

Email Accessibility in Outlook

Descriptive Link Text

Links must be **descriptive out of context**. In other words, imagine the link text divorced from any surrounding text: would the user be able to know what this link does or where it goes?

Descriptive Link Text:

- [October 31 Askwith Forum Registration](#).
- [All-Staff Meeting Feedback Form](#).
- Learn more in our [guide to sustainable practices in the workplace](#).
- Read our [latest blog post on improving email accessibility](#).

Undescriptive Link text:

- [Register](#) for the October 31 Askwith Forum.
- Please provide us with feedback on the all-staff meeting through this [Qualtrics link](#).
- [Learn more](#) about sustainable practices in the workplace.
- Read our latest blog post on improving email accessibility [here](#).
- <https://bit.ly/sfha435>

Font Size and Type

Use **at least 11pt size for body text** and use a **sans-serif font**. The Outlook defaults are sufficient.

Color

Use colors sparingly: consider using italics or **bold** for emphasis rather than color. If you use colors, use the inbuilt accessibility checker in Outlook to **ensure contrast is sufficient**. Consider using the color palette approved by HGSE's communications team: [Visual Identity and Logo | GSE Communications](#)

Tables

Avoid using tables in emails to arrange content. If a table must be used for a significant amount of tabular data, ensure that it is arranged so that the top row of the table acts as a header row (this is the default). Do not merge or split cells.

Images

If images are used, ensure they have **descriptive alt-text**. After inserting an image into the body of the email, right-click on the image and select "View Alt Text". Provide a description of the image that relates to its meaning and purpose within the email.

Attachments

Any attachments to the email must also meet accessibility requirements.

Headings

If the email is long enough to contain (sub)headings, then they **must be reflected in the HTML markup and tiered appropriately**. The email should begin with a “Heading 1” that matches the subject line of the email. Subsequent headings should be marked as “Heading 2” and subheadings of those headings, “Heading 3” and so on. Here is an example structure:

H1: Subject Line of Email

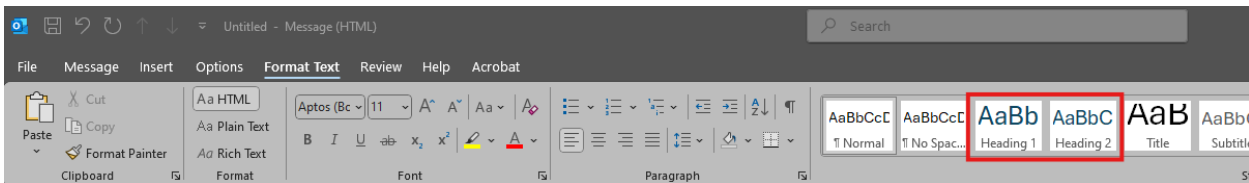
H2: Upcoming Events

H3: Event 1

H3: Event 2

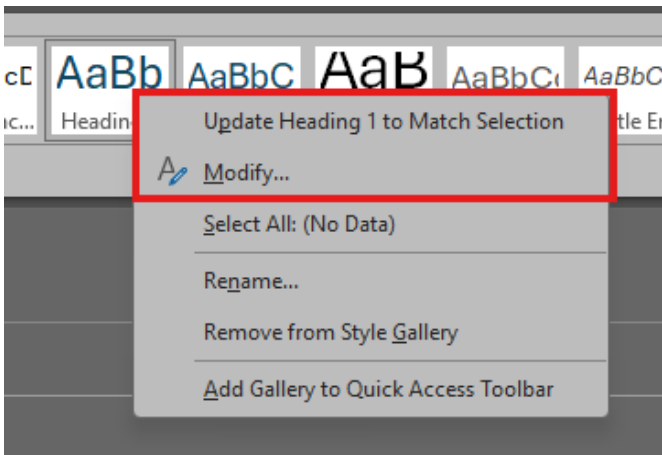
H2: Further Resources

To affect this in Outlook, select the text that is a heading and use the “Format Text” tab and the “Styles” toolbar to ensure heading text is marked up appropriately:



You can amend the style of the headings in two ways:

1. Modify the style for a heading directly by right-clicking the style on the toolbar and clicking “Modify”.
2. Making changes to the style of the text in the email itself, then selecting “Update Heading # to Match Selection” after right-clicking the style on the toolbar.



Checking Accessibility

Before sending, go to the “Review” tab and select “Check Accessibility” to review any alerts.

Feel free to contact canvas@gse.harvard.edu for advice or a review!