Checking PDFs for Accessibility

Kutztown University Disability Services Office (DSO)

It is always best, if possible, to start with an accessible *source document* (such as Microsoft Word) and export it to an accessible PDF. This way, if the document is edited later, the document's accessibility features will still be intact. When the document is exported to PDF, the accessibility features will be passed to the PDF as well.

However, it is not always possible to start with an accessible source document. If that is the case, accessibility features can be added to the PDF using Adobe Acrobat Pro DC. The checklist below will guide you through checking a PDF for accessibility. This checklist applies specifically to Adobe Acrobat Pro DC.

Please note: Modifying PDFs can have unpredictable results, so it is best to save often, and in multiple versions.

Step 1: Does the document have text?

Open the document in Adobe Acrobat Pro DC. Try selecting text using a mouse, or select all text using *Edit > Select All* from the Acrobat Menu.

If not, this is an image file and is not currently accessible. You can convert the image to text using *View > Tools > Scan & OCR > Open*. Select the option to Recognize Text (in this file). Adobe will automatically convert these scanned images to editable text and images.

Step 2: Is the document tagged?

Go to *File > Properties*. In the bottom left corner of the Document Properties dialog, see the "Tagged PDF" field.

If this field is listed as "No" then this document will need to be tagged. Tags provide the order and structure on which accessibility is built. Add tags by selecting *View > Tools > Accessibility > Open > Autotag Document*.

To review and repair the content reading order, go to *Accessibility > Reading Order > Page Content Order*. If the order of the content is not in the correct numerical sequence, select the "Show Order Panel" button and Acrobat will open the Order pane on the left side of the window. To change the content order, click and drag the items listed to their appropriate location.

Step 3: Check for any lingering errors.

Run the accessibility checker that is built into Acrobat Pro. Select *Tools > Accessibility > Accessibility Check*. Adobe will generate a report that lists items in various categories. Each item is preceded by an icon indicating that the item either passes, fails, or requires manual inspection. Right click on any item to see a list of options for fixing the problem or learning more about it.

Even though the first two steps would be picked up by the accessibility checker, some documents could generate dozens of errors that could easily be addressed in the first two steps. This way, the accessibility checker will report fewer problems and will be easier to read and work with.

For more information, WebAIM (Web Accessibility in Mind) provides a tutorial for PDF Accessibility, which can be found at the following link: https://webaim.org/techniques/acrobat/acrobat.

Creating High Quality Scans

Sometimes it is necessary to scan a document for an instructional need. When documents are in electronic form, they are easier to distribute and can be more accessible than print documents for students with disabilities. However, to be fully accessible, certain steps must be followed to be sure the scanned document is of high quality. Even if a document is not needed for a person with a disability, a poor scan can negatively impact the end user's experience.

To save time and energy, sometimes you can perform a quick search on the internet to see if the document already exists online.

If you are unable to find a version online, you can create a scan yourself, but for a scan to be high quality, it will need to be free from:

- Text that is cut off
- Crooked pages
- Dark gutters (the margins where shadows occur from curvature of the book's spine)
- Poor contrast
- Pages that are rotated 90 or 180 degrees
- Handwriting
- Highlighting
- Underlining
- Watermarks and coffee stains
- Excessive use of script or italic fonts
- Blurring

Be sure to consider these issues when choosing an original source and producing the scanned version!

Some other helpful steps may include:

- Push the spine of the book down while scanning to ensure that all text is copied in a clear manner. A book with a spine will not naturally lie flat on a scanner, which means text on the edges of the page will be distorted.
- Don't combine pages. Limiting each print page to one electronic page will improve reading on mobile platforms and helps speed up the conversion process using Optical Character Recognition (OCR) software.