

- An accessible document can be as easily read by a sighted reader, as a low vision or non-sighted reader.
- It has a hidden or invisible layer of instructions to guide adaptive technologies like screen readers through a document.
- Without these instructions, the screen reader may interpret the document in the wrong order, without important graphics or in a format too jumbled for the user to understand.
- Making a document accessible is easiest when you are in the early stages of creating the document.
- Use the built-in accessibility checker tools.
- Access tutorials and other resources.

Ideally, the file will have been made accessible when it was originally created, whether it was created in Microsoft Word, Adobe InDesign, Microsoft Excel or Google Docs.

Common Accessibility Issues:

No (or incomplete) Metadata

Metadata is used by Search Engines to display information about the document to give the visitor enough information to determine if this is the document they are looking for.

Metadata is usually transferred automatically from the source document in most instances.

- **Title:** Should be descriptive to the document (as opposed to numbers, symbols, etc)
- In the document's properties, the settings need to be established so that the document title is displayed (and read by assistive technology), as opposed to the File Name.
- **Language:** Is the correct language of the document set?
- **Author:** Should not be an individual's name, but the company, agency, department, etc.
- **Subject:** Can be the same as the title
- **Keywords:** help making it easier to locate when searching online. Use headings and/or bookmarks in your list of keywords

No (or improper) Tagging: Tags are the basis of an accessible PDF file. They indicate the structure of the document, communicate the order in which the items should be read, and determine exactly which items will be read.

- **Not Tagged:** if a PDF doesn't have tags, it's not accessible and not in compliance.
- **Improper Tag Structure:** A tagged PDF is not automatically accessible. If incorrect tags are used, if tags are put together incorrectly or if the reading order isn't correct, the PDF will be inaccessible.

No Alt Text: Use alt text for images to describe the image to a visually impaired person.

Scanned PDF: Displays as an image, each page treated like one big picture.

Table Headers not defined: For data tables to be read correctly by screen readers, the header cells need not only to be defined as headers (in TH) tags, but their scope needs to be assigned – column or row – so the screen reader can correctly associate data cells with the correct header cells.

Resources:

<https://helpx.adobe.com/acrobat/using/create-verify-pdf-accessibility.html>

<https://commonlook.com/why-document-accessibility-matters/>

<https://www.hhs.gov/web/section-508/making-files-accessible/checklist/pdf/index.html>