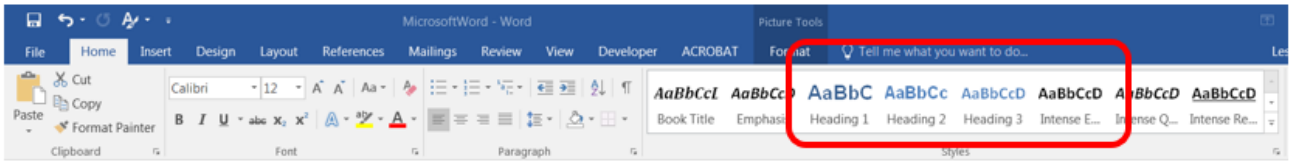
Making Accessible MS Word Documents

Use Headings

Why? Screen readers do not read underline and bold as headings. A screen reader user will not know that text is a heading unless you designate it as such.

When typing a new section heading, use the preset headings available on the **Home** ribbon. Just click on the appropriate heading style in the ribbon and type your heading. When done and ready to start typing regular text, just click **Normal** on the **Style** portion of the formatting ribbon; you may need to navigate through the Style options to do so. Remember to keep your headings hierarchical; for example, using Heading 1 for a top heading then Heading 2 for a subheading.



Tip: You can change an already existing header into an accessible header text by putting the cursor on that text and clicking on the appropriate heading.

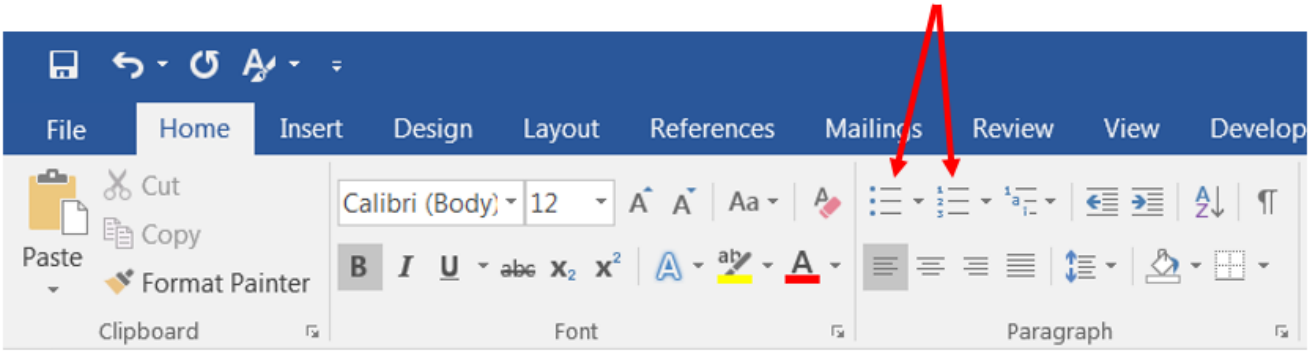
Tip: You can easily keep your current formatting and still make text into an accessible header. Simply place your cursor on the old header then **right click** on the appropriate header selection; in the menu that appears, select **Update to Match Selection**.

Tip: You can change the default heading styles by right clicking on a header style in the ribbon then selecting **Modify** and make changes as desired.

Tip: You can also use styles such as **Emphasis** to indicate words within a paragraph that you would like emphasized.

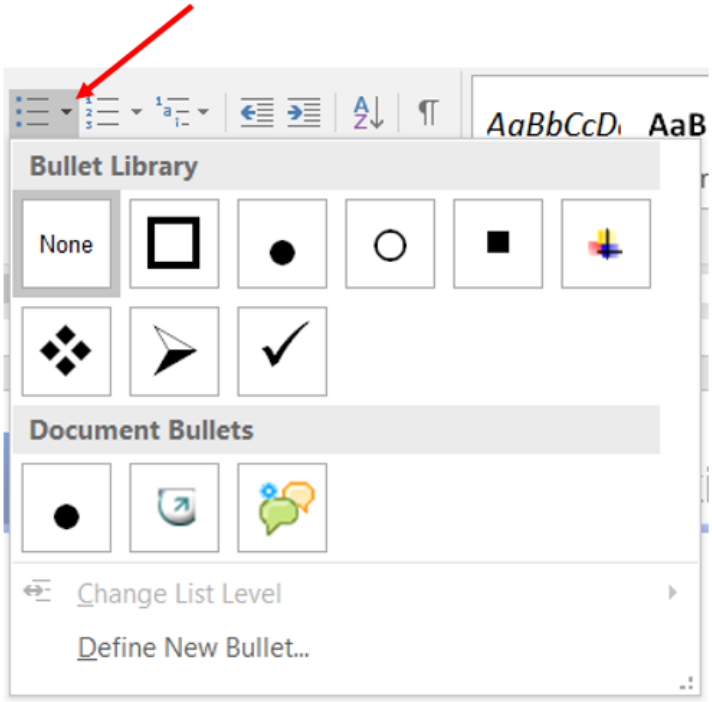
Create Formatted Lists

Why? Hand-created lists cannot be read properly because screen readers need specific formatting to let users know what's a list.



When creating bulleted or numbered lists, use the list formatting tools available in the **Paragraph** section of the **Home** ribbon.

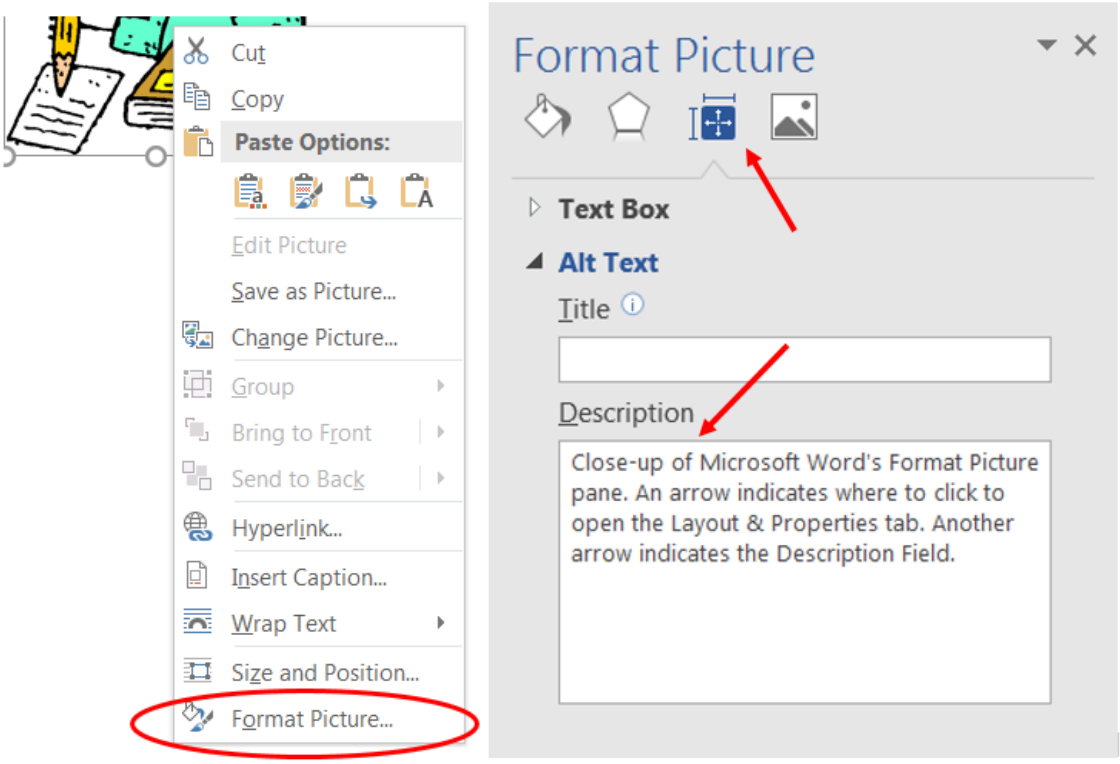
Tip: You can change the type of bullet and still maintain accessibility. Just click on the dropdown menu next to the list formatting tool and select the type of bullet you wish to use.



Add Alternate Texts to Images and Graphics

Why? Screen reader users can also benefit from the included images if you provide descriptions of them. It's especially important if the chart or graph adds information to the point you're making.

When adding images to your documents, provide alternate texts describing the images used. Right click on the image and select **Format Picture.** In the formatting pane, choose the **Layout & Properties** tab then select **Alt Text**. Type a useful description of the image in the **Description** field.



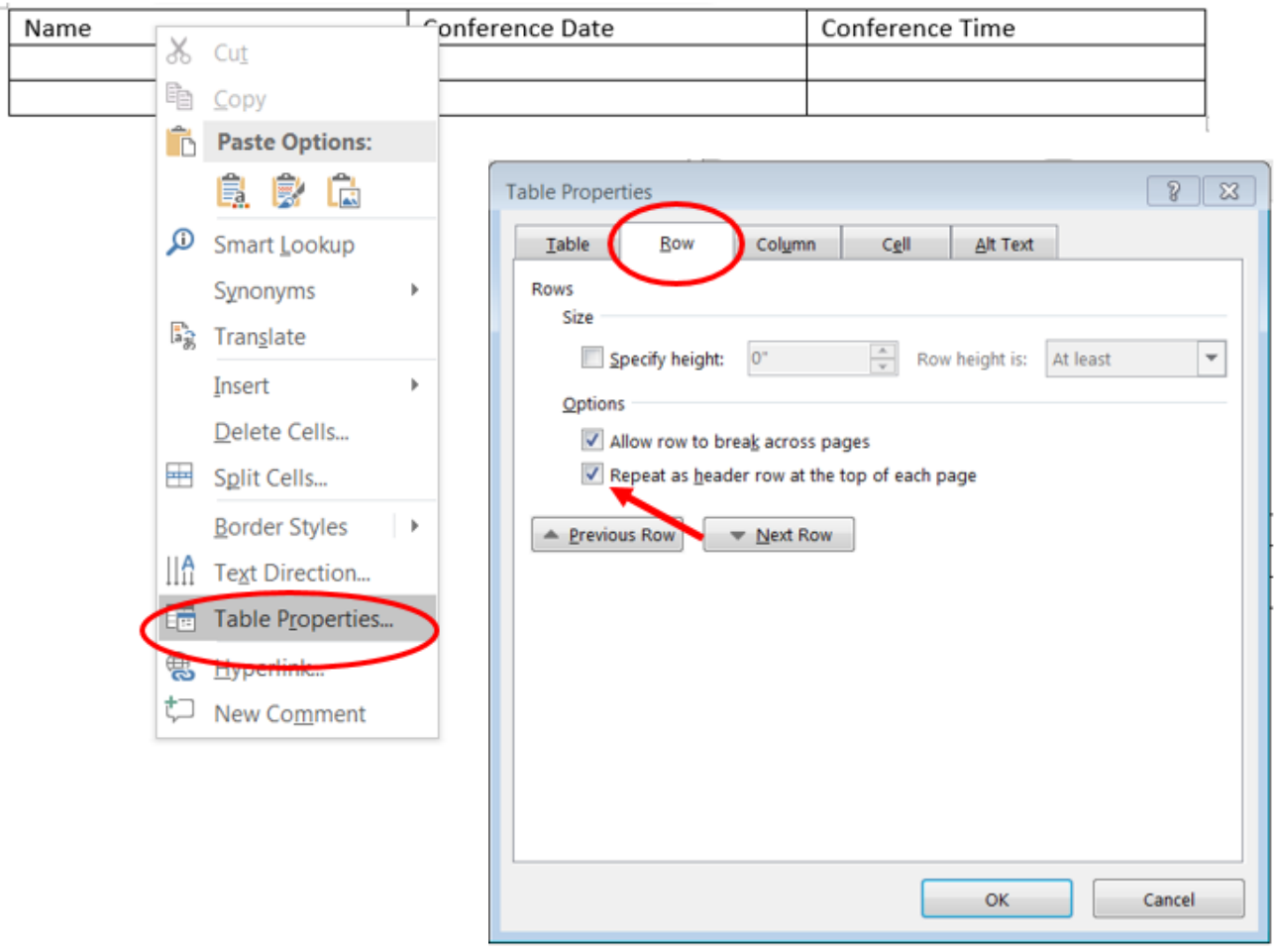
Tip: When adding alternate text, be succinct yet accurate. Try to provide an equivalent of the image's content and function. Keeping alternate text to fewer than 125 characters is recommended. Generally, including something like "Image of…" or "Picture of…" is not necessary; just by using alternate text indicates images or graphics.

Tip: If any image is purely decorative, alternate text is not needed.

Format Tables Carefully

Why? Screen readers read tables one cell at a time, left to right then top to bottom. Cells that are split/merged or that have other tables embedded within them cause problems for screen readers.

Make sure that the first row of a table is set as a header row. Place your cursor in the top row and right click then select **Table Properties**. In the dialogue box that opens, select the **Row** tab. Check the box next to **Repeat as header row at the top of each page** then click **OK**.



Tip: To check the order in which the cells will be read, place your cursor in the first cell of the table. Repeatedly strike the Tab key; the cursor will move in the order that a screen reader will go through the table.

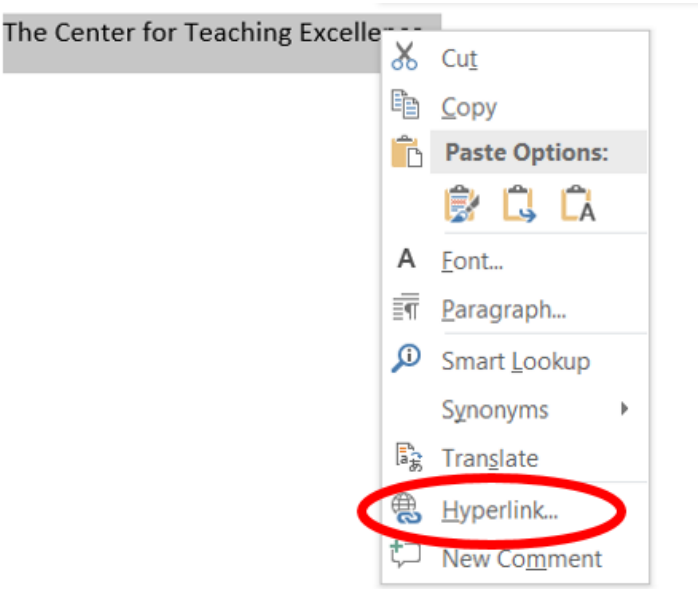
Note: These directions will vary somewhat when using Microsoft Word for Macs. The key is using the Format Table menu to set the first row as a table header.

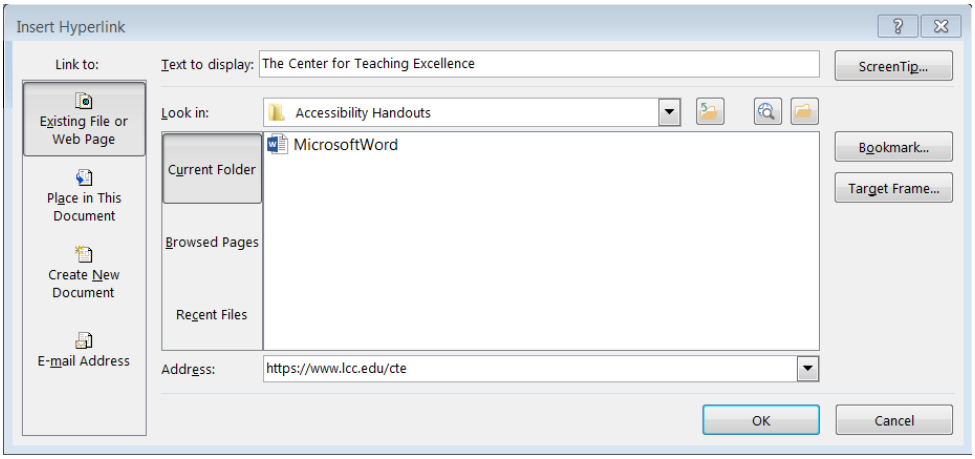
Create Clear Links

Why? Everyone uses hyperlinks to navigate between texts. However, just pasting in a URL doesn't allow someone using a screen reader to know where that hyperlink will direct them.

When adding a link to text, begin by actually typing the destination for that link. (For example, type "The Center for Teaching Excellence" for sending someone to the CTE's webpage.) Then highlight and right click on the text. In the menu that appears, select **Hyperlink**. In the **Insert Hyperlink** dialogue box, paste or type the URL for the destination page in the **Address** line. When finished, click **OK**.

Your goal is to have a link that looks like this: The Center for Teaching Excellence.

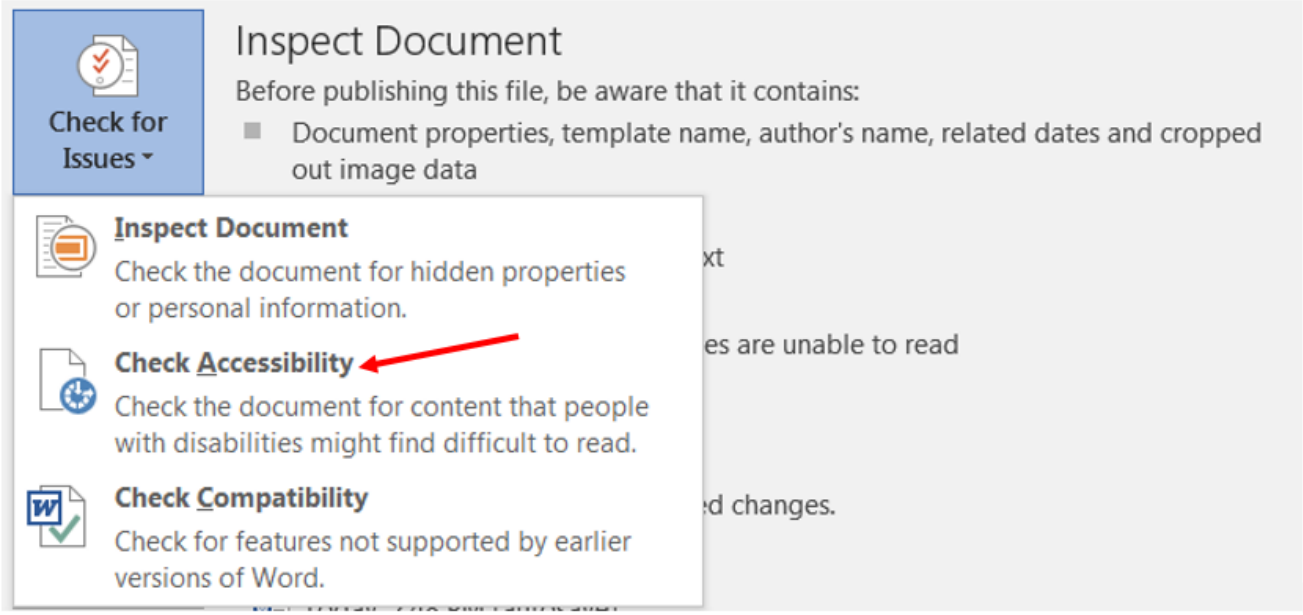




Run the Accessibility Checker

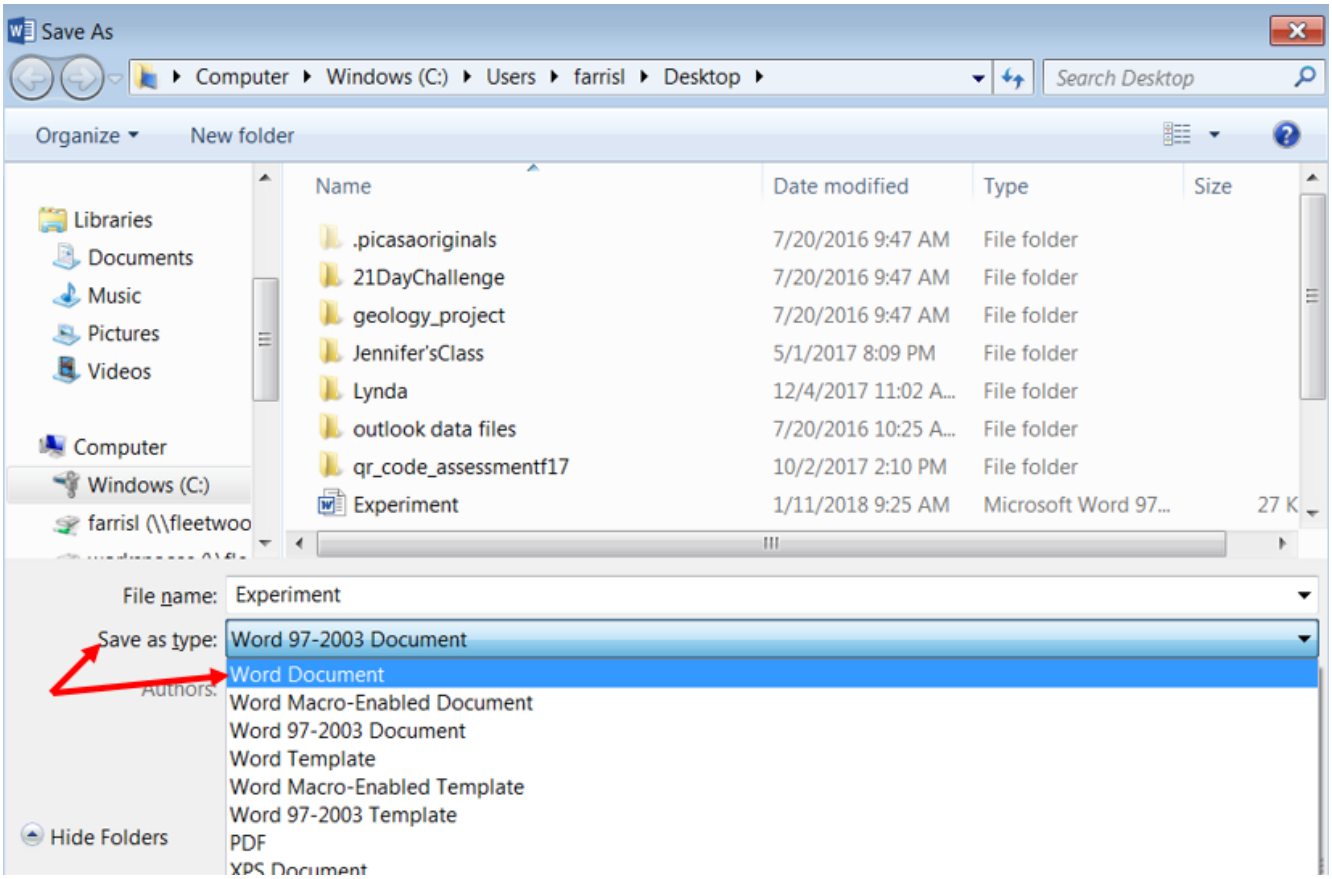
Why? Microsoft's built-in accessibility checker will let you know if your document contains any accessibility issues and help you fix them.

Select the **File** tab. Next to the **Inspect Document** information, open the **Check for Issues** dropdown menu and select **Check Accessibility**.

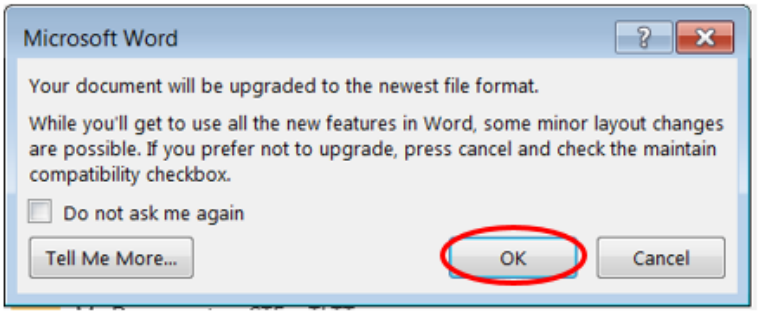


Update Your File Types

Word 1997-2003 files are not compatible with the Accessibility Checker and other features; therefore, if you're experiencing trouble, it's a good idea to update your file types. Under the **File** menu, select **Save As** then navigate to where you wish to save the file. When the Save As dialogue box opens, use the **Save as type** drop down menu to select **Word Document**. Click the **Save** button.



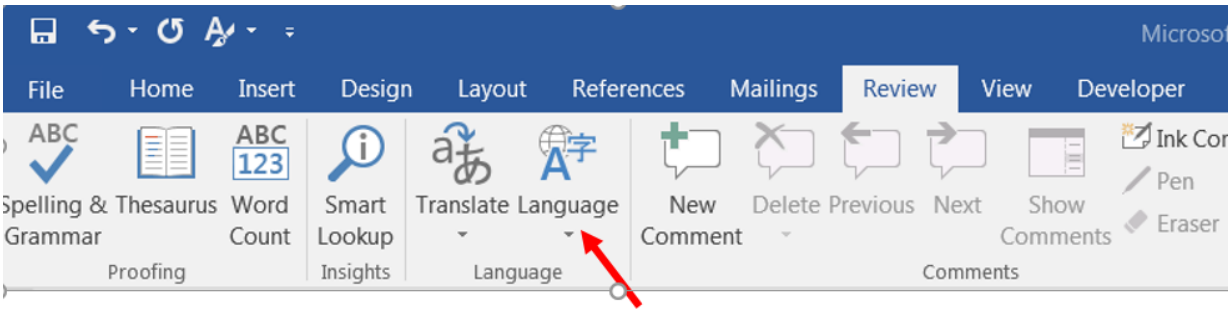
The dialogue box below may open, asking you whether or not you really want to change file types. Just click **OK** because you want the accessibility feature available in the latest versions of Word.



Make Sure to Identify the Language

Why? Screen readers are multilingual. Before reading a document, they will look for the language used to create the document.

Open the **Review** ribbon and click on the drop down menu for **Language**. Choose **Select Proofing Language** from the menu. In the dialogue box that opens, select the language you wish to use then click **OK**. The default is usually United States English, but it's often good to check.

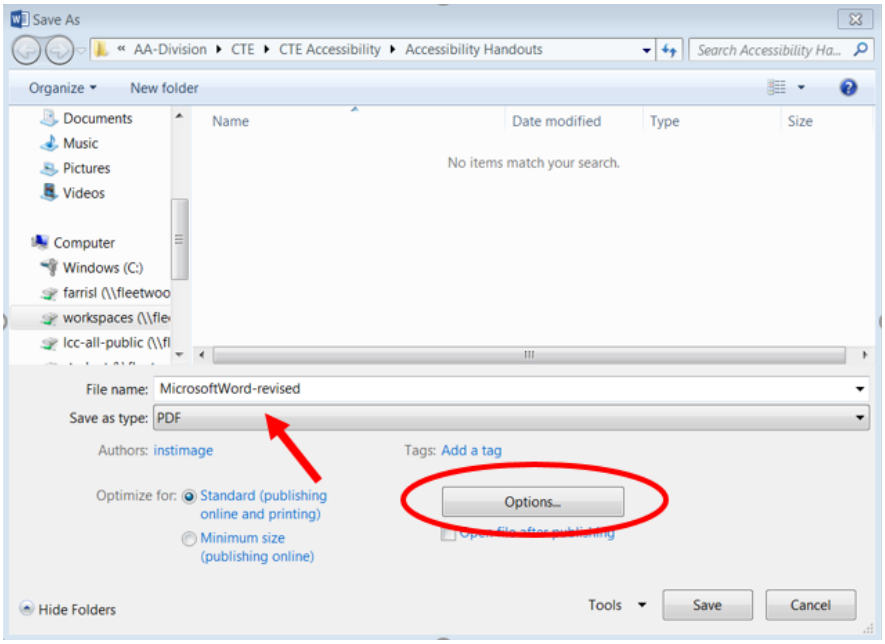
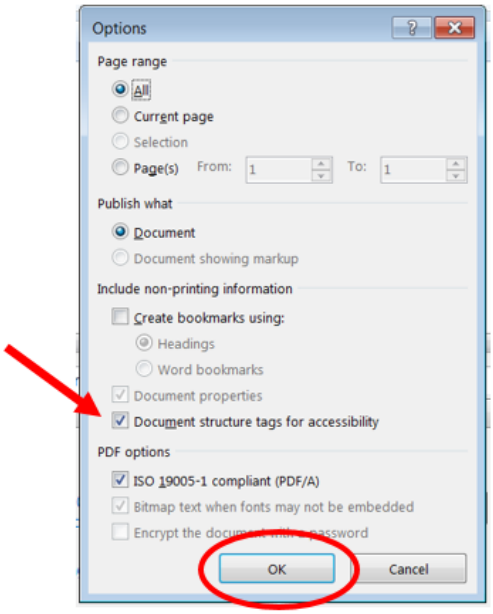


Hint: If you are working in a document with more than one language, you can simply highlight a paragraph (or any part of the text) then follow the process above to set the language for just a portion of the text.

Ensure that PDF's Are Tagged When Created

Why? Tagging a PDF simply tells the screen reader the order in which to read the document.

To create a PDF file, select **File** then **Save as** then navigate to the location where you wish to save the file. In the dialogue window that opens, make sure to select **PDF** from the **Save as type:** dropdown menu. To ensure that a file is tagged, click on the **Options** button.



Make sure the box for **Document structure tabs for accessibility** is checked then click **OK**.