



Color and Contrast Guidelines for Word

Appropriate colors and contrast are necessary for people to see words. This is particularly true for people who are colorblind or have other visual disabilities. Contrast is the difference in luminosity between the text and the background. Good contrast allows more people to read what we write. We can use different colors to draw attention to different parts of our document. But we all perceive colors differently from one another and some of us do not see color differences at all.

Sufficient Contrast

When there is not enough contrast between the color of the text (also called the foreground) and the color of the background, it can be difficult to visually distinguish between the text and background.

For those who are color blind, certain colors (such as red and green) can appear indistinguishable from each other. In such cases, text without enough contrast can be unreadable.

To ensure that information is perceivable, [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\) 2.0 Level AA](#) requires that the contrast ratio (the degree of difference between a foreground color and background color) is:

- At least 4.5:1 for “regular” sized text which is 14 points, not bolded, and smaller.
- 3:1 for large text:
 - ▶ Bold text if it is 14 points or larger.
 - ▶ If it is 18 points or larger.

Note: On mobile devices, large bold text can still appear very small. The best practice is to make sure that all text has a contrast ratio above 4.5:1.

Some examples on a white background are:

- Pure red, RGB (255, 0, 0), has a ratio of 4:1. **I am red text.**
- Pure green, RGB (0, 255, 0), has a very low ratio of 1.4:1. **I am green text.**
- Pure blue, RGB (0, 0, 255), has a contrast ratio of 8.6:1. **I am blue text.**

Color Contrast in Images

Images that you create or customize must meet a contrast ratio of at least 3:1. This is particularly important if the image is of low quality or when the image is enlarged. Examples of these images are:

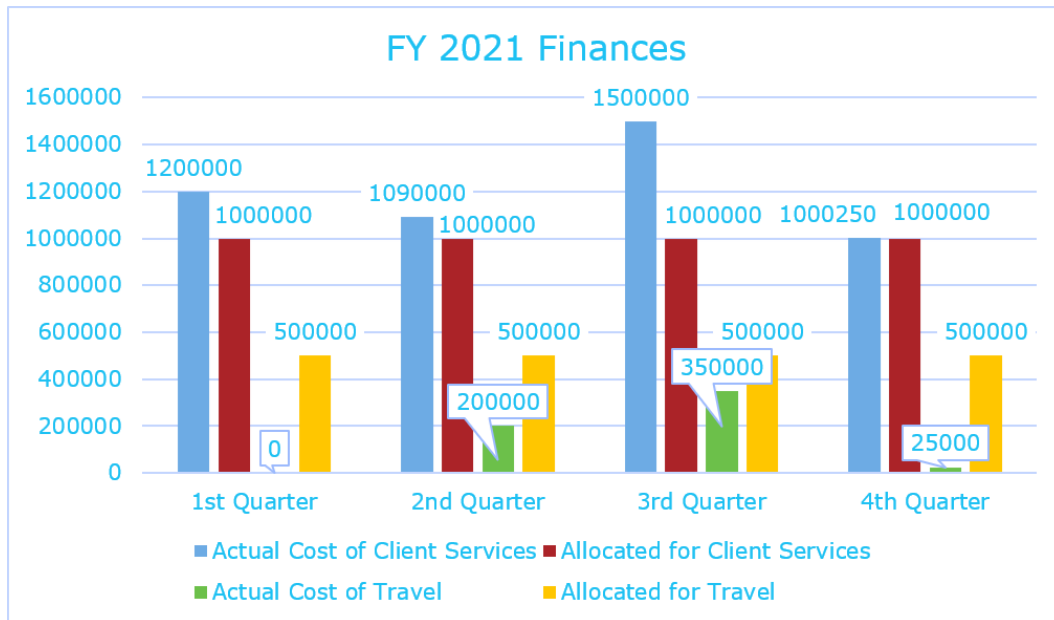
- Graphs,
- Charts,
- Icons,
- Symbols, and
- Infographics.

Many default graphs are inaccessible when first added to a document. If a table accompanied the graph, then color contrast in the graph didn't have to meet this guideline.

Tip: Add a black outline to graphs and charts. This gives people a better experience.

Note: Logos are exempt from this guideline. It is acceptable if text in a logo fails color contrast.

Example: The blue text in the image has insufficient contrast on the white background.



Accessible Red

Live Training Note: We will demonstrate this.

A shade of Red that meets color contrast requirements on a white background in Word is **Dark Red**.

1. Open the **Font Color** menu.
2. Go to the **Standard Colors** section and click on the first option, **Dark Red**.

Color Contrast Tools

Color contrast tools tell you if the combination of colors used are accessible. Do not worry about remembering the ratios in the section above.

Across HHS there are different versions of MS Word. Newer versions do check color contrast in the Accessibility Checker tool. This tool does not have the ability to check color contrast in an image.

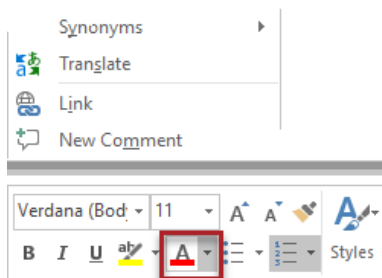
The [Colour Contrast Analyser](#) is a free download. Enter a ticket with the Help Desk to get it downloaded.

WebAIM has an informative article on, [Contrast and Color Accessibility](#).

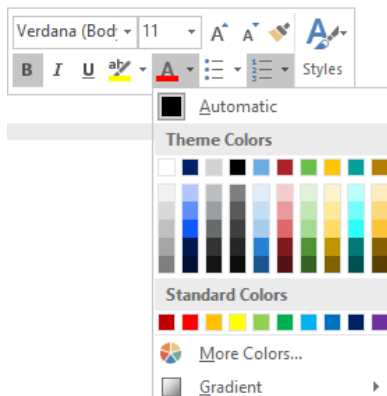
How to Find RGB/HEX Values

Color contrast tools offer the option of using an eyedropper to identify a color. Different monitors can portray the same color differently. Because of that, an eyedropper may not correctly identify the color in the document. For consistent results, identify the color using **R**ed, **G**reen, and **B**lue or HEX values. The steps listed are an example to find the color of the text:

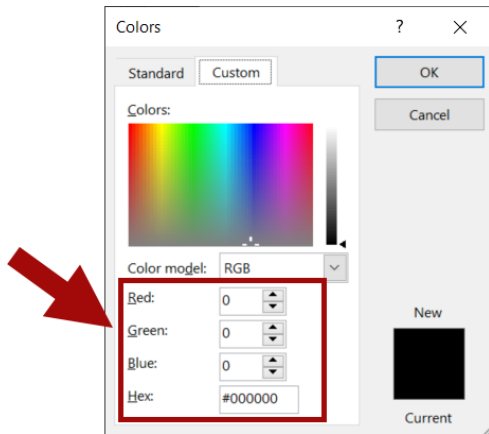
1. Highlight the text you need to check.
2. Right-click on the highlighted text. Two menu pops up. Click on the **Font Color** command that is in one of the menus.



3. The Color Palette menu pops up. Click **More Colors**.



4. A Colors window pops up. Go to the Custom tab.



5. Copy the **Red**, **Green**, and **Blue** or **HEX** values.
6. Open a color contrast tool and insert the value.

Color Reliance

Color must not be the only way to present meaningful content or instructions. Using color alone to provide meaning creates difficulty for everyone.

Example 1:

Bad Example: All tasks in red text must be completed by close of business day (COB). People will not have a clear understanding what needs to be completed by COB.

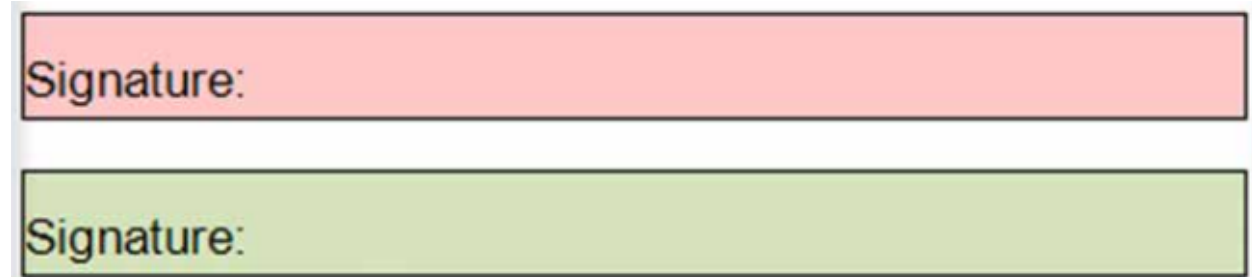
- Test PDF with screen reader.
- **Make memo document accessible.**
- **Complete required training.**
- Delete out-of-date templates.

Good Example: One way to continue to use color is to add text such as, (Complete by COB)

- Test PDF with screen reader.
- **Make memo document accessible. (Complete by COB)**
- **Complete required training. (Complete by COB)**
- Delete out-of-date templates.

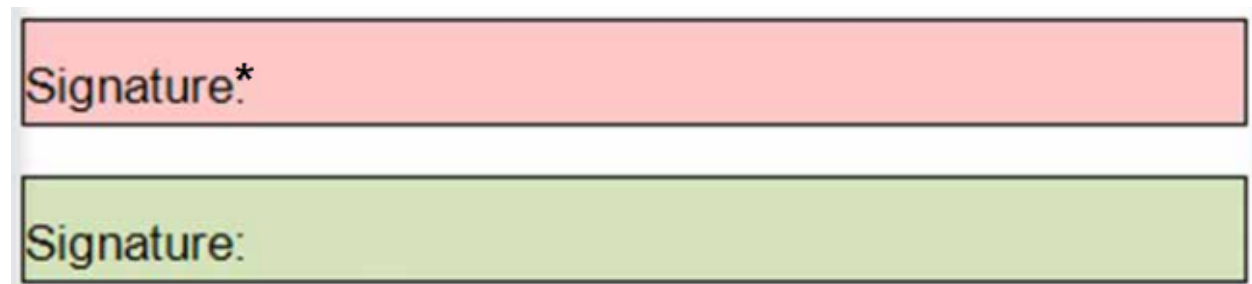
Example 2:

Bad Example: Sign the green box to donate your paycheck. Sign the red box to keep your money.



The image shows two horizontal rectangular boxes. The top box is light red and contains the text "Signature:". The bottom box is light green and also contains the text "Signature:". The boxes are separated by a thin white gap.

Minimally Acceptable Example: Use color in combination with a symbol. Sign the green box to donate your paycheck. Sign the red box with an asterisk to keep your money.



The image shows two horizontal rectangular boxes. The top box is light red and contains the text "Signature*". The bottom box is light green and contains the text "Signature:". The boxes are separated by a thin white gap.

Good Example: Use color in combination with clear and meaningful text in the form field.



The image shows two horizontal rectangular boxes. The top box is light red and contains the text "Keep Money Signature:". The bottom box is light green and contains the text "Donation Signature:". The boxes are separated by a thin white gap.

Example 3:

Bad example: New information is in red. Information that will be removed has a strike through the text.

A Word template lets you reuse the same styles and structure in many documents. HHS Word templates, created by the Communications Department and the Accessibility Team, include approved [branding](#) (styles and structure) and [accessibility](#) guidelines. Use these templates to produce documents that meet HHS requirements.

Good example: You can add text to clarify the meaning. You can easily find the changes to the content.

[New] A Word template lets you reuse the same styles and structure in many documents.[End New] HHS Word templates, created by the Communications Department and the Accessibility Team [Delete], include approved [branding](#) (styles and structure) and [accessibility](#) guidelines [End Delete]. Use these templates to produce documents that meet HHS requirements.

Note: Track changes in Word are accessible *if* you leave the file format in Word. This means the file is not converted to PDF.

Make sure the color of your track changes meets color contrast requirements.