

Intro to PDFs

What is a PDF?

A PDF is a file or document in Portable Document Format – a format that can be viewed on any computer platform and operating system found in mainstream computing, using a free application called Adobe Reader.

PDFs are beneficial because the file is not editable by the person viewing the document, and when you save the document into this format, it will retain the original font and page layout regardless of which fonts and applications the viewing computer has installed.

PDFs require Acrobat Reader (free software) to view, but many other applications can open PDFs as well.

How are PDFs made?

When a book or article is scanned, the resulting format is commonly PDF. They can also be created by saving a Word document as a PDF file.

Scanning tips

For best results in scanning to searchable PDF (accessible PDF), make sure the original scanned text is free from highlights, underlines, words in the margin, and shadows in the center binding or at the edges of the page. **(Even if you perform all the steps of making a PDF accessible, if the words are partially obscured by markings, the text recognition will be poor.)**

If the original scan is marked in such a way, consider retyping it or locating a clean copy.

If none exists, contact [Laura Knobel-Piehl](#) in Student Disability Services for assistance.

Making Existing PDFs Accessible

Is a PDF readable to people using accessibility software and hardware?

A PDF is only accessible to assistive technology if the PDF has been intentionally edited so that the text on the page is recognized as individual characters and not just a “picture” or “image” of a page of text. In order for this to happen, recognized text (sometimes called real text) needs to be added to the page. This process is called OCR or Optical Character Recognition.

People who use assistive technology such as screen readers, braille displays, and captioning software, as well as people who like to save text from PDF files to read on their tablet or smart phone, require the recognized text to be in place. If recognized text is missing, the words cannot be read.

How can I check if my PDF is accessible?

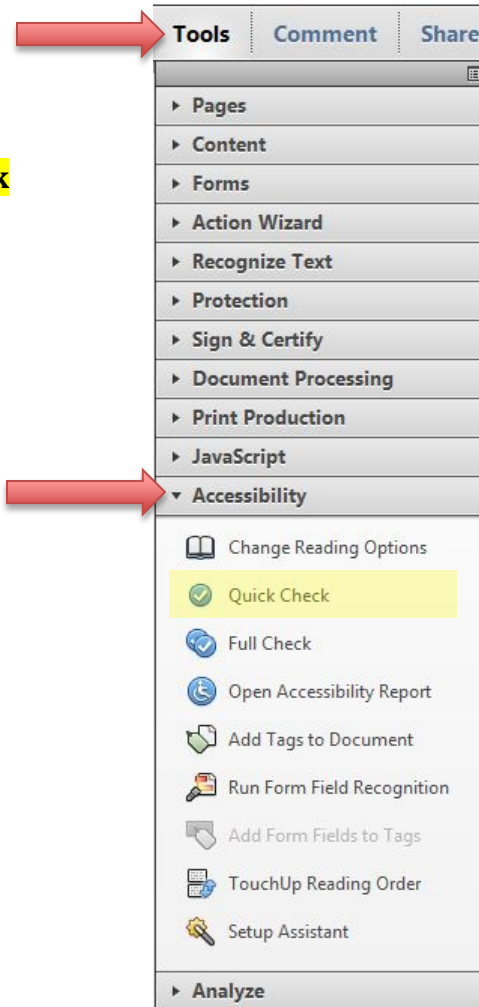
Option 1: Just highlight!

The easiest way to check for Accessibility is to simply try to select text in the PDF document as if you were going to highlight a word or sentence. If the text has been recognized, you will be able to highlight the word or sentence you choose. If not, the document is just an “image” of a page with no recognized text added.

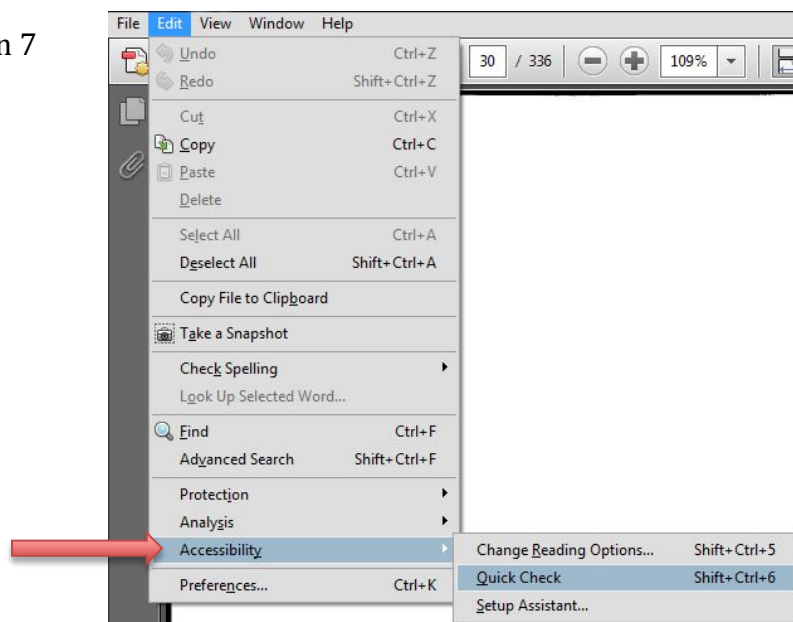
Option 2: Performing Quick Check

While viewing the PDF in **Acrobat Pro**, click on **Tools** in the panel at the top-right of the window.

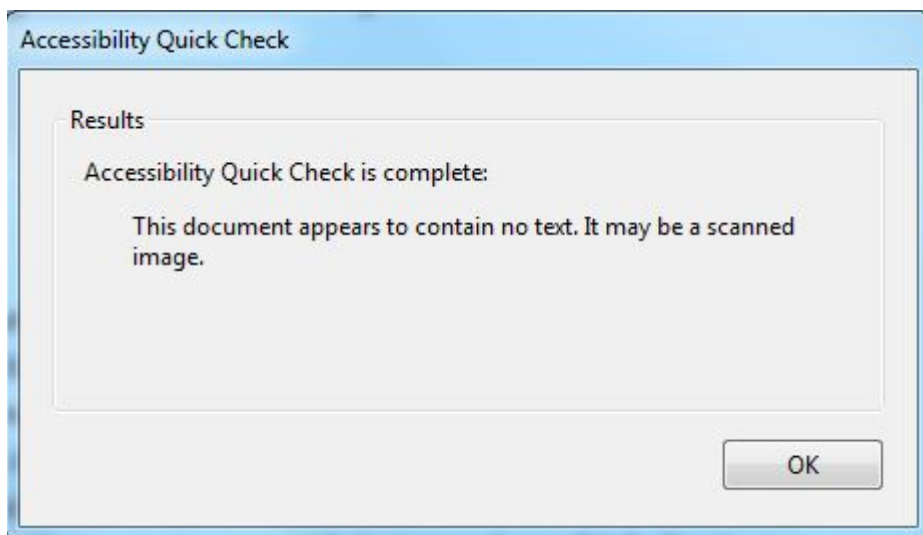
Then, click on **Accessibility** to reveal the **Quick Check** feature.



In the free **Adobe Reader** (version 7 and above) go to **Edit -> Accessibility**, then select **Quick Check**.



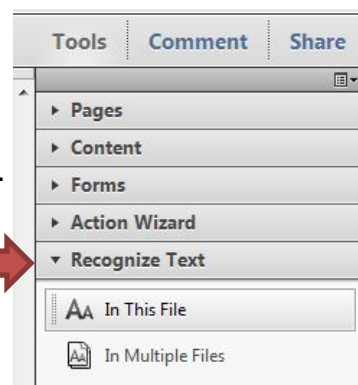
If you get a message like this, you will need to have the text recognized using a program like Acrobat Pro, OmniPage Pro or ABBYY FineReader:



Recognizing text

Ensure you have Acrobat Pro or Standard installed. (The free Adobe Reader program can only check for recognized text. It cannot add recognized text.) If you do not have Acrobat Pro or Standard, you may call your IIT representative and request that it be installed for you.

1. Open your PDF document using Acrobat.
2. Select the **Tools** pane from the upper-right portion of the screen.
3. Expand the **Recognize Text** heading and select **In This File**.
4. **Save** the document.
5. Last: Perform either of the Quick Checks above to make sure Real Text has been added.



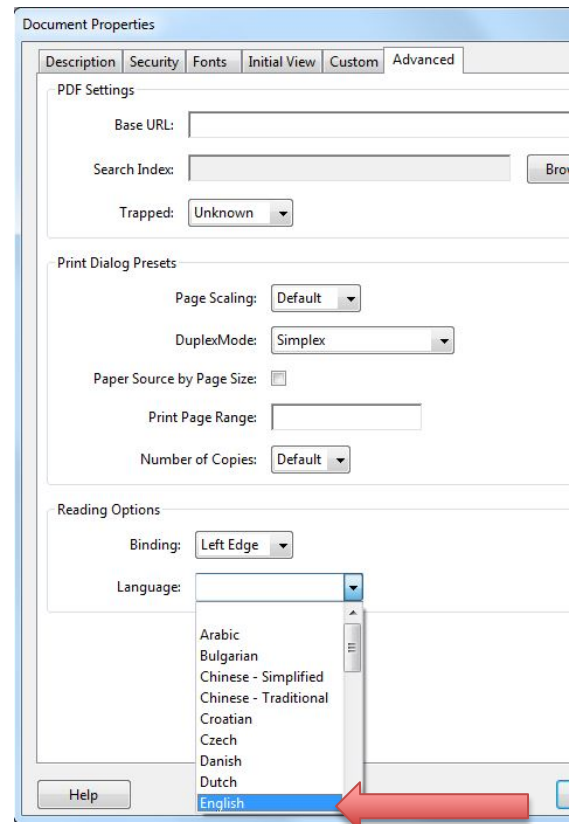
Additional Accessibility steps

Define the language of the document:

Screen Readers for the visually impaired (such as JAWS) can recognize different language and read them according to pre-installed language voices. However, because English borrows words from other languages, JAWS can easily be tricked into slipping into a foreign tongue! For instance, listing a book's authors as "Smith, et al" can confuse JAWS. It will read "Smith" using the preinstalled English voice, then switch to the French voice upon reading "et." Then remain in French for the duration of the document.

To prevent this, ensure the document properties define the intended language.

1. Select **Properties** from the **File** menu.
2. Select the **Advanced** tab at the far right.
3. Select the **Language** of the document.

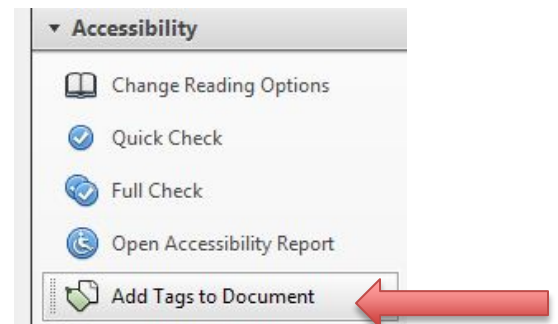


Add tags to the document:

Any image or figure in the document will not be read if it doesn't have a tag behind it. Therefore, if there is an important graph, chart or picture, it must be tagged as such. Likewise, if there is a decorative shading or border, it can be told to be ignored.

Select "Add Tags to Document" from the Accessibility Pane.

Every item that requires a tag in order to be readable will have a corresponding link in the resulting Recognition Report on the left side of the screen. Clicking on each item in the list will take you to that page.



Add alternate-text

To add explanatory "background" text to a picture, image, or figure:

1. Click "**TouchUp Reading Order**".
2. Click the numeral indicating the reading order to edit.
3. Draw a rectangle around the object the program found.
4. Indicate what type of object it is in the TouchUp Reading Order window (table, text, figure, etc.).
5. Right-click on the object and select "**Edit Alternate Text**."
6. Give a brief description of the object, then click "**OK**." For example, if there is a photo labeled Figure 2.1, you might choose to type "Figure 2.1 is a picture of the sun shining over a stretch of desert sand."