Making **PDFs** accessible with **Adobe Acrobat PRO** and **Microsoft Word**

Adobe Acrobat PRO is a PDF application that can be found as part of Adobe Creative Suite, a paid suite of applications from Adobe. It is also available as a standalone application. It includes a desktop application and web version and is compatible with most platforms including Windows and Mac.

The accessibility tips provided below work for both the Mac and Windows version of Adobe Acrobat PRO, however, some features may vary according to the version of Adobe Acrobat that is being used and the operating system version. Many of the accessibility tips below are designed to make the document more navigable with a screen reader.

1. **Prepare** your original **Word** document

   a. Before converting your Word document to PDF, prepare your document for accessibility by following the Accessible Microsoft Word guide.
   b. Include a **title** and **author** in your Word Document.
   c. Use the built-in functionality of Microsoft Word wherever possible, especially for **headings**, **paragraphs**, and
   d. Convert **complex graphics** to images to simplify the PDF tagging.
   e. Ensure tables are as simple as possible and **avoid merged** cells – complex table conversion from Word to PDF is not always accurate and may not be read aloud by the screen reader the way you intended. For more complex documents, consider using *Adobe InDesign* as the accessibility conversion is more accurate.

2. **Export** to PDF

   a. In Microsoft Word, "Save as PDF".
   b. In Options make sure to check "Document structure tags for accessibility."
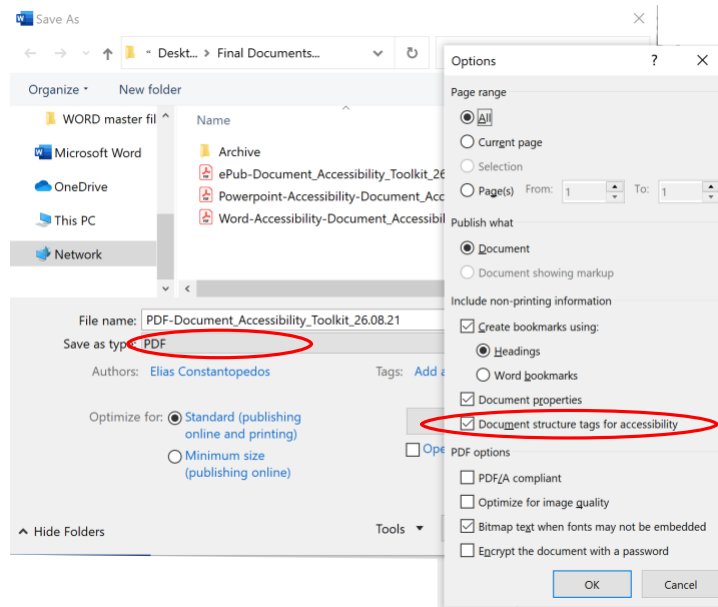   c. Press OK to save.

Figure 1 The Save as PDF option for Microsoft Office

3. **Check** PDF for accessibility issues

    a.   Open your PDF using Adobe Acrobat PRO.

    b.   In Acrobat choose the "Accessibility" option.
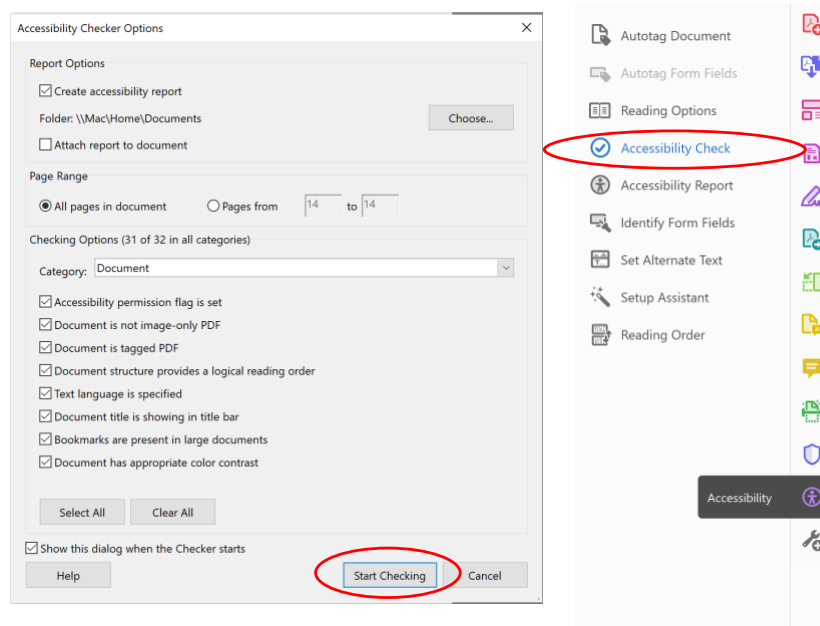
    c.   In the dialog box press OK to start the check.

Figure 2 The accessibility check menu and dialog for Adobe Acrobat

d. The more accessible your initial Word document, the better the results of the accessibility checker.

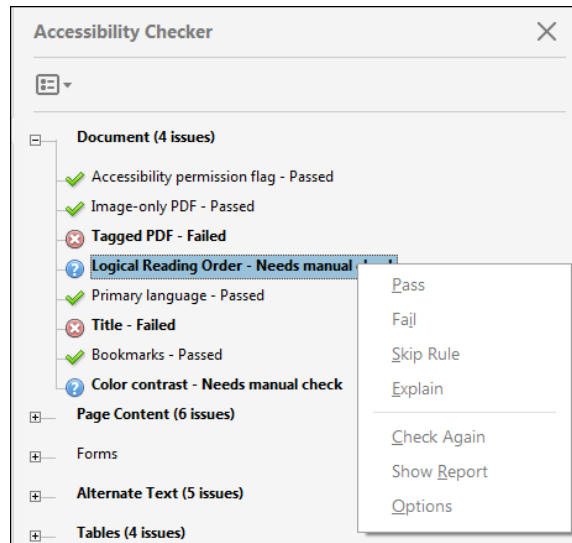e. You can right-click to 'fix' or 'explain' each accessibility issue.

Figure 3 The results of the accessibility checker

f. Now let's follow the warning and recommendations presented by the checker to improve our document.

4. Ensure your PDF has a **Title**

a. Click "File" and then choose "Properties"

b. Enter your document 'Title' in the window that appears.

5. View and edit your **PDF tags**

a. When you 'save as' a PDF, tags are automatically added to the elements within your document like the headings, paragraphs, and figures. This makes it navigable and readable with a screen reader.

b. If you set up your original Word document for accessibility, your tags will be well structured, however, they can always be improved.

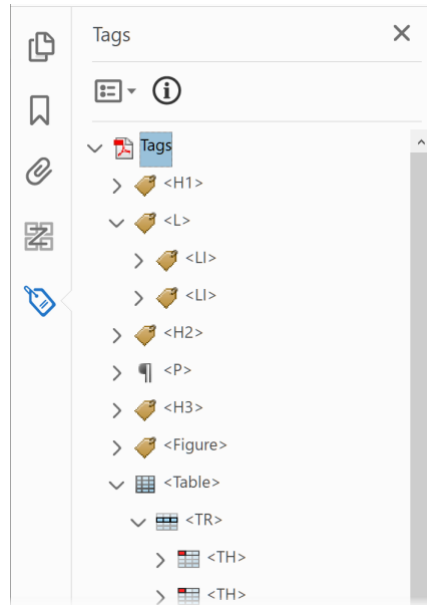c. Check your tags manually in the tags panel and edit where appropriate.

Figure 4 The tags panel in adobe acrobat

6. Check the **Reading Order**

a. Choose "reading order" in the accessibility panel or press the reading order icon in the left-hand menu.

   i. Check the order of the numbers on the page.

   ii. Use the reading order panel to change or add tags.

   iii. Drag the numbered elements in the left-hand column to represent the correct reading order.

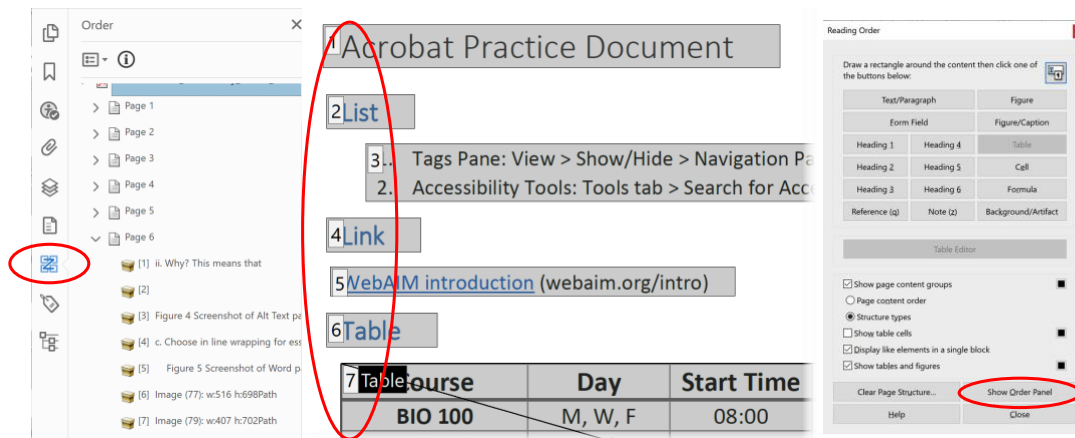b. A correct reading order will ensure a screen reader will read aloud your document in the order you intended.

Figure 5 The reading order panel and editor in acrobat

7. Edit the **Image descriptions**

    a. Ensure essential images and charts contain **alternate text.**

        i. Choose "Set Alternate Text" in the accessibility panel.

        ii. Choose OK to scan the document for images and figures.

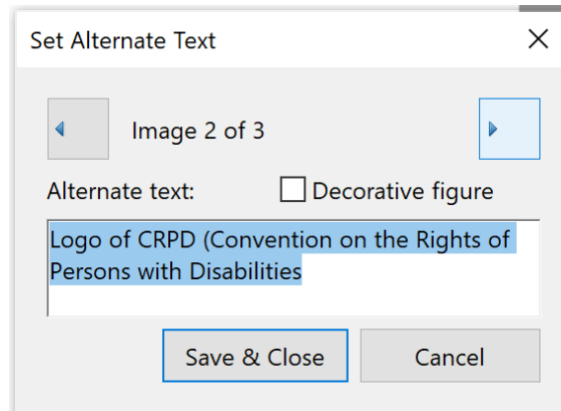   iii. Now you will be able to edit the image description on each image.

Figure 6 A dialog box to set alternate text in adobe acrobat

        iv. Image descriptions will be read aloud by a screen reader helping users who have difficulty seeing the content.

        v. For tips on writing image descriptions refer to the guidelines from the Diagram Center

    a. Mark non-essential visual elements as **decorative.**

        i. For decorative graphics like backgrounds or dividing lines, ensure you check "Decorative figure", so they are not read aloud by the screen reader.
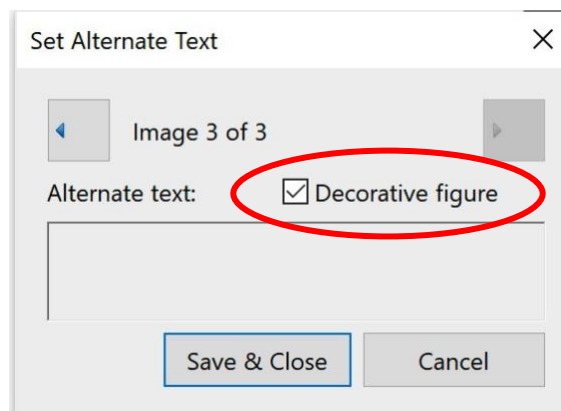
Figure 7 A dialog box to set alternate text as a Decorative figure

8. Ensure color **contrast** between text and background

   a. The accessibility checker will display a warning if the contrast between the color of your text and the color of your background does not meet the requirements for persons with visual impairments; your target contrast should be a 3:1 ratio.

   b. You must manually correct these issues in your original document.

   c. You can use this app; Color Contrast Analyzer to help you.

9. Making **tables** accessible

   a. Tables can present several accessibility challenges when converting from Microsoft Word to PDF. In particular, the conversion is not always accurate, and you may find problems auto-tagging the table.

   b. Where possible **avoid merging cells** in your original file as this will create issues for a screen reader trying to read your PDF.

   c. If your table does not tag correctly or has issues that cannot be corrected, you may want to consider using an alternative program. Converting tables from documents designed in **Adobe InDesign** can produce a better result more compatible with screen readers.

   d. You can edit your table by clicking on "Reading Order" > selecting the table > then selecting "Table Editor." Here you will be able to mark header rows and edit cell tags. This can make your table more readable with a screen reader.

8. **Re-check** the PDF for accessibility issues

   a. Use the "Accessibility Checker" to recheck the document ensuring all issues have been checked and corrected.

9. Test with a **screen reader** and include **persons with disabilities** in the process

   b. You can test how your document performs with a screen reader using the 'Narrator' built into Window, 'Voiceover' built into Mac or NVDA, a free screen reader for Windows that is widely used.

Additional Links

Read more about ways to make your word documents accessible:

- https://webaim.org/techniques/acrobat/
- https://www.adobe.com/accessibility/products/acrobat/using-acrobat-pro-accessibility-checker.html
- https://helpx.adobe.com/in/acrobat/using/create-verify-pdf-accessibility.html