



Accessible emails



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Making emails accessible for everyone

Most of us send emails on a daily basis. They are often seen as a quick and easy way to communicate information. They are also a good way of communicating your message to a lot of people at once.

But have you ever considered how accessible your emails are and whether your message is getting through to everyone?

In this resource, we will provide tips to help you make your emails as accessible as possible for everyone.

Things to consider

Plain text

Most of the emails we send are in HTML. HTML is a website coding language. HTML controls the structure of content and how it is viewed. HTML allows us to send formatted emails, which include images, hyperlinks, buttons, logos, headers and colour options.

There is a lot you can do to make your HTML email accessible. But it is important to remember that some people will prefer to send and receive emails in plain text and find them more accessible, so always give people choice.

Switching your HTML email to plain text may not be sufficient. You need to consider how to get across your message without images and the design and formatting options available to you in HTML. You may need to rewrite your text or add additional text.

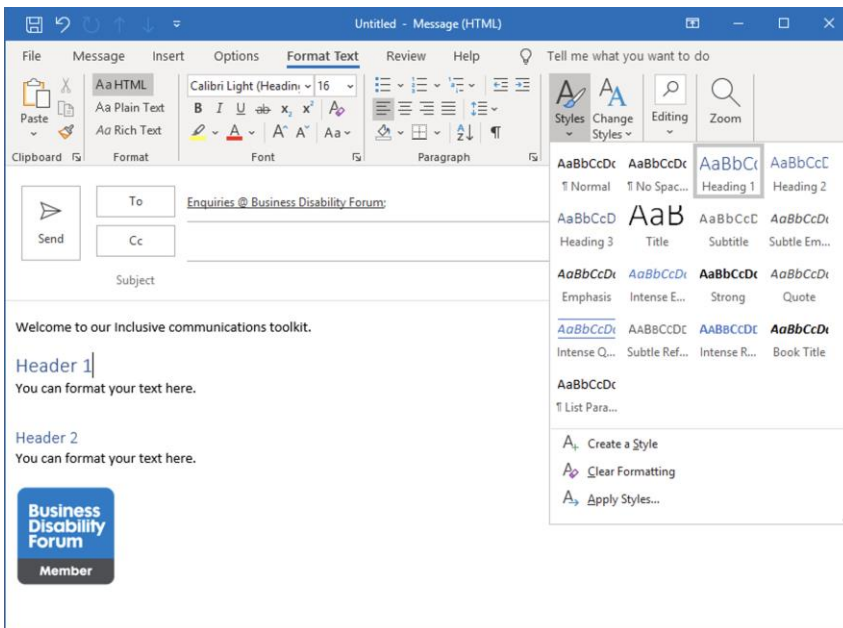
Subject lines

Keep your subject lines short, factual and to the point. Remember some people use screen readers to help them access emails. Screen readers are a form of assistive technology which turn text to speech. They are used by people who are blind or have visual impairments, as well as people who have dyslexia or a learning disability.

Lengthy, abstract subject lines can be annoying for people who use screen readers and may make them pass over your email in their Inbox. They can also be confusing for people with learning disabilities or autism.

Headers

If you are creating an email in HTML, use heading elements to make your emails easier to navigate and to break up large chunks of text. If you are using Outlook, then use the Styles options to create your headings. Headings should be used in a logical order, so begin a section with 'H1', then create subheads in that section using 'H2' and so on.



Fonts

Some fonts are easier to read than others. Use a sans serif font and a minimum font size of point 12 (some people may prefer 14).

Language

Write in plain English. Avoid any unnecessary jargon or overly complex sentence structures. Use language which is inclusive and accessible. Make sure you represent disabled people in a realistic and positive way in your writing.

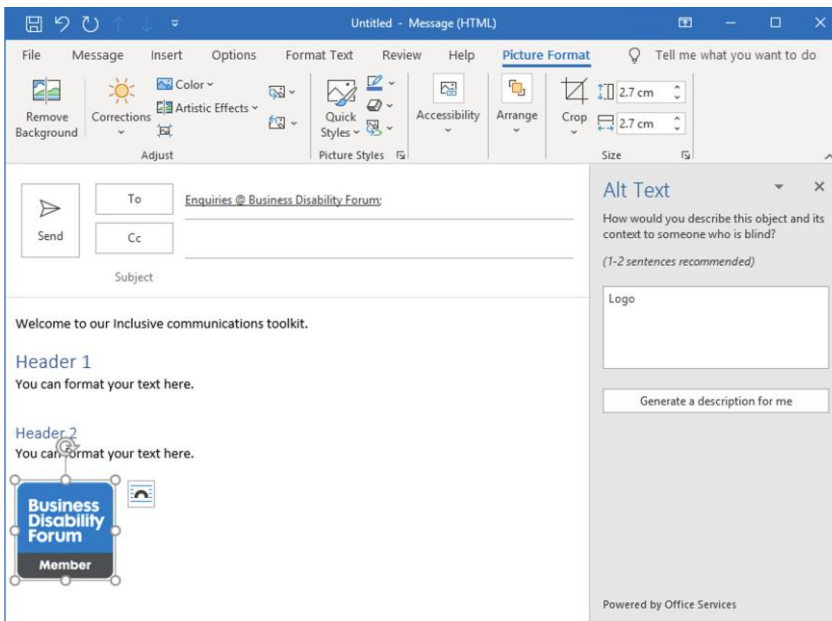
Keep your content to the point. Some people may not be able to scan an email easily to find the information they need, so summarise the key points at the beginning of the email and don't include any unnecessary content.

You can find out more about language in the 'Keeping it simple' and 'Inclusive language' resources within this toolkit.

Images

Images are a good way to break up long chunks of text and to illustrate a point. Make sure images support the message being expressed in the text, rather than making the point on their own.

Also make sure any images that you use are tagged with alt text or alternative text. In Outlook, you can do this by right clicking on the image and then selecting the 'Edit alt text' option. Alt text is important for anyone who is using a screen reader. It describes the image in words.



You can find out about writing alt text in the 'Using images' resource in the practical resources section of the toolkit.

Videos

Videos can help to bring content to life, but it is important to make sure your videos are accessible. Videos should include captions and audio description.

See the 'Video and audio' content resource within this toolkit.

Colour

Check any colour combinations that you have used in your email to make sure there is good colour contrast. People with sight loss can find it difficult to view text where there is low colour contrast e.g. a light coloured text on a light coloured background. People with dyslexia may find the high colour contrast of black text on a white background too intense, and often prefer a dark grey on a cream background.

Also make sure that you do not use colour as the only means for expressing a piece of information. Remember that some people, such as people who are colour blind, find it difficult to differentiate between certain colours. Always use colour in combination with text or shape.

You can find out more about colour contrast in the 'Design and accessibility' resource.

Links

Emails often include one or more links which the receiver needs to click on to carry out an action.



It is important that links can be easily recognised. Use colour and emphasis to highlight the links and make sure the link text is meaningful. For example, instead of writing 'click here', write 'go to Business Disability Forum's homepage to find out more'.

Including a lot of links may seem like a good idea, but can be annoying for screen reader users. Screen readers will read out every link. It can also make your email confusing for everyone. Just include the most relevant links.

Buttons

Buttons are becoming a popular alternative to links. They can be easier to identify in an email than a link. Make sure your button is a good size and that the whole of the surface of the button is clickable. This is useful for people with visual impairments and people with physical disabilities.

See the point above about colour. Make sure you use text with colour on your buttons, not just colour.



Login here →

Website content

If your email directs people to other content, the content you link to also needs to be accessible.

Accessible email checklist

- Is your email available in plain text?
- Have you included a short, descriptive, subject line?
- Have you included headers and used a logical layout?
- Have you used an accessible font and font size?
- Is your email written in plain English?
- Is your email succinct?
- Have you summarised the key points at the beginning of the email?
- Have you used inclusive and accessible language?
- Do all images have alt text?
- Does video content include captioning and audio description?



- Is there good colour contrast?
- Are any points made by images or colour supported by text?
- Do all links have meaningful text?
- Are links easy to find in the content of your email?
- Are all buttons labelled?
- Is the content that you link to accessible?

Email marketing and campaigns

Email marketing services

If your email is part of a wider marketing or communication campaign, you might be using an email marketing service, like Mailchimp, to create and distribute your emails.

Services like this now come with a lot of accessibility features built in and also give you the option of creating plain text versions.

Creating email campaigns

If you are creating an email campaign yourself, you will need to have a good knowledge of HTML or work with colleagues who do.

In the case study section of this toolkit you can find out about the work carried out by Skipton Building Society to make their customer emails more accessible.

Further information

- Microsoft, Make your Outlook email accessible to people with disabilities [support.microsoft.com/en-gb/office/make-your-outlook-email-accessible-to-people-with-disabilities-71ce71f4-7b15-4b7a-a2e3-cf91721bbacb]
- Mailchimp, Accessibility in email marketing [mailchimp.com/help/accessibility-in-email-marketing/#Best_practices]
- Web Aim, Design for screenreader compatibility [webaim.org/techniques/screenreader]
- Web Design, A beginner's guide to email accessibility [webdesign.tutsplus.com/tutorials/a-beginners-guide-to-email-accessibility--cms-31240]



Business Disability Forum is committed to ensuring that all its products and services are as accessible as possible to everyone. If you wish to discuss anything with regard to the accessibility of this document please contact us.

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