PDF

# Intro

There are steps that you can take to make your PDF as accessible as possible. One way to start is to use the Make Accessible tool under Action Wizard to determine accessibility issues with your PDF and follow the prompts to fix issues.

If you are not using the Make Accessible tool, you can use the following steps to make your PDF more accessible.

# Autotag

In the Accessibility tool, choose Autotag document. If the document is already tagged, choose to either overwrite tags or skip this step. Tags are used by screen readers to identify information in a PDF and to read it out in the proper order. Making sure that your tags are in the correct order and correctly describe their related information is critical for an assistive technology user to fully experience your document. View your tag tree by selecting View and choosing Show/hide Navigation Panes. Select Tags to open the Tag tree.

# Tag Order

Check that the tag order matches the logical reading order. A good rule of thumb for reading order is that it should follow the order in which information appears visually. If the tag order does not match the logical reading order, click and drag on tags to reorder. For complex documents, you may have to add additional tags or delete tags. Add a tag by clicking on the tag above where you want the new tag to appear. Highlight information to be tagged, and right click on the tag above where you want the new tag to appear. Select Create Tag from Selection.

For images, you may need to create a new tag via the Reading Order panel. Open the Reading Order panel by choosing View, then Show/Hide, then Navigation Panes. From there you can open Order. Right click on any item and open Show reading order panel. Use the tool to draw a box around the area to be tagged and select the type of element. Right click on the new item and select Tag as… with the appropriate tag.

# Headings

Check that your headings are correctly set in the original document and that they are tagged properly. To check this, open the Tag tree. In the Tag tree, review your heading and paragraph tags. Heading tags include H1, H2, etc. and paragraph tags appear as P. Ask yourself the following questions: Are any tags that should be paragraphs labelled as headings? Are any tags that should be headings labelled as paragraphs? Are any headings the wrong heading level? For example, is a heading level 1 labelled as an H2? If you’re unsure how to determine a heading’s appropriate tag, follow this rule of thumb: Typically, the bigger and bolder the heading is, the higher the heading level. A large, bold font is likely to be a heading level 1, while a smaller font is likely to be a heading level 2 or 3.

# Alt Text

Set alternate text for all images. For users who are unable to see images, alternate text, or, alt text, provides a textual description of the image that a screen reader can then interpret. To set alt text for your images, open the Tag tree. Right click on Figure tags to open Properties. This will allow you to edit alt text for your image.

Write good alt text can seem challenging. A good rule of thumb is to describe the image as you would describe it aloud. Think about what the audience is supposed to gain from the image, based on the surrounding content. Also, consider what the surrounding content says. If the image is described in detail in the text, as may happen with a chart, simple alt text is sufficient. If the image is not described and is critical to the user’s understanding, you will need to provide more substantive alt text.

If an image is decorative, meaning it is meant to add visual interest, not meaning, set the image as an Artifact in the Tag tree. After opening the Tag tree, right click on a Figure tag to open Properties. Then set the tag type to Artifact.

# Media

If you use media, such as audio, include a transcript. For visual media, like a video without sound, include textual descriptions of the media. Caption all multimedia, such as videos with sound. Captions must be synchronized with sound and must be accurate.

# Color

Check your document’s color contrast using Color Contrast Analyser or Color Contrast Pal. The links for these tools are on this webpage. Color contrast between foreground and background should be a ratio of 4.5 to 1. Adjust colors as necessary if your foreground to background ratio does not meet this standard. Also, put text on a solid background. Keeping text on a solid background makes it easier to read for users who have low vision or learning disabilities. It can also help to keep attention on the text, which is valuable for those with attention difficulties.

# Title

Ensure that the document has a title. This is different from the PDF’s filename, because it gives all users additional information about the document. For example, the title of the PDF displays at the top of the document viewing window, signaling users as to what the document contains. Document titles can often be more descriptive than filenames. To set a PDF’s title, under File, select Properties. In the dialog box, enter a title for the document. You might choose the first heading as the document’s title.

# Language

Setting the document’s language gives assistive technology information about how the document should be read. Some screen readers adjust accents according to the document’s programmatically identified language. To set a PDF’s language, under File, choose Properties. Select Advanced properties. Under Reading options, set the document’s language.

# Hyperlinks

Set hyperlinks in your text, and give your hyperlinks meaningful link text. For example, instead of saying Click here to learn more, your link might say Learn more about this quote. Link text should describe the link’s target. In the example, the link text lets the user know that the target is an article about the quote. This is helpful for all users, and especially helpful for screen reader users. To set a hyperlink, select the Edit PDF tool. Choose Link and select Add/edit web or document link. You can then draw a box around text or an image. This box will be the boundary of your link. Enter the URL in the dialog box provided, and your link will be set.

# Accessibility Check

Finally, run a full accessibility check via the Accessibility Tool. Fix any remaining problems that arise. In the full check, Reading Order and Color Contrast will always come up as requiring manual review. This is because a machine cannot determine if reading order is accurate or if color contrast is compliant. If you have manually checked these and are confident about your document’s reading order and color contrast, your document has been made accessible.

# Conclusion

Following these steps helps make your PDF as accessible as possible for individuals with disabilities.