ACCESSIBLE TECHNOLOGY INITIATIVE

Web • Instructional Materials • Procurement

Authoring Accessible Emails
Outlook 2016

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This guide provides systematic instructions using Outlook 2016 on the PC to apply accessibility principles. However, the principles outlined in this document are universal to other email clients and are not exclusive to a specific computing platform such as Windows.

HTML vs Plain Text Format

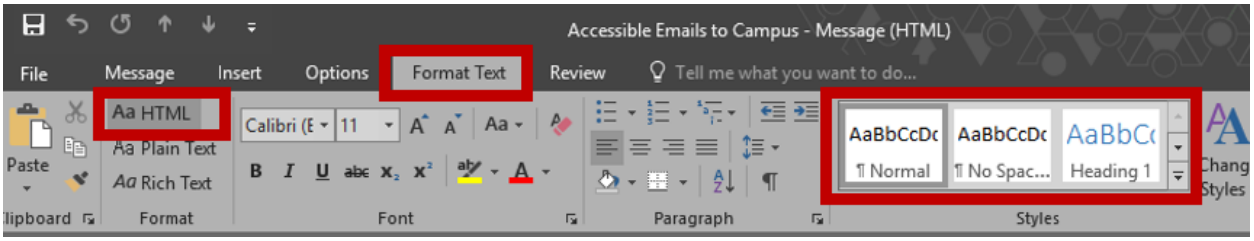
HTML format is the default composition format for Outlook 2016.
In the context of this training, “plain text” does not refer to the composition format of Outlook emails. A quick solution to cover accessibility is to include the plain text of your message along with the inaccessible visual presentation in the body of the email. Follow the guide below for an email presentation that is both visually appealing and accessible.

Headings for Email Structure

If your email is longer than a single paragraph, it probably requires structure. Headings can provide this structure. Please note that "Heading 1" should be used for the email title instead of “Title”. Use “Heading 2” for main headings, “Heading 3” for subheadings, etc. Do not use fake headings by using bold, underline, or italics for visual effect but not applying a heading style.

To apply headings to your email:

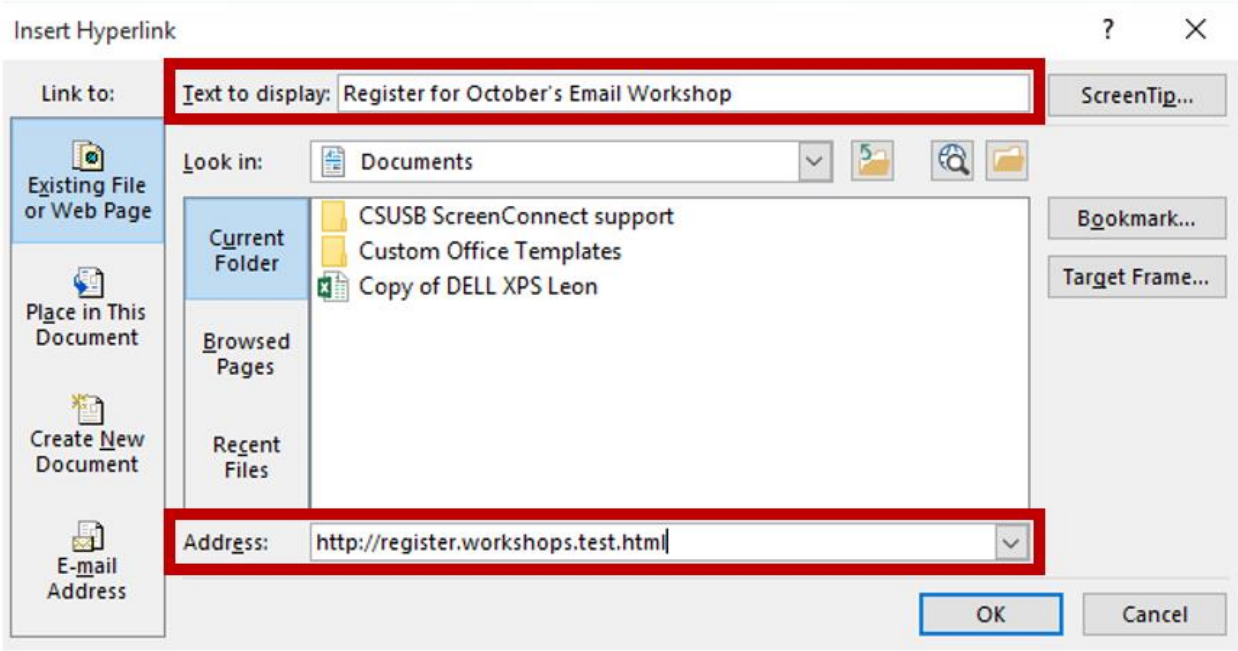
1. Select text or place cursor on line.
2. Click the appropriate heading level on the Format Text tab > Styles.



Hyperlinks

Links should display a meaningful description and have the full URL masked. To include the entire URL (if you intend your audience to print the email) enclose it in [brackets] so that it is not formatted as a clickable hyperlink.)

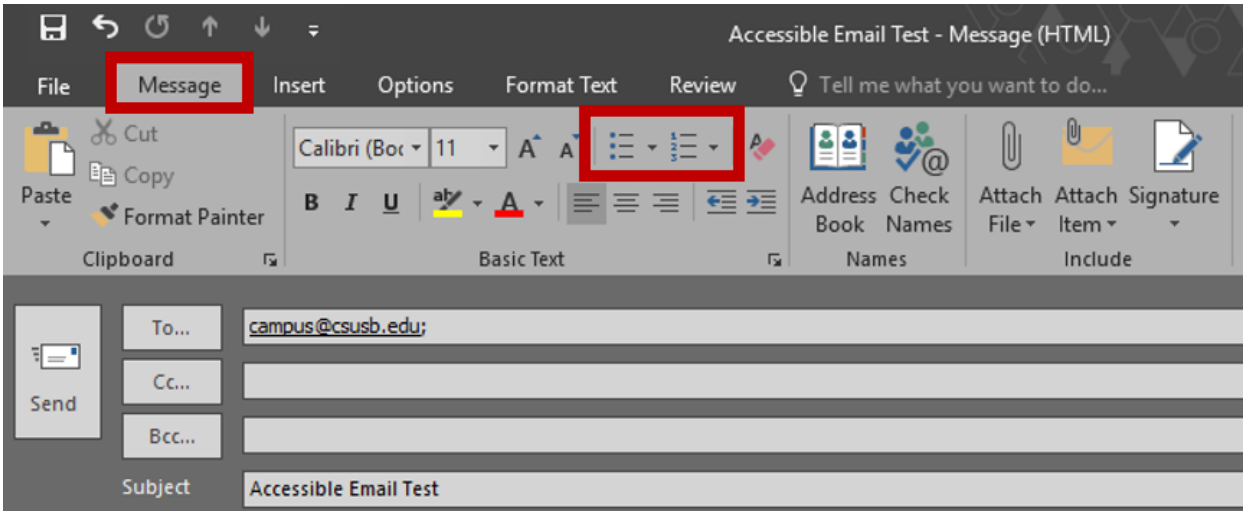
1. Select the text you want to make into a link.
2. Right click and choose “Hyperlink” from the menu.
3. In the “Text to display” field, use a simple description that can stand alone if read out of context.
4. In the “Address” field, enter the full Web address.



Lists

Lists, whether numbered or bulleted, should be created with the tool in the Message tab. Avoid fake lists by manually typing numbers in sequence or using dashes.

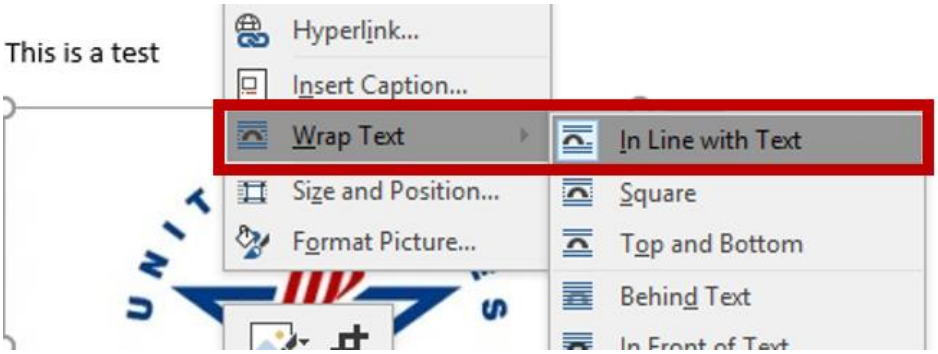
- In the MESSAGE tab choose numbered list or bulleted list.



Images

When inserting non-decorative images into your email, ensure you use “inline”. Any other text wrapping will cause the screen reader to ignore the image.

- Choose “inline” image format right-click on the image > wrap text > in line with text



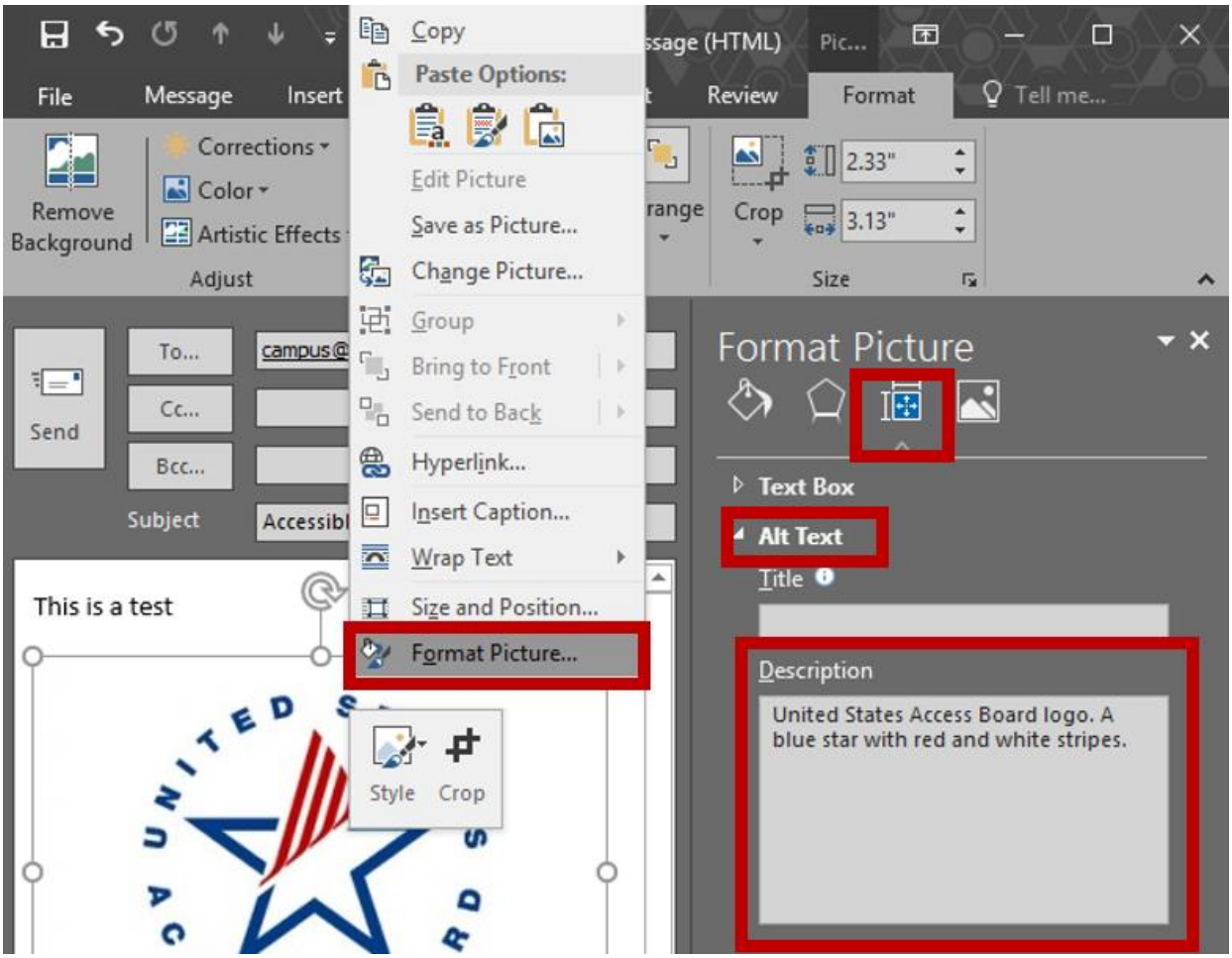
Images are either decorative or informational. When images that contain information are not accessible, the information or context conveyed is not available to users of some assistive technology. Decide what the purpose of your image is and then follow the guidelines below:

- **Decorative images** do not convey information. Avoid overuse.
- **Informational images** are the most commonly used and enhance text with additional meaning or illustration. These need alternative text (see below).
    - **Complex images** contain a lot of informational or data that exceeds the capabilities of assistive technologies ability to recognize alt text over 150 characters. Summarize complex images in the body of the document if alt text will exceed 150 characters.

Alternative Text (alt text)

Alt text must be included for informational images. Screen readers read alt text to describe an image.

1. Right click on the image and select FORMAT PICTURE to reveal the format picture pane on the right side of the document.
2. Select LAYOUT PROPERTIES icon to reveal the ALT TEXT pane.
3. For informational images, enter a succinct explanation in the “Description” field (screen readers ignore alt text of more than 125 characters). Ignore the “Title” field.



For purely decorative images that convey no meaning, leave the “Description” field and the “Title” field completely empty (not even a space). This signals the screen reader to completely ignore the image.

Best Practices for Font and Color

Font type

Sans Serif fonts are ideal for electronic readability. Avoid using ornate font styles, as they can be visually distracting.

Font readability makes a big difference: Calibri 12

Font readability makes a big difference: Blackadder ITC 12

Font readability makes a big difference: Edwardian Script 12

A minimum font size of 12 point is recommended for readability. Avoid light colored, low contrast, or fluorescent colored fonts.

Color Use

Avoid using color alone to convey meaning— use redundancy (something differentiating items other than just color) so that individuals who may be colorblind or use a screen reader can differentiate meaning.

Color alone:

X X

With redundancy:

F P

Use high contrast color combinations. Do not use colored or patterned wallpapers or backgrounds, as they can cause distraction for those with print disabilities and make your email unreadable to those who are colorblind.

Avoid the use of background images in email as they can make your email unreadable.

Low contrast

High contrast

The Accessible Technology Initiative at CSUSB

The Accessible Technology Initiative reflects the California State University's commitment to provide access to information resources and technologies to individuals with disabilities. This commitment is articulated in Executive Order 926 (EO 926), the CSU Board of Trustees Policy on Disability Support and Accommodations. The initiative will facilitate improvements in the following three priorities:

1. Web accessibility
2. Instructional materials
3. Procurement of Electronic & Information Technology (E&IT)

For more information on the Accessible Technology Initiative at CSUSB email accessibility@csusb.edu or call 909.537.5079

Access an electronic version of this document or scan the QR code below.

[http://www.csusb.edu/accessible-technology-initiative/training]

Document Properties

- ✓ Creation: 1/30/2017 by Leon McNaught & Christine Fundell.
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