

Accessible Emails: Best Practices

Basic accessibility requirements for your email communications

Email design and content play a major role in making communication accessible to everyone. Once you have opened your Hostos Office of Communications-designed email template in Outlook (for which this information sheet was prepared), in the body copy area between header and footer, enter your content according to the following best practices. This is not an exhaustive document, there are too many unique circumstances to account for everything, but following these parameters will go a long way toward reaching the widest audience.

Maintain a Logical Reading Order

Establish a logical order and maintain a hierarchy in your email content. This will help people with cognitive disabilities and individuals using screen readers. Header elements ensure hierarchy to individuals using screen readers. In addition to style statements like bold text and colors, use heading sizes that will identify and differentiate the important sections of your content. Keep alignments consistent. Flush left is especially readable if there's a lot of copy.

Suggested header sizes can range from 18 to 24 points, subheaders can range from 14 to 16 points.

Use Large and Readable Fonts

Keep visually challenged viewers in mind while setting the font style and size of your email. Font readability varies from desktop to laptop to phone screens. For that reason it's best to use no less than 12 point type for body copy. Keep the text evenly spaced so that it is easily readable. Minimize the use of multiple font styles, and avoid condensed-style typefaces.

Avoid bullet points. Screen readers speak each instance out loud ("bullet") and too many can distract from the content's message. Semi-colons may be sufficient to separate items in a list.

Accessible font examples:

- Arial;
- Calibri;
- Century;
- Gothic;
- Helvetica;
- Tahoma;
- Verdana;
- Times New Roman;
- Georgia

Keep the Content Simple

Avoid flashy content and keep it as simple and short as possible. Get straight to the point and avoid using complicated layout and metaphors.

Use Enough White Space in your Copy

It is important to give proper spacing to the text and create enough white space around the copy to make it easy to read. Set appropriate line heights to the text and add padding to the tables and images in your content. People who read your copy must be able to scan it.

Use a Helpful Color Scheme

Complex colors can be confusing for those with color vision deficiencies and hence consider how viewers perceive different colors. Use the right colors in email, maintaining the basic color arrangement of dark text on light backgrounds and light text on dark backgrounds to ensure the content is easily distinguishable. Hostos's primary color scheme when using Outlook is a **dark blue**, a **bright orange**, and a **muted deep yellow**. If uncertain, **black** is always a good choice!

Limit the use of “Click Here” Links

Click Here links are a great way to provide shortcuts for sighted individuals, but those relying on screen reading software have greater difficulty navigating through webpages and emails with too many destination links.

Make the Clickable Links Prominent

Keep the clickable links large and visible, especially for those who have issues in controlling a mouse with precision. Keep the link differentiated from the images and make sure the link text describes what's in the link. Tell your readers what to expect from the link by writing contextual link text. For example, instead of just saying “Click Here”, make it more precise by saying “Click Here to View the Products!” and don't include the word link on the text.

Label Attachments

Individuals using screen readers greatly benefit from accurate and properly named attachment files. Organization is a key factor in evaluating accessibility. All attachments must stipulate what it is about.

Use Proper Alternative (“Alt”) Text for Images

Alt Text helps people who can't see the screen to understand what's important in images and other visuals. Images serve best as a context-giving accents, not as the primary means to convey information. Avoid using text in images as the sole method of conveying important information. If you must use an image with text in it, ideally repeat that same text in the body copy of the document. Using the Alt Text function, briefly describe the image and mention the existence of the text and its intent.

Right click (control click on a Mac) the image to select the “edit Alt Text” option, or click the image and then look for “edit Alt Text” under the Format menu.

Note: This screenshot may not match your Outlook browser, because not everyone's version is identical

In this example the Alt Text might read:

Hostos Accessibility Resource Center graphic. Together we can, juntos podemos

Type it into the Description box. A title isn't necessary.

