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Working with Headings in Word Documents

You may notice the following low accessibility error message when you upload a Word document: **This document does not have headings.** We need to educate ourselves on the importance of the styling of documents. Headings, in particular, protect tab order and facilitate the use of screen readers to read documents.

Why use headings?

Facilitates searching

Headings can provide structure and clarity. This can help students better understand the content and facilitate reading.

Essential for students with visual impairments

Headings help people using a screen reader navigate a document. Imagine reading a book without any chapters or titles.

Easier navigation

Headings allow for a table of contents to be generated automatically. This can help students understand the content of a document and makes it easier to find a specific section.

A 'heading' isn't always a heading

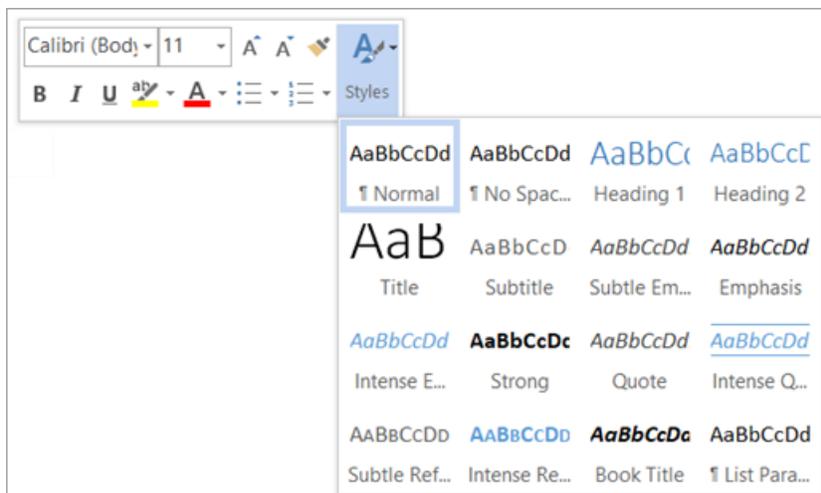
Do not only use visual appearance such as text size, bold or underline to mimic a heading. Always use the program's native heading styles to ensure headings are properly marked as headings.

How to Add Headings

Add headings in Microsoft Word 2016

Mark as heading

- Open the original in Microsoft Word 2016.
- Select the text that should become a heading.
- Select the **Home** tab. In the **Styles** group, click the appropriate heading level. If you don't see the heading level you are looking for, click the arrows to browse the full list of preset styles.
- Always choose "Heading 1" for level 1 headings, "Heading 2" for section headings, "Heading 3" for subsection headings, etc. "Normal" is used for paragraphs.
- Repeat these steps for all the text that should become headings.



How to Create Good Headings

Structure your document to optimize readability

Long documents without structure can be difficult to process. Headings can help provide structure and can make the content easier to work through and understand.

Mark as heading

Do not only use visual appearance such as text size, bold or underline to create headings, but always use the program's native heading styles. This will mark it as a heading for assistive technologies and improve the structure of a document.

Apply a logical heading hierarchy

Treat your document like a book; it should have higher-level chapters (heading level 1) with possible sections (heading level 2) and subsections (heading level 3), etc. Headings should begin with the highest level (heading level 1) and should follow a sequential and descending order.

Avoid too many heading levels

Keep the overall structure of your document simple. Most technologies, including screen readers, are limited to six levels of headings. Going beyond six levels can cause headings to not be read and should therefore be avoided.

To learn more, I suggest reading Microsoft Office's page on making documents accessible:

<https://support.office.com/en-us/article/Make-your-Word-documents-accessible-d9bf3683-87ac-47ea-b91a-78dcacb3c66d>)

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact **Brian Rocco**, the Office of Disability Services, or the Academic Access Program in Carson Hall 500.

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