



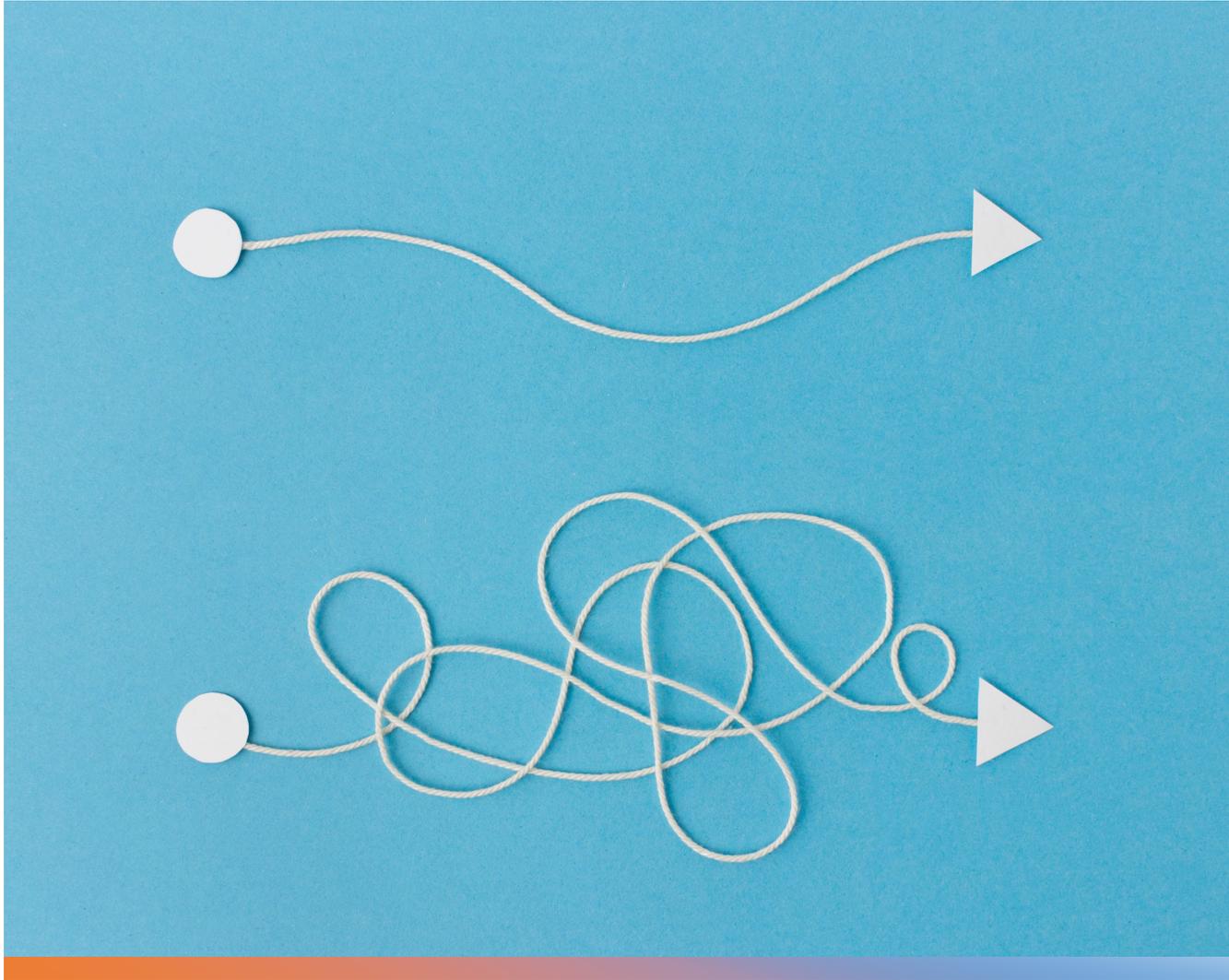
Creating accessible

Microsoft Word Documents

With Excel and PDF Export Basics

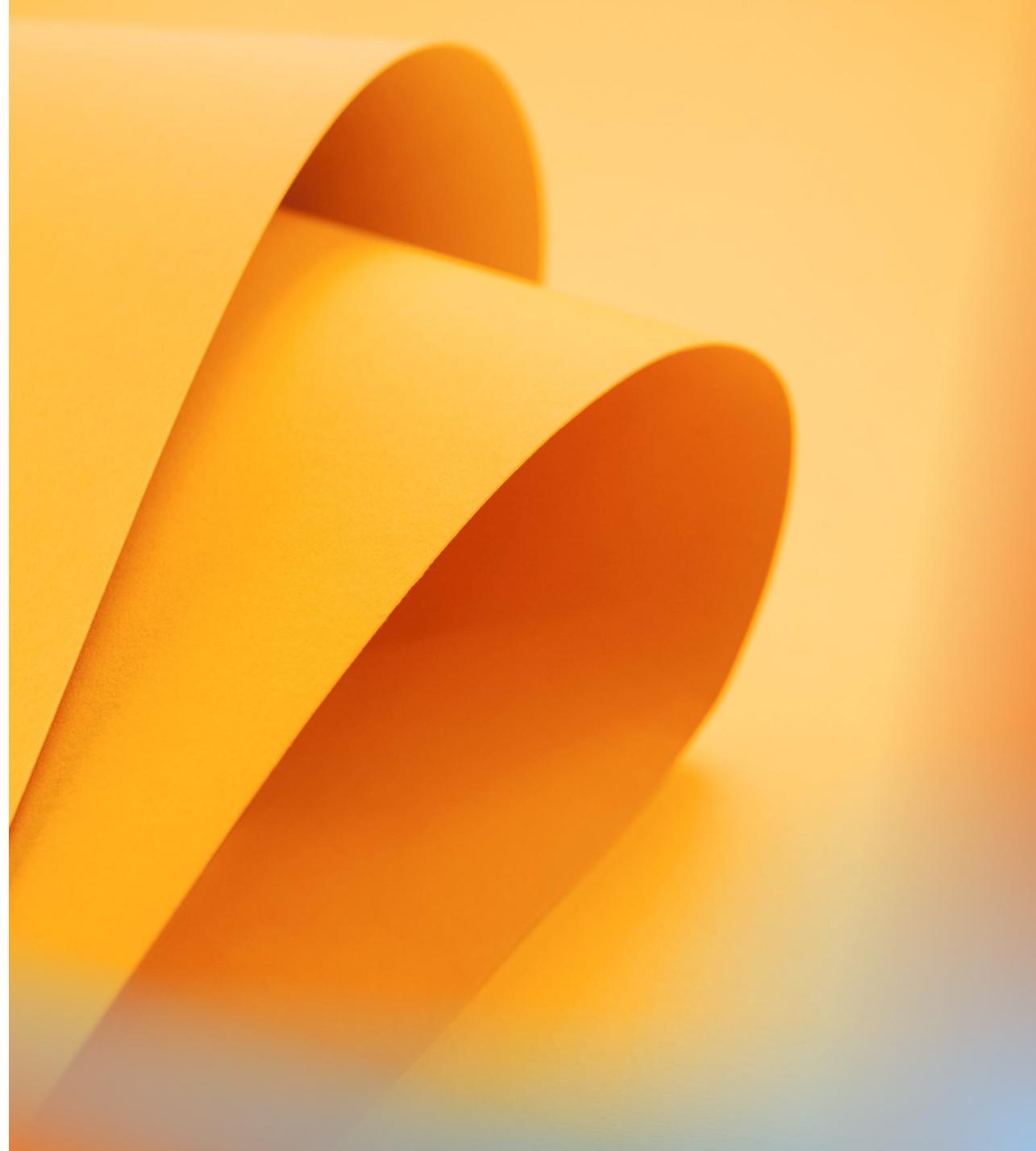
Why Accessibility in Documents Matter

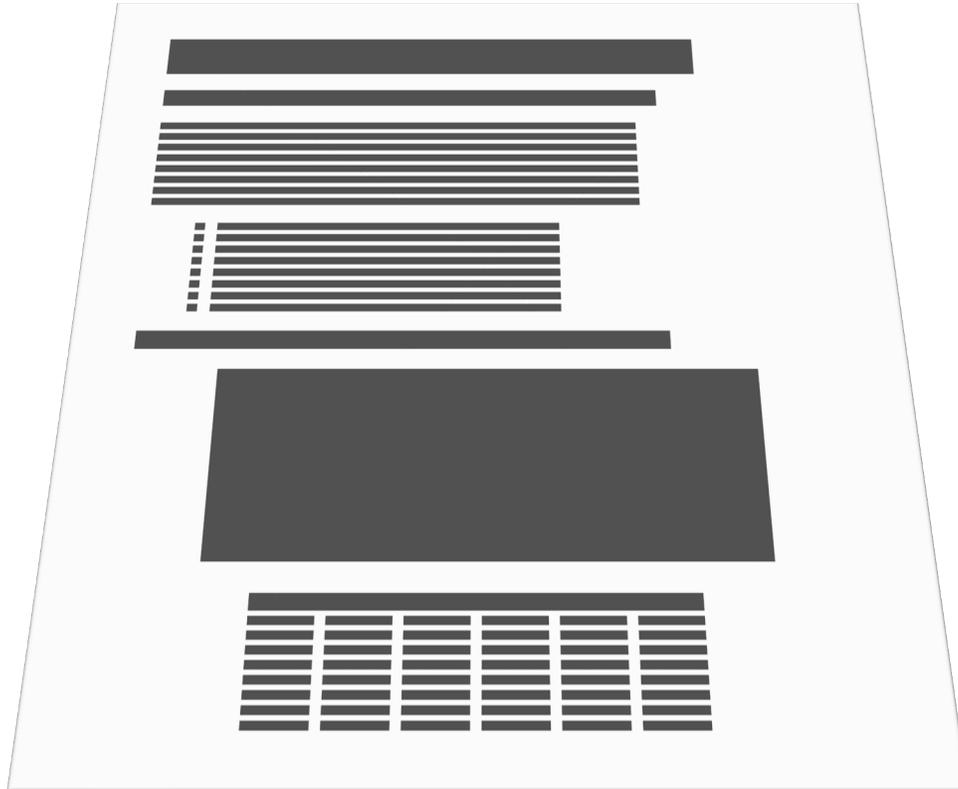
- Not all users access content visually or with a mouse
- Assistive technologies rely on **structure**, not appearance
- Poorly structured documents can be difficult or impossible to navigate
- Improve usability for everyone
- Reduce barriers for people with disabilities



Accessibility Guiding Principles

- Accessibility Starts in the Source File
- Structure Matters More Than Visual Design
- Keep Layouts Simple and Logical
- Don't Rely on Color or Visual Cues Alone
- Use Built-In Accessibility Tools





Creating Accessible Documents in Word

Common document structures include:

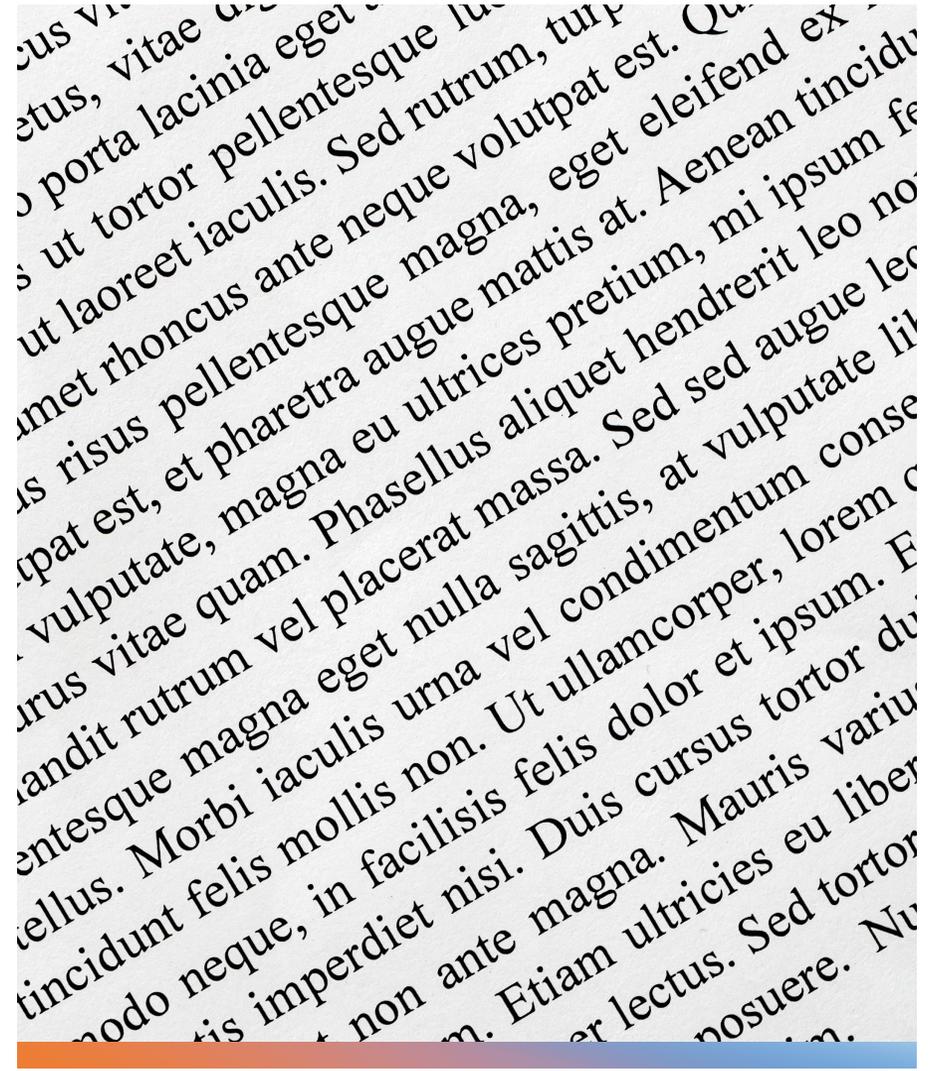
- Paragraphs
- Headings
- Lists
- Tables
- Images

Paragraphs

Everything is a paragraph... Unless it isn't!

Microsoft Word treats all text as a paragraph by default.

- Paragraphs control structure, not spacing or layout
- Use paragraph markers to see hidden formatting
- Avoid using empty paragraphs to create visual space
- Be aware of soft breaks (Shift + Enter), which stay within a paragraph





Text & Fonts

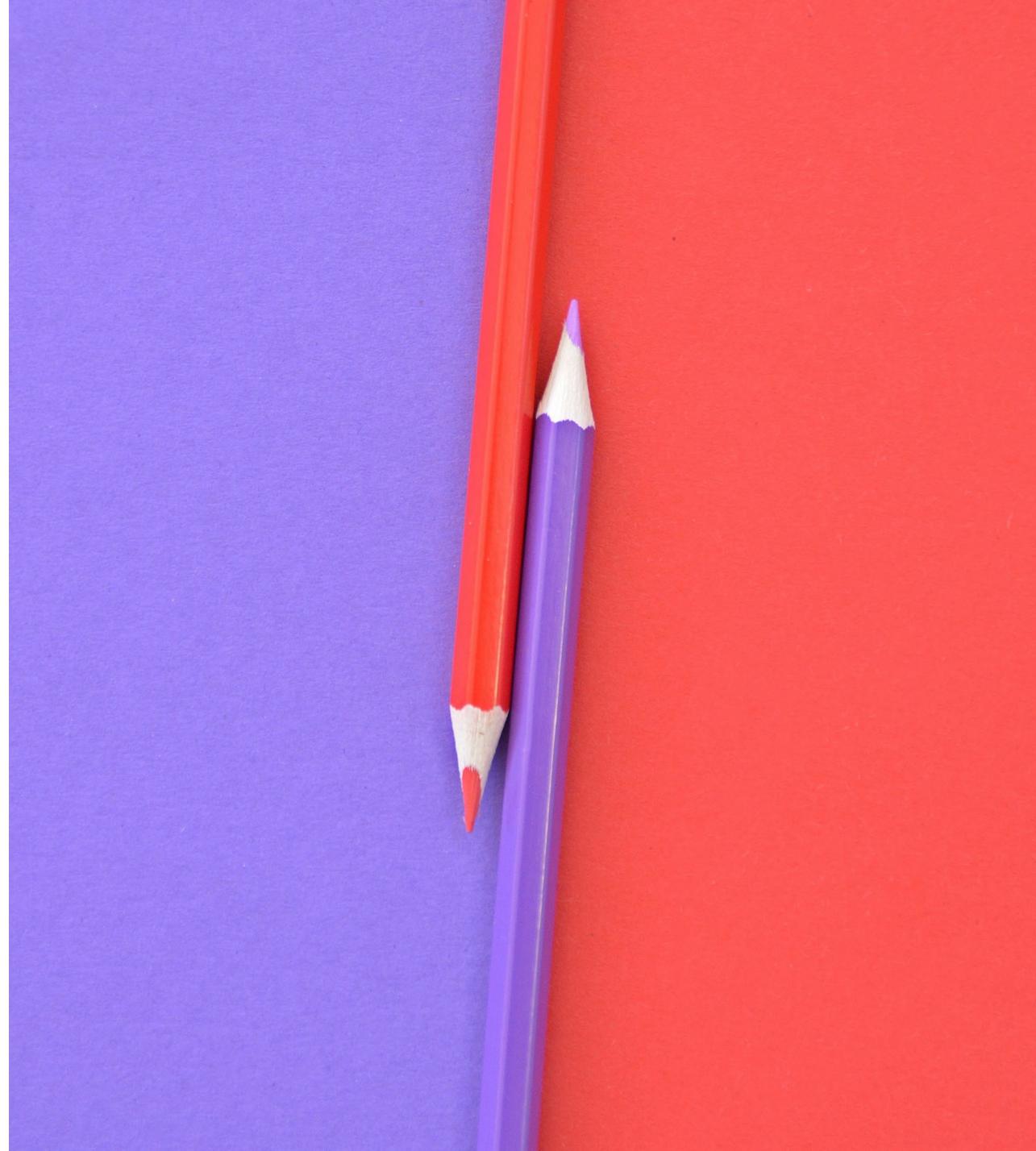
- Font Choice: Use readable, sans-serif fonts.
- Font Size: Make sure font Sizes are at least 9, but 12 is ideal.
- Text Styles: Avoid using only color to convey information. Use bold, italics, or underline to emphasize

Color and Contrast

Text becomes difficult to read if the color is too similar to the color behind it. Increasing contrast makes text easier to read.

- **Contrast Ratio:** Maintain a good color contrast for text and background to ensure readability. 4.5:1
- **Color Coding:** Avoid conveying information solely through color. Use patterns, shapes, or labels to differentiate.

4.5



Headings and Heading Levels



Headings

- Functions as a landmark within a document
- Every heading has a level
- Be sure to use the Navigation Pane

Heading Level

- A heading's level indicates its nesting level within the document hierarchy
- Always start your documents with a Heading Level 1; all subsequent headings should be level 2 or greater
- A Heading Level 1 is much like the title of a book, and all subsequent headings are like chapters and sub-chapters in the book

Lists and List Types

Lists

- Group related items together
- There are 2 types of lists: ordered and unordered

Unordered Lists

- Commonly referred to as “bullet lists”
- No order is implied

Ordered Lists

- Commonly referred to as “numbered lists”
- Items are implicitly ordered



Images and Alternative Text

Images

- Images are visual elements
- Images may be decorative or may convey information
- An image requires alt text if it conveys relevant information

Alternative Text

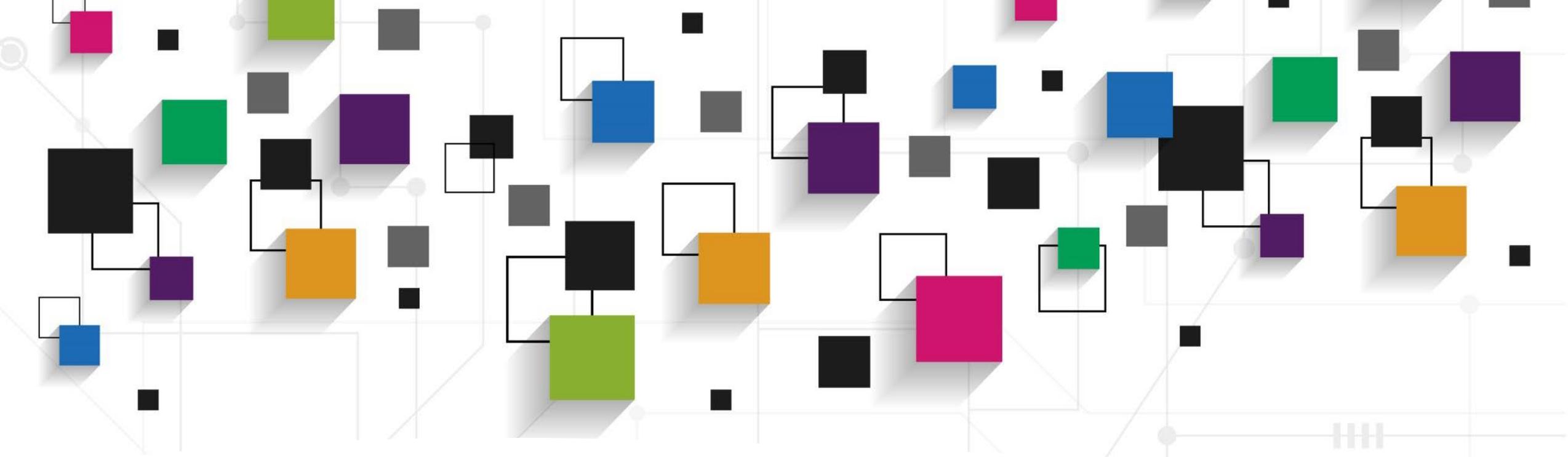
- Alternate text should be short, concise, and complete
- Don't include "image of" or "logo of"; users know when they encounter an image





Links

- Make certain that the text used for links is both clear and informative, offering users a meaningful understanding of the link's destination.
- Avoid the use of generic phrases such as "click here" or "read more."
- For instance, instead of using "Click here for more information," opt for "Learn more about our accessibility guidelines."



Tables and the Table Header Row

- Use tables only for tabular data, not page layout
- Avoid merged or empty cells
- Define column headers using a table header row
- Header rows communicate relationships between data
- Header text should be short, clear, and descriptive

Why Excel Accessibility Matters

Excel is often used for:

- Data tables
- Schedules
- Reports later exported to PDF

Screen readers rely on:

- Header rows and columns
- Cell relationships





Core Accessibility Practices in Excel

Excel is about structure not layout.

- Use header rows and columns
- Avoid merged cells
- Keep layouts simple and linear
- Don't rely on color alone to convey meaning
- Use meaningful worksheet names



Accessibility Checker in Word & Excel

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• Word

Built-in Accessibility Checker helps identify common issues

Flags:

- Missing alt text
- Missing table headers
- Color contrast issues

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Excel

Excel also includes an Accessibility Checker

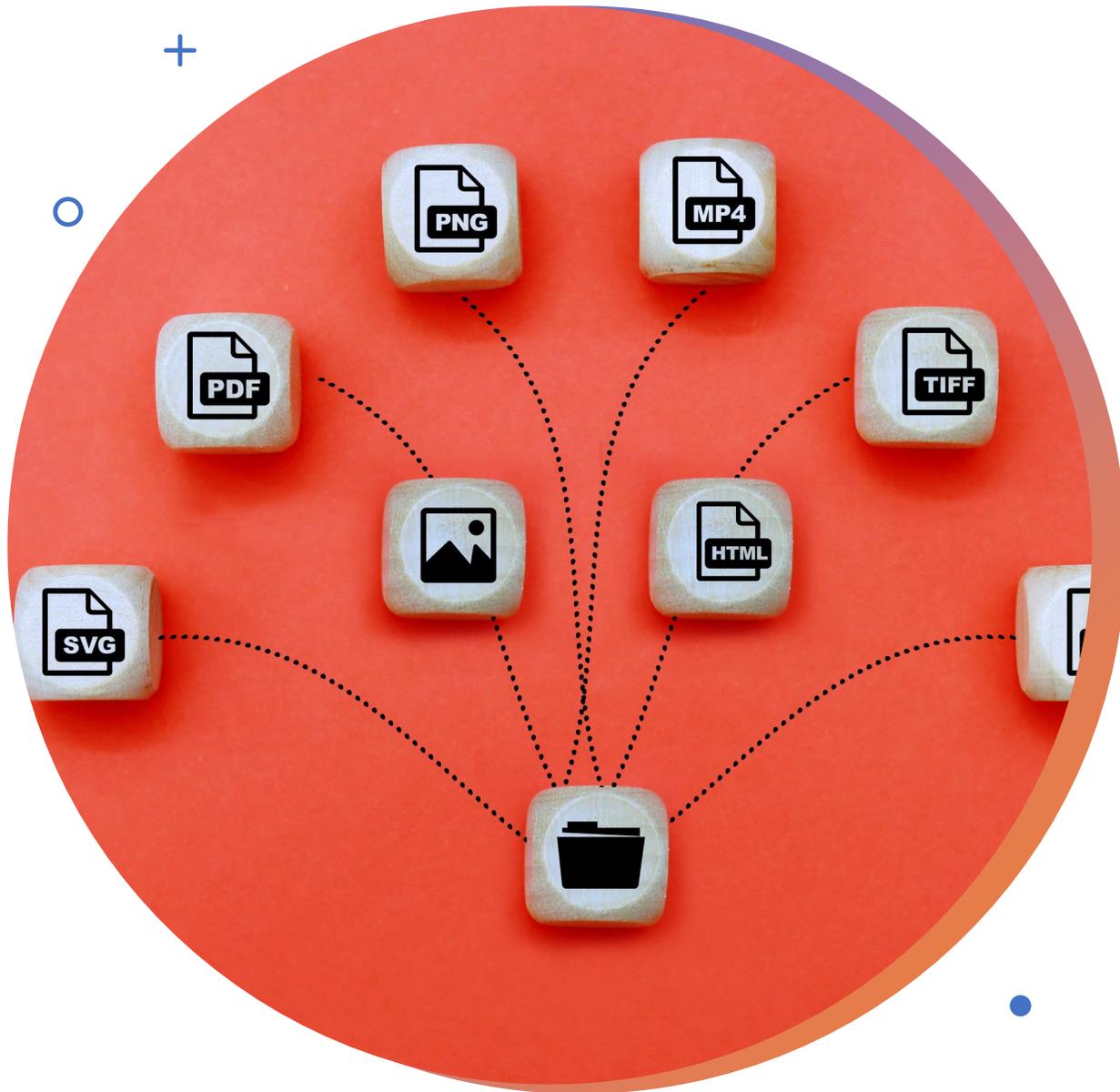
Flags:

- Missing headers
- Poor contrast
- Missing alt text for objects



Exporting to Accessible PDF

- Use Save As → PDF from Word or Excel
- Structure from the source file carries over
- Visual formatting may not convert to tags (font size, bold, color, spacing, alignment)
- Always check the PDF after export



Basic PDF Remediation in Acrobat

- Check tags
- Fix reading order issues
- Add missing alt text

Canva and Accessible PDFs

- Creating a fully accessible PDF in Canva is very limited
- Canva-generated PDFs are often **very difficult** to remediate
- Canva's accessibility tools can help, but they do not guarantee compliance

Recommendation:

If the final deliverable must be an accessible PDF, use a design program that supports proper document structure and tagging from the start.





Formatting Activity

Let's fix a
document!