Transcript for Accessibility Bites: Word Documents
BCcampus event hosted February 29, 2024
Facilitator: Josie Gray

JOSIE GRAY:
Okay, let's get going. Thank you everyone for joining us for this fifth and final topic in the Accessibility Bites series. Before I get started, I wanted to highlight that you can download the slides for this session from bit.ly/accessbites, and my colleague will put that link directly into the chat. These slides are accessible and they include my full speaking notes. You can use them to follow along as well as go back to them later at any time or adapt for your own purposes. In this folder, you will also see slides from the previous Accessibility Bites sessions. You can go back and view those as well. I am very grateful to live and work on Moh'kins'tsis, which is what the Blackfoot call the area that is now the city of Calgary. This place is part of Treaty 7 signed in 1877, and it includes the territories of the Blackfoot Confederacy, including the Siksika, Piikani, the Kainai Nations and the Tsuut'ina Nation and the Stoney Nakoda, which includes the Chin-iki, Bearspaw, and Wesley Nations. This place is also home to the Métis Nation of Alberta, Region 3. As part of my land acknowledgment today, I wanted to talk a little bit about fire. There was a news article last week declaring that the province of Alberta has declared an early start to the fire season, which allows them to start preparing earlier and getting ready. Last year's fire season broke records burning about 10 times the amount of land as the last five-year average. Wildfires heavily affected Indigenous communities in Northern Alberta, including many who lost homes in fires. And the smoke pollution affected the whole country and beyond. This year, it's expected to possibly be worse due to an incredibly mild and very dry winter that we've had so far. Just to show you, by this time last year there had been nine new forest fires in Alberta, and this year, there have been 30 new fires already. It's not looking great. Some additional context. Looking at the history of wildfires in what is called now Canada, it is important to note that many Indigenous nations have traditional knowledge around using fire and controlled burns to care for the land. That knowledge was devalued and disregarded in favour of a colonial approach of fire suppression and economic extraction. In addition, historically, Indigenous Peoples have been blamed for wildfires set by settlers and industry as a way to justify removing them from their lands, especially from national parks like Banff. Now, Indigenous communities are generally the most vulnerable to wildfires. Just to tie it all together, wildfires are very much a climate justice issue, a disability justice issue, and a racial justice issue. I wanted to include that as part of my land acknowledgement today as we are moving slowly into the warmer months and to give some context for the wildfire season that's likely to come.

My name is Josie Gray, and I use she/her pronouns. For those who can't see me, I'm a white woman in my late '20s with mid-length blond hair glasses and a septum piercing. I work for BCcampus and I've been working in digital accessibility and education for seven years. I have a Masters of Design in Inclusive Design. And the things I'll be sharing throughout this series have come from my experience in making educational materials more accessible to disabled students. However, it's important to recognize that I am not a disabled person and that disability is a huge category and there's a huge amount of diversity, even among people with

similar disabilities. I say this because I don't know everything about what it is to make something accessible to all people and what may work for one person may not work for someone else. I really want to encourage everyone to dig into all of the topics and then seek out further learning, especially from people with lived experience. Welcome to the fifth session of the Accessibility Bites series. This series has been looking at different accessibility topics related to teaching and learning in post-secondary. For today's topic, we're exploring Word documents. I will be using Microsoft Word to demonstrate everything, but all of these practices apply wherever you might be writing digital content, whether that's in Google Docs, or websites, or the learning management system, etc. There's a lot of transferability between the stuff we'll go through today.

Here's what you can expect from the session today. For the first 15 minutes, I will be presenting some core practices that are needed to make content in Word documents accessible. And then we will use any time that we have left for additional discussion and questions, as well as an activity.

Before we get further into this topic, we need to understand accessibility. For the series, when we talk about accessibility, we are specifically talking about what is needed to ensure people with disabilities can have equitable access to education. To make education accessible, we must design and create resources, experiences, tools, and spaces that allow for and support the diversity of our bodies and minds. Rather than focusing on what we think of as normal or average, we're going to start from a place where we expect and plan for the presence of diversity and work to build in flexibility and choice so people can access their education in a way that works for them. Although accessibility can benefit everyone, the needs of disabled people are the priority and the focus of accessibility work.

Let's get into all of the different concepts. The most important thing when writing digital content is to use proper headings. And to not just change the text size or to make text bold, to visually make it look like a heading. Headings give your document structure and show how topics relate to each other. When you use proper headings, it ensures people who use screen readers can navigate the document. When someone is using a screen reader, they have the option of reading through just the headings so they can get an overview of the topics covered and decide where they want to start to read. Without proper headings, that person would be forced to read the document from beginning to end and have no ability to scan or jump between sections. When you use headings, you'll have to decide which heading level to use. The heading level communicates how topics relate to each other. For example, heading 1 is generally the title of the document or the web page. Heading 2 is for those main topics in the document. Then heading 3 would be subtopics, etc. For people who are reading visually, the levels are generally communicated by size and style of the text. For example, all heading 2s will look the same. They will generally be a little bit smaller than heading 1. For people using screen readers, their screen reader will tell them which heading level the text is using. The correct heading level is important as it supports comprehension and allows people to begin to build mental models of how various topics in a document relate to each other. As such, you should

never skip heading levels. For example, if your previous heading is a heading 2, your next heading level should not be a heading level 4. Using headings will also make your life easier generally. It'll ensure your document looks consistent all the way through, and it will allow you to automatically generate a table of contents. I have a screenshot on this slide of a syllabus set up in a Word document. This document is using proper headings and I went in and added to the heading level just to make it easy to see what text is using what heading level. The document is titled, "Provincial Biology Course Syllabus," and that is a heading level 1. And then course objectives, required text readings and resources, course schedule. All of those are heading 2.

This is how you can insert headings in Microsoft Word. First, you want to select the text you want to mark as a heading. Then you will go in Microsoft Word to the home tab that's open along the top. And you're going to look for the section of the home tab labelled Styles. And this will contain all of the different heading levels. Select the correct heading level for the text you've selected. In this case, I'm selecting heading 2. If you're trying to identify if text in your Word document is set up as a heading, you can put your cursor inside the text and open up that Styles menu. If that text has been assigned a heading level, that heading level will be highlighted in the Styles menu. If you don't like the default styles in Microsoft Word or Headings, you can modify them. You can just click the heading level you want to edit in the Styles menu and select Modify. This will open up another window where you can change the font and the colour and the text size. And once you're done, all of the changes will be applied to all of the text in your document that is using that heading level.

For images, you need to make sure that all images in your document that convey information have alternative text, which is a written description of what is happening in the image for those who can't see it. To add alt text, you can right-click the image and select the view Alt Text. A box will pop up with space for you to add your alt text. In this example, I've already added some alt text. And it reads, "An aerial view of a lake surrounded by mountains. If you have an image in your document that you don't think is relevant to the content, it's just there for decorative purposes. And you want anyone who's using a screen reader to skip over the image. You can market as decorative instead. But only do this if the image really isn't important. If you're unsure how to describe images, we covered that topic in a previous Accessibility Bites session, so you can go back and explore that content for more info.

When linking in your Word document, make sure you are using descriptive link text. This means that the text of the link should describe the destination of the link. On the slide, I have three examples and three different ways that you might set up links. What I'm going to ask you here is which of the three examples do you think is most accessible? You can put 1, 2, or 3 in the chat, but I'll read them through. Option 1 is "Click here for information on BCcampus." Here is the link text. Option 2 is "You can find more information about BCcampus at http://bccampus.ca/ where that URL I just read out is the link text. Then the third option is "Information about BCcampus is available online." with the word BCcampus being the link text. If you'd like to make a guess about which of the three options is the most accessible, feel free to put it in the chat. I've seen a lot of threes, a few twos. Got a bit of a split group. Okay, in this

case, the most accessible option is number three. And that's because it's using the title of the website as the link text. And the reason for this is that someone using a screen reader is able to have their screen reader read out all of the links on the page. When the screen reader does that, it's only going to read out the link text. It will not include the surrounding sentence. If a screen reader were to read out the links on the slide, it would say "here link https, colon slash slash BCcampus.ca slash link BCcampus link." Only one of those options makes it really clear where clicking that link will take us. We could figure it out with the URL. The URL is a bit better than here, but not all URLs are so short. And it can be very annoying to have an entire URL read out for you.

When using lists, make sure they are structured as a proper list. This means you should use the numbered or bulleted list option available in the Microsoft editor. This is usually pretty easy as Microsoft Word can generally identify when you're writing a list and it will set it up as a list. But using those built-in list options in Microsoft Word will ensure that the lists will be recognized and navigated by someone using a screen reader.

When you are creating tables in Microsoft Word, keep them simple. Don't use merged or split cells. That can make them very difficult for someone who's using a screen reader to interpret. In addition, you should indicate which cells are headers of your table by using the check boxes under Table Design in Microsoft Word. Those check boxes can allow you to indicate if there's a header row or a header column.

You also need to pay attention to how you use colour in your document. This is important for people who have low- or poor-contrast vision, people who are colour blind, or for those who use a device with a monochrome display, or who may be printing in black and white. In general, information should never be conveyed by colour alone. For example, here are two versions of the same bar graph, charting student device preferences. The first graph uses the colours red, blue, and green to differentiate between students who prefer desktops, smartphones, or laptops. When we view the same graph in grayscale, it becomes really difficult to tell which bar corresponds to which category. The red and the green look almost identical. And this could be a serious barrier for someone who has a hard time differentiating between those colours. This problem can be solved by using colours with a higher contrast ratio and by labelling each bar as shown in the second example. Adding those labels to the bar ensures that the meaning of the graph isn't relying on colour.

Let's look at colour contrast for text content. On the screen, I have a document that is using this darkish blue colour for headings on a white background. We want to test if that colour combination is accessible. When testing colour contrast, you need to use the colour hex codes. Hex codes allow you to communicate the exact shade of a colour. To find the hex code in the text of your Microsoft Word document, you can select the text and then go to the font colour dropdown, and go to More Colours. And then there's a custom tab where there will be a hex text box with the colours hex code. Hex codes generally have six characters and are a combination of numbers and letters. For this example, the hex code is 365F91 and the hex code

4

of the white background is ffffff, so six f's. And then I would open up a colour contrast checker. And my colleague just put a link to that in the chat so you can open it up on your own screen if you like. There's lots of different colour contrast checkers online, but this is the one I used here. In this contrast checker, I put that colour for that blue, the hex code, in as the value for the foreground and I changed the background to white. And then the tool will tell me if the colour combination passes accessibility requirements for normal size text, which would be the main text of the document, as well as for large texts like headings. In this case, this colour combo does pass the WCAG AA guidelines for normal text and large text. It's a good one to use for the document.

The final step before sharing your document is to run an accessibility check. Microsoft Word's accessibility checker doesn't check for everything, but it can be helpful for flagging text that should be a heading or images that don't have alt texts or things like that. You can find the accessibility checker under the Review tab in Microsoft Word.

Let's go through a recap of the things I've covered. We talked about using headings to convey topic hierarchy. We talked about describing images that are conveying information. We talked about using descriptive link text for all links. We talked about using properly structured lists and tables to make sure they can be navigated by screen readers. We talked about not using colour alone to convey information, and then also ensuring there is adequate contrast between foreground and background colours. And then finally, if available, using an accessibility checker to catch any things that might have been missed.

Okay, now let us move into some questions and then I have an activity that we can work on. I see a question already in the chat. Anyone else who has questions, feel free to put them in the chat or you can raise your hand as well if you'd rather just speak your question. The question is, "Can you recommend a free online tool that can be used to check how a screen reader will read a draft document? Not just text-to-voice, but real screen reader capacity." The best way to check how a screen reader will handle a specific document or web page is to try out the screen reader. That can be challenging. If you haven't used a screen reader before, it might be better to find someone else who has that knowledge, who can test it for you. But there are a number of screen readers available. There are browser-based screen readers. If you use a Mac computer, you can use voiceover. If you use a PC, you can download an open source screen reader called NVDA. Those are all tools that you can use. Another option that I use for web content is called WAVE, WAVE accessibility checker. It doesn't, it won't tell you how a screen reader will handle the content, but it will show you which things are marked up as headings, where images have alt text. It'll flag issues that you might have to go back and fix. So it's a really good checker. So I'm just going to find the WAVE tool and I'll put that link into the chat. Thank you, Sue. Already in the chat. Okay. Other questions? The maps tools called VoiceOver.

PARTICIPANT:
Hi Josie, I have a question. Well, thank you for the presentation. It was very helpful. This might not be part of the plan today, but I was wondering if you could quickly share some strategies or tips about how to make the tables more accessible in the Word document.

JOSIE:
I can definitely do that. I'll bring up a Word document that I can share on the screen and I'll just give a demo. Okay, I don't think I have an existing table. But I can create one really quickly. Okay, I have this template document that I'm going to share in the chat for people to experiment with. But just to show right now creating a table in Microsoft Word, I'm going to insert a table as you normally would. I'll just keep it really simple. For now. My table would have various header content. I'm just going to use placeholder text right now to keep this quick. Then it would have data that might be numbers, might be text. Okay. You have the content of your table set up. One of the things I talked about was not using merged for columns or cells that go across multiple rows or columns. Because that can complicate the structure of the table and make it really difficult for someone using a screen reader to navigate. Always keep your table simple. If you need to have more... Strategies to handle more complex tables, or to break it out into multiple tables is usually the way to do it. Just try to keep them as simple as possible. Then what we have to do here is indicate where our header cells are. Under the Table Design tab, you'll see these number of check boxes. Right now, the default is that there is a header row and the first column in the table is also a header row, Sorry, row headers and column headers. That's the terms. For this table. I only have the first row as my column headers. So I'm going to keep this header row checked and I'm going to uncheck the first column because these aren't headers here. Technically now it will be accessible in that way to a screen reader. In Microsoft Word then you can go through the Styles menu and select a style that's going to actually visually show you where the headers are. That's down there. Then the thing here that we talked about with colour is making sure you're using colour that is high contrast. A lot of these default colours are not. So this white on orange is likely not going to pass the colour contrast check test. But that shows a very quick example. Any follow up questions there?

PARTICIPANT:
No, that was very helpful. Thank you.

JOSIE:
Someone has put a map VoiceOver user guide in the chat. That's great. Thank you for sharing. Other questions? "Is there any benefit to listing URLs at the end of the document in addition to the hyperlinks or the hyperlinks alone sufficient?" That's a great question. I would say if you're sharing the document digitally and you only expect the document to be accessed digitally, just using the hyperlinks is fine and great. If you are thinking the document might be printed, then sharing those URLs in another place is really good practice. Anyone who's using that document in a printed format could still find those websites, whether that's in a list at the end of the document, maybe in footnotes. Depending on the platform. You might approach it in different ways. But if you think it might be printed, making those URLs available somewhere else is good

practice as well. We've also been sharing that you should include alt description of your tables and enable the option to repeat as header row at the top of the page. Sue, do you want to speak more to that? That would be great if you would.

SUE:
Yeah, I get this feedback when I test. I think a lot of screen readers will hit on a table almost as if it's a bit of an image. It's nice to give a little summary, an advance similar to what you would do for an image. The purpose of the table, and if your table is going to go over one page, it's really nice to see the header row at the top of the next page for context, enabling that in the row properties. Not the breaking across, so I always deselect the top one and use the repeat as header.

JOSIE:
Perfect, thanks. Sue. Do you know if in Word there's a place to add alt text for tables?

SUE: Yeah, also in the Properties.

JOSIE:
In the Properties. Perfect. Thank you for sharing that. Alt text there it is. Great. Thank you. Okay, I've not seen more questions coming in, but feel free to put them in the chat or unmute if you, if you do have questions.

I do have... Paula shared in the chat a sample document that is not accessible in any way. As an example that people can try out and experiment with. You're also welcome if you have your own Word documents that you want to see how you do compared to what we covered today. Feel free to work on those as well. But we do have about 5 minutes. If you'd like to download the document we put in the chat or look at some of your own Word documents and just go through some of the things we talked about and either just identifying the problems or trying to fix them as well. Question about best practices in saving a Word document in PDF format and creating an accessible file name. If you're working in Word and you want to share your document as a PDF, I'm just going to pull back up my Word document. All of the accessibility work that you do in Word will be transferred to PDF. Making sure you have your headings and your alt text, all of that. Doing that first in Word will make your PDF document a lot more accessible. When you want to save your document as a PDF, you can go to File, Save As. I believe, it's been a while since I've done this, might be wrong. Save As Adobe PDF, then that'll save it properly. Sometimes there will be an option to save it as an image PDF, which would take out all of the structure and just treat it like a picture of the page. Make sure you're not doing it that way. I think that should be able to get to the results you want. You mentioned creating an accessible file name. I'm not sure I understand the question there. Feel free to clarify or expand on that one. Tagged PDFs. I don't. The response is, remember checking an option for a tagged PDF. A tagged PDF is definitely what you're looking for to ensure your document, your PDF document is accessible. But I personally don't remember having to check an option for a tagged PDF when I exported to PDF before. I'm not sure about that. Another

question, "Is there a way to make PDFs accessible without having access to the Microsoft Word document it may be based on? Definitely if you have the Pro version of Adobe Acrobat, you can go in. There's built-in accessibility checker, you can go through and apply heading levels, adult text. It can definitely be done from the PDF side. It's a lot harder though. If you do have access to the source document, it's generally always easier to work with the source document than trying to make those changes after in the PDF. It is possible, it's just a lot harder. Hand up, go ahead.

PARTICIPANT:
I asked about the tagged PDF. I recently switched from PC to Mac, and then I remembered that when I was using PC, there is an advanced option where I need to click on and there's an option for tagged PDF. So I'm wondering whether Mac also requires the same procedure.

JOSIE:
Yeah, it's possible that the behaviour is different on a Mac compared to a PC. I think if you are seeing the option to export as tagged PDF, that's the option you should go with. I just haven't seen, I haven't seen a Microsoft Word for myself having to select that, but if you are seeing that as one of the options, that's the option to go with.

PARTICIPANT:
Okay. Thank you. About the file name. We say like, the best practice of the file name is not to use a space and then provide descriptive text for the file name. I think the same applies for the accessibility. Another question is like in the Word setting, I remember that there's a setting that we can put the title for the document in window. I'm wondering whether Mac also has the same setting.

JOSIE:
Yeah, I'm not sure. I think there is a way with Microsoft Word to add a title in the document's metadata. I was reading about that in the last few days. I haven't done that before, so I don't know exactly where it is. If anyone else knows more about that, feel free to jump in. I think there is a place in Microsoft Word to add a document title in the metadata. Thank you, Sue, for sharing that information. Document title is set under File and then Info for the PC Office, so there is a place to do that. In terms of accessibility for file names, I don't know any specific guidelines around that. Again, if other people have more information about accessibility and file names, feel free to please share that. Because it's not something I know about specifically. But a great question. Thank you.

I've seen some people are trickling out. I think we are over time. Thank you so much everyone for attending today. I really appreciate your time and your engagement. If you're looking for recordings from the past sessions of the Accessibility Bites series, you can access them at media.bccampus.ca. You'll just have to search for Accessibility Bites. And again, you can download all of the slides from all of the Accessibility Bites sessions from bit.ly/accessbites. Thank you so much everyone. I really appreciate it. I hope you have a good rest of your day.