

# Accessible Canva Designs

Tips, Tricks, and Techniques... and some shortcomings

# Why Canva Is So Popular

## Canva is popular because it is:

- Easy to learn
- Full of ready-made templates
- Web-based (no software to install)
- Quick for creating graphics

## People often use Canva for:

- Flyers
- Infographics
- Social media graphics
- Presentations
- Posters

# Choosing the right format

Choose the format that matches your content. Starting with the right option helps reduce accessibility issues later.

| Canva Docs                              | Canva Designs (Flyers, Posters, Graphics)                       |
|---|---|
| Best for text-heavy, structured content | Best for visual layouts and creative designs                    |
| Simpler reading order (linear)          | Reading order must be manually set                              |
| Easier to organize written content      | Requires more attention to layout and tagging for accessibility |

Both have their **quirks and limitations**, which will be covered on the next slide.

# Limitations using Canva

| Canva Docs  | Canva Designs (Flyers, Posters, Graphics)  |
|---|--|
| Does not tag tables correctly. It uses <NonStruct> and <Div> tags instead of proper table tags like <Table>, <TR>, <TH>, and <TD>.          | Tags tables correctly, including column headers. Row headers and header scope (row or column) must be set in Acrobat.  |
| Tags lists correctly. Bullets and numbers are included as part of the <LBody> tag.  | Does not include the bullet or number in the tag structure. The <Lb1> tag is empty but has “Actual Text” property of “decimal” for numbered lists and “bullet” for bulleted lists. |
| Lists can be centered correctly   | Lists can be centered, but only the text is centered. The bullet or number remains left-aligned.   |
| In multi-column layouts, text stays in the first column. Adding more text makes that column taller instead of flowing into the next column. | True multi-column layouts are not possible. You can simulate them by placing two or more text boxes side by side.  |

# Accessibility First Design

## Follow these principles:

- Start with the content
- Keep layouts simple
- Use clear heading structure
- Avoid unnecessary decoration, or mark as decorative
- Test your design

# Disclaimer: Important Limitation

Even if the exported PDF passes automated accessibility checks:

- Some text readers may still read content out of order, or
- Some content may not be read at all

This happens because Canva has **limited control over the PDF tag structure and content layering.**

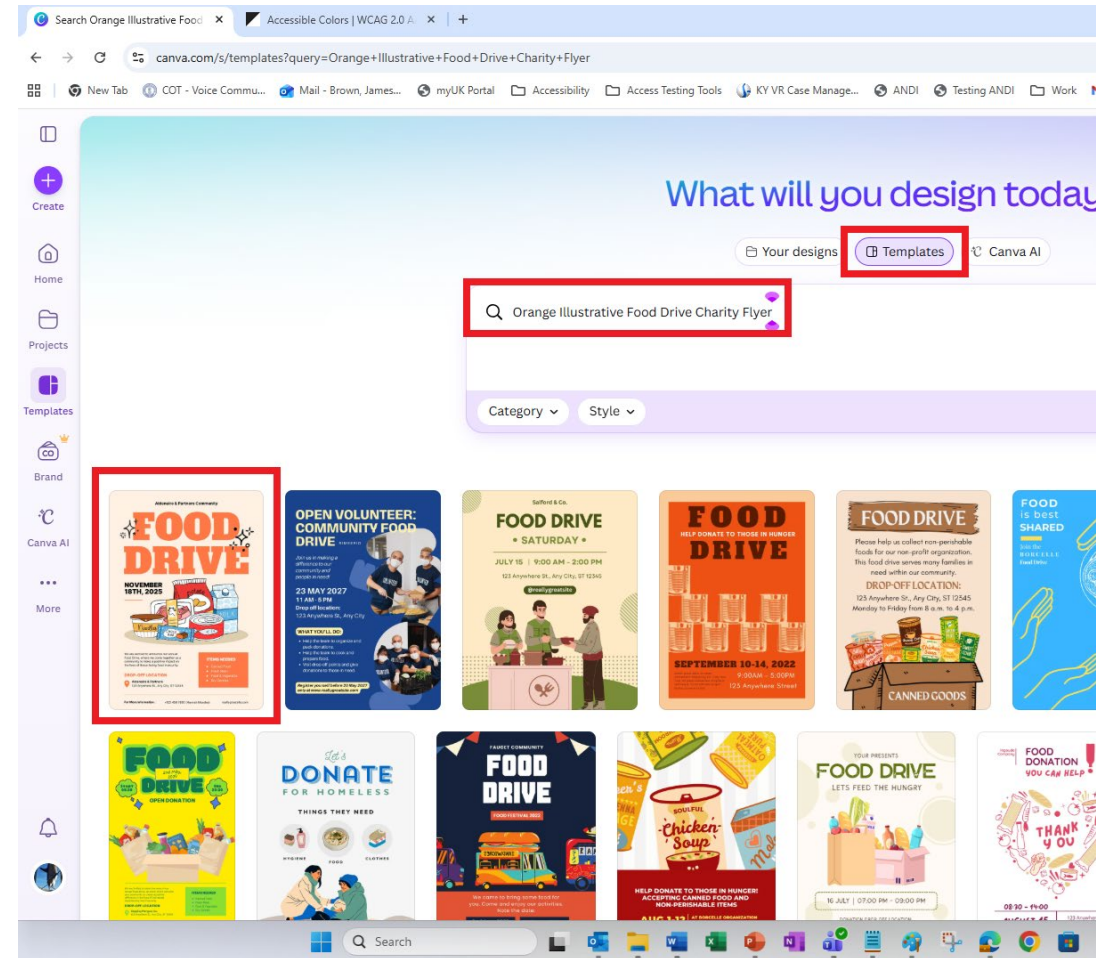
This primarily applies to using the pre-built templates. Creating documents from scratch give you greater control over this.

# Canva Accessibility Workflow

Best Practices for Creating Accessible Designs with Canva

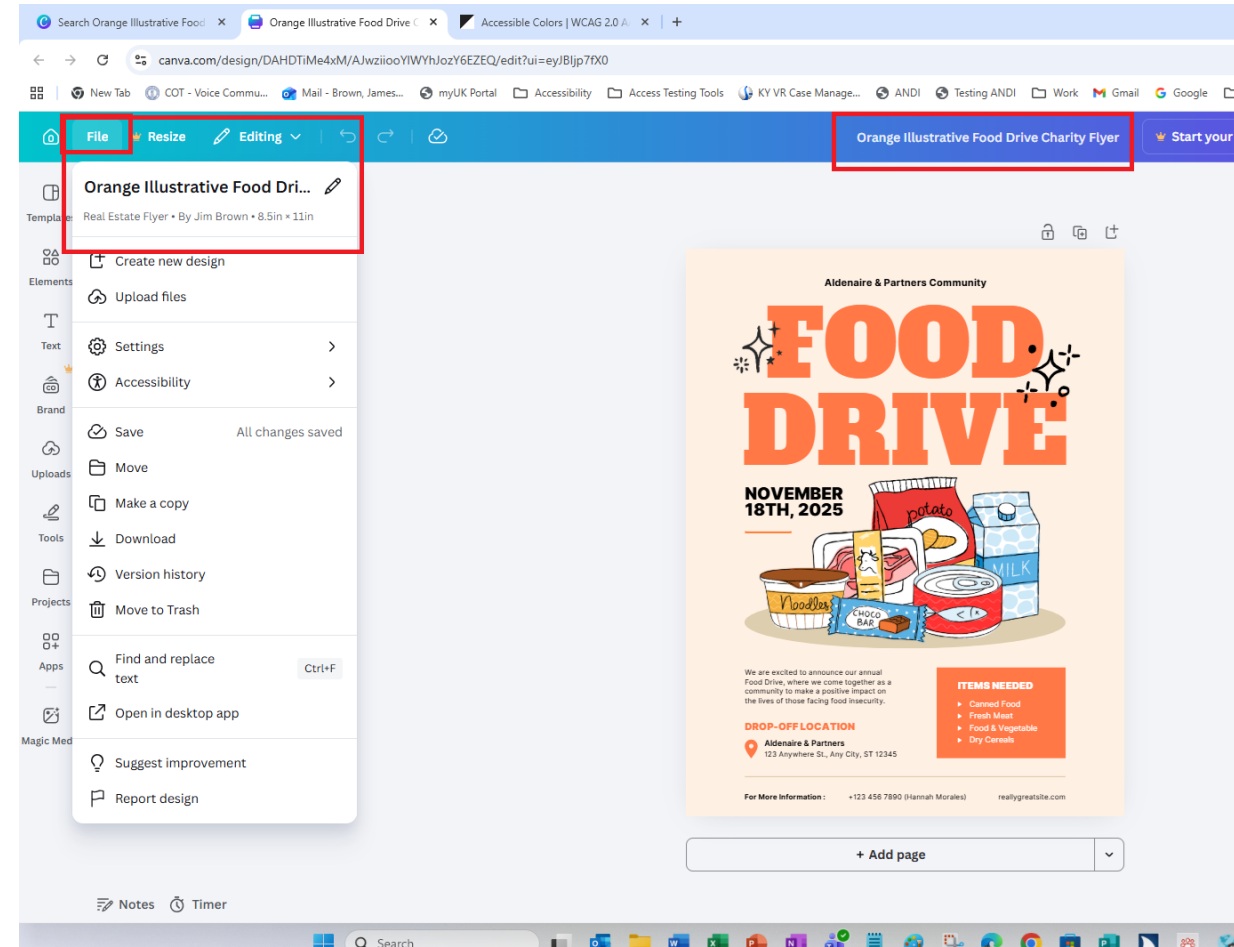
# Template used for today's demonstration

- Select “Templates, then in the search bar, type “Orange Illustrative Food Drive Charity Flyer” and press Enter
- Select the first template from the search results
- Select “Customize this template”



# Add a Title Property

- The Title can be changed either from the File menu, or in the title bar across the top
- Name the file “Food Drive, November 18, 2025: Aldenaire & Partners Community”

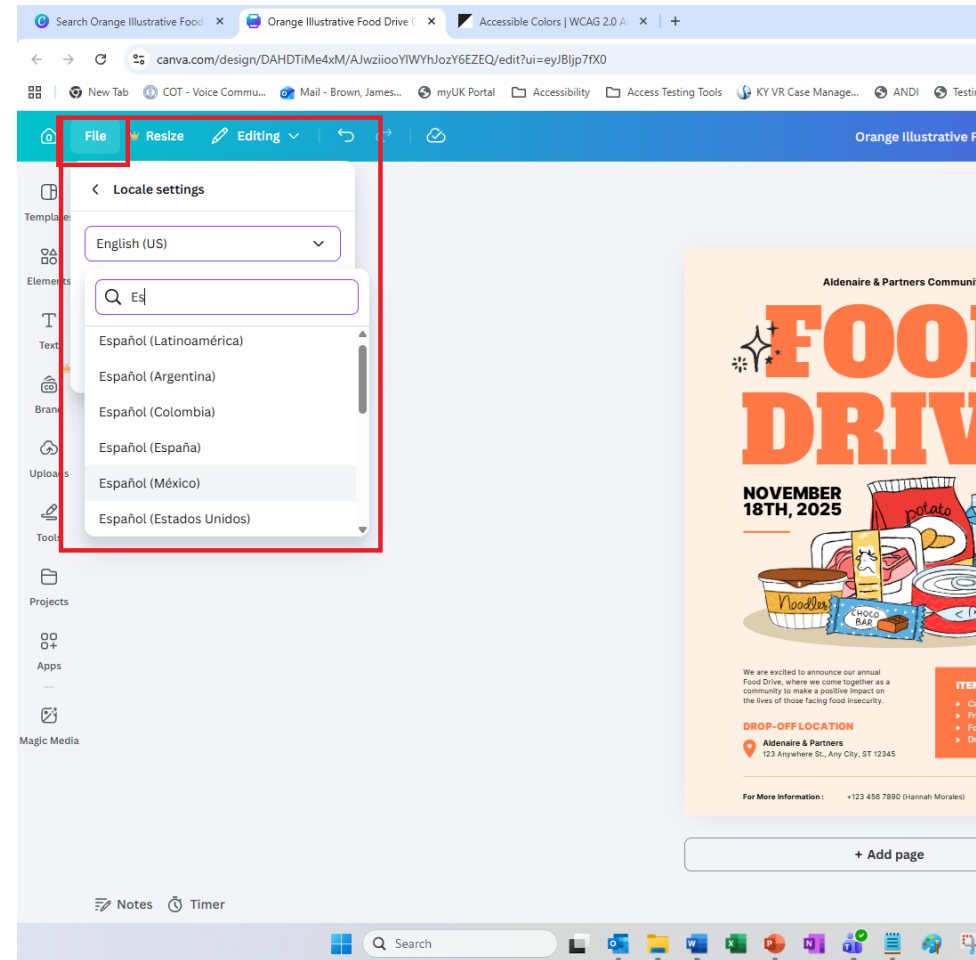


# Set the Language

If the document is written in a foreign language, changing the document's language setting in Canva will ensure that the PDF will be read using the correct dialect when using assistive technology such as screen readers.

To change the language:

- File > Settings > Locale Settings
- Type and/or select the language
- This setting carries over to PDF upon export



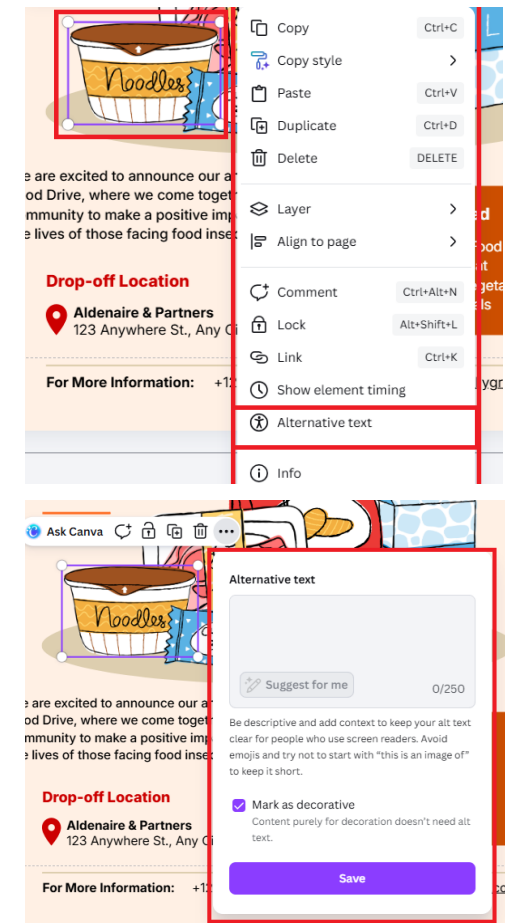
# Provide Alt Text for Images

Alt text should describe the **purpose of the image**, not just what it looks like.

Screen readers read this description aloud to people who cannot see the image. Without it they may miss important information in the document

## How to do it:

1. Select the image in your design.
2. Open the **More options (three dots)** menu.
3. Locate the **Alt Text** field.
4. Enter a short description of the image



# Structural Markup

Accessible documents rely on **structural markup**

**Examples include:**

- Headings
- Lists
- Tables
- Landmarks

# Headings in Canva

By default, **Canva automatically assigns heading levels based on:**

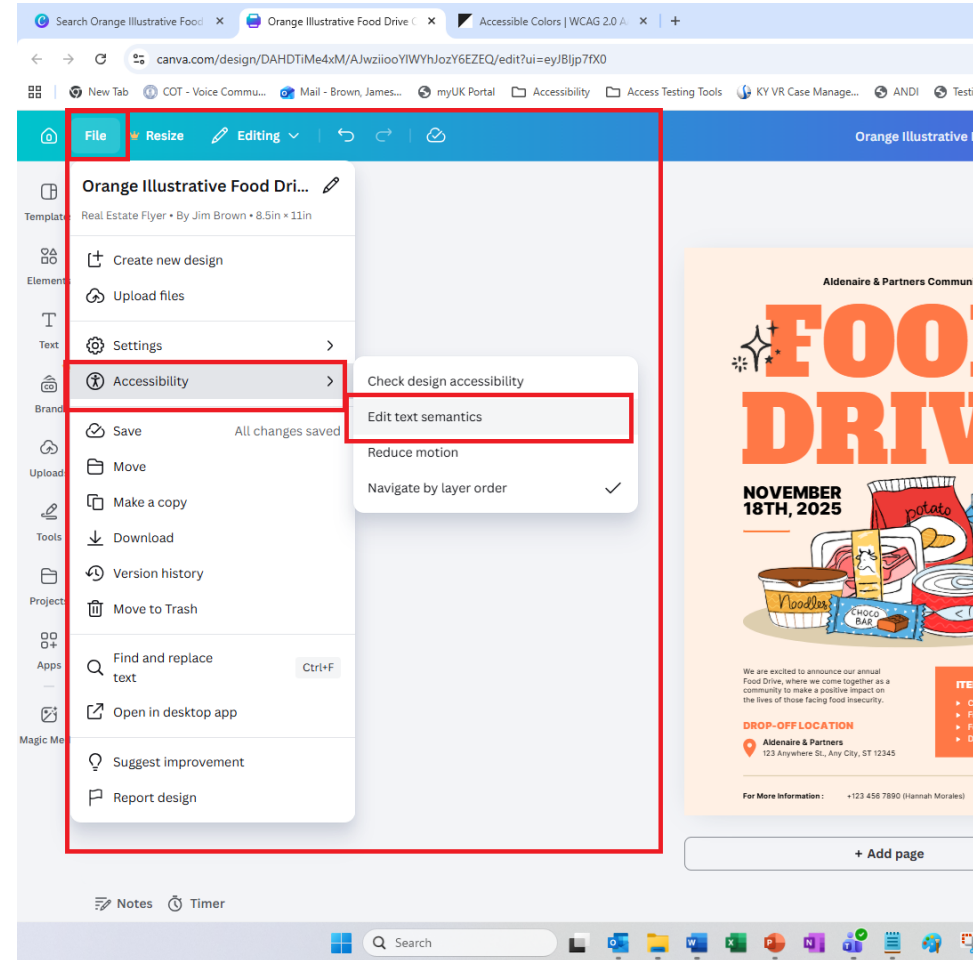
- Font size
- Position on the page

**This can create:**

- confusing heading structures
- skipped heading levels

# Manually Set Headings

To manually edit/set Headings, go to:  
File > Accessibility > Edit text semantics

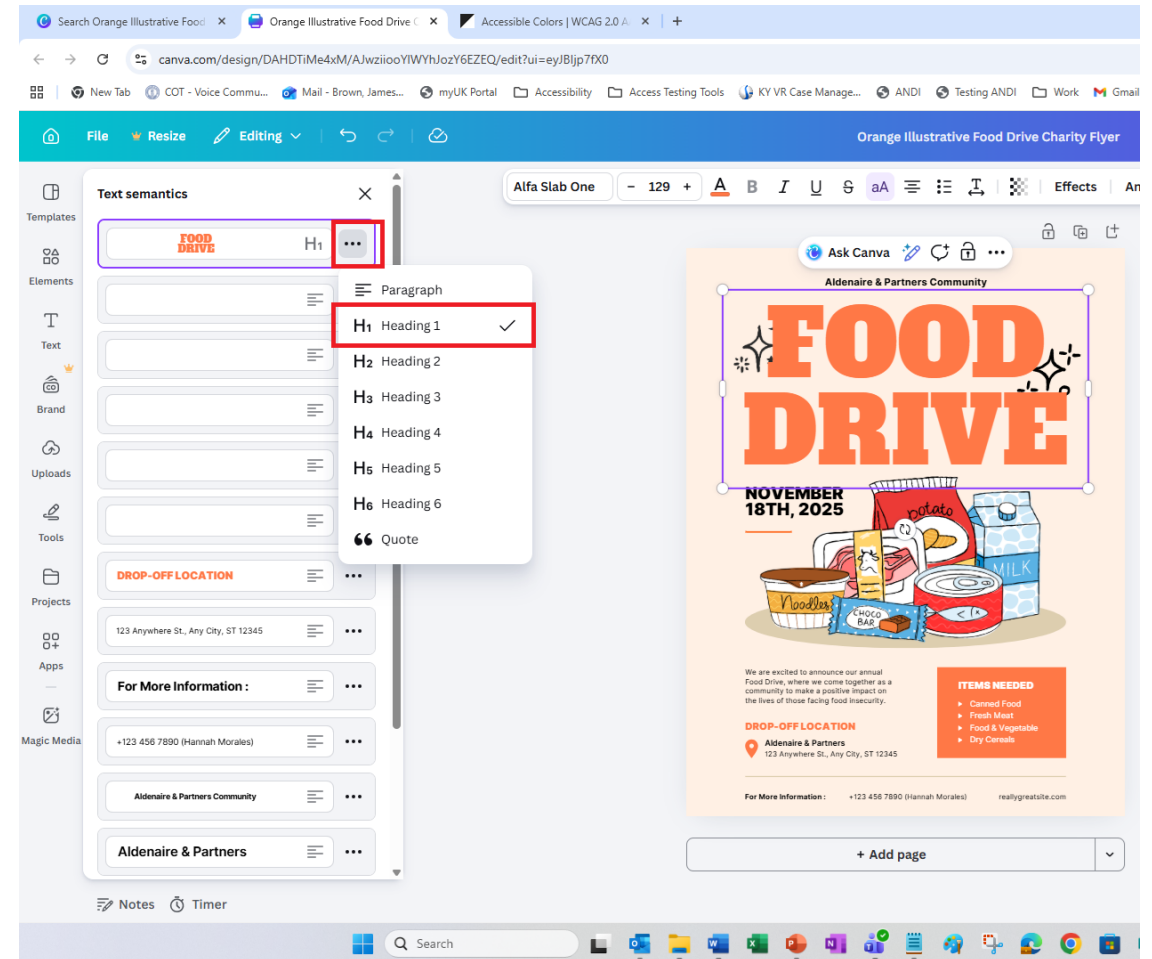


# Set Heading Levels

For each individual element, select the 3-dot menu button, then select the appropriate heading level. Set all others to “Paragraph”.

If you have multiple elements in the same textbox container, expand the list in the text semantics editor and assign a structure to each element individually.

**Note:** Check that Lists are assigned “Paragraph” style here, not a heading level.



# Setting the Reading Order

Reading order determines how screen readers read content.

## **In Canva:**

- Reading order follows the Layers panel.
- Content is read from the bottom layer upward.
- The Layers panel includes everything on the page.

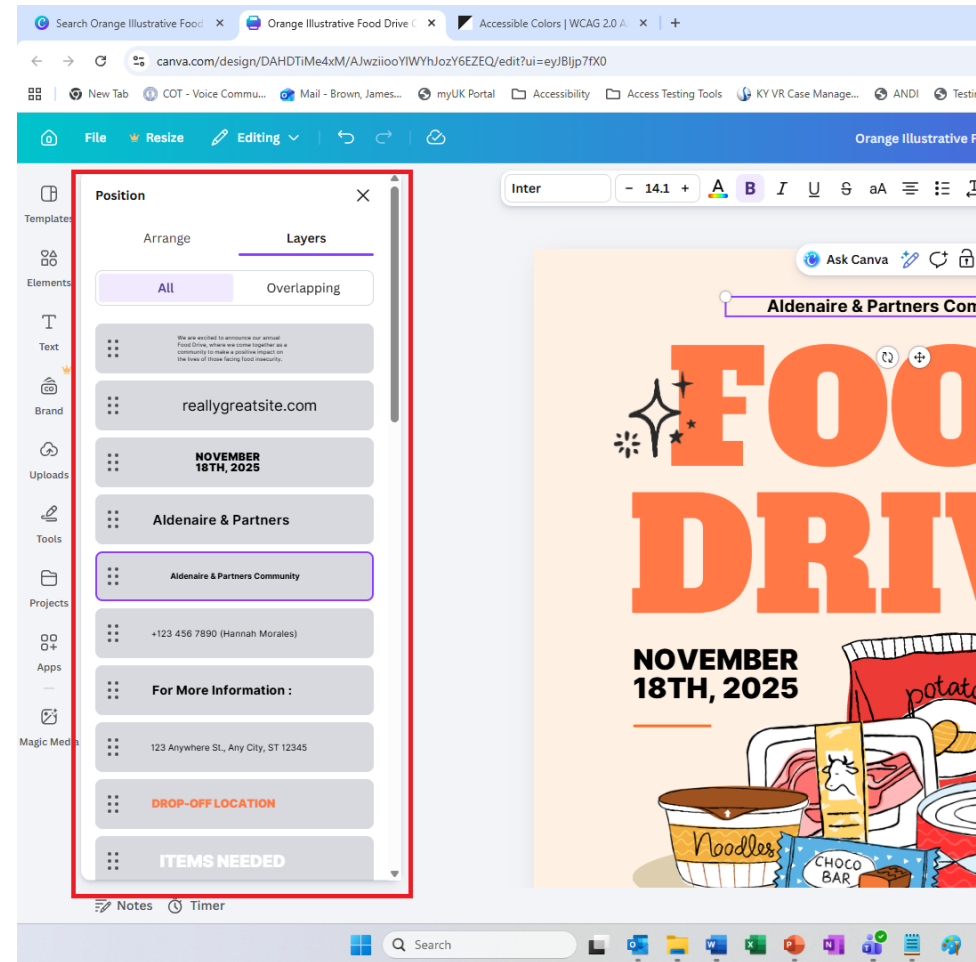
## **Be careful when moving items:**

- Changing layer order can affect visibility of surrounding elements.
- Items may appear hidden if moved incorrectly.

# Layers Panel in Canva

To access the Layers panel in Canva:

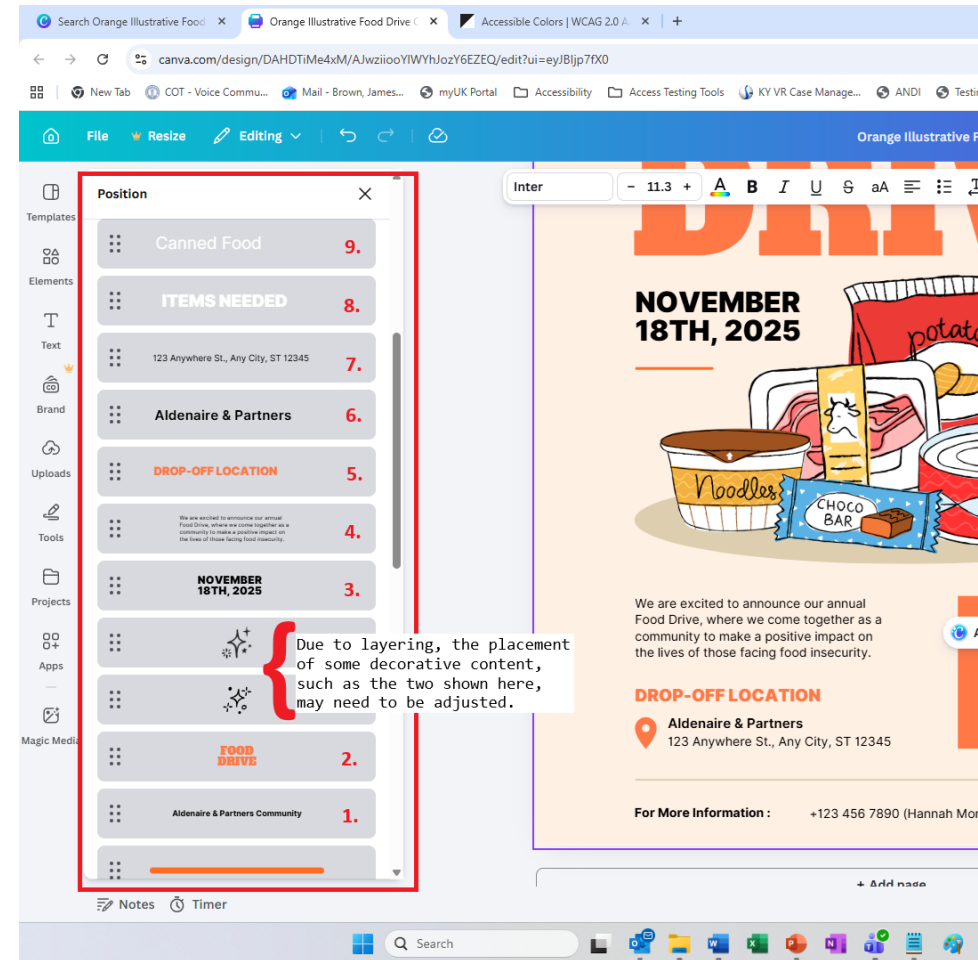
- Click Position in the top toolbar while an element is selected
- Choose the "Layers" tab.
- Alternatively, right-click any element and select "Layers," or
- Use the keyboard shortcut Alt + 1



# Ordering Content in the Layers Panel

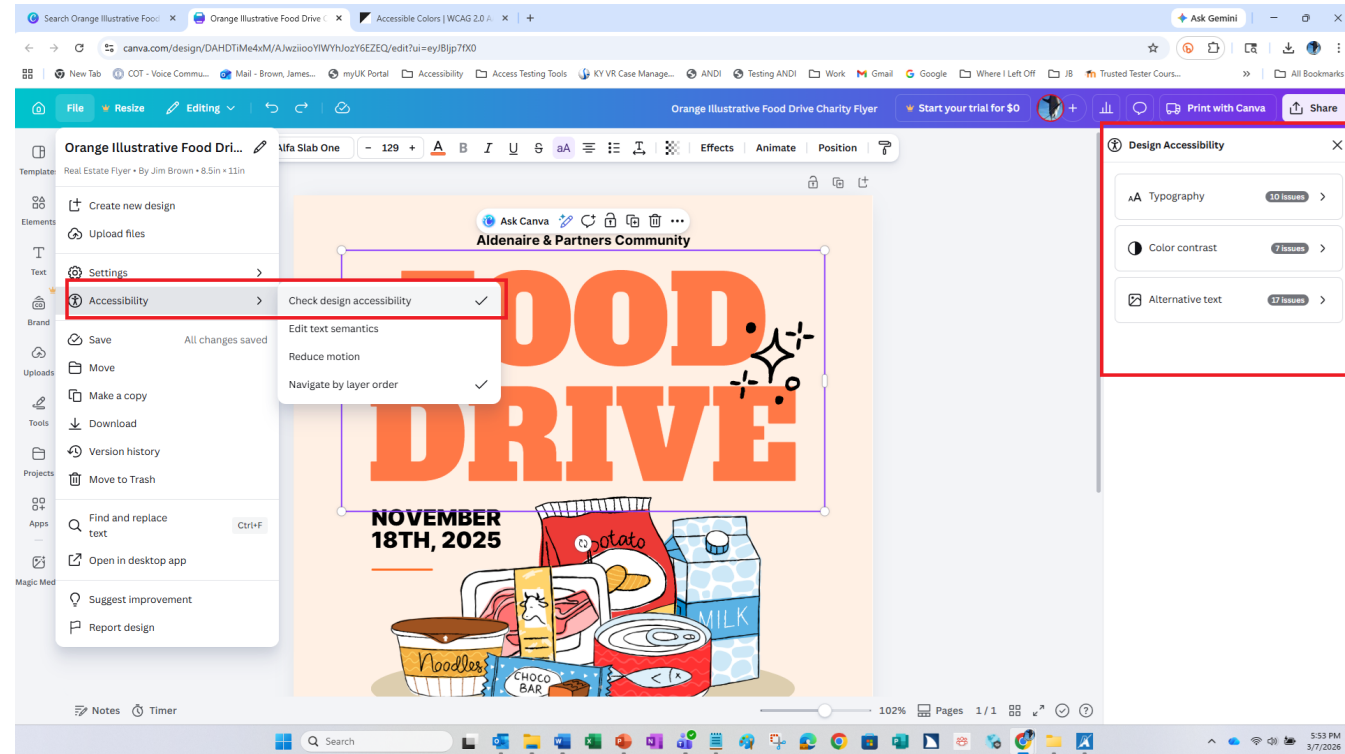
Content is read from the bottom layer upward

- Order content so that the first item in the reading order is at the bottom and the last item is at the top
- Use caution... remember that all elements appear in the Layers Panel, not just readable content.
  - You may have to adjust non-readable items accordingly



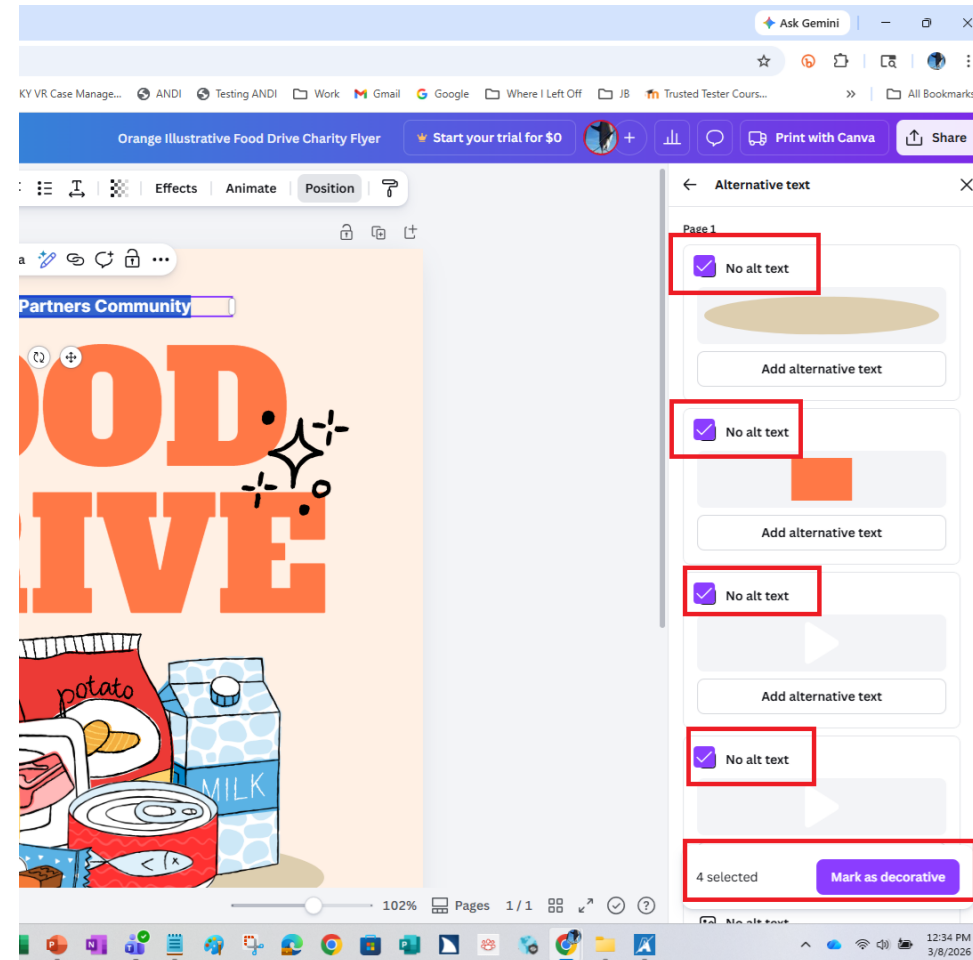
# Run the Accessibility Checker

- File > Accessibility > Check design accessibility
- Address the issues identified by the checker. You may have to make layout adjustments in the document after this step.



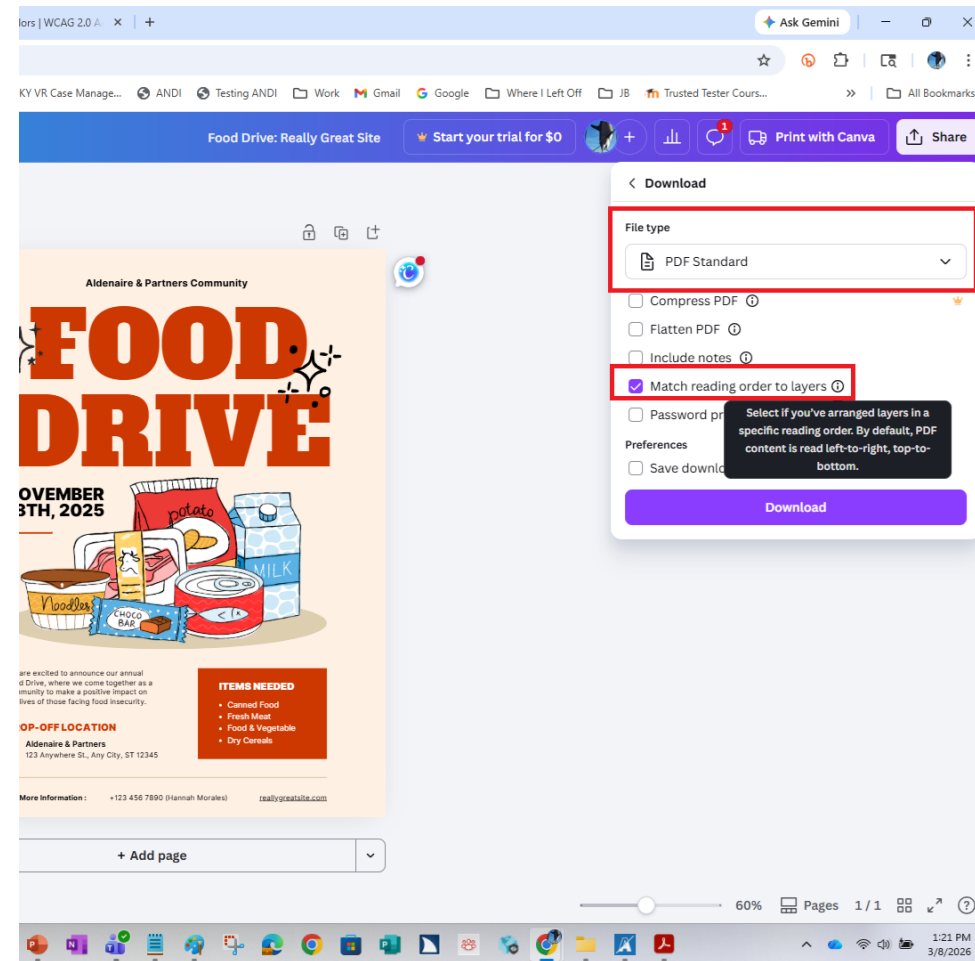
# Accessibility Checker – Alt text

If you have many decorative images, graphics, shapes, and icons, you can group select them all to mark as decorative in bulk.



# Exporting to PDF

- File > Download > change file type to PDF Standard
  - Select “Match reading order to layers
  - **Note:** By default, PDF content is read left-to-right, top-to-bottom



# Testing Accessibility

- Always test documents made with Canva
- Manual and Automated Testing is required
  - Know up front where barriers may exist—should another design tool be used?
- Recommended testing tools:
  - Screen reader: JAWS and/or NVDA preferred (reads from the Tags tree)
  - Acrobat Read Out Loud (reads from the Order panel (sometimes called the Z-Order))
  - Acrobat Accessibility Checker
  - PAC (PDF Accessibility Checker) (note: Screen Reader Preview does not always work on documents made with Canva—even though it reads well using an actual screen reader)

# A Final Checklist

## Before exporting your design:

- Use simple layouts
- Avoid text in images
- Check color contrast
- Set heading levels manually
- Review reading order in Layers
- Add alt text to images
- Run Canva accessibility checker
- Test the exported PDF

# Choosing the Right tool

| Tool       | Best For                         |
|------------|----------------------------------|
| Canva      | Visual graphics                  |
| Word       | Accessible documents             |
| PowerPoint | Accessible Presentations         |
| InDesign   | Advanced (Accessible) Publishing |
| Venngage   | Accessible Infographics          |

# Key Takeaways

Canva is a powerful design tool, but it has accessibility limitations

- Canva PDFs often require thorough testing & remediation.
- Fixing one problem can sometimes create another.
- Reading order and structure are common problems
- Simple layouts improve accessibility
- Using pre-built templates tend to have more issues with accessibility
- Sometimes another tool may be a better choice, such as Word, PowerPoint, Venngage, or InDesign

# Questions?

Contact me:

**Jimmy Brown**

Accessibility Coordinator

Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation

[JamesA.Brown@ky.gov](mailto:JamesA.Brown@ky.gov)