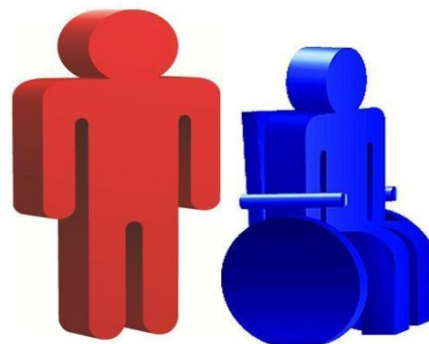




# Dialogue



*The newsletter of the Human Resources Division, Spring 2013.*

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## Design your documents with ACCESSIBILITY in Mind.

By: Maria D. Gonzalez, Office of Access & Opportunity

Our ability to access and process electronic information has become a very important factor in leading a productive life in today's society. While this contributes to the ease at which information can be shared, it also increases the chance that clients, customers or colleagues will be "left out" if the document does not adhere to some basic accessibility "guidelines."

Accessibility "guidelines" are group of rules and standards designed to ensure that persons using various assistive technology devices can access the content. For most word processed documents, the accessibility guidelines are rather simple and easy to accomplish.

There are four principal areas of concern: styles and headings, general presentational issues, images, and tabled information<sup>1</sup>. In this edition, I will address (1) style and headings and (2) common issues with accessibility issues with documents. General presentation, adding alternate text to graphics, and creating tables will be cover in our next edition of Dialogue.

**Please know that the text that will be (can be) read by a Screen Reader is best represented by the Draft view on your ribbon bar.<sup>2</sup>**



**The Commonwealth: Working to be a Model Employer**

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Footnote<sup>1</sup>: [Maine Cite Program](#)

Footnote<sup>2</sup>: SSA Guide: Producing Accessible Word & PDF Documents

### Common Accessibility Issues with Microsoft Word:

People who are familiar with website accessibility will note that several of these issues are parallel to website accessibility guidelines:<sup>3</sup>

- **Graphics do not have text equivalents.** *Screen reader* technology cannot interpret information about graphics, and may either read nothing or read the name of the embedded file, which is very seldom useful. Text equivalents provide a meaningful description of the graphic that can be read by screen readers.
- **Headings are not used properly.** Many blind people depend on headings arranged in a hierarchical (outline-style) order to provide information about the organization of the document. Skipped heading levels (e.g., providing a Header 2 and Header 4 but no Header 3s) or heading markup used for text formatting rather than indicating document structure can prove confusing.
- **Column headers for tables are not indicated.** Tables in Word documents require column headers so that screen reader users can get a context for the cell they are currently reviewing. Unfortunately, unlike with websites, there is no way to provide row headers in Word.
- **URLs are long and confusing.** For users with and without disabilities, it's preferable to use link text that explains the link's purpose (e.g., "Center for Accessible Technology home page") than to use the URL as the link text.
- **Reading level is not optimized.** Many documents use more complex language than is necessary to present information. This is likely to be problematic for people with cognitive disabilities, as well as beginning readers, ESL students, and potentially any document readers.
- **Form fields don't make sense.** Like fields within web pages, in Word form fields need to be associated with labels that describe their purpose.



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Footnote<sup>3</sup>: article taken from [Accessible Technology Coalition](#)

### Styles and Headings

Styles and Headings are one of the most overlooked tools found in the modern word processor. All word processor applications contain this tool but few people get into the habit of using them.

Using styles and headings can make your documents easier to navigate by persons using a screen reader. Users can hear an outline of the page's main ideas, then backtrack to read the parts they are most interested in. The drawback to this is too many documents lack headings. Without headings skimming through content is useless. **Headings should represent an accurate outline of the content.**<sup>4</sup>

A style is a set of formatting characteristics applied to paragraphs, tables, characters, or lists. In a document, styles are used to quickly and consistently change the appearance of the content. Styles can also impose a relational structure (hierarchy) on a document by assigning outline levels to headings.

- Always use styles to format paragraphs, headings, table text, and lists (bullets and numbered lists).
  - Where necessary, use styles to format characters (e.g., words that always appear in bold or italic).
1. Start in the Styles Group (Ribbon... Home Tab... Styles Group):
    - To modify any previewed style, right click it.
    - Open the Styles Pane for managing and controlling all available styles. To open the Styles Pane, select the icon in the bottom right corner of the styles group

### Visual versus programmatic formatting

To a sighted reader of a document, a 'heading' looks like a heading when it is visually formatted differently to other text. Things like centering, bold, underlining and capitalization can all be used to differentiate a chunk of text to look like a 'heading'. Formatting of this kind (bold, underline, etc.) can also be used within paragraphs, to emphasize certain words.

The problem for Screen Reader software is that because this type of formatting can be applied in *either* a heading or a paragraph of text, there is no way for the software to detect which one it is—leaving the user wondering whether *is it a heading or a regular paragraph?*

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Footnote<sup>4</sup>: [Web Accessibility in Mind](#)

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### Text / Fonts

Use simple fonts without excessive special formatting<sup>5</sup>.

#### Make sure that:

- Font selection is simple. Do not use compressed (**Print Example**), condensed (**Print Example**), complicated (*Print Example*), decorative (*Print Example*), or cursive (*Print Example*) fonts.
- Font size is no smaller than 12 point. When possible use 14 point font. Large print Materials use between 16 and 18 point. See font size examples: 12 point, 14 point, 16 point, 18 point
- Formatting codes such as italics, bold, and oblique, are used sparingly. Avoid writing in this format for entire sections and documents.
- **Underlining does not connect with the letters being underscored.** In other words you will have to add alternate text to the underline.
- Text is not written completely in all upper case lettering
- Non-standard system fonts can include non-standard characters. For example, the 'symbol' and 'Windings' font sets contain iconographic characters that are not going to be read by Screen Reader software. If non-standard characters are used, an alternative description of the meaning of those characters is required for Screen Reader Users. Standard/Systems fonts recommended:
  - Arial
  - Courier
  - Times New Roman and
  - Verdana



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**Footnote<sup>5</sup>:** portion of this article taken from MA. Dept. of Public Health Accessible Print Materials

## Removing *B*arriers to *E*mployment:

Persons with Disabilities have long faced barriers to employment. The Commonwealth is always seeking opportunities for greater inclusion in our workforce and the Reasonable Accommodation Capital Reserve Account (RACRA) is just one vehicle to assist agencies in our quest to remove employment barriers.

As a reminder The Office of Access and Opportunity and the Massachusetts Office on Disability administer the RACRA funds and there are still funds available if you need to access them in order to provide a reasonable accommodation for a member of your staff. RACRA funding is designed to assist executive branch agencies in their efforts to reasonably accommodate employees with disabilities when agency funding is an issue. Awards from RACRA do not supplant existing agency responsibilities to respond to reasonable accommodations, but are intended to be a back stop when and where an agency finds that it cannot meet the marginal cost(s) of providing such reasonable accommodations. But time is quickly running out as we approach the end of our fiscal year.

But time is quickly running out as we approach the end of our fiscal year. ADA Coordinators, if you have reasonable accommodations that fit the RACRA criteria, please submit them to: Myra Berloff, Director of the Massachusetts Office on Disability, One Ashburton Place, 13 Floor Boston, MA 02108.

You can access the RACA application by clicking on the link below:

[MOD RACRA Application](#)

The chart below represents self-reporting by Executive Branch Agencies on the number and cost of making accommodations to date in FY2013:

Reasonable Accommodations Quarter	Total Accommodations Made	Total Cost
Q1 - FY2013	22	1,132.34
Q2 - FY2013	65	12,399.24
Q3 - FY2013	17	1,972.13



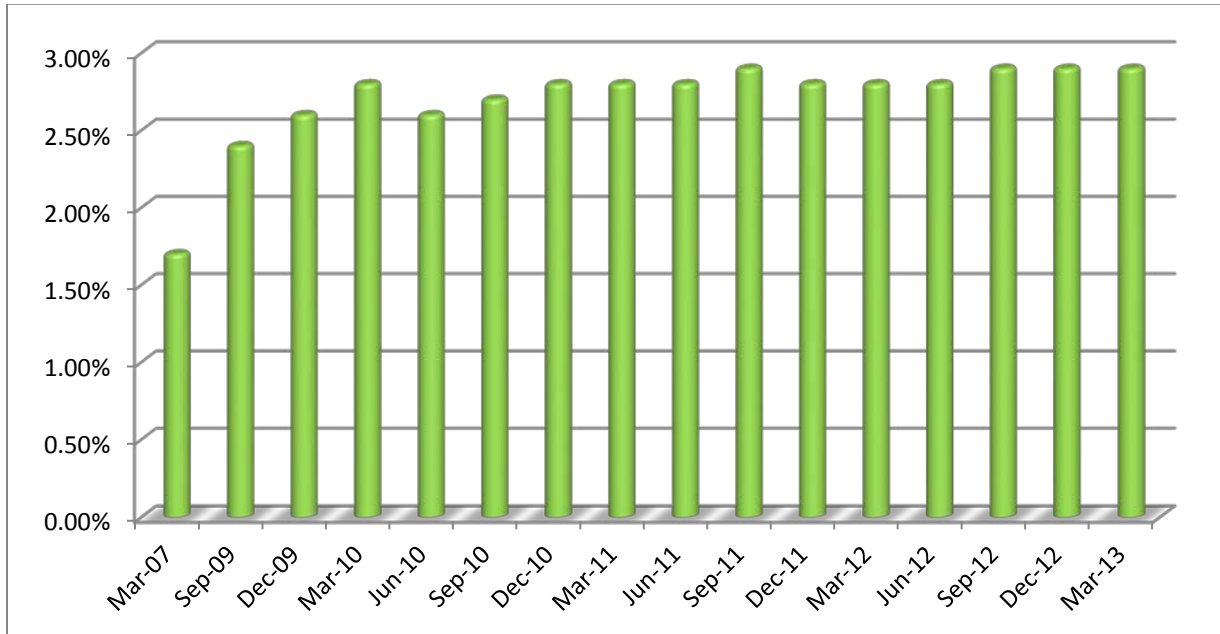
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Another vehicle that aides in removing employment barriers are creating greater awareness through education and training; to that end, we are happy to report the following progress towards our goal of 100% compliance on ***Diversity Part II- Disability Awareness*** Training: ***21,438 or (48%) of the Executive Branch*** employees have completed the eLearning and ***2,385 or (63%) of the Executive Branch*** managers have completed the half day classroom training.

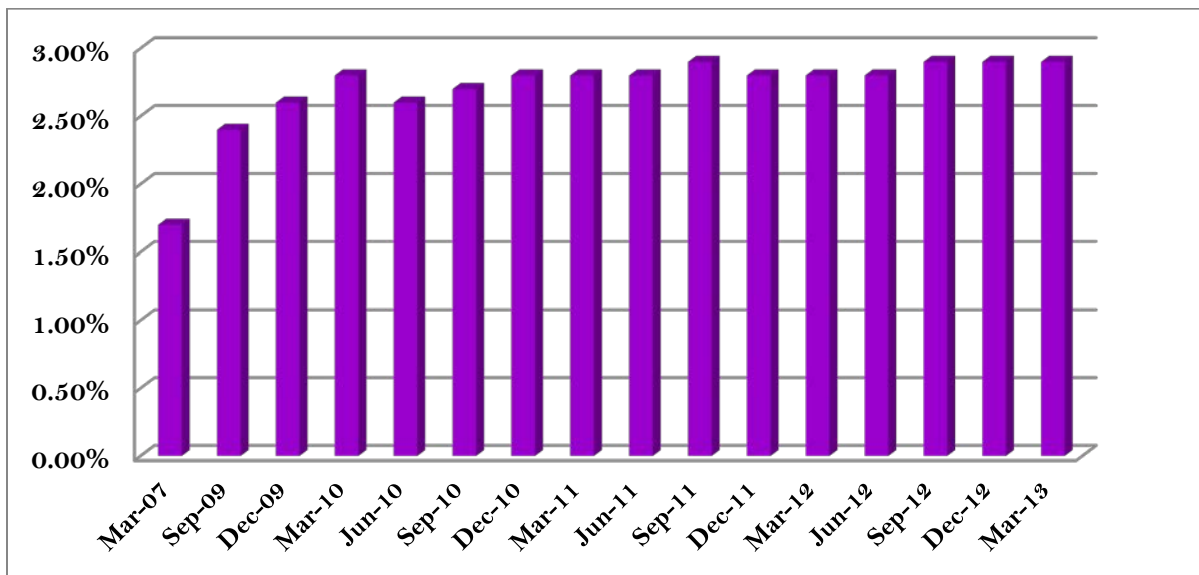


## Are We Making Progress?

**Figure 1:** The Percentage of Self-Identified Executive Branch Employees from March 2007 to March 2013.

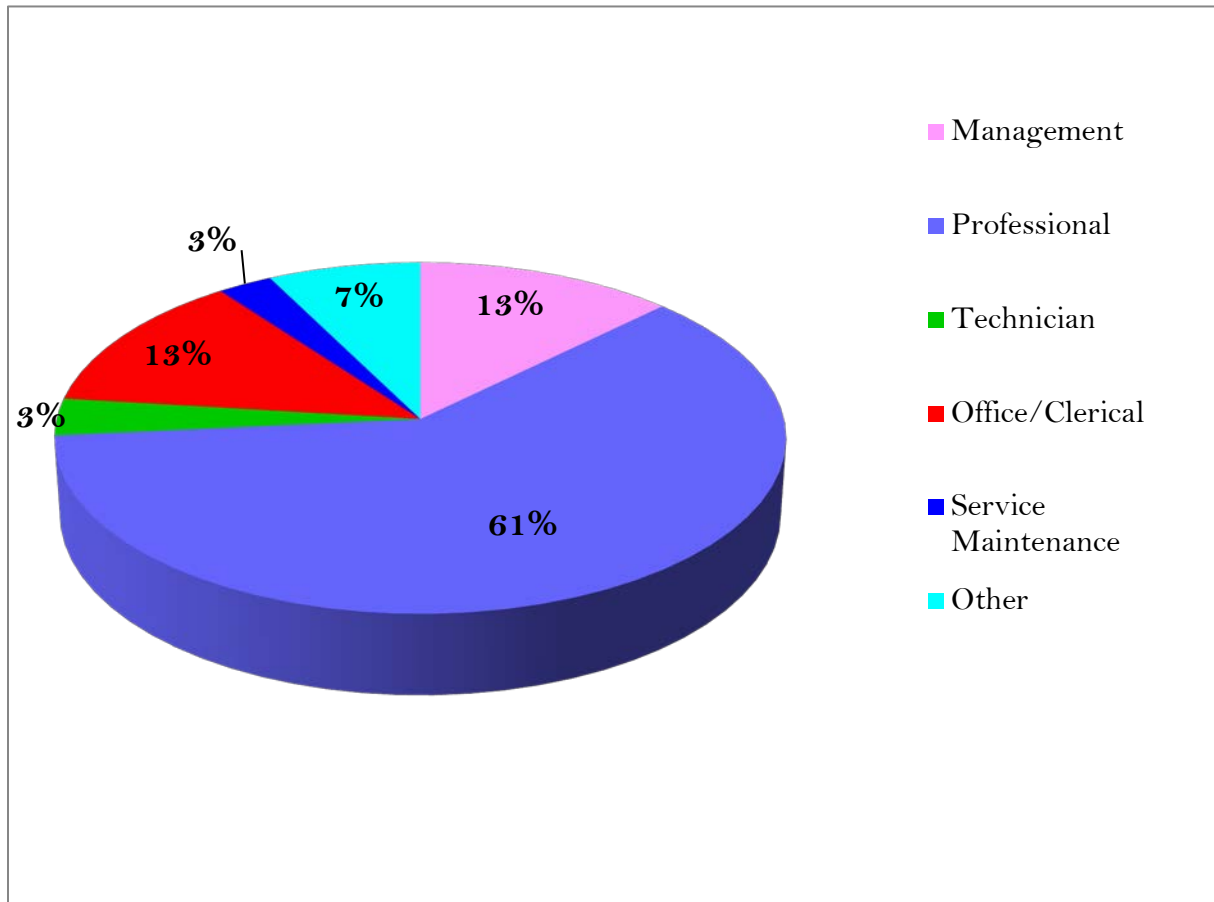


**Figure 2:** The Percentage of Self-Identified Executive Branch Management Employees from March 2007 to March 2013.



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**Figure 3:** The Percentage of Self-identified Executive Branch Managers and Employees by EEO-4 Job Category as of close of Quarter 3, FY13.



**“Commitment is an act, not a word.” ~ Jean-Paul Sartre**