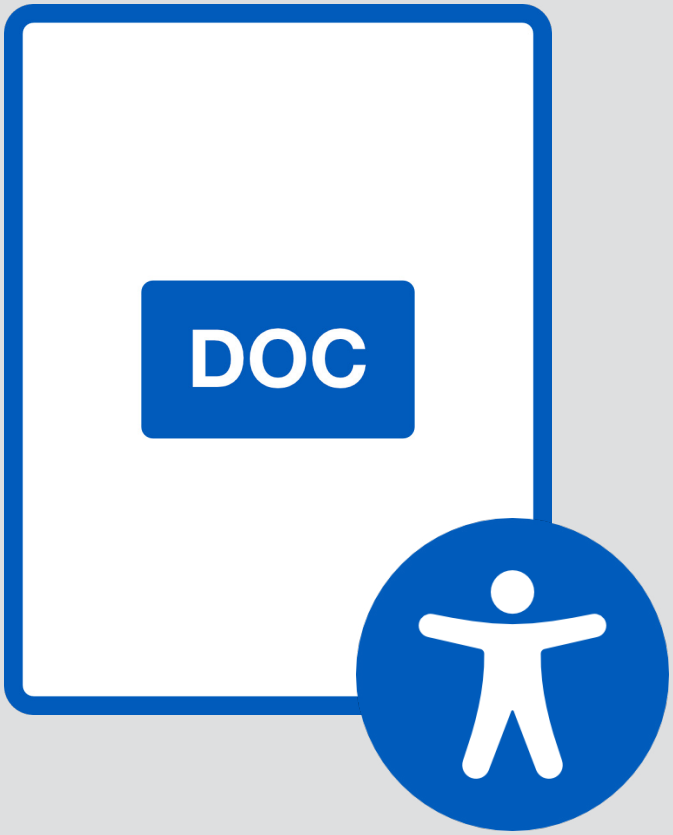
Mayor's Office for
People with Disabilities

Accessible Document Requirements

Guidelines to Provide Documents All New Yorkers Can Access



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Authority

Local Law 187 of 2025, codified as NYC Administrative Code Sec. 23-802(c), requires City agencies to follow these Requirements for printed documents distributed to the public—whether in print, on an agency's website, through a mobile app, via email, or any other means. These Requirements extend to non-City entities engaged by City agencies to create documents on behalf of the agency or relating to the agency's programs or activities. These Requirements are sectioned by primary document type and include requirements when printing documents.

Definitions

Access Technology

Specialized hardware, software, and tools that allow people with disabilities to independently navigate digital environments.

Alt-Text

A programmatic description of a graphic. This description should be concise and focus on the information the content creator intends the viewer to get by looking at the image.

Contrast Ratio

A ratio (x:1) which represents the difference between the contrast of two colors. The greater the first number, the greater the contrast between the two colors.

Electronic Document

A document that is distributed through email or made available on a website or mobile app, including as a PDF or Word document.

Letterhead Content

Content that is located at the top of a page, that may or may not repeat on subsequent pages, that includes basic information about the agency. Examples of this information include the agency logo, contact information, leadership, departments, etc.

Print / Printed Document

A document that is distributed to the public as a hard copy. If a document is intended as both a print document and an electronic document, then please refer to the requirements applicable to both types.

Programmatic

Relating to when information is provided in the coding of a document.

Remediation

To make an inaccessible PDF or document accessible.

Screen Reader

Software that reads the content on a computer screen or mobile device and allows users to navigate the information.

Semantic Structure

Use of programmatic elements like headings, lists, links, and tables that provide information to an access technology user about the structure of the information within a document.

Tabular Data

Information that relies on the row and column position of a table to be understood. This information is limited in nature—comprised of numbers, symbols (e.g. checkmarks), individual words, or short phrases.

Tagged PDF

A PDF with a structural tag tree which is used by access technology to provide the document's information along with its structure.

Requirements for All Documents

Implementation guidance is available in the how-to guide Creating Accessible Documents Guide.

These requirements apply to all document types and distribution methods (hard copy and electronic).

Fonts

Use only sans-serif fonts (e.g., Arial, Helvetica, Lucida Sans, Tahoma, Verdana). Smaller fonts like Calibri and Avenir should be avoided. Do not use narrow, compressed, or thin fonts, and keep the font weight at medium or more.

Maintain a minimum font size of 12 points. This includes footnotes, endnotes, headers/footers, and all other "fine print" items. Superscript and subscript reference letters and numbers are an exception if the font size was 12 points prior to applying this style.

Plain Language

Content should be written with plain language principles and techniques. Resources on how to write in plain language can be found at designsystem.nyc.gov/standards/nyc-web-content-style-guide.html#plain-language.

Plain language writing emphasizes clarity, organization, and the audience's ability to understand. Write content for the public at a 6th grade reading level. Note, reading-level tools only assess for sentence length and word complexity and do not assess for all plain language techniques. If a document, for legal reasons, cannot be written in plain language, then a plain language summary should be produced and distributed.

Add descriptive headings to make it easy for readers to skim and find information. Always put the most important information at the top. Break up large paragraphs of content with bullets and numbered lists. Use bullets when the order does not matter and numbered lists when there is a sequence.

Content

Avoid the use of ALL CAPS (and SMALL CAPS), except for abbreviations or acronyms like NYC, RSVP, etc. Use **bold** to create emphasis.

Documents longer than seven pages need to have a Table of Contents or something similar. This can be as simple as an “In This Document” section at the beginning listing the main sections of content with a page number reference and link to that place in the document.

Styling

Maintain a minimum 7:1 contrast ratio between text and its background. The WebAIM Color Contrast Checker can be used to check whether the contrast ratio is at least 7:1. Avoid placing text on top of images or graphics. If this is unavoidable, place the text in a box with a solid background. Color should not be used to convey meaning; if the document is printed in black and white, there should not be any lost meaning.

Paragraphs must be left-aligned, not justified. Avoid large blocks of centered or right-aligned text. Text written in right-to-left languages is an exception to right alignment. Avoid the use of hyphenation to break words at the end of lines; let them wrap naturally. Text should be kept in a horizontal line. It should not follow a curved or wavy line or be aligned along a circle or any other shape.

White space is encouraged. Be sure to have at least one blank line of space between paragraphs. Try to limit each line to 60 to 75 characters. Maintain a minimum line-height, also referred to as leading, of 1.25, or 125%.

Do not use over-stylized text. Avoid large blocks of italicized text and avoid using underlines, except for links and ‘red-lined’ documents.

Requirements for Printed Documents

Printed Documents are those that are distributed to the public as a hard copy.

Alternative Formats

When preparing documents that will only be distributed as a hard copy, alternative formats must also be available upon request. Their availability should also be noted in the distributed hard copy version. Alternative formats that should be available include large print, braille, and accessible electronic files. If the document is one that requires translation based on your agency's Language Access Plan, an American Sign Language (ASL) version should also be prepared. In addition, the large print and accessible electronic versions should be available in the translated languages. To accomplish this in a timely manner, these formats should be prepared alongside the version for printing.

Below are details about alternative versions:

- A **large print** version uses larger font sizes and benefits those with low vision. They have a minimum font size of 18 points, including footnotes, endnotes, headers and footers, and all other "fine print" items. A large print version can be created by adjusting the font sizes of the text within the document.
- **Braille** versions require specialized knowledge, software, and equipment to create. Agencies are encouraged to either build the expertise to produce braille in-house or establish a contract with a third-party vendor. This allows for a quick turnaround when a request is received.
- **Accessible electronic** versions are created by following the requirements for All Documents, along with those for Electronic Documents.
- An **ASL version** is a video of the document being interpreted into American Sign Language. Agencies are also encouraged to have an established vendor contract to create these videos.

Requirements When Printing Documents

These requirements should be followed by printers of hard copy documents.

- Paper must have a matte, non-shiny finish.
- Paper weight must be a minimum of 20-pound bond, 24-pound if double-sided.
- Mind binding margins, allowing for additional white space between adjacent pages.

Requirements for Electronic Documents

Electronic Documents are those that are distributed through email or made available on a website or mobile app, including as a PDF or Word document.

Agencies are encouraged to post information on their websites as standard webpages, instead of posting or distributing that information as a PDF. This includes PDF forms, flyers, press releases, reports, etc. HTML is inherently more accessible.

Semantic Structure, Including Headings

Establishing a **Semantic structure** organizes the document into a machine-readable hierarchy using elements like headings, paragraphs, lists, etc.

The semantic structure within a PDF is determined through the document's tagging structure. MS Word and InDesign will preserve this structure when converting the document to PDF. Use the following requirements when creating the source document to ensure this tagging exists upon export.

Use the creation software's built-in style functionality to ensure heading levels are assigned programmatically. In MS Word, this is done by using the default Heading 1-6 styles (the look of these can be customized). In InDesign, this is done in the Export Tagging section of the heading style's properties dialog. Headings should not be overused; they are used to create an outline of the document's content.

Use the software's built-in list creation tools when styling list items. This ensures the proper tagging structure when exported. List items should never also be styled as headings. If using a heading structure that has a numbered list look, create this numbering/lettering pattern manually.

When creating links, the link text must be unique and descriptive. This means the reader must know, just by reading the link text, where that link will take them ("MOPD Website", not "Click Here"). If the link text is the URL, it should be shortened and human readable ("nyc.gov/mopd", not "https://example.gov/a7KQ-9x2M-B4tR-8LpN-5cYd" or "https://nyc.gov/site/mopd/index.page"). Email addresses should also be hyperlinked. Hyperlinks must be distinguishable by something more than color (e.g., underlined). Remember, if the link text is not black, check to be sure its contrast meets the minimum requirement above.

If the document has a Table of Contents, or similar, its items are hyperlinks to each referenced section. Most desktop publishing software (e.g., MS Word and InDesign) makes this easy if you have used Styles to assign headings.

Layout

Spacing between paragraphs and other elements should be accomplished through paragraph style settings, *not* with blank lines. Blank lines should also not be used to force content to a new page; use page breaks instead.

If the document is produced in MS Word, use of text boxes, flow charts, or interactive fields will need remediation in Acrobat Pro DC after it has been converted to a PDF. InDesign has more support for these elements, but they may also need some remediation once converted.

Tables should only be used for tabular data, not for layout. Tables must have their header row programmatically indicated. Cells should not be merged across columns or rows.

Other Requirements

All non-decorative images must have meaningful ***programmatic*** alt-text descriptions. Programmatic means the description of the image is placed in the authoring software's alt-text or image description field and becomes a part of the PDF's tagging when exported. A meaningful description will convey the context behind using the chosen image as it concisely describes the image. For example, if using an image of a large crowd at an event to promote the success of the event, you might describe the size and diversity of the attendees; if writing a photography blog on different techniques, for the same photo you might describe how the people in the foreground and background are in focus. Decorative items (e.g., lines or shapes used for layout) are marked as such.

Important, non-repetitive information should not be placed in the source document's header/footer regions or master layout. This would include things like the agency logo and 'letterhead' content. Only text and images that are repetitive should be placed in these areas (e.g., items like page numbers, chapter titles, etc.). These items will automatically be hidden from a screen reader when the document is converted to PDF. So, 'letterhead-type' information on the first page should be on the page directly, but if it is repeated on subsequent pages, it should be placed in the header/master layout on those pages.

Tagged PDFs are created from their source. This is done by using the 'Save As…' or 'Export' option, ***not*** Print to PDF. All the document property and accessibility tagging options should be set in the source document's export settings.

PDF Document Properties

To create an accessible PDF, its document's Property settings should be as follows:

- Description Tab
  - Has a Title appropriate to the document
  - Author and Keywords entries, if present, are relevant
- Initial View
  - Layout and Magnification
    - Navigation Tab: Page Only
    - Page Layout: Single Page Continuous
    - Magnification: Default
    - Open to Page: 1
  - Window Options
    - All Options ***Unchecked***
    - Show: Document Title
  - User Interface Options
    - All Options ***Unchecked***
- Advanced
  - Language: [Document's Language]
  - All other settings can be left to their defaults.

A note on documents with multiple languages: The 'Document Language' should be the primary language of the document. All parts of the document in another language must have that language set within that element's properties. When translating entire documents into multiple languages, each language should be its own PDF, ***not*** a single PDF with all the translations.