



Sam Houston State University Graduate & Professional School

Thesis/Dissertation ADA Compliance and Digital Accessibility

Overview

In accordance with federal law, [ADA Title II - Subpart H Regulations](#), and related state laws and code, students are **required** to ensure their thesis/dissertation draft (.docx) is **universally accessible** for submission, approval, and publication.

Accessibility standards apply to all digital components of the Electronic Theses and Dissertations (ETDs). It will be easier for students to make their draft accessible at the early stages of writing. The Graduate and Professional School (GPS) strongly encourages student to use the pre-formatted templates provided on our [Theses & Dissertations webpage](#) as well as attend one of the formatting workshops offered every semester to ensure they meet these requirements. Note: When using the Word templates, only use Microsoft applications (i.e., Word desktop) to create and edit your draft; using applications such as Google Docs will drastically alter the template settings.

Below are the major requirements for accessible ETDs. A detailed accessibility checklist and additional resources to assist with adhering to ADA regulations is also provided.

1. Headings, Tabs, and Bookmarks: Draft must have chapter headings, subheadings using Styles (in Microsoft Word) to create bookmark outline of draft.
2. Alternative Text: Provide alt-text to describe all images, figures, and graphs.
3. Color Contrast: Ensure that you are using color combinations that are readable to persons who are color vision deficient.
4. Tables: Use correct tools to make your tables so that row and column headers are explicitly identified (i.e., Don't convert tables into images; use a tool such as excel to create tables).
5. Abbreviations and Acronyms: Spell out words upon first use then abbreviate afterward. EX: *The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) is the lead agency for exposing, preventing, and investigating intelligence activities, including espionage. The FBI is also the lead agency for enforcing civil rights law.*
6. Hyperlinks: All hyperlinks must be distinguishable (underlined text) and active (lead to the actual source). Grad students can refer to the [APA Accessible URLs](#) to assist with formatting DOIs and URLs in the references section. Note: It is acceptable to use the original DOI link format of your chosen style manual/guide; however, the APA website does provide other examples of formatting as well; formatting must be consistent throughout the references/works cited/bibliography.

7. Numbers, Bullets, Styles: Use the numbers or bullets styles feature (Word) to create structured lists in thesis/dissertation draft.

Accessibility Checklist for Word Documents

1. Heading Styles and Bookmarks

Using heading styles provide organization and structure to your document. The Graduate and Professional School offers several Word templates with pre-formatted heading styles to assist students with organizing their thesis/dissertation. You may need to change the font style and position of heading styles/levels depending on what style guide you are using. Ensure that your heading styles are consistent throughout your document as this is the basis for creating bookmarks within your document once it is converted into the final approved PDF version of your thesis/dissertation by the Thesis/Dissertation Specialist.

2. Alt Text Images

Adding alt text to images, tables, figures, pictures, etc., provides a description of the images for people who are blind or have low vision. To add alt text, right click the object/image. Select **“Edit Alt-Text”** and add a description of the image (This should be done with all images in your document). If there is descriptive text in the image, include that text in the description as well; screen readers cannot read text within an image.

3. Edit Document Properties

Adding information to the document properties of your thesis/dissertation helps identify your word document and add additional metadata. In Word, select **“File”** then **“Properties.”** Add the title of your thesis/dissertation in the title field and your name in the author field.

4. Color Contrast, Symbols and Bullet Points

Avoid using color fonts or color combinations that will make it difficult for people who are color blind or color vision deficient (CVD) to read. For example, a sign with a red background and black text cannot be seen by some color-blind people (red background with white text is a better option). Avoid using the following color combinations in text and images.

- Green and Red
- Blue and Yellow
- Green and Gray
- Blue and Gray
- Green and Brown
- Green and Black
- Blue and Purple

Some symbols and bullet points can be difficult to read; an example being the asterisk (*). Students are advised to increase the font size slightly on symbols and bullets if they appear to be too small for people with low vision to distinguish.

NOTE: New versions of Word offer an “Accessibility Checker” feature to easily check for accessibility issues in your document. In Word, select “**Review**” then “**Check Accessibility**.” The accessibility checker will appear and list any issues found in your document. Please address as many of these issues as possible.

When the final approved PDF version of your thesis/dissertation is sent to you to submit through Vireo, the following information will be checked and edited in the PDF document properties by the Thesis/Dissertation Specialist:

1. Title and Author Name
2. Initial View (Show Document Title)
3. Language (English)
4. Keywords (Optional)

Additional Resources

For more information on accessibility for Microsoft Office suite and Adobe Acrobat PDF, follow the links provided. SHSUs accessibility resources are also provided.

1. [Microsoft Accessibility Help and Learning](#)
2. [Adobe PDF Accessibility Review](#)
3. [SHSU Electronic & Info. Resources Accessibility](#)
4. [SHSU Web Accessibility](#)