Creating accessible documents is one way to ensure that all Vermonters have access to public health information. Overall, you want to make sure that the document is simple and organized, information is easy to understand, and text is easy to read with your eyes or with assistive technology, such as a screen reader. Learn more about why accessibility is essential for some and useful for all.

You can use the "Check Accessibility" tool under the Review tab in Word to help identify things to fix (**How-to video**: Accessibility Checker).

Below are some things to keep in mind when creating a document. Many of these elements are already set in the fact sheet templates. For this reason, be sure to use the preset fonts, styles and colors, and please **do not reformat the document**. Many of these elements are also included in the Brand and Style Manual and the other templates and tools available on the HIVE.

Plain Language

✓ Write information in plain language so that it is understood the first time it is read or heard.

- Write for your reader.
- Lead with the key message.
- Use the active voice.
- Keep it simple and short.
- Use a positive tone.

✓ Find more plain language tips

White Space, Margins and Columns

✓ Avoid cramming too much on one page – having "white space" is good.
✓ Use wide margins and no columns.

Font Size and Style

✓ Use large font size (at least 12 pt) and sans serif fonts (for example, Franklin Gothic or Calibri).
✓ Use bold to emphasize text instead of underlining it. When something is underlined, it typically means that it is a link.
✓ Avoid using all caps. Avoiding acronyms is also best practice.

Headings and Using Styles

- ✓ Use headings to organize the information.
- ✓ Use lists whenever possible – bulleted or numbered.
- ✓ Use preset styles in the document templates.
- ✓ **How-to video:** Heading Styles

Color and Contrast

- ✓ Make sure text and data can be understood without color.
- ✓ Choose color combinations with high contrast. Check for color contrast.

Images and Charts

- ✓ Use images (graphics, pictures, icons or symbols) to help explain your message.
- ✓ Write out the main takeaway from a chart.
- ✓ Add alternative text, or Alt-text, to all images and charts.
  - Use only a few words, though it may need to be more when explaining charts and other complex images that relay information.
  - For a chart, describe what it is showing in one to two sentences (this is in addition to writing it out in the body of the document). Name the chart type (for example, bar, pie, line, etc.), data type or axes. Concisely describe overall trends or patterns and relevant data points.
  - Mark images as "decorative" if they serve no purpose in conveying information. For example, the checklist icon on page 1 is marked as decorative.
  - **How-to video:** Alternative Text

Tables

- ✓ Use "Insert Table" to create a table. Don't use the "Draw Table" option.
- ✓ Use headers and make sure they repeat if the table is on multiple pages.
- ✓ Don't merge or split cells.
- ✓ For tables that contain a lot of data, make sure that the main takeaway is described in text – or consider if the table is truly necessary.
- ✓ **How-to video:** Tables

Hyperlinks

- ✓ Make hyperlinks meaningful – but not too long – and tell the reader where the link will take them.
- ✓ Don't use "click here" or "here" or "learn more" – use something like "learn more about COVID-19" instead.
- ✓ **How-to video:** Hyperlinks

File Properties

- ✓ Set the title of the document – use the full title.
- ✓ Set the author as "Vermont Department of Health."
- ✓ Create the file name:
    - Use the title of the document (or a shortened version if it's long). Don't include "final" or "draft."
    - Use lowercase letters with dashes (for example, document-accessibility-checklist.docx).
    - No underscores, no spaces, no special characters, no version dates (unless it's in the title – for example, 2020 Health Surveillance Report)
- ✓ **How-to video**: [File Names and Document Properties](#)

PDF Conversion

- ✓ If you have Adobe Acrobat Pro DC, use "Create PDF" in the Acrobat tab.
- ✓ If you have Adobe Reader, choose "Save as Adobe PDF."
- ✓ Do **not** use "Print to PDF."
- ✓ Do **not** "Save as" by choosing the PDF file extension.

Adobe Settings

- ✓ Set the initial view to show the document title.
    - Go to File > Properties > Initial View
    - Under Window Options, select "Document Title" from the dropdown menu.
- ✓ Set the language if the document is not in English.
    - Go to File > Properties > Advanced
    - Select the language from the dropdown menu. You can type in the language if it's not found in the dropdown.