

Quick Steps for Checking and Making PDFs Accessible

What is a PDF?

PDF is a format or type of document. It stands for Portable Document Format.

Why It's Important? (*howto.gov*)

Making your PDF documents accessible is important so that all users are able to access your agency's information—no matter its format. Not only is making your content accessible a [best practice](#), agencies are also required by OMB to [maintain accessibility](#) and follow standards from [Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act](#) as amended in 1998.

Accessible PDFs **should contain** the following:

- Filename with no spaces or special characters – use dashes
- Filename characters limited – use keywords from document title
- Document properties – title, author, keywords, language
- Hyperlinks verified and contain full URL
- Tags/logical reading order/document structure
- Alternative text for images

Creating PDFs

When people talk about "accessible" PDF files, they usually are referring to "tagged" PDF files, even though there is more to an accessible PDF than tags. PDF tags provide a hidden structured, textual representation of the PDF content that is presented to screen readers. They exist for accessibility purposes only and have no visible effect on the PDF file.

PDF files are not typically created in Acrobat. They are usually created in another program and *converted* to PDF. The majority of the PDF files on the web were probably created in Microsoft Word. The file must be exported correctly. If a file is created by printing to PDF, it will not be correctly tagged. Before you convert your Word document to PDF, be sure to use a good [Word Accessibility Checklist](#).

The Adobe Add-in, also called PDFMaker, is the best choice to create high-quality tagged PDF files. With the Adobe add-in installed, you can export to PDF one of two ways:

1. Select **File > Save as Adobe PDF**.
2. Or you can select **Create PDF** from the Acrobat ribbon.

Either one of these options will open the same dialog box. The program should create a tagged PDF file by default. If this is not the case, select **Preferences** from the **Acrobat** ribbon and ensure that **Enable Accessibility and Reflow with tagged Adobe PDF** is selected.

Adobe Accessibility Checker

Adobe has a built in accessibility checker for PDFs. The Advanced Check (**Tools** in the right-hand column, **> Advanced > Accessibility > Full Check**) is a detailed accessibility check.

Although it is more complete than the Quick Check, it does not capture all areas of the document that may need fixing. A more thorough and manual review is still recommended.

Adding PDF Document Properties

The property fields need to be filled in for Title, Author, Subject, Keywords and Language. To edit the document properties, select **File > Properties**. Complete the fields with descriptive information under the Description tab. Avoid acronyms unless used with a complete spelling and avoid using employee names for publicly available files. Set the language under the Advanced tab > Reading Options > English.

Creating Document Structure in PDFs

The Document Structure tells screen readers how to read the document. The Document Structure is located on the left side of the screen where small thumbnail icons appear in a column. Select the top icon which resembles two pieces of paper. Then right click on each thumbnail, select page properties, and change the Tab order to “Use Document Structure”.

PDF Document Tags and Reading Order

To add tags to the document, select **Tools > Accessibility > Add Tags to Document**. The TouchUp Reading Order tool allows a user to quickly add and edit PDF tags and view the reading order of elements on the page. To use the TouchUp Reading Order tool, select **Tools** from the right-hand menu, then select **Accessibility > TouchUp Reading Order**. All of the content will appear enclosed in numbered boxes. Each of these boxes represents a tag and the number corresponds with the tag number in the Order panel. Clicking on a number will allow you to edit that tag.

Alternative text in PDFs

The easiest way to add alternative text is with the TouchUp Reading Order tool. When an image is tagged as an image (or figure) the alternative text will appear next to the image. If it has no alternative text, the caption will read "Figure - No alternate text exists." To add alternative text, **Right click** on the image and select **Edit Alternate Text**. Enter the [appropriate alternative text](#) in the dialog box.

Resources

<http://webaim.org/techniques/acrobat/>

<http://webaim.org/techniques/word/>

<http://webaim.org/techniques/acrobat/converting>