A11y Quick Ref

Your 8-Step PDF Accessibility Checklist

Use this checklist as a guide to help ensure PDF accessibility

(Note: if sharing your content on a public or intranet site, first ask: **Should it be a document or a webpage?**)

Contents

1. Create an accessible source document.

The key to an accessible PDF is to start with an accessible source document.

☑ Review the various document accessibility checklists to make your source documents accessible. There are different things to consider based on the document type. If your document layout isn't complex, you follow the document checklist and properly convert it to PDF, the document should be mostly, if not fully accessible.

☑ Once converted to PDF, run it through the Adobe Acrobat Professional Accessibility Checker or the free PAC 2024 Checker and review the remaining steps.

2. My PDF has tags and includes readable text.
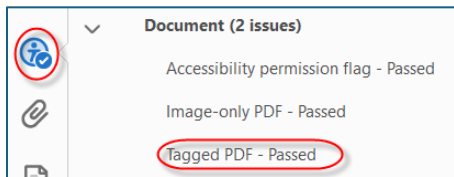
☑ Tags should be semantic (headings, paragraphs, lists, tables, etc.).

☑ The first heading should be an "H1" and only heading levels 1-6 should be used.

- o Heading levels should not be skipped (e.g. H2 followed by H4).

- o Heading levels can restart (e.g., H3 followed by H4, followed by H2).

- o Headings give you the ability to automatically add a table of contents to your document.

☑ The document should not just be a scanned image of text. The text needs to be converted to readable text.

☑ See various document accessibility checklists for instructions on exporting to tagged PDF.

3. Meaningful images in my PDF have appropriate alternate text. (Manual check to ensure alt text is accurate)
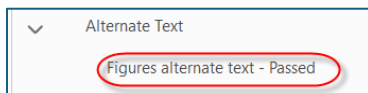
☑ Alternate text should be as clear and concise as possible. (if you reviewed your image alt text in the source document, you do not need to review it in the PDF)

☑ Phrases such as "image of" or "graphic of" should be avoided since screen readers already announce properly tagged images as "graphic".

☑ Decorative images should be properly artifacted (i.e., marked as decorative text in the source document).

NOTE: Be aware that at times, image alt text will not transfer to the PDF version even though you set it in the source document.

For more information on image alternative text, including a guide on complex images, visit the accessible images page.

4. My PDF has a logical reading order. (Manual check)

Logical Reading Order - Needs manual check

☑ The order in which your tags appear in the tags tree (tags PANEL) determines the logical reading order of the document.
NOTE: Tag Order vs. Reading Order
There is a "Tags" panel and an "Order" (also called reading order) panel and sometimes the order in both panels do not match. ***Tag tree order takes priority.***
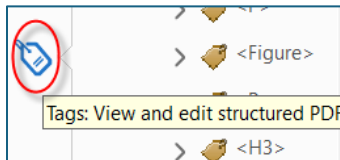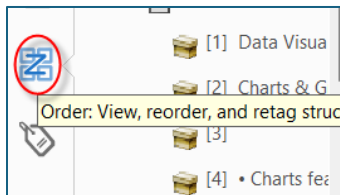

Figure 1 Tags Panel

Figure 2 Order Panel

5. My PDF passes color contrast requirements. (Manual check)

Color contrast - Needs manual check

☑ WCAG 2.1 level AA requires a color contrast ratio of at least 4.5:1 ratio for normal text and 3:1 ratio for large text. Non-text images (like icon buttons chart objects) require a color contrast ratio of 3:1.

     o Large text is defined as 14 point bold, or 18 point or larger.

☑ Information should not be conveyed solely through color.

6. Tables in my PDF are tagged correctly.
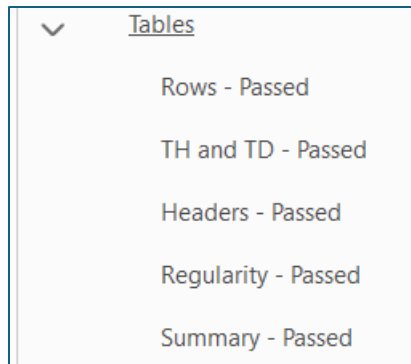
- ☑ Data tables must have table headers for columns and rows.

- ☑ Column and row scope should be designated to associate header cells with data cells.

- ☑ Complex tables should be avoided. If they exist, they should use cell ID's for association.

- ☑ Avoid tables for layout.

Note: Table regularity errors in PDF are most commonly associated with not having the same number of cells going across or down.

7. My PDF contains the necessary metadata. (Manual check)
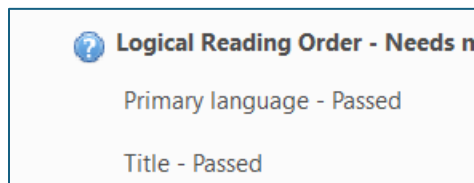
- ☑ Specify the document language to assist screen readers in pronunciation and navigation. (this is normally automatically set in source document software).

- ☑ Include a meaningful title in the document properties.

8. PDF Form fields (created in Adobe Acrobat Professional) and other interactive elements in my PDF are tagged correctly and are navigable by keyboard alone. (Manual check)
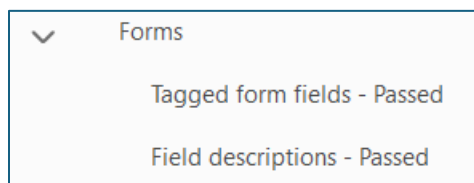
- ☑ Ensure form fields have clear labels and descriptive tooltips.

☑ Ensure the appropriate tab order has been set.

☑ Ensure hyperlinks have meaningful link text. Avoid generic phrases like "click here." I have thoroughly tested my PDF with a combination of automated PDF checkers and manual testing.

Your file is considered accessible when:

1. You followed the source document checklist
2. Ran the automated PDF checker and received all "Passing" messages
3. Reviewed your manual check steps and they pass

Need the ability to do more advanced remediation for complex PDFs?

A few examples include:

- Documents with a more complex design (like newsletters, brochures or data visualizations)
- Documents which combine multiple files from many different formats (like Annual Reports or large meeting agendas)
- Scanned documents where there is no source document and need to be converted to text
- Creating PDF fillable forms

More Information:

- State of Missouri Accessible Documents Page
- State of Missouri Accessible Images Page

Training:

- LinkedIn Learning "Advanced Accessible PDF" Course
- Missouri Assistive Technology's YouTube Videos, "PDFs Simply Made" and "Advanced PDF Accessibility"