Guiding Principles - Making Accessible PDF Documents from Microsoft Word

Accessibility Tip

PDFs are all about being tagged before the file conversation, not after! A tag gives a pdf file structure similar to a heading in Word documents.

Dos

- ✓ Ensure your document has a logical and **organized hierarchical reading structure** (Heading Levels, Table of Contents, Bookmarks, Links, etc.).

- ✓ Always add **Alt-Text** (alternative text) for images and any graphical objects.

- ✓ Perform an **OCR** (optical character recognition) to make text readable for screen readers before your final save of the document (Adobe Software).

- ✓ Run an **Accessibility Checker** in Word and Acrobat Professional. This is found in the review pane in Word or in the Accessibility tab in Acrobat Professional.

- ✓ Use the "Convert to PDF" in Word to **generate tags** and tag tree for your file. This is found in the Options setting before the final save.

✓ Ask a colleague or personally **test** the document when finished with a screen reader.

Don'ts

☒ Save a scanned text document as an image file.

☒ Print your document directly as a PDF.

☒ Use a table to organize text into columns for forms created in Microsoft Word.

Optical Character Recognition (OCR)

When a textual document is created as a pdf or image the text must be recognized in a separate process so that screen readers can read the file. Specialized software will scan the image file and recognize individual characters of the words to make the document readable and editable in a digital form. This process is known as optical character recognition.

Retrofitting for Accessibility

If an existing PDF file is not accessible, you will need to use special software, such as Acrobat Professional, OpenBook or Kurzweil to perform optical character recognition (OCR). Also, it can take more time to correct an inaccessible file, rather than creating it from the start.

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