

PDF Accessibility Guide

Overview

A document or application is accessible if it can be used by people with disabilities—such as mobility impairments, blindness, and low vision—and not just by people who can see well and use a mouse. Accessibility features in Adobe Acrobat, Adobe Reader, and Adobe Portable Document Format (PDF) make it easier for people with disabilities to use PDF documents and forms, with or without the aid of assistive software and devices such as screen readers, screen magnifiers, and braille printers.

Making PDFs accessible tends to benefit all users. For example, the underlying document structure that makes it possible for a screen reader to properly read a PDF out loud also makes it possible for a mobile device to correctly reflow and display the document on a small screen. Similarly, the preset tab order of an accessible PDF form helps all users—not just users with mobility impairments—fill the form more easily.

Each PDF File is Different

Not all PDFs are the same. PDF files are created in a variety of ways, from a variety of applications, and for a variety of purposes. In addition to applying the proper accessibility enhancements to PDF documents, achieving your accessibility goals for an individual PDF file requires understanding the nature of the PDF and the uses for which it is intended.

By following these procedures in the recommended order, users can efficiently proceed through the analysis of a PDF file in a systematic fashion. Ensuring certain characteristics that a PDF file needs will guide you to the most appropriate next step for making an individual PDF accessible.

This series also discusses techniques for converting source files to accessible PDF. Using the Adobe PDFMaker with Microsoft Word as an example, this guide provides best practices for designing your source document with accessibility in mind so that the original document can be efficiently transformed into an accessible PDF version.

*These recommendations assume you are starting with the source file, **not a PDF file** as the process is much more difficult to confirm accessibility.*

Tips for Creating from Microsoft Word

In general, the following rules apply.

- Design your source document with accessibility in mind
- Do NOT use character formatting for headings, use the program's styles.
- Do add alternative text to graphics in the source file

- Do use a table editor if available to create tables
- Do NOT use a table editor to design layouts
- Do generate the PDF file in a way that generates tags
- Do set your PDF output preferences option to tagged PDF
- Do check the results in Adobe Acrobat X Pro using Advanced > Accessibility > Full Check (shortcut: Alt + A + A + F)
- Do follow the suggestions for repair and repeat checking until no errors are detected

Use Styles

Design your documents with styles. Styles add the structure necessary to make your documents usable to people with disabilities.

Text

The default text style for Microsoft Word is Normal.

- Text should be at least 12-point type.
- Avoid using Microsoft Word text boxes.
- Avoid using Enter to create space between paragraphs. Use the space before and space after properties of paragraphs in your styles.

Headings

Use Styles to create heading formats. Title, Heading 1, Heading 2, Heading 3, etc. Make styles progress in a logical manner, a Heading 2 should come after a Heading 1

Columns

To create columns, do not use the tab key or the spacebar to create space between columns of text. Also, avoid using text boxes or placing text in a table. The proper method is to use Word's Column layout feature.

Lists

Use Word's list styles when creating bulleted or numbered lists to ensure that the structure represented by the list is transmitted to the PDF document. The list styles are found in Word's Ribbon on the Home tag in the Paragraph Group.

Tables

Do not use tabs or spaces to create a table effect. Use Microsoft Word's table editor.

- In order to have the cells in a table heading row automatically tagged as Table Headers (<TH> tags) when the Word document is converted to PDF, highlight the first row of the table.
- With the heading row selected, right mouse click and select the Table Properties option.
- With the Table Properties dialog displayed, select the Row tab and check the "Repeat as header row at the top of each page" to indicate the row is a header row, even if the table does not break across document pages.

- If you don't do this, or if you do not want the header row to be repeated in a multipage table, you will need to change the table cell tags in the header rows from <TD> to <TH> using the Acrobat X Pro Tags Panel or the Table Editor which is accessed from the Touch Up Read Order Tool.

Links

Allow Word to turn web addresses into hyperlinks. Word hyperlinks are automatically converted to PDF hyperlinks.

Use Word's hyperlink dialog. On the Ribbon, select Insert Tab and the Hyperlink toolbar (keyboard shortcut Ctrl+K).

Add Alternative Text

Alternative Text or Alt Text refers to text that can be read by a screen reader to describe graphics and images which people with visual disabilities cannot see. All Graphics and Images should be provided with alternative text descriptions. Avoid placing graphics too close to text. This can cause problems when converting to PDF. Place white space between text and graphics.

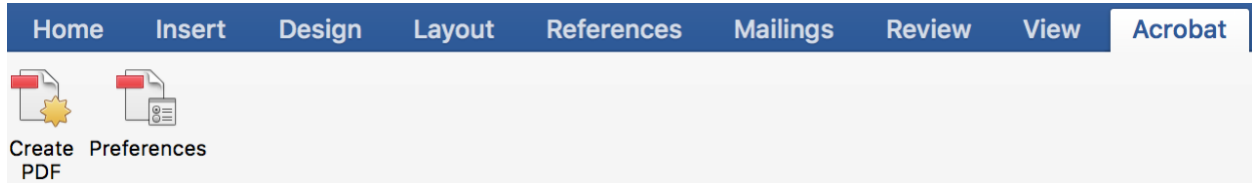
Convert the Word Document to Accessible PDF

Open the Microsoft Word file. Depending upon the version of Microsoft Word, there will be specific methods for converting the document to an accessible PDF file.

There are two controls on the Microsoft Word interface for converting to accessible PDF.

Do one of the following:

- Click the Create PDF button on the Acrobat toolbar. Enter a filename and location for the PDF, and click Save.



Or...

- Save As... to a PDF file.

