



Submitting accessible briefs to Senate committees

Written evidence submitted to a Senate committee (whether from an individual or organization) is commonly referred to as a brief. A brief may provide opinions, comments and recommendations on a subject being studied by a Senate committee.

To help ensure briefs are available in an accessible format, individuals and organizations are encouraged to use the following best practices when preparing their document.

File format

Microsoft Word documents are the preferred file format.

Font, justification and colour

- Use a sans serif font (e.g., Calibri, Arial or Verdana).
- Choose a font size of 11 to 14 points for the body text.
- Avoid using all caps, underline, and italics.
- Use bold only to emphasize a few words or a short sentence.
- Left justification is preferred. Avoid justified or centred alignment.
- Choose “Automatic” for the font colour whenever possible.
- Avoid relying on font colour to relay information.
- Check that there is enough contrast (visual difference) between font and background colours. Colour selection can be verified by using a tool like the [WebAIM Contrast Checker](#).

Built-in Microsoft Word functions

Microsoft Word includes many built-in functions to help keep documents accessible.

Headers

Identifying headings and subheading helps to organize text for readers. Take advantage of the built-in heading styles to structure documents. Styles are found under the “Home” tab. The built-in styles allow those using assistive technology to go directly to the desired content.

In contrast, headings created using only font size, bold, italics, etc. will not be picked up by assistive technology.

Keep styles in a logical order. Heading level 1 should be followed by heading level 2, etc.

Paragraph spacing

Similarly, using paragraph spacing will enhance the accessibility of a text. Instead of empty carriage returns (pressing “Enter” multiple times), use the paragraph spacing function to adjust the space between lines and paragraphs.

Lists

Avoid creating lists using tabs, dashes or other symbols. Instead use the “Bullet” or “Numbering” features.

Header and footers

Avoid creating a header or footer as typed text on the page. Instead select the “Insert” tab and select either “Header” or “Footer.”

Footnotes or endnotes

Please use the built-in tools under the “References” tab in the ribbon to insert endnotes and footnotes.

Images

All images (including charts) that are not decorative need to include a caption or alternative text. Alternative text is a short description of the information contained in the image. It is added by right-clicking on an image and selecting “Edit Alt text.”

Please avoid using text within a graphic as it will not be readable by assistive technology. The same is true for text boxes.

Tables

Keep tables as simple as possible so they are easy to navigate using assistive technology.

- Use Microsoft’s styles to create tables
- Add headings to columns and rows
- Avoid split or merged cells or blank fields
- Include alt text with a short summary of the content

Links

Hyperlink words that describe where a link will take a reader. For example, if linking to the Senate of Canada’s “For Witnesses” web page, hyperlink the words [Senate of Canada’s “For Witnesses” web page](#). Avoid using words like “click here” because if they are read out of context, readers will not know what they refer to. Using a raw URL should also be avoided.

Plain language

Using plain language when writing will also enhance its accessibility for all readers. When writing:

- Be clear, concise and well organized
- Avoid jargon
- Spell out acronyms or abbreviations on the first reference
- Include definitions of terms that may be unfamiliar to readers
- Consider breaking up long blocks of text and/or using more subheadings

Additional resources

1. Government of Canada toolkit: [How to create accessible documents in Office 365](#)
2. Government of Canada toolkit: [Accessible Word documents](#)
3. Microsoft tutorial: [Everything you need to know to write effective alt text](#)
4. Microsoft tutorial: [How to add alt text](#)