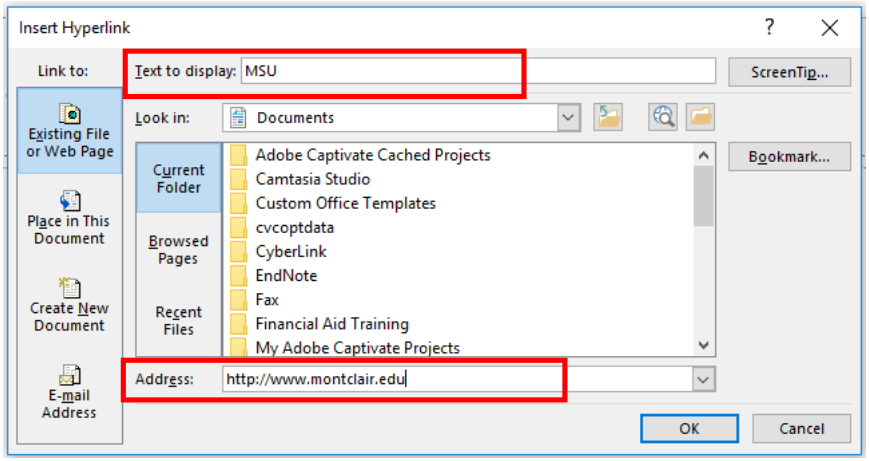
To ensure your Excel spreadsheets are accessible, ensure the following when adding videos to your spreadsheet:

- Videos that include dialogue should also include closed captions or subtitles in a supported format for users that are deaf or hard of hearing. If captioning is not possible, a text transcript of the video should be provided.
- Videos include an audio track with video descriptions, if needed, for users that are blind or visually impaired.
- Embedded audio should have a transcript included.

Links

When links exist in your spreadsheet, ensure the link text is meaningful. Use the Excel link tool instead of copying and pasting the URL.

1. Click on the **Insert** tab and click on **Hyperlink**
2. Type a descriptive title for the link under **Text to display**
3. **Paste** the URL under **Address**:

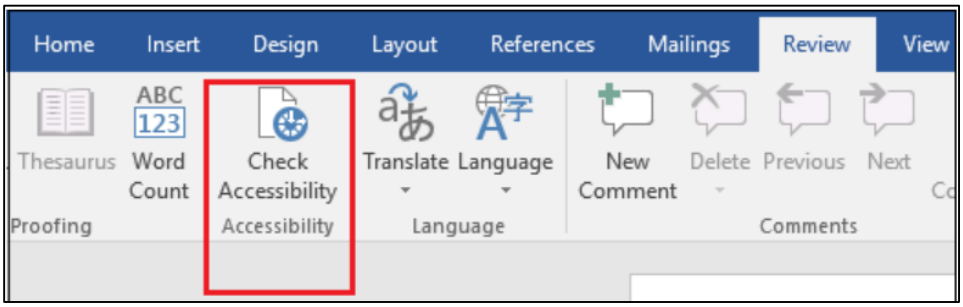


Accessibility Checker

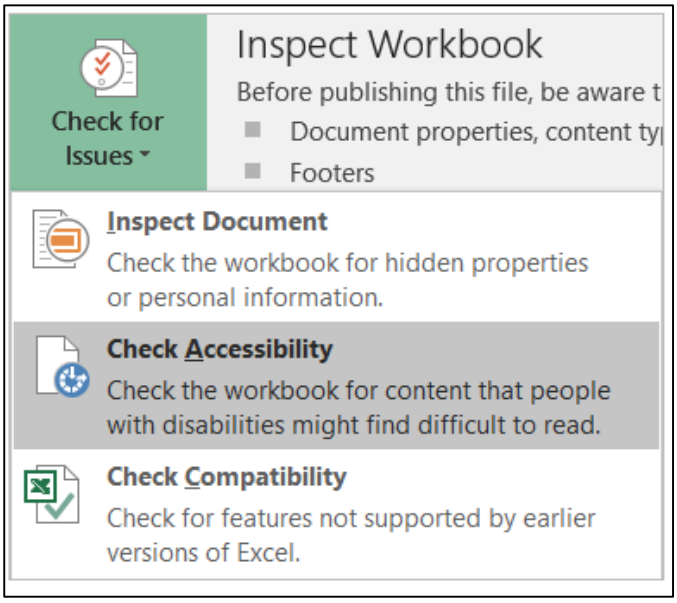
The Accessibility Checker tool in Excel finds accessibility issues in your document. The tool generates a report of issues that could make your content difficult for people with disabilities to understand. **Accessibility Checker** also explains why you should fix these issues and how to fix them.

Start Accessibility Checker

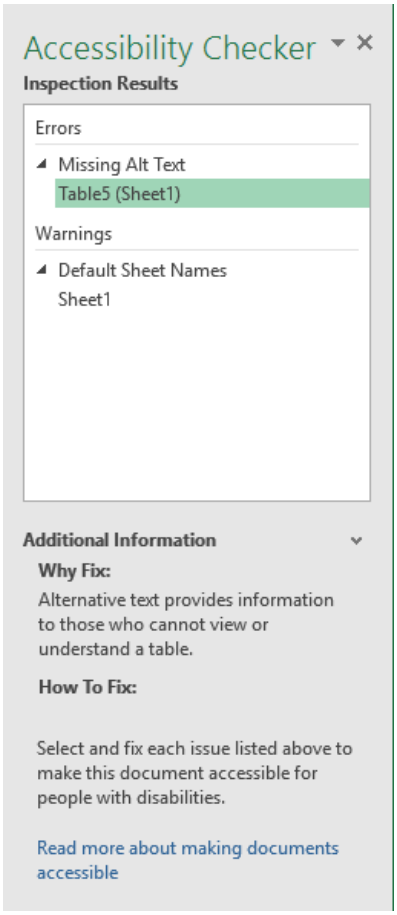
The **Check Accessibility** tool may be found on the **Review** tab depending on the version of Excel you are using.



If your version does not have the option, click on the **File** menu. Under **Info** click on **Check for Issues** and select **Check Accessibility.**



The **Accessibility Checker** pane will appear on the right. To see details of an **Error** or **Warning**, click on an issue under **Inspection Results**. Under **Additional Information**, you can get an explanation of why this issue should be fixed as well as to fix it.



Document Meta Data

Adjusting the spreadsheet's meta data can assist in making your spreadsheet more accessible for those using assistive technology.

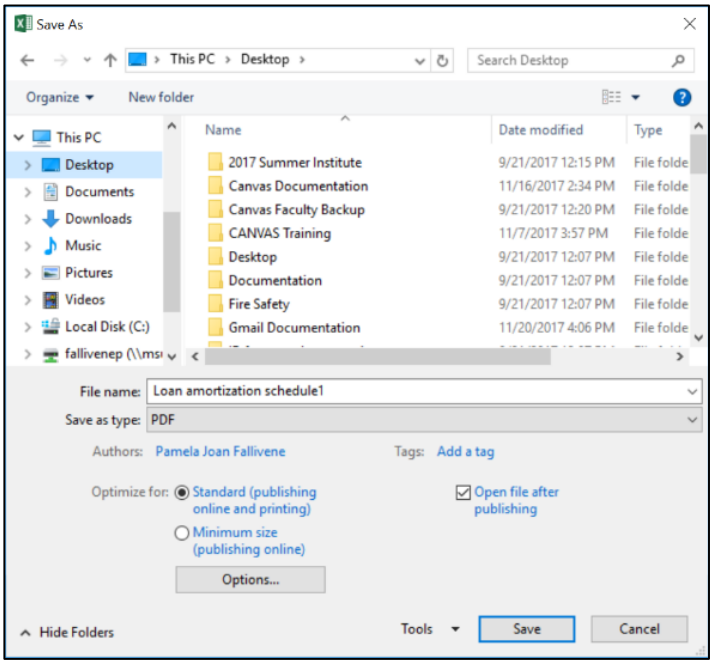
Giving the spreadsheet a title:

1. Click on **File**
2. Click **Info** and click in the **Title** field and enter a title
3. To edit the existing **Author**, right-click on the author's name

Saving as a PDF

If saving your Excel file as a PDF, making your spreadsheet accessible in Excel will reduce the amount of time it will take to make the PDF file accessible.

1. Click on **File** and select **Save As…**
2. Pick a file location
3. Select **PDF** as the **Save As Type…**

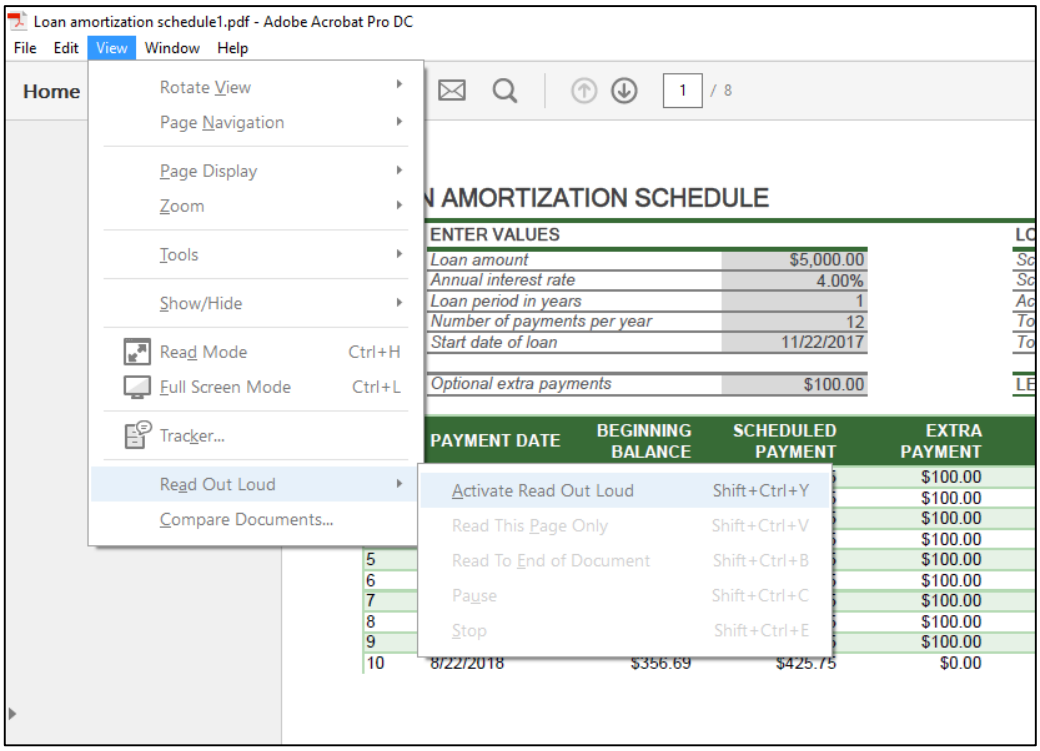


Note: It is important to save your spreadsheet via the steps above. Creating a PDF via File / Print does not tag the file in Adobe and therefore it will not be accessible.

Test It

You can listen to your spreadsheet to test if it is readable in the **Read Out Load** feature of Adobe Acrobat Pro. **Read Out Load** is a Text-to-Speech tool.

1. Save the file as a PDF and open in Adobe Acrobat Pro
2. Click on **View** and select **Read Out Load / Activate Read Out Load**
3. Click on **View** again and select **Read Out Load** and click on either **Read this Page Only** or **Read to End of Document**



References:

"Make your Excel spreadsheets accessible." https://support.office.com