



How to Create, Test and Remediate Emails for Section 508 Conformance Using MS Outlook

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Background

The purpose of this document is to assist individuals in creating, testing, and remediating **Emails**, for Section 508 conformance. The guidance provided is based on the Section 508 Baseline Test Guide for Emails, and the Section 508 Email Checklist authored by the Accessible Electronic Document Community of Practice (AED COP). For more information on the AED COP, to download the latest AED COP guidance, and to gain access to a detailed test process, visit [the Federal Section 508 website](#).

How to Read This Document

This document is comprised of two sections:

1. The AED COP Email Checklist.
2. Instructions on how to remediate Emails for Section 508 compliance.

For more information on how to remediate Emails or to request training, please [contact your agency Section 508 Coordinator](#) or email Section508-OCIO@usda.gov.

AED COP Email Checklist

When creating an accessible **Email**, or when reviewing a **Broad Email Distribution** for Section 508 conformance, the following conditions must be considered. The response to each criterion should be **Yes** or **Not Applicable** to be considered accessible. If **No** is selected, the issue must be resolved to be considered accessible.

For ease of use, Microsoft’s Accessibility Checker is located on Microsoft’s main menu under **File > Info > Check for Issues > Check Accessibility**.

Note: Due to the human-centric nature of accessibility and Section 508 conformance, content creators must ensure individuals with disabilities are able to request additional formats and corrections that may not be detected using automated tools, i.e., improper use of color coding.

General

A. Email layout and formatting requirements	Yes	No	NA
The body of the email is typed using plain text <u>using and</u> a minimum of 12pt font.			
Headings in the email have been formatted using Style elements.			
The email refrains from using flashing/flickering/animated text.			
When color is used to emphasize the importance of selected text, an alternate method is used.			
Lists are created using the Bullet Style elements.			
When tables are used for organization/presentation, the email is read linearly.			
All attachments meet the relevant accessibility requirements pertaining to their format.			
All URLs contain the correct hyperlink and display the fully qualified URL.			
All surveys linked in emails and email signatures are accessible.			

Images

B. Email image requirements	Yes	No	NA
All images, grouped images, and non-text elements that convey information have alternative text descriptions.			
Complex images (i.e., charts and graphs) have descriptive text immediately after the image.			
The email is free of background images and watermarks.			
All multi-layered objects have been flattened into one image and one alternative text description is used for this image.			
The email is free of images embedded in tables.			

Formatting for Broad Email Distribution

This section details best practices to follow in addition to the checklist to ensure accessibility.

Setting HTML as the Default Outlook Format

HTML is the preferred format over Plain Text for Emails. To set HTML as your default format in Outlook:

1. Select **File > Options > Mail**
2. Under **Compose Messages**, select **HTML**

Note: When replying to a Plain Text email, you will need to manually select **Format Text > HTML**.

Selecting Fonts for Accessibility

Font selection directly impacts people with a variety of disabilities, i.e., dyslexia and color blindness. Below are some tips for accessible font selection:

1. Serif fonts, like Times New Roman, should be avoided in broad distribution emails.
2. Sans serif fonts, like Arial and Calibri, are acceptable.
3. Avoid the use of italics, script-based or decorative fonts.
4. All font sizes must be at least 12pt.
5. Avoid the use of red or green text. The most common forms of color blindness occur on these spectrums.
6. For emphasis, use a combination of methods i.e., color, size, boldness, etc.

To create default font settings for all emails, follow these steps:

1. Select **File > Options > Mail**.
2. Under **Compose [Mail Messages](#)**, select **Stationery and Fonts**.
3. Under **Personal Stationery** you can determine the fonts used for **New Mail Messages** and **Replying or Forwarding Messages**.

Accessible Signatures

Note: The information provided in the previous section titled **Selecting Fonts for Accessibility** also applies to email signatures.

To create a signature for your emails:

1. Select **File > Options > Mail**.
2. Under **Compose Mail**, select **Signatures**.
3. Here you can create and save multiple signatures and determine when they are used (i.e., for **New Mail Messages** and **Replying or Forwarding Messages**).
4. Avoid the use of MS Outlook themes, background images, text with poor contrast (i.e., red text on white background)
5. To add alternative text to company logos: Right Click on the image, select **Picture > Alt Text** and add a clear and concise description. Ensure that the level of description matches the intended purpose. For signatures:

Example of an accessible description: “Forest Service Logo.”

Example of an accessible yet ineffective description: “A badge shaped image of a golden tree between golden letters U and S with the title ‘Forest Service’ at the top.”