



6 Little Things: The Last 3, but Not the Least!



In the March newsletter, ABLE Tech wrote about 3 of 6 little things that you can do to start to create more accessible content. These are things that you can do in pretty much any authoring tool out there: document tools like Microsoft Word, Content Management Systems, Learning Management Systems, and more!



This month, we finish up with the last 3 little things - Tables, Color and Links.

Disclaimer: these techniques are just a start. There is more to making your content accessible than these things, but this is a good place to start.

So cozy up next to your favorite authoring tool (like Microsoft Word, your content management system, or your learning management system) and let's make some more accessible content!

Table Headers

Tables are a great way to present data points. Class schedules, research data, and sets of important dates can all fit into data tables.

In keeping with the theme that what we do visually needs to count behind the screen too, it's important to be sure that table headers (the cells that identify what data is in a row or column) are identified using more than a bold font.

This is one where the authoring tool has everything to do with how you create table headers that know that they are table headers.

Microsoft Word 2010

Microsoft Word 2010 only lets you identify one row of column headers in a table. So to create an accessible table in Word, you really should keep it as simple as possible. If you have more than one row of column headers, then consider using the PDF format, or HTML, to publish the

table. Either of those formats let you work with more layers of headers, such as row headers.

It is pretty straightforward to identify the row of column headers, though:

1. Select the row that has the column headers in it
2. Right click to bring up the context menu
3. Select Table Properties
4. Select the Row tab
5. Check the box that says “Repeat as Header Row at the top of each page”

This makes sure that the Word document knows that the row you selected is made up of headers for the columns in the table. And, as the checkbox label says, it also makes sure that the header row repeats at the top of each page that the table appears on. This makes it easier for everyone to use your table!

Acrobat Pro

Acrobat Pro lets you create more accessible tables that have more than a single row of column headers. You can create accessible tables with row headers, and you can even create more accessible tables with header cells that are nested in the table itself.

There is a little bit more to creating accessible tables in Acrobat Pro than in Microsoft Word. That’s also true in Content and Learning Management Systems. This is because these tools typically support better table accessibility.

There are a few concepts to mention before we go on:

- Scope refers to what a table header applies to, either row(s) or column(s). In a simple table with one row of header cells, each cell will have a scope set to columns since each header cell is a header for a column. Header cells that apply to rows have a scope set to row.
- Span refers to the number of rows or columns that a particular header cell applies to. If you have one header cell that is a header for two columns, then the span will be set to 2

You can get quite a ways with the scope and span values, but there are sometimes tables that have nested headers and are generally difficult to read. That sort of complex table is beyond what we’re talking about here.

Manipulating the scope and span values in Acrobat Pro requires the use of the Table Editor tool. The Table Editor lets you set scope and span values for table header cells individually, or as a group of header cells. Fortunately, the Table Editor is pretty well documented in a few places:

- [About the Table Editor, from Adobe](#)
- [Adobe’s Acrobat Pro XI Accessibility Guide](#)
 - [Acrobat Pro XI Accessibility Guide section on Tables](#)

Content and Learning Management Systems

Here, your mileage will vary. Most CMS and LMS platforms let you identify table headers, assign scope and span attributes, define table summaries, and handle complex tables. How you do that depends on the system. Look for those attributes, though, in your user manual or in on-screen menus that appear when you create or edit tables.

Color

There are a couple of things to remember when you use color: contrast between text and background colors, and using color to convey meaning.

Color Contrast

It is really important to make sure that your font color contrasts enough with the color behind it. The good news is that you don’t have to limit yourself to just using black font on a white background. But there is a pretty big difference between this:

If you can read this then you may have had to lean toward your display and squinted.

And this:

If you can read this more easily then I’ve improved the contrast.

There are some good ways to quantify how much your font color contrasts with its background. Your authoring tool may have a contrast checker built in. There are several that let you check in either web pages or documents, or both.

- [The Paciello Group Colour Contrast Analyser](#) is a great tool that lets you select a font color and a background color with eyedroppers and it automatically shows you the contrast ratio and whether it meets the web standards for contrast. (The standard we suggest aiming for, at a minimum, is WCAG 2.0 level AA). This is one of ABLE Tech's go-to tools.
- [The Color Contrast Analyzer extension for Chrome](#) is another incredibly helpful tool, though it relies solely on visual feedback. It grabs whatever is in the browser, including documents like PDF or PowerPoint, and compares contrast between pixels. Then it shows you every place on the page where contrast is high enough.
- [WebAIM's Color Contrast Checker](#) has recently been improved. A very handy tool that works in any browser.

Use of Color

Sometimes, we use color to convey important meaning. Maybe we say that all required fields on a form are indicated with a red font. Maybe we use colors to distinguish between the different lines on a line graph.

If the only thing that we use to convey this meaning is color, though, then we keep anyone that can't perceive the differences in color from being able to see what is what.

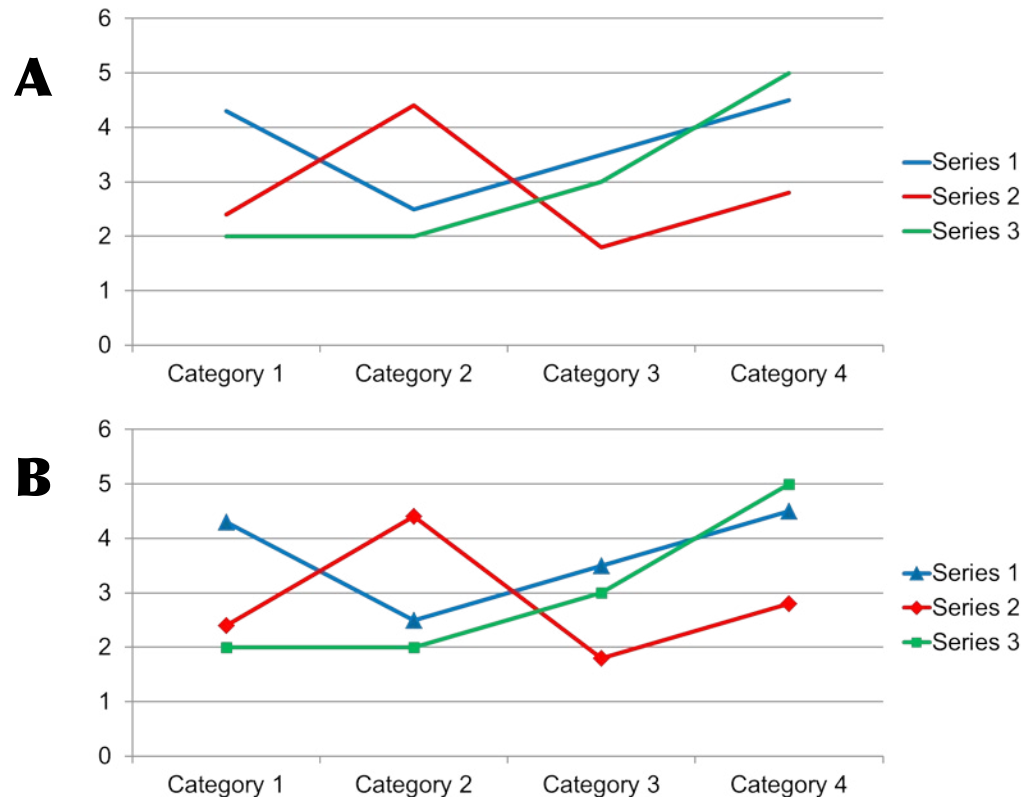
The solution? Well, it's not avoiding using color to convey meaning. Please do. For a lot of people, it's a great way to make content more meaningful. Just remember to add something in addition to the color.

So, if you indicate required form fields in red, then add an asterisk next to them as well. Or go one better and include

the word "Required" in parenthesis so that it's easier for everyone to tell.

What about those charts and graphs with different colored lines? Most authoring tools let you add shapes or lines to the different colors to help to distinguish them from one another using something other than color. This will vary in your authoring tool, but look for something about adding markers to lines, or patterns to bars or sections of a pie chart.

In the end, instead of **A** - you want **B** (see below)



Links

We frequently use links to provide extra information in our content. Believe it or not, the way that we create those links can make a big difference when it comes to accessibility.

Have you ever come across a link that looks like this?:

https://www.ok.gov/triton/modules/formbuilder/form.php?form_id=8891752

Not real easy to tell what in the world will happen if you follow that link. If you read the whole thing, then you may pick up on some clues.

- The word “form” is in there, so this is probably something that accepts data
- There is a .php extension, meaning that this is not just a regular old web page (that’s one that the more technically-oriented may pick up on)
- There is a big set of cryptic letters and numbers

What if the link looked like this instead?:

[Fill out our webinar evaluation form here.](#)

Well, that’s much more helpful. I can tell just by reading that link text that, if I follow the link, then I’ll go to a webinar evaluation form.

Both of those links actually point to the same page on the internet. But how I create the link makes all of the difference.

The key is to use link text that will tell someone what to expect when they follow the link. You don’t want to make the link text a paragraph. A few words is the goal. But you create more accessible and usable links if you think for just a few seconds about what your link text should say.

A few more things about links:

- It’s best to avoid using redundant link text, like “Read more” or “Click here”
- If you have a document that’s meant for digital and print, then use helpful link text and put the full website address in as a note in parentheses or a footnote so that people that have the print version can still see the web address
- Avoid repeating link text in the Title attribute, or using the Title attribute to make up for link text that is not descriptive enough
- Remember that your link text should make sense in context, but still be distinct from other links in the content.



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