Accessible Tables in Word

Tables organize information and make it easier to process. Ensuring that tables are accessible involves several elements: structure, heading rows, and alternate text.

The structure of a table needs to be consistent; each column should have the same number of rows. Tables should not have any combined or split cells. Consider breaking complex tables into multiple, smaller tables so that you can keep the structure consistent.

Tables need to have heading rows. Assistive Technology requires certain information to properly identify how to process and read the information within tables. A header tells assistive technology that the next element in the document is a table and how to properly process it. All tables require headers even if the tables are only used to arrange text.

1. Locate the table in your file, and place the cursor in the top row of the table
2. At the top of the Ribbon the "Table Design" menu will appear. Ensure that the box for "Header Row" is checked.


If you have a table that is longer than one page, you should ensure that the Header Row repeats at the top of the second page to help comprehension.

1. Right click in the Header Row of the table and select "Table Properties" from the drop down menu
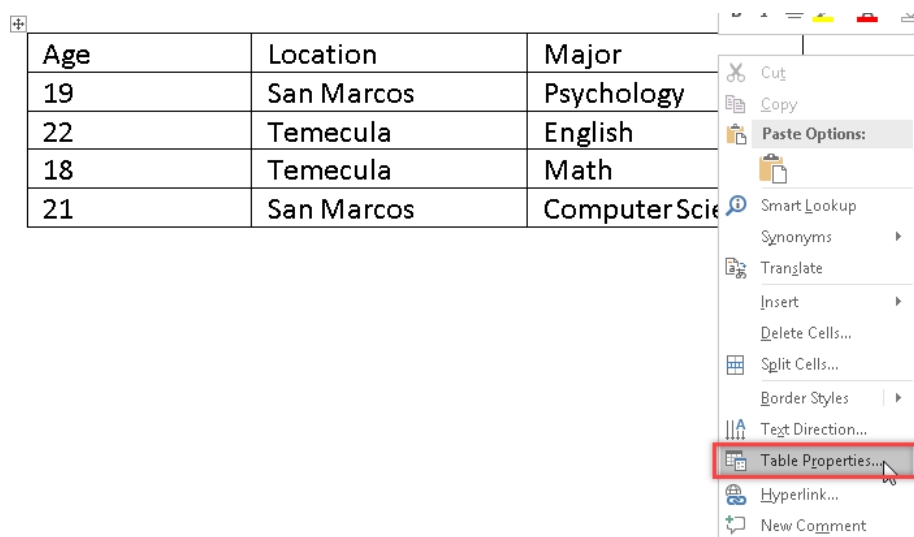
2. The Table Properties menu will then open. Click the "Row" tab. Then mark the checkbox for "Repeat as Header row at the top of each page". Click "ok"
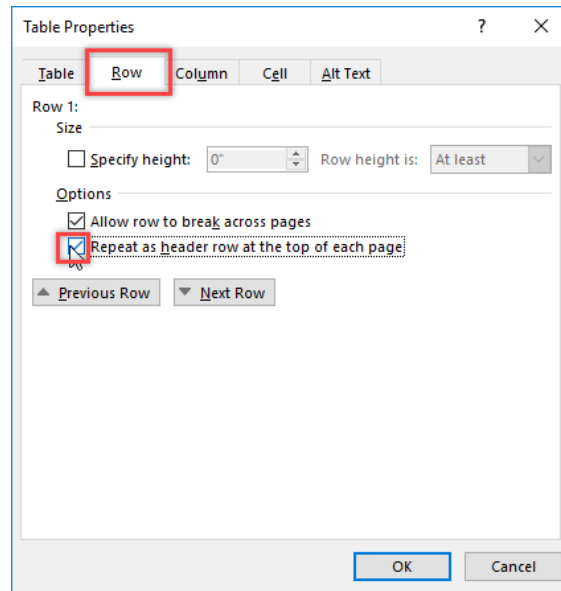
Unlike alternative text for images, screen readers can access and read off all of the text within a table. Therefore, for successful alternative text, we supply a general overview or high level description of the table. Do not duplicate all of the Header row information, and do not exactly duplicate the table name or label. Some examples of alternative text for tables include:

- List of events with associated dates
- Demographic information of participants
- Comparison of study elements by location
- Data concerning p-tables
- itemized budget by category
- Information regarding…

A good alt text for the below table might be, "student data" or "student academic information".

Age	Location	Major
19	San Marcos	Psychology
22	Temecula	English
18	Temecula	Math
21	San Marcos	Computer Science

If you must have a complex table, explain the relationship of the data to the heading i.e. "Column 1 lists the morning schedule while column 2 lists the afternoon schedule." You can also describe the information as a whole i.e. "School Schedule". (Note: For the example below, it would bebetter to separate the schedule into a morning table and an afternoon table).

Schedule	
Morning	Afternoon
Math	Art
English	Science

1. Select the table. Right click and select "Table Properties" from the drop down menu
2. Click on the "Alternate Text" tab and type your alternate text.
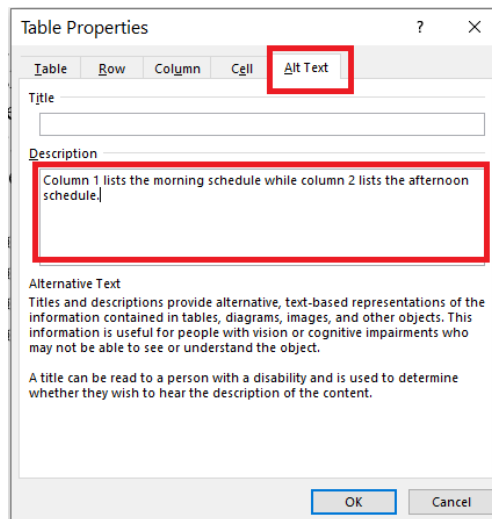
Special Concerns for Tables

Sometimes individual cells or text within a table will be highlighted to give emphasis or show trends within the data. Screen readers do not register color and will not relay this important visual marker.

To ensure the same information is conveyed everyone, use a symbol to mark each colored cell or text. If multiple colors are present, each color needs to be identified by a different symbol. Good options include (*, ^, ~, `). A 'key' should then be placed right below the table with the following language

(symbol) indicates cells highlighted in (color). Example:

Header	Data 1	Data 2
Descriptor	5	7*
Descriptor	3^	1

* indicates cells highlighted in yellow.

^ indicates cells highlighted in dark blue