LECTURER:  
I'm Andrew Downie. In the previous video, we looked at using styles to create well-structured and therefore highly accessible documents. Today we're going to look at the sometimes vexed issue of using tables.

A brief history. Two decades ago, screen readers could not navigate tables. They can read the information in the table but they would read it in a linear fashion which could be very confusing when trying to read a whole string of numbers. These days, quite complex HTML and PDF tables can be navigated by screen readers, but many screen reader users may find the navigation quite difficult. There is less scope to build in accessibility in Microsoft Word.

So given all the above, keep tables as simple as possible. Let's have a look at a table. I'm going to let you hear the screen reader reading the table.

SCREEN READER:  
Table with six rows and nine columns level one, row one, column one -

LECTURER:  
So the screen reader tells me how big the table is, how many rows and columns.

SCREEN READER:  
Row two, Monday.

LECTURER:  
I'm going to move to the right.

SCREEN READER:  
Brisbane column, 220. Sydney column, 315. Canberra column, 410.

LECTURER:  
You'll notice that it is reading the column title plus the cell that I'm focused on. A limitation of Word, if I arrow down -

SCREEN READER:  
Row 312, row 414 -

LECTURER:  
It doesn't tell me the day of the week. The Nvidia screen reader, which is the one I'm using, has a nice little feature.

SCREEN READER:  
Column one, Wednesday. Row two, Monday.

LECTURER:  
That lets us deal with that. I'm going to press an Nvidia command.

SCREEN READER:  
Set row to column one as start of row headers.

LECTURER:  
Now I'll go to the right.

SCREEN READER:  
Brisbane column, Sydney column 315.

LECTURER:  
Now I'll go down the column.

SCREEN READER:  
Tuesday row, 317. Wednesday row, 416.

LECTURER:  
Now the screen reader is reading both column and row headings. When to use tables? Use tables to display tabular data. When not to use tables? Do not use tables to layout text on the page. This may create major problems for assistive technology and it may well make revision very difficult. Creating tables. Create the table from the Insert tab of the Ribbon. Do not draw the table because if you do, screen readers will not be able to navigate it. Especially in Word, try not to create non-uniform tables. That is, tables that have large cells, because the screen readers will then struggle to associate column and row headings with the cell that's being focused. Under Properties in the Layout tab of the Ribbon uncheck 'Allow Rows to Break Across Pages' and check 'Repeat as Header Row at the Top of Each Page'. The reason the screen reader was able to associate the column headings with the cell that I was focused on in that little demo earlier was because I had checked that option. If I hadn't checked it, the screen reader wouldn't have known it was a heading. It's also a useful thing to check anyway, particularly if the table goes over to another page. Autofit to content can be very helpful. And at least, in my copy of Word, that's checked by default. Let's have a look at that.

I've come to the top row of the table. I suggested earlier going to Properties under the Layout tab of Tables on the Ribbon but we can simply right-click or use the applications key on the top row and arrow into table properties. There are several tabs here. We want the Row tab. Allow rows to break across pages, I have unchecked it. Repeat as header row, I have checked that, which is very helpful for several reasons. And as I mentioned, Autofit to content is checked on this particular copy of Word by default. For those who are using Office 365 there is another feature that's worth mentioning. If you're still using 2016, then this doesn't apply. I'm going to go to the Ribbon with the keyboard but you can use the mouse. There will be some options here that you may not have in your copy of Word, that's OK. I've come over to Table Tools. Header row is checked. Total row is not checked. Border rows are checked. I'll uncheck that because I don't like it being checked. We'll drop back into it again. Now, first column is not checked. If I check that, if this document was now converted to a PDF using the Save As dialogue, that left column would now be marked up correctly, ao that a screen reader would read it as headings.

It's all a bit esoteric and we'll deal with PDFs in another video. Images in Word will be the topic for the next video. I'm Andrew Downie. Thank you for watching.