# PDF Accessibility\* Checklist

* The original document meets all guidelines for accessibility.  
  Rationale: PDF files are typically created in some other application or by scanning existing documents. Review the Guidelines & Standards for creating accessible text, spreadsheets, and presentations before creating your PDF version. Begin with an accessible text document BEFORE converting to PDF.
* Verify the document is a searchable text file, not an image-only scan.   
  Rationale: Documents scanned without OCR (optical character recognition) may appear to a assistive technology as large images without readable/selectable text
* Indicate document structure and non-text elements by tags.   
  Rationale: well-formed, tagged PDF documents ensure logical reading order, that all text is selectable and readable for assistive technology, and that users can navigate the document using document structure (e.g. headings, footers, page numbers, etc.)
* Ensure clear reading order is easy to follow.   
  Rationale: PDF files created from brochures and other documents with tables, columns, and multi-page articles may result in unexpected reading order or document flow.
* Specify the document language.   
  Rationale: Setting the document language in a PDF enables some screen readers to switch to the appropriate language.
* Select document fonts that allow characters to be extracted to text.   
  Rationale: Custom fonts or symbol-based fonts may not be readable by screen readers or other assistive technologies. Users should be able to select an alternate font to view/print the document.
* Set document permissions to allow access for assistive technology.   
  Rationale: A document author can specify that no part of an accessible PDF is to be copied, printed, extracted, commented on, or edited. This setting can interfere with the user of a screen reader’s ability to read the documents screen readers must be able to copy or extract the document’s text to convert it to speech.
* Provide alternative descriptions for images, formulas, and other items that do not translate naturally into text.  
  Rationale: non-text elements such as pictures, graphs, charts, and other items require alternative text to describe the visual characteristics.
* Mark up data tables with proper table structure including row and column headings. Table summaries are optional unless the table data cannot be understood without it.  
  Rationale: when tables are used to organize or present data (and not for layout), they must include additional markup to ensure users can associate the content of each cell with its appropriate modifiers.
* Add tags to links created through annotations/PDF mark-up.  
  Rationale: Links added to a PDF after it is created associates the link with the geographic region of the page and not in the regular flow of the text. In order to ensure the link is available for keyboard and assistive technology users, additional tags must be added to identify the link location within the reading flow of the text.
* Mark up/tag lists to group list items together.  
  Rationale: Assistive technology will recognize and group together items identified as part of a list. Without this information, users may have difficulty navigating the list and interpreting the start and end of the list. If list tags were not generated in the original document, they should be added after conversion to PDF.
* For documents with original pagination, add PageLabels to reflect the page number formatting, including appendices and front matter.  
  Rationale: if PageLabels has not been provided to describe the page number formatting, the page numbering scheme will not be reflected in the Page Navigation toolbar in Adobe Acrobat Pro or Reader. This toolbar displays the page number in a text box, which users can change to move to another page. In addition, users can select the arrows to move one page up or down in the document. PageLabels help users locate themselves in a document by ensuring that the page numbering displayed in the PDF viewer page controls has the same page numbering as the document.
* Add navigational aids to long documents (6 or more pages)   
  Rationale: Users without a mouse for scrolling and users of assistive technology utilize bookmarks and tables of content to quickly navigate to relevant sections of longer documents.
* For interactive PDFs and forms, refer to the PDF Forms Checklist.   
  Rationale: Interactive features and forms distributed in PDF require additional markup and design considerations for access by users of assistive technologies. Please see the additional checklist for details.

## Resources

* [PDF Techniques for WCAG 2.0 - http://www.w3.org/WAI/GL/WCAG20-TECHS/pdf.html](http://www.w3.org/WAI/GL/WCAG20-TECHS/pdf.html)
* [UW Accessible IT: PDF Accessibility - http://www.washington.edu/accessibility/pdf.html](http://www.washington.edu/accessibility/pdf.html)

# \*About PDFs and Accessibility

Although it is possible to create an accessible PDF document and possible for a user to read the document if equipped with the appropriate software, many users and advocacy groups continue to recommend that PDF documents be accompanied by alternative format documents that are more universally accessible, such as an accessible Word Document or HTML (web page).