

CMS Section 508 Quick Reference Guide - MS Outlook 2013 Usability

Element	Description
Be Concise	Keep e-mails short. If you're not brief, readers may overlook important information.
Focus on Key information	Divide information into relatively short segments or "chunks" of closely-related text. This will avoid information overload, enabling readers to navigate and process information more easily.
Titles and Headings	Use titles or headings to emphasize important segments or "chunks" of information. Also, make headings "look" different from body text (e.g., by using bold or italic). Effective headings help readers navigate through the material more easily, finding the information that's important to them.
Bullets and Numbering	Use the automatic bullet or numbering lists available in Outlook. Do not manually type lists preceded by special characters, such as hyphens or asterisks.
Original Message	Always reference the original message when you reply to a message.

Context

Element	Description
Abbreviations (Shorthand)	Don't use shortcut abbreviations. For example, avoid "BTW" for "by the way" or "TIA" for "thanks in advance." Some readers may not understand these shorthand notations.
Abbreviations and Acronyms	Explain all abbreviations and acronyms the first time they are used—for example by introducing the abbreviation in parentheses. Example: ...the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS)....
Subject	The Subject line should be brief and make the contents of the e-mail clear.
Time Sensitivity	For a time-critical message, include the time sensitivity in the subject line. Example: Timesheets Due Today

Layout & Formatting

Element	Description
Background Images and Colors	Avoid background images in your e-mail, such as stationary, watermarks, or wallpaper. Avoid dark-colored backgrounds; use white or light-colored backgrounds.
Color	Do not use color for emphasis without providing an alternative method of emphasizing text (e.g., bold or italics); do not use color alone.
Fonts	Use recommended sans serif fonts (Calibri, Verdana, Arial, or Tahoma). <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use very dark-colored lettering against white or light-colored backgrounds; avoid light colors.• Select point size 12 or greater.• Avoid ALL CAPS and fancy fonts.• Do not rely on bold or italic as the only means of emphasizing content. For example, use bold and italic together, or use color in combination with bold or italic.

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Element	Description
Graphics (Images)	<p>Graphic elements included in the body of the e-mail must be accessible (508-compliant).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Images should be tagged via HTML or captioned in text beneath the image. • Images generally must have alternative text descriptions (“alt text”). • Images that are strictly decorative (e.g., holly leaves on a holiday party announcement) should be tagged with alt="" so a screen reader will ignore them. <p>To add alt text to a graphic or image, right click on the image. Select “Format Picture” (or “Format Graphic Area”), then select “Alt Text.” Type an alt text description, then close.</p>
HTML	HyperText Markup Language (HTML) is the best message format to use for e-mails that contain headings, images, lists, or Web links.
Links	Files or forms on the Web that are linked from within an e-mail must also be accessible if they are under the control of the office originating the e-mail. An e-mail may link to a Web site without regard to accessibility if the site is outside the direct control of the office originating the e-mail.
Special Characters	Avoid special characters such as the copyright symbol and emoticons (e.g., smiley face).
Tables	<p>To create a table in Outlook, click “Insert,” “Table,” “Insert Table.” You may also copy and paste an accessible table from Word or Excel into Outlook. For either option, follow the guidelines for Tables in the HHS Checklist for 508-compliant MS Word documents:</p> <p>http://www.hhs.gov/web/508/accessiblefiles/checklistword.html.</p>

Attachments

Element	Description
Attachments	All attachments must be accessible (508-compliant).
Graphic Signatures	<p>Don’t use graphic signatures; they’re not accessible.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A screen reader may read the signature simply as "graphic." • Readers may wonder about the importance of a graphic that really is not important to the content of the e-mail. • To indicate a signed document, put /s/ above the person’s name. <p>Note: In addition to being non-accessible, graphic signatures are vulnerable to misuse.</p>
Non-Compliant Attachments	<p>E-mails with non-compliant attachments (such as flyers or newsletters) can be made 508-compliant in one of two ways. You can either:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make the attached document 508-compliant, or • Add the text of the attached document within the body of the e-mail so that all pertinent details of the document are included.