How to Make PDFs ADA Compatible

Why?

What's the fuss? Why make PDFs, or any other document for that matter, ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) compliant?
It's the law. As a state and federally funding institution, you *must* comply with Section 508, Section 504, and the ADA.

- It can also affect a program's accreditation standing.
- It's the right thing to do.

What is ADA Compliance?

Simply stated, ADA compliance means we make every effort to make information accessible to those with disabilities. This includes those who are visually and audibly impaired.

What makes a PDF "ADA Compliant"?

Some of the features of an ADA compliant PDF include:

- Searchable text
    - **Note**: PDFs created by scanning may actually be an image and not searchable text.
- Images with Alt Text
    - Alt text is hidden text used to describe an image to a visually impaired individual.
- Bookmarks for documents over 9 pages
- Add tags
- Logical reading order (left-to-right) in tables
- No background images or watermarks
- Table rows that don't split across pages

A checklist to ensure your PDF document is ADA compliant is provided by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Before creating a PDF

Verify your document (Word or otherwise) is free of potential ADA problems before converting it to a PDF.

Remove Background Image/Watermark in Word

If your document has a watermark or background image, perform the following:

1. Open the Word document
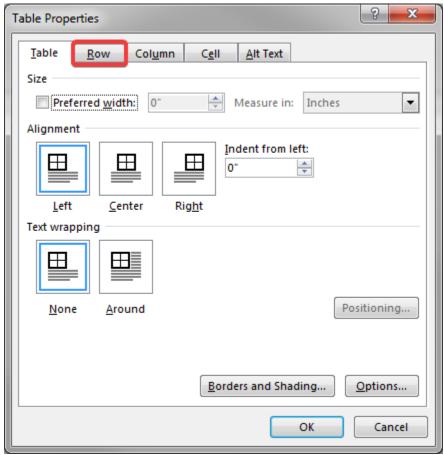2. Perform on of the following:

- If using Word 2003/2010, click the **Page Layout** tab, and then select **Watermark** in the Page Background group.
- If using Word 2013, click the **Design** tab, and then select **Watermark** in the Page Background group.

3. Select **Remove Watermark**

Remove Table Rows from Splitting Across Pages
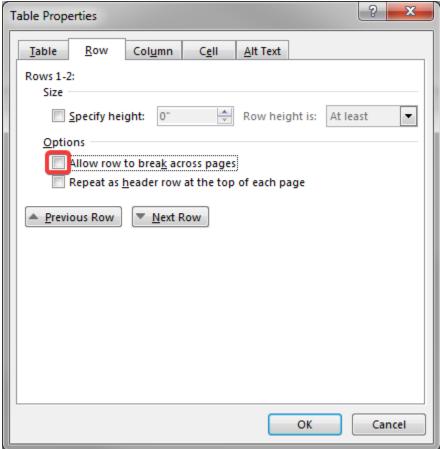
If your document contains tables, perform the following:

1. In the Word document, click the table selections button at the top left of the table. The button looks like perpendicular arrows pointing in four different directions.
   - **Note**: The entire table will be selected.
2. Click the **Table Tools/Layout** tab on the ribbon
3. Click **Properties** in the Table group
   - The Table Properties dialog will appear.
4. Click the **Row** tab

5. Uncheck the box for **Allow row to break across pages**

6. Click **OK**

Modify the PDF

Once a PDF has been created, either via scanning or by converting an existing document, you may need to perform one or more of the following steps.

Convert PDF to Searchable Text

If the PDF was created by scanning, perform the following:
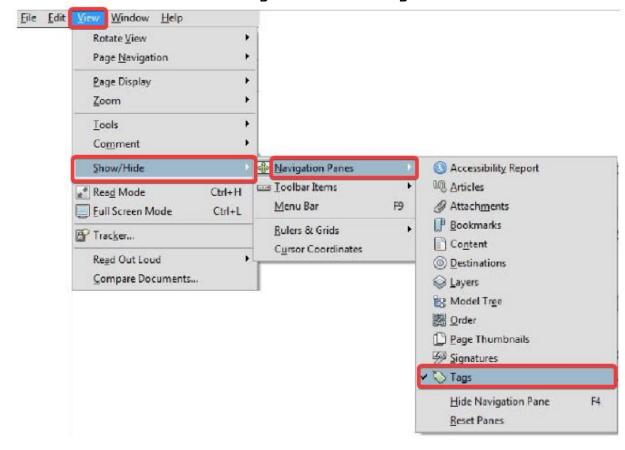
1. Open the PDF in Acrobat X Pro

2. Click the **Tools** button on the right

3. Click **Recognize Text** and then click **In This File**
   - The Recognize Text dialog will appear.
4. Click **OK**
5. Save the PDF

Add Alt Text to Images

1. Open the PDF in Acrobat X Pro.
2. Choose **View > Show/Hide > Navigation Panels > Tags**

- The Tags pane will appear on the left side of the window.
- **Optional**: Click the Options button and then ensure **Highlight Content** is **checked**.

3. Click the plus signs **(+)** to expand the logical structure tree, then find and select the **<Figure>** tag element for the desired image
4. Click the **Options** button and select **Properties**... from the menu.
    - **Note**: A TouchUp Properties dialog will appear.
5. Type text that describes the image in the **Alternate Text** field.
6. Click **Close**

Add Bookmarks

If the PDF document contains 9 or more pages, bookmarks should be added. Bookmarks allow the reader to quickly navigate to points of interest within a PDF by linking to a specific page and view of that page.

1. Open the **PDF** in Acrobat X Pro and navigate to the **page** to which you wish the bookmark to link to
2. Adjust the view settings, zooming in or out
3. Using the **Select** tool, create the desired image or text to bookmark
    - To bookmark a single image. Click in the image or drag a rectangle around the image.
    - To bookmark a portion of an image, drag a rectangle around the portion.
    - To bookmark selected text, drag the rectangle to select the text.
        - **Note**: The selected text becomes the label of the new bookmark, though you can edit the label.
4. Click the **Bookmarks** button on the far left
5. Click the **Options** button and click **New Bookmark** from the menu
6. If desired, edit the text of the bookmark

Run Accessibility Checker

Running the Accessibility Quick Check or Fill Check to find potential problems.

1. Select **View > Tools > Accessibility** from the menu bar
    - Accessibility options will appear in the Tools pane on the right.
2. Do one of the following:
    - Select **Quick Check**
        - The results of the quick check will be displayed with any possible recommendations.
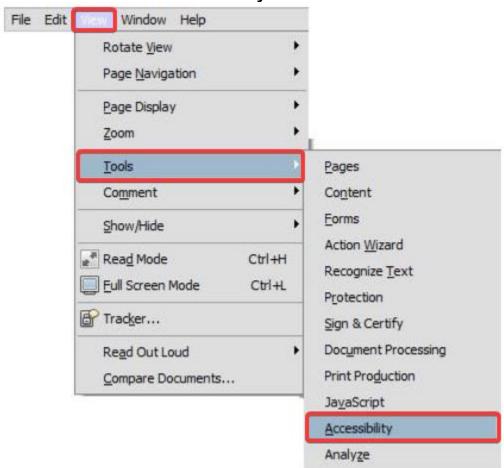
- Select **Full Check** and when the Accessibility Full Check options screen is displayed, click **Start Checking.** Then **OK** at the result message screen.
  - An Accessibility Report will appear in the left pane, listing potential problems, as well as links to instructions on how to fix said problems.

Add Tags

PDF files should include structure, that is, a set of instructions that define how the content logically fits together (e.g., correct reading order, the presence and meaning of significant elements such as figures, lists, tables, etc.). In PDFs, structure is expressed via "tags" which can be automatically generated.

1. Open the **PDF** in Acrobat X Pro
2. Choose **View > Tools > Accessibility**

- **Note**: The tag management will appear under the Tools menu on the right.

- A Recognition Report will appear in the left pane, listing the location of tags and the level of "confidence" (e.g., high, medium, low, etc.) of each tag. The report also contains links to instructions on how to fix potential tagging problems.
3. Verify the tags match reading order
4. Select **Add Tags to Document**

Resources

- More information on using the [Acrobat X Pro Accessibility Checker](#) is available from Adobe.
- More details on [making PDFs ADA compliant](#) is available from Adobe.