



Accessible PDF document

PDFs should only be used when there is a specific need for this format, determined through research and in line with the [Australian Government Style Manual](#). This is because PDFs can often be inaccessible for a variety of reasons:

- PDFs have a fixed layout and do not work well on different devices and with assistive technologies (failing WCAG criteria 1.4.10).
- PDFs don't provide the necessary structure for screen readers to convey information accurately.
- Complicated designs, images, and unusual fonts can make things even harder, especially for people with a visual impairment.
- PDFs often lack helpful features like bookmarks and links, making it tough for users to locate specific content.

When you find yourself in a situation where you have no choice but to use a PDF for publishing, it's important to make sure that the PDF is easy to use for everyone and includes a corresponding webpage version or a summary.

Creating an accessible PDF involves making the document usable for everyone, including those who use screen readers, magnifiers, or other assistive technologies. However, it's important to emphasise that achieving PDF accessibility can be quite challenging, and we advise against using PDFs unless it's absolutely necessary for formatting your content.

Prepare your source document

It's essential to start with an accessible source document before converting your document to PDF. Use a word processing software like Microsoft Word, Google Docs, or Adobe InDesign, and follow these guidelines:

- **Use proper headings:** Organise your content with headings and subheadings. Use built-in heading styles (e.g., Heading 1, Heading 2) instead of manually formatting text.
- **Add alt text to images:** For all images, charts, graphs, and non-text elements, provide concise and descriptive alternative text. In Word, right-click an image, select 'Edit Alt Text,' and add a description in the 'Alt Text' field.
- **Create meaningful hyperlinks:** Use clear and descriptive link text that conveys the link's purpose. Do not use generic terms like 'click here.'

- **Use accessible fonts and colours:** Choose readable fonts (e.g., Arial, Times New Roman). Ensure sufficient contrast between text and background colours for readability.
- **Properly format tables:** Only use a table if there's no easier way to show your information, like using a list or regular text. If your document must contain tables, use table tools in your word processor to add column and row headers. Avoid merged or split cells.
- **Run a final accessibility check:** Running a final accessibility check in your source document before exporting the final version is crucial to ensure that your content is inclusive and can be accessed and understood by all individuals, regardless of their abilities or disabilities.

For more detailed information refer to the Microsoft Word document instructions above.

Convert to PDF

Once your source document is accessible, follow these steps to convert it to a PDF.

- **Microsoft Word (Windows):** Go to 'File' > 'Save As' > 'PDF' and select 'Options.' Ensure that 'Document structure tags for accessibility' is checked.

Check accessibility with Adobe Acrobat Pro

We are using Adobe Acrobat Pro as an example of PDF remediation software, choose a software relevant to your needs.

Converting an accessible document to PDF may create new accessibility issues. Adobe Acrobat Pro offers tools to assess and enhance PDF accessibility. Here's how to check and fix accessibility issues:

- Open the PDF in Adobe Acrobat Pro
- Go to 'Tools' > 'Prepare for accessibility' > 'Accessibility Check.'
- Select 'Start Checking.'

Review the Accessibility Checker results. It will identify issues that need attention.

Fix accessibility issues:

- issues like missing alt text, right-click the element and select 'Fix'.
- heading structure and reading order, use the '[Reading Order](#)' tool in the 'Prepare for accessibility' panel.

Re-run Accessibility Checker: After making changes, rerun the Accessibility Checker to ensure all issues are resolved.

Set document properties

Set document properties to provide important information about the PDF. Setting document properties ensures your readers know vital context.

- **Title:** Go to 'File' > 'Document Properties' > 'Description' and enter a clear and descriptive title, author, subject and keywords then select 'Ok' to save.
- **Language:** Specify the document's language in the 'Advanced' tab of the document properties. Go to 'File' > 'Document Properties' > 'Advanced' and set the language then select 'Ok' to save.

Resources

[Create and verify PDF accessibility](#)