Creating Accessible Documents using LibreOffice Writer

Introduction

Learn how to format learning resources, newsletters, and other public facing documents to improve accessibility. Adopting these simple steps as a standard practice will prepare you to share your content in a variety of accessible file formats for all readers.

Step 1: Creating a Document in LibreOfficeWriter

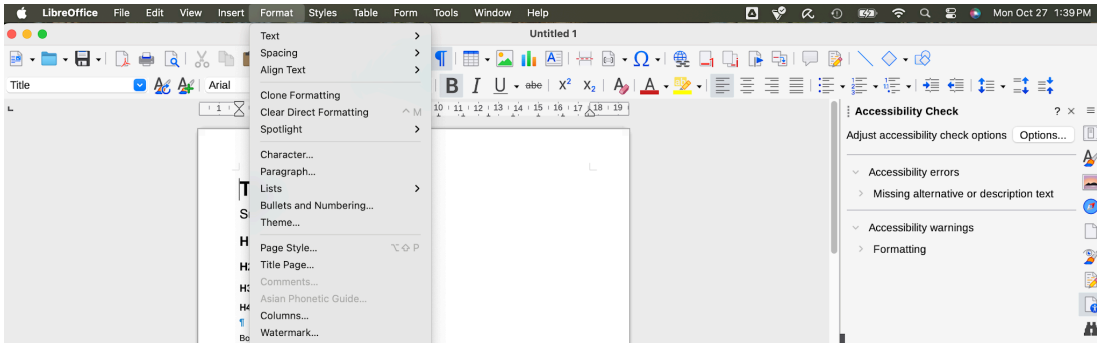
Starting from scratch

Open a LibreOffice Writer file and write your content as you would in Microsoft Word, or any other word processing application.

Formatting existing resources to improve accessibility

To make existing work accessible, you can Copy + Paste content into a new LibreOfficeWriter document.

1. Some accessibility edits require changes to the original content so **conversion rights** are required when you're changing other peoples' work. Seek approval from the publisher or author or rights holder when possible.
2. **Always "Clear Direct Formatting" on copied and pasted content -** "Clear Direct Formatting" is found in the Format menu.
    a. When text is copied into a word processor, there may be formatting that you cannot see visually but is embedded in the code. Clearing this will reset the formatting so there aren't any issues that come up when the document is read by Text to Speech Software.



Step 2: Paragraph Styles

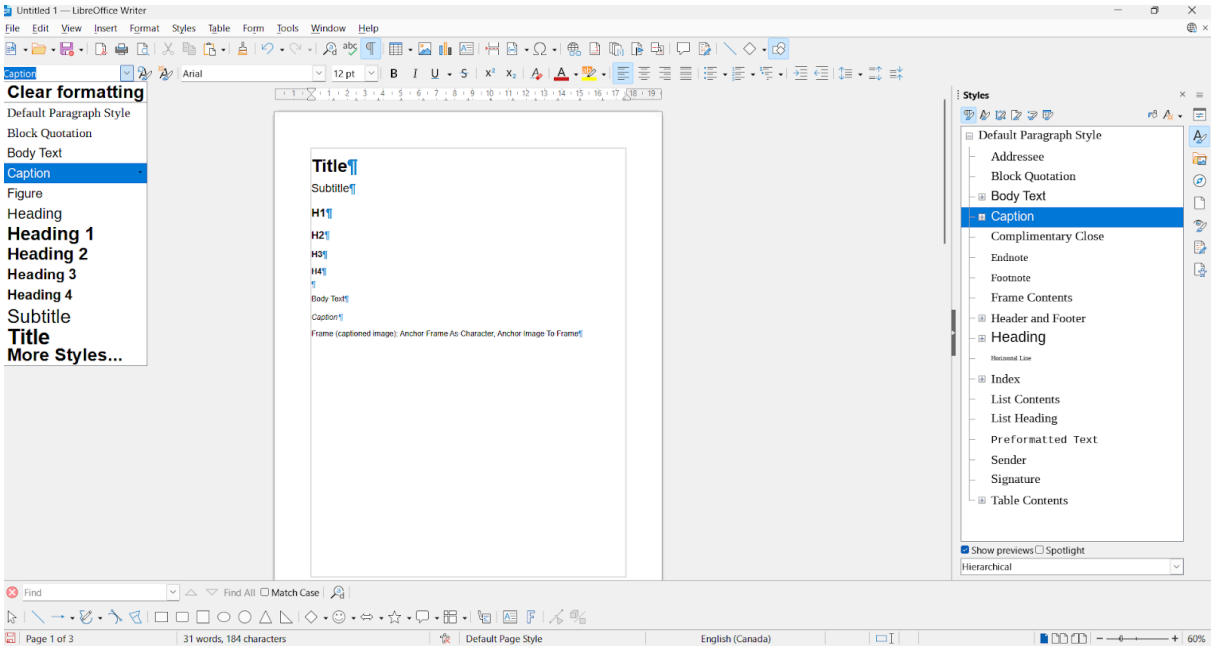
Paragraph Styles are formatting options - headings, titles, body text, captions - that help organize content. Using styles breaks content into digestible pieces allowing all readers to find and understand information more easily.

Use Paragraph Styles to format your content rather than “Direct Formatting.” Direct formatting means changing font size and style directly in the document. Styles code content hierarchy and navigation landmarks that screen readers and ebooks use to navigate content in an accessible way.

Styles are found in the top left panel in LibreOfficeWriter.

Titles, subtitles, headings, captions, figures, frames, body text are the most common styles you will use in a document.

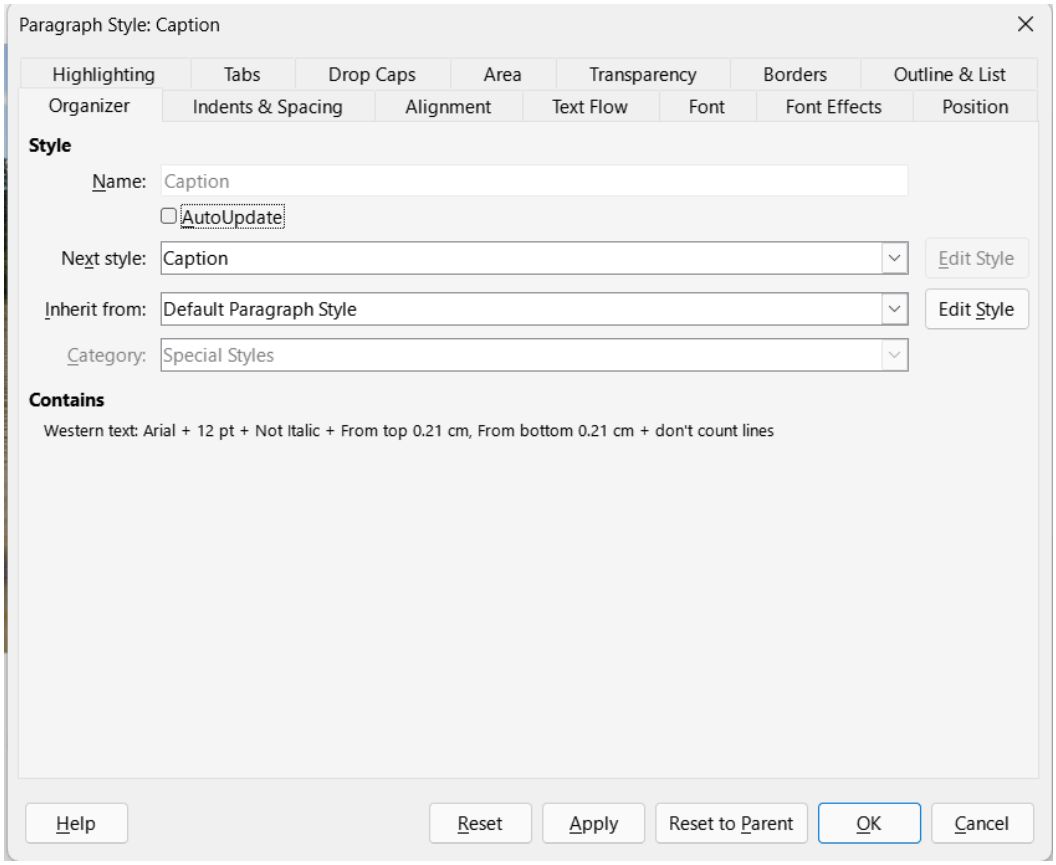
Select “**More Styles...”** within the drop down menu if you cannot find the style you need - this will open up the Styles side panel with more formatting options.



How to set and change paragraph style settings:

1. Change the paragraph style in the drop down menu by navigating to the dropdown beside the file name and select “Edit Style.” Styles can be changed in the Styles sidebar by right

clicking and selecting “Edit Style.”



a. Set the **Font Style** and **Size**.
b. Adjust the **Indent & Spacing.** Line spacing of 1.15 is recommended for Accessible PDFs and EPUB3’s.
c. Apply and save these settings.
d. Review your entire document to make sure that all content is formatted using Paragraph Styles.

Paragraph Style Hierarchy

- **Titles and subtitles** should only appear at the top of your style hierarchy, aka the first lines of your document.
- Always **outline the level of headings in sequential order**. For example, start with Heading 1 (H1), then Heading 2 (H2), and so on (H3, H4, H5, etc) in the order that they appear, or based on how you want readers to navigate the content.

Step 3: Alternative Text (alt text) and Captions

Adding alternative text (alt text) to images, charts, and other visual items in a document is one of the most important and difficult tasks when making a document accessible. Let's go over what alt text is and why it is important:

What is alt text?

> Alt text is used to replace visual items like images when the image isn't viewable. It is read by screen-readers in replacement of the visual image, or to add supporting context.

Learn About Writing Alt Text

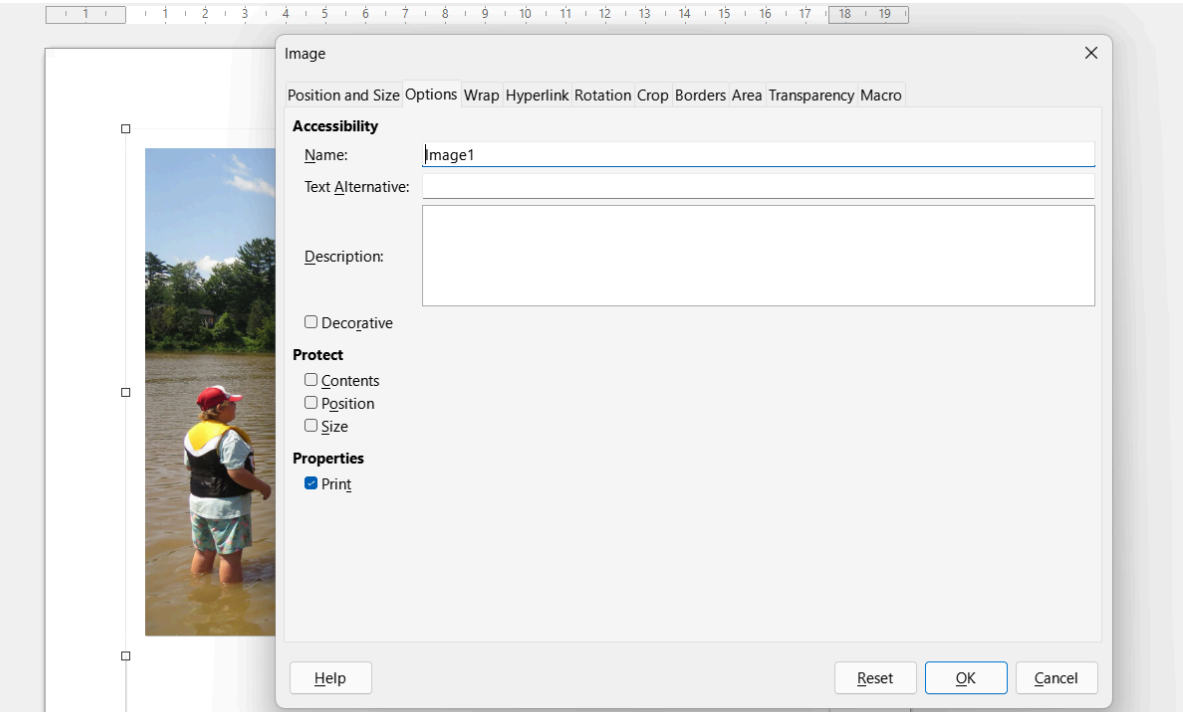
- Manitoba Flexible Learning Hub's *Building great alt-text in teaching materials and communications*
- W3G's *Resources on Alternative Text for Images*

How to add Alt Text in LibreOffice Writer

To add an image, chart, or other visual item in a document go to Insert in the top menu and select the appropriate item.

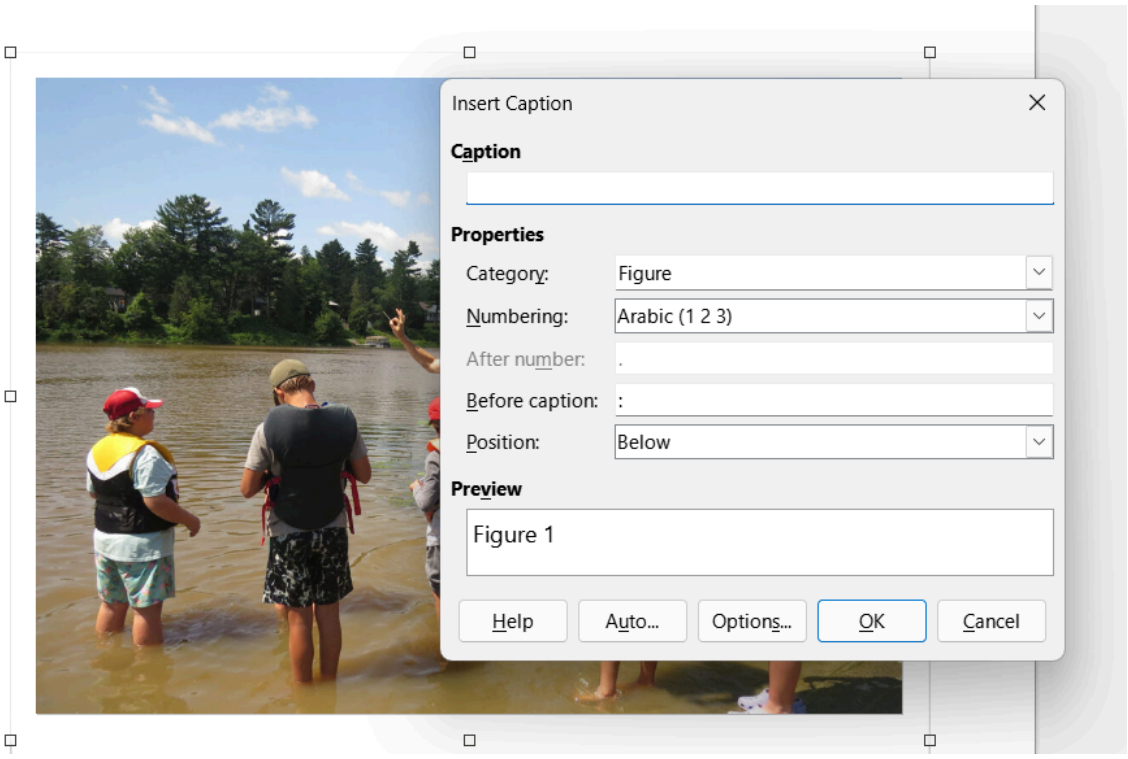
For this example, we will add alt text to images. Right click on your image, select '**Properties**,' and go to '**Options**'. Here you'll see:

- **Name:** Name your image accordingly. This may be read by a screen-reader so use a naming convention that makes sense when read aloud.
- **Text Alternative:** An alternate text description of the image *under* 150 characters.
- **Description:** A description of the image *over* 150 characters. Use only if necessary.
- ☐ **Decorative:** Screen readers do not read Decorative Images. Images would be marked as decorative when they don't add any context to the content, like an icon, image, or illustration that is added for visual effect.
- ☐ **Print:** Includes the selected item when you print the document. Select Print if you would like the image to appear in PDFs.



Captions

Descriptive captions may be used in place of alt-text. To do this, right click your image and select "Insert Caption".



- Set **Category:** Select from the list (Illustration, Table, Text, Drawing, Figure) depending on the content.
- **Numbering:** This is the numbering system assigned to your Category field, for instance "Figure 1:"
- **Position:** Select where you want your caption to display.

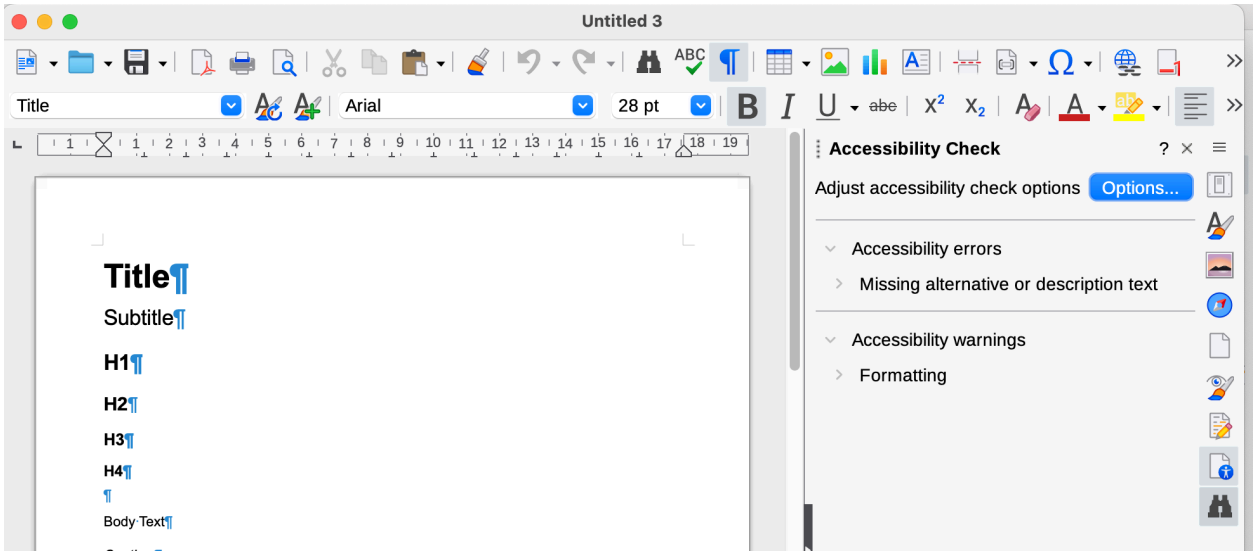
Placing and Anchoring Images and Visual Items for Accessibility

1. Anchor all Images, Frames (captioned images), Tables, Charts, etc. "**As Character**" or the item and its alt text may disappear when exported as an EPUB3 or Accessible PDF.

Adjust the placement of your visual content to fit the context of the article when editing for accessibility. The alt text or caption will be read out loud where it appears in the content, so its placement should make sense in reference to the context.

Step 4: Using Accessibility Check

LibreOffice Writer has a built-in accessibility tool to ensure your files meet accessibility standards.



1. Open **Accessibility Check** within the Tools menu.
2. In the Accessibility Check sidebar, you can adjust accessibility check options.
   a. Ensure all "**Online Accessibility Check Options"** are selected.
   b. If you make any changes, select "**Apply"** before closing this window.

Reviewing Accessibility Errors and Warnings

To address these errors and warnings, double click on the items and it will highlight the error in the document. Whether it is an image missing ALT text, a hyperlink missing information, or text styles not being applied properly, you can easily identify issues using the accessibility checker.

Review Libre Office's Guide to Accessibility Check for more information.

Step 5: Exporting Your Document into an Alternate Format

There are multiple ways to export your document from LibreOffice Writer. Here is a breakdown of each:

Accessible Word Processing File (.odt, .docx)

"**File**" > "**Save As...**":

- ODT Text Document (.odt): A commonly used text format that can be opened in different programs.
- Microsoft Word .docx: you can save, open, and edit Microsoft word (docx) files in Libre Office.
    - Unless requested, saving Writer files as .odt files will more accurately preserve the formatting you've set in Libre Office.

Export As a PDF:

"**File**" > "**Export As**" to export your document as PDF. To ensure the document is fully accessible, make sure these fields are selected: :

- **General:** Hybrid PDF (embed ODF file)
- **General:** Universal Accessibility (PDF/UA)
- **Links:** Export bookmarks as named destinations.
- **Links:** Export URLs relative to file system.

Exporting as an EPUB

"**File**" > "**Export As**" to export your document as an EPUB3. To ensure the document is fully accessible, make sure these fields are filled in:

- **Cover Image:** Make sure you select a cover image, otherwise the reading application will create a cover image using the document title.
- **Identifier:** You can choose a unique way to identify the document, if it's part of a series or published by a certain company, you can add that here.
- **Title:** This is the title of the EPUB and is usually automatically applied, so ensure this is the correct title.
- **Author:** Who wrote this document? If it's an article this goes beyond the company who posted the article. For example, if an article is posted by "Newspaper Company Name" there is usually an author who actually wrote the article. Make sure that you add that information here.
- **Language:** Ensure you add the language type.

Further edits can be made to your exported EPUB3 files using the free and open source Calibre E-Book Management Software.

- If exported EPUBS have alt-text or image errors, the HTML can be edited directly using Calibre Editor.

Additional Resources

Accessibility Standards Canada's *Guidelines for creating accessible documents*
The Document Foundation Wiki's - *Creating Accessible LibreOfficeFiles*