

Meet a Member of Our Staff

Myra Coffield began her nearly 15-year association with the VA by providing support to the agency's Webmasters as a contractor with VA Web Operations. In 2011, Myra became a member of the VHA Section 508 team. In addition to being our Webmaster, Myra shares her extensive experience in the areas of accessibility and Section 508.



Because her mother worked in the field of deafness and interpreting, Myra was introduced to sign language before she became hard of hearing during high school. When she got a job at the Model Secondary School for the Deaf (MSSD), Gallaudet University in Washington DC, which offers undergraduate and graduate degrees to deaf, hard of hearing and hearing students, she was required to take sign language courses. She is now fluent in American Sign Language (ASL). As a stage manager in the Performing Arts program at MSSD, she learned about assistive technology used by people who are deaf or hard of hearing, and found ways to incorporate that technology into the theatre program.

"For example," Myra explains, "during a show, the stage manager, who is usually in the back of the theater, needs to be able to communicate with the crew. This is usually done through headsets. At Gallaudet, assistants

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using headsets signed cues in front of video cameras. The cues were displayed on video monitors so that the students in the crew could see them backstage."

When she started working at Gallaudet, she had no experience with computers. But when she was introduced to web browsers and the Internet, there was no stopping her. She began teaching herself the essentials of web design, and launched a new career. After working for companies like Lockheed Martin, the Environmental Protection Agency and NASDAQ, she started working for VA in 2001.

Myra says she likes to be involved in "the creative side of things, supporting people and giving actual help." Along with designing the layout and graphics for our newsletter and website, and making companion videos for our "Creating Accessible Documents" tutorials, Myra recently came up with a new way to help VA staff make their documents accessible. It's called Bring Your Own Document, or BYOD. You can learn more about BYOD on page four of this newsletter.

For development teams whose projects need to comply with Section 508, Myra's advice is to "Reach out and ask. Do your homework before you start a project. Come to us with your questions while you're still in the design phase. We can help you avoid getting tripped up by accessibility barriers later on."

*When a video is captioned,
I know what the speaker said at
the same time everyone else does.*

If she could completely eliminate just one accessibility barrier, what would it be? "Lack of captions. When I watch a video I'll hear someone talking and I'll think, "What? No, that can't be what he really said!" Then I have to rewind and forward and rewind the video until I find the right spot and listen again, trying to figure out what the speaker actually said. It's frustrating, and it takes a lot of time. When a video is captioned, I know what the speaker said at the same time everyone else does."

In her spare time, Myra is an active member of the professional theatre community and a competitive ballroom dancer.

Section 508 Office Realignment

In December of 2013, the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Section 508 Office was combined with the Office of Information and Technology (OIT), Product Development (PD)



Section 508 Office, creating a single team of Professionals committed to providing Section 508 guidance and support. We're excited to be combining our expertise and

resources to help VA staff and contractors develop electronic content that meets the Section 508 requirements. We'll continue to offer our customers the excellent Section 508 guidance they've grown to expect, but this merger will give us the opportunity to take a good look at the work we're doing and make it even better. If you have any questions regarding this realignment, please contact [Frank Morello](#).

Amped Up for AMP

AMP is a web-based tool that includes a collection of Section 508 Best Practices that can help you when you are developing documents, webpages, or Applications that need to comply with Section 508. AMP includes a testing engine that allows you to perform manual and automated tests on your content. It can also generate and store reports. The reports show levels of compliance, along with links to best practices and steps to help you remediate any violations found during testing.

When you submit content for testing, the reports for specific groups of content can be organized into projects. For example, an e-learning course may have PDF, Word and HTML components. All types would

be tested against accessibility best practices for each of those file types. We refer to them as media types. Reports for each media type will be organized into a project specific to the content.

HOW CAN YOU LEARN MORE?

Getting started is easy. If you are a VA employee or contractor, simply send an email to oitsection508@va.gov with your name, email, organization and phone number and a member of the Team will get you set up. If you submit either VHA e-learning course content or a Mobile course for Section 508 testing, a "seat" within AMP will be automatically generated for you, and you'll be notified by email when the test results for your content are available for viewing.



Avoiding Section 508 Violations

In past issues, we've listed some of the most common Section 508 violations we helped remediate during the previous Quarter, along with tips and resources to help you avoid them. In this issue, we've decided to take a different approach. Instead of presenting you with a long list of violations and a small amount of information about each one, we'll focus on just one violation and give you an in-depth look at how to avoid it.

ENSURE HEADINGS ARE DENOTED THROUGH STRUCTURE AND NOT IMPLICITLY

Applicable Standard(s):

§ 508-1194.31 (a) At least one mode of operation and information retrieval that does not require user vision shall be provided, or support for assistive technology used by people who are blind or visually impaired shall be provided.

This is an accessibility issue we very often see in PDFs. Heading structure may not seem all that important, but it can make a big difference for people using assistive technology.

Suppose that you need to read a ten-page document on your computer screen. You open it up to find a title in large, bold type and text divided into sections by headings that are also displayed in bold type. You can very quickly understand how the document is laid out, and you can read only the sections you want, skipping the text below headings that don't seem important to you.

But what if you open the document to find only page after page of text, with no way to tell where one section ends and another begins, and no way to jump to the sections you want. That's what happens to people using assistive technology (AT) when there are no structured headings in a document.

Headings are often created by applying larger fonts, bold text, underline, italic, color or other eye-catching features to distinguish them from other content. Unfortunately, these methods do not provide a structure that can be identified by AT.

So how can you avoid this issue?

If you are creating a document in Microsoft Word, it is possible to structure headings that are accessible to AT users by applying Word styles. The default heading styles can be found on the "Home" tab and in the "Styles" pane.

When you convert your Word document to PDF, you'll need to take some additional steps to preserve the heading structure. You can find out about those steps here:

[Learn the steps to preserve the heading structure](#)

If you're using Adobe Acrobat Professional, you can apply heading structure using the TouchUp Properties Type combo box. Access the TouchUp Properties through the Context menu of any tag and select Properties.

You can learn more about using headings in Acrobat Professional in our PDF tutorials:

[Using Headings to Provide Structure](#)

If you have a seat in AMP (see page 2 for more information on AMP) you can learn the Best Practices for ensuring headings are denoted through structure.

[Review the Best Practices in AMP](#)

Bring Your Own Document, BYOD

Until recently, whenever we discovered an inaccessible document in an email message or on the web, we would contact the author and provide an explanation of Section 508. We'd let them know that because their document was inaccessible, it wasn't reaching its entire audience, and we'd provide information about our training materials. But when we realized that some of the people we contacted were continuing to post inaccessible documents, we came up with a different approach.

Instead of just notifying a document author that their content wasn't accessible, one of our team members picked up the phone and called with an offer of help. It was immediately clear that document authors really do want to create documents that are accessible and in compliance with Section 508, they just didn't know how.

People were having trouble, in particular, with PDF documents. So, instead of just telling document authors how to make their PDFs accessible, we started showing them. The combination of teaching by showing and using the author's own documents as examples gave birth to the "Bring Your Own Document," BYOD program.

We started with a few "proof of concept" Lync sessions where we invited people we knew were both responsible for creating PDF documents and also committed to accessibility. We wanted to make sure that this new approach was going to meet the needs of our customers.

We're well into our BYOD program now and the response has been overwhelmingly positive. We've worked on PDF documents in Adobe Acrobat Professional. We've worked on preparing MS Word 2010 documents to be published to PDF and touched up in Acrobat. We've worked with InDesign projects that were then turned into PDFs. We've taken scanned images of print, which are some of the most inaccessible PDFs of all, and taught customers to make those pictures of print into real text and tag them for accessibility.

Over and over again, we've heard things like, "I've never been able to figure out how to make that work properly." "I've read everything I could find about making documents accessible, but this is the first time I've really understood it." Here's an email we received for a session we did in January:

"I just wanted to thank you and your team. I just went through the BYOD session with Myra and Sue. This was probably one of the most useful ways of helping people understand the details for 508 compliance in a document I thought was pretty good. They kept it entertaining while teaching. I'm still a student but hopefully making progress to give your team less work in ensuring items are accessible. Also your team's expertise in the broad range of software made it easy to hop between discussions at a technical level for future project planning." And the best part? Our BYOD participants are spreading the word.

So what about you? Are you responsible for creating and distributing documents on behalf of VA? Do you know how to create documents that comply with Section 508?

If not, these tutorials are a good place to start:

- [Creating Accessible PDFs](#)
- [Creating Accessible MS Word Documents](#)
- [Creating Accessible MS PowerPoint Documents](#)

If you've reviewed our tutorials and feel that you still need help, you're invited to "Bring Your Own Document."

You can submit a document of your own, to be considered for one hour, every other Friday. Accessibility experts will share your screen and show you exactly how to make your document accessible. We'll show you how it's done. Then we'll give control back to you and let you try it.

You'll need to submit your document no later than two days before each session. We'll select one or more documents to work on each session. So roll up your sleeves, BYOD, and join us.

Using the Inspect Tool to View Accessibility Data

Inspect (Inspect.exe) is a Windows-based tool that allows you to select any UI element and view its accessibility data. This tool helps with manual inspection of the accessibility properties of UI elements. Using this toolbar you can:

- View Microsoft UI Automation properties and control patterns, as well as Microsoft Active Accessibility (MSAA) properties to see what is being exposed to AT.
- Test the navigational structure of the automation elements in the UI Automation tree, and the accessible objects in the Microsoft Active Accessibility hierarchy. The order in which the objects are placed in the tree structure is equivalent to the reading order of the application.

Inspect provides additional toolbar features, including options that allow developers to move to the parent, first child or siblings of the selected object and a feature that displays a yellow rectangle around the object being reviewed.

This tool can be used during development and testing of accessible web content. Recommended use includes:

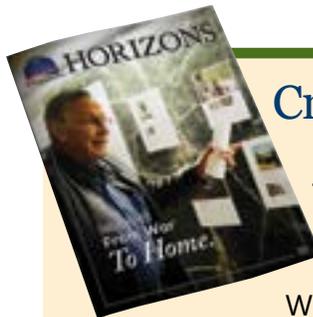
- Revealing the name, role, value and state of elements using the Inspect feature.
- Tracking focus during keyboard testing and watching the cursor for mouse testing. As focus changes, the data view updates with the selected element's properties. It has a caret tracking feature that can be used to evaluate the programmatic focus indication in custom controls such as rich text editors and custom input controls.

- Displaying a tree view that shows the hierarchical structure of the user interface elements.

Inspect is part of the Windows Software Development Kit (SDK). Download the SDK and choose the Inspect Object tool from the tools area of the installer.

Download page:

<http://www.microsoft.com/en-us/download/details.aspx?id=8279>



Creative and Accessible

This issue, Creative and Accessible features *Horizons*, the newsletter of the Wilkes-Barre Veterans Affairs Medical Center. Working with designer Ryan Matteo, our experts helped him produce a visually rich and completely accessible newsletter. As with all PDFs, the newsletter started life in another program, in this case, InDesign. Rather than remediating Section 508 violations in Acrobat Pro, we went back to the document using InDesign. Myra shared her screen with Ryan and showed him exactly how to correct the elements that produced 508 violations once the InDesign document was published to PDF. We used InDesign styles to provide the document structure required for accessible documents, and were able to include required metadata fields directly in the InDesign document. Sue then verified that everything in the PDF was being read correctly by a screen reader. We did a final check in Acrobat Pro to ensure there were no violations that were being picked up by the Acrobat accessibility checker.

Our congratulations to Ryan Matteo, the staff for *Horizons*, and the Wilkes-Barre VAMC! [Read about this issue and download the final product.](#)

Get Onboard!

It is now possible to be alerted when a new edition of the 508 XPress becomes available. Just visit <http://www.ehealth.va.gov/508/newsletter/> and activate the link to subscribe to our list.

Visit the VHA Section 508 Web site to review Section 508 checklists; training materials for developing accessible content in Flash, HTML, Word, PDF and PowerPoint; and to locate additional resources.

Internet: www.ehealth.va.gov/508/

Intranet: vaww.vista.med.va.gov/508workgroup/ *

*Links designated with an asterisk are available to VA internal users only.