

Checklist for Ensuring Accessibility of PDF

The checklist specifically applies to Acrobat Pro X and XI. Many of the same principles applied in earlier versions of Acrobat as well, but the steps for completing them are different. For additional information about fixing accessibility using Acrobat Pro versions 7 through 9, see [WebAIM's tutorial](#). **NOTE:** Modifying PDFs can have unpredictable results, and there is no undo. Save often!

- Tested for image or text file; converted to text if needed
- Tested for tags; added tags if needed
- Tested for Reading Order; hid unnecessary images, added alt text, rearranged reader order, edited tables if needed
- Tested for Headings; added built-in headings if needed
- Tested for markup; tagged lists, tagged tables, put content in reasonable order if needed
- Tested for URLs as links; created links if needed
- Tested for Language; identified if needed
- Tested for Other Errors, fixed if needed

Step 1. Does document have text?

How to test: Try selecting text using a mouse, or select all text using Edit > “Select All” from the Acrobat menu.

If No: This is an image file and is not accessible. Covert to text using View > Tools > “Recognize Text”.

Step 2. Is document tagged?

How to test: Go to File Properties (Ctrl+D in Windows, Command+D in Mac). In the bottom left corner of the Document Properties dialog, see the “Tagged PDF” field.

If No: this document needs to be tagged. Tags provide the structure on which accessibility is built. Add tags by selecting View > Tools > Accessibility > “Add Tags to Document.”

Step 3. Does document need to be “touched up”?

How to test: Use View > Tools > Accessibility > “Touch Up Reading Order” to see the order in which content on the current page will reflow if the document is viewed in a small window such as on a mobile device. This can also provide a fairly (though not entirely) accurate representation of the order in which screen readers will read the content.

Some accessibility fixes can be made using this tool. Here are a few:

- Hide decorative or redundant images from screen reader users. To do so, click an image, then click “background”
- Add or edit alt text for informative images. To do so, right click on an image, then select “Edit alt text”.
- Rearrange read order if needed. To do so, click “Show order panel”, then drag items to their appropriate location.
- If the page includes data tables, click a table, then click the “Table Editor” button to edit accessibility features within the table.

Step 4. Are headings marked up as headings at appropriate levels?

How to test: First, study the document visually to determine what the heading structure should be. Next, open the Tags Panel by selecting View > Show/Hide > “Navigation Panes” > Tags. The Tags Panel shows a tree of tags that is very similar to HTML.

There are a variety of ways to explore the tag tree. For example, use Acrobat’s text selector tool to highlight text in the document (for example, a heading) then click the menu icon at the top of the Tags pane and choose “Find tag from selection”. This will expand the tag tree if needed and highlight the selected tag.

Alternatively, click the menu icon at the top of the Tags pane and be sure “Highlight Content” is checked. Then click on any tag to see the content associated with that tag highlighted in the document.

Headings should be marked up with tags that are equivalent to HTML headings tags (i.e., <H1> for the main heading, <H2> for subheadings, then <H3>, <H4>, etc. Some authoring

tools may create tags that have heading-like names (e.g., “<Heading_Level_1>”). However, these are not recognized by screen readers and will need to be changed.

To change a tag, right click on the tag, select Properties, and then choose an appropriate tag from the list. If you know what the correct name should be for a particular tag, you can also double-click the tag and type in the correct name.

Step 5. Are tables regular, and cells correctly tagged?

Word has limitations when it comes to making tables accessible. Tables can be very difficult for screen reader users to understand unless they include markup that explicitly defines the relationships between all the parts (e.g., headers and data cells). For a simple table with one row of column headers and no nested rows or columns, Word is up to the task.

However, more complex tables can only be made accessible within HTML or Adobe PDF (accessible table markup can be added to the PDF using Adobe Acrobat Pro).

Often complex tables can be simplified by breaking them into multiple simple tables with a heading above each.

For simple tables, the only step necessary for accessibility is to identify which row contains the column headers. To do this in Word, select that row (Table > Select > Row), then right click the row and select “Table Properties”. This brings up the *Table Properties* dialog. In this dialog, click the *Row* tab, and check the checkbox that says “Repeat as header row at the top of each page.”

Evaluation Tools	Assignment Number:	Assignment Value:	% Weight of Overall Grade:
Open Book Tests	3	20%	60%
Essay	1	30%	30%
Bonus Marks	N/A	10%	10%

Step 6. Does other markup need to be fixed?

How to test: Follow the same instructions as in the previous step. However, rather than focusing specifically on headings, consider the overall structure.

- Are lists tagged as lists?
- Does content in appear in a reasonable order? In Step 3 you checked the read order of content, and may have rearranged some items so they would flow in a meaningful

order in a small window. While this order is typically close to the order of items in the tag tree, the latter is the actual order in which items will be read by screen readers. If items seem to be out of order in the tag tree, drag them to a better location.

- Authoring tools generate a wide variety of tags. These typically aren't cause for alarm, as screen readers ignore most of them and render their content as paragraphs. As long as headings are tagged as headings; and lists, tables, and images are all tagged up appropriately, a document will likely be easy for screen reader users to navigate, read, and understand.

In some cases, the tag tree of a document is a total mess, and it might be easier to delete all tags and start over building them from scratch rather than try to fix the existing tags.

Step 7. Are URLs encoded as links?

How to test: Try clicking a link to see if it attempts to open the target resource in a web browser.

If not: go to Tools > "Document Processing" > "Create Links from URLs"

Step 8. Is the language of the document defined?

How to test: Go to File > Properties > Advanced > Language.

If not: If no language is specified, select one and save the document.

Step 9. Check for any lingering errors

How to test: Run the accessibility checker that is built in to Acrobat Pro. Select Tools > Accessibility > "Full Check" then read the report and follow the prompts.

This is the final step in our checklist, rather than the first step, because some documents generate dozens of errors that can easily be addressed with the first seven steps. This way, the accessibility checker will report fewer problems and will be easier to read and work with.