

# Creating Accessible PDFs Using Acrobat Pro: Demo Walkthrough

## Introduction

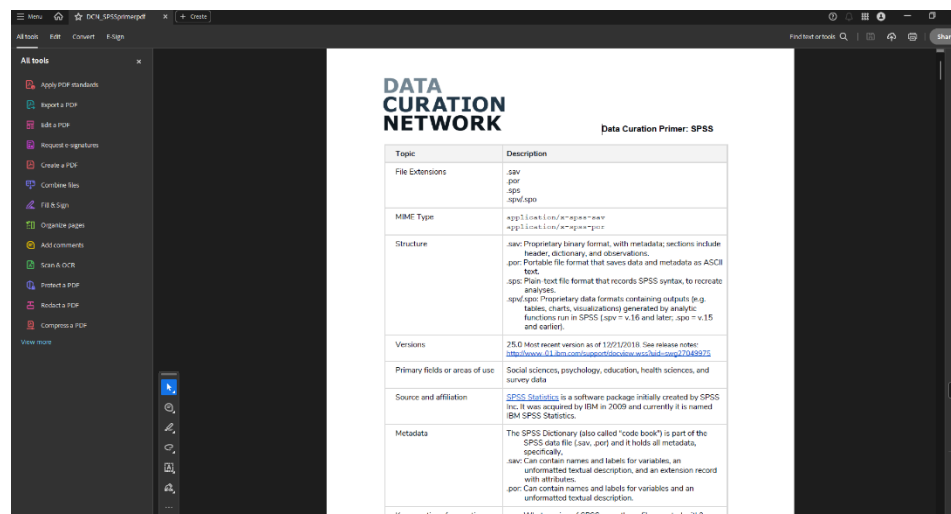
PDFs are quite possibly the most widely used digital document format yet many of its accessibility features go unused and misunderstood. This demo walkthrough, which accompanies the 2025 RDAP workshop, “Accessibly Create and FAIR(ly) Share Visualizations”, guides you through the following:

- Checking the accessibility of a PDF
- Applying standards
- Enhancing a PDF’s accessibility
- Saving

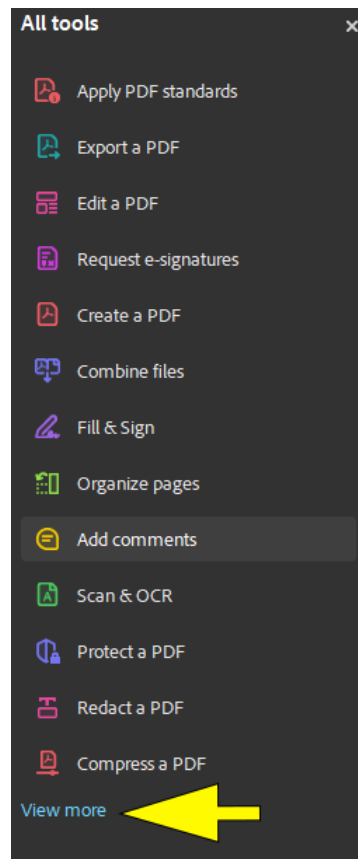
This guide focuses on Adobe Acrobat Pro, which is a paid software and has far more features than Acrobat Reader, which is a free software intended only to view PDFs. There are dozens of free alternatives to Acrobat Pro, either web-based or locally installed, but their features and accessibility options vary and were not assessed for this demo. Furthermore, this guide assumes you are working with an existing PDF.

## Part One: Prepare for Accessibility

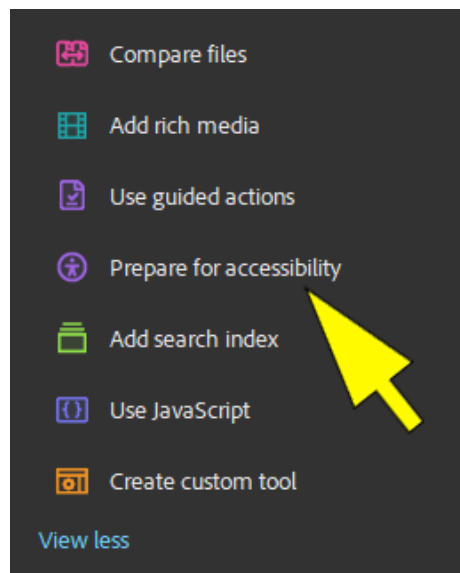
### Open a PDF using Adobe Acrobat Pro



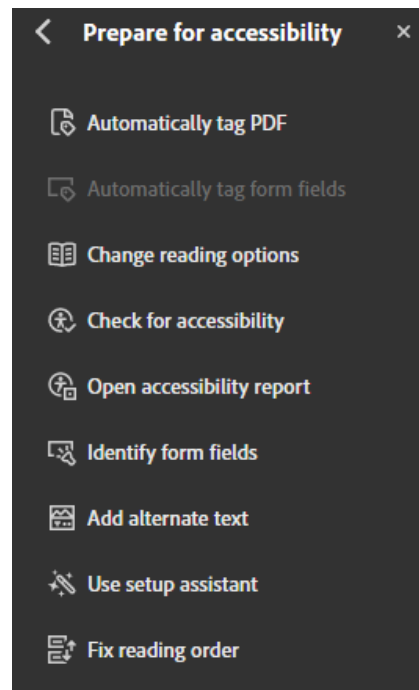
Click **View more** in the left-hand menu



Click **Prepare for accessibility**



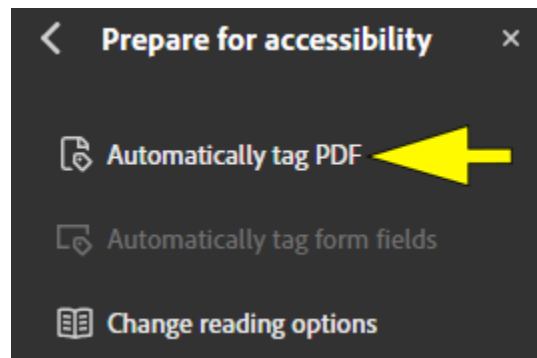
Familiarize yourself with the following options



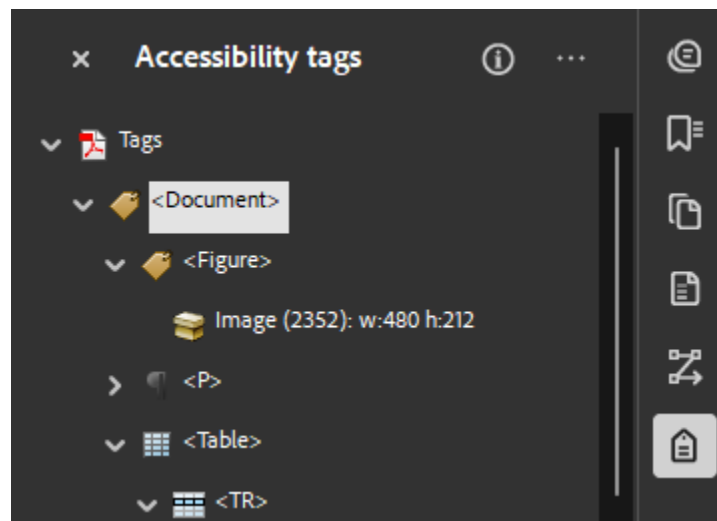
- **Automatically tag PDF:** automatically adds tags to each element of the PDF so that screen readers can access the document. If document is already tagged, Acrobat will alert you and allow you to reapply tags.
- **Automatically tag form fields:** tags form fields – only applies to documents that are built as forms.
- **Change reading options:** allows you to change how the document is read, including by tag order, inferred order, or left-to-right/top-to-bottom order.
- **Check for accessibility:** analyzes the document looking for potential accessibility issues including missing alt-text, text language, and color contrast.
- **Open accessibility report:** opens the accessibility report created when checking for accessibility.
- **Identify form fields:** allows you to manually assign form fields to the document.
- **Add alternate text:** allows you to add alt-text to images in the document.
- **Use setup assistant:** walks you through all accessibility options when preparing a document for accessibility.
- **Fix reading order:** allows you to manually assign tags document elements to correct or customize reading order.

This guide focuses on the four main tools you will need, including **Automatically tag PDF**, **Change reading options**, **Check for accessibility**, and **Fix reading order**.

Click [Automatically tag PDF](#)

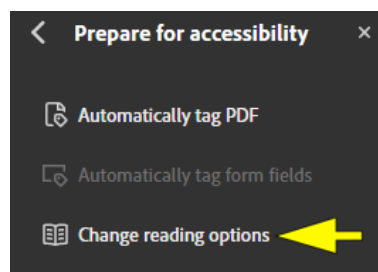


After a few moments, the document will be tagged and all parts (images, tables, etc.) will be delineated on the right side of the program window.

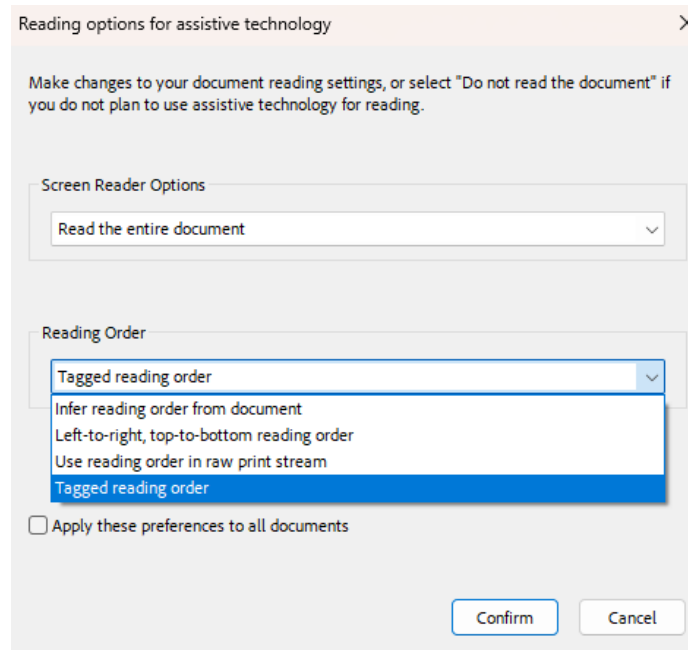


You can inspect and click on the tags to verify their accuracy, in doing so each tagged element will be highlighted on the document itself. Right-click on a nested element to open a context menu with options to retag, delete, change order and more.

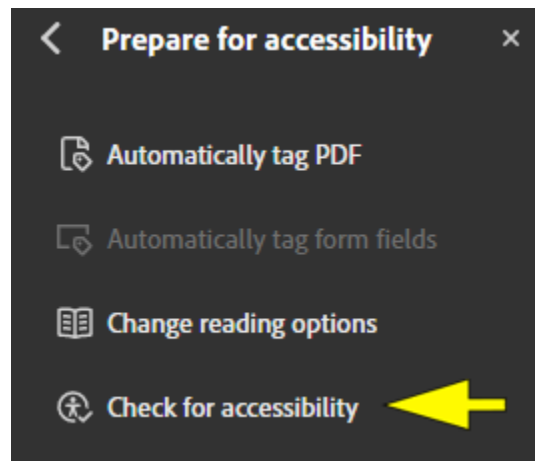
Click [Change reading options](#)



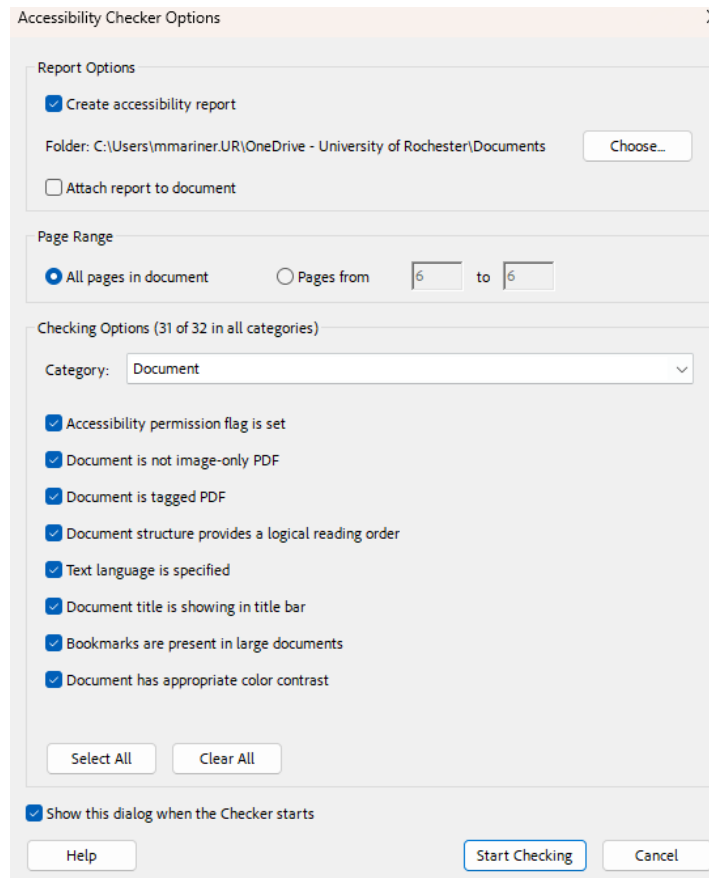
A window will appear giving you options on how to instruct assistive technologies, like screen readers, to approach the document. For instance, a user can opt to change the overall reading order or limit how much of the document is read by those technologies. Tagged reading order is the default option and generally the most correct.



Click [Check for Accessibility](#)

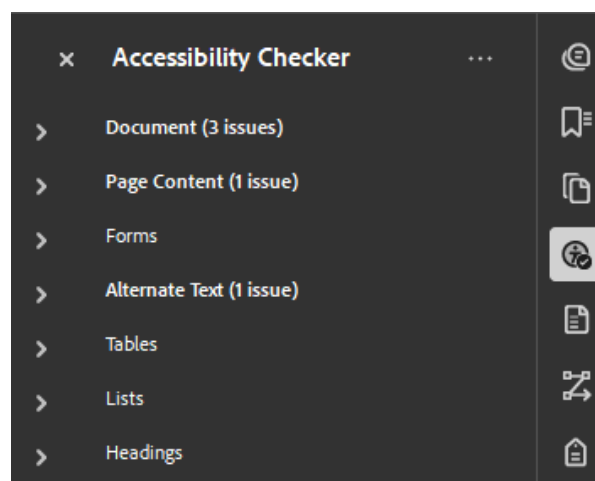


This will open a window with options you can select to customize which accessibility features will be assessed.



Here you can choose to generate a separate accessibility report file, limit the assessed pages, and select which accessibility features to include or omit. For most documents, the default options pictured above are adequate.

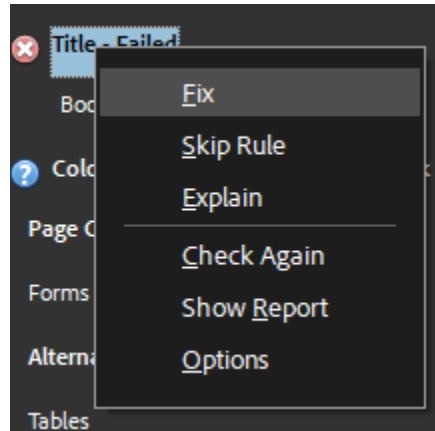
After a few moments, the accessibility checker will generate a list of everything it assessed noting any issues on the right-hand side of the document.



In this example the **Document** section notes three issues that need attention:

- Logical Reading Order: this cannot be automatically verified by Acrobat and must be manually assessed by the user.
- Color Contrast: like reading order, this also must be assessed by the user.
- Title: in this example, the document has no professed title, which means screen readers and assistive technologies will not know the name of the document.

Right-click **Title** and select **Fix**

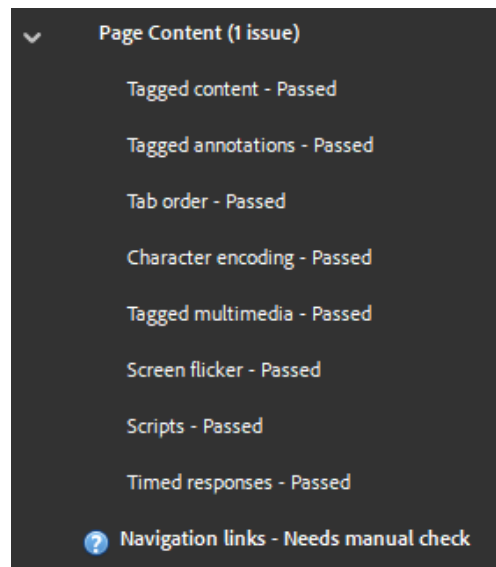


You may also select **Skip Rule** to omit an assessment and **Explain** to open a help page on Adobe Acrobat's website.

After selecting **Fix** a window will appear allowing the user to enter a title, subject, author, and keywords. Only lack of a title will alert accessibility checker.

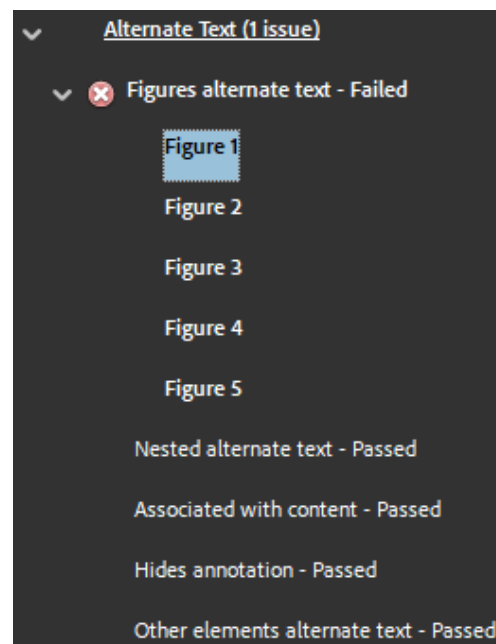
A screenshot of the 'Description' dialog box in Adobe Acrobat. The dialog has a title bar 'Description' with a close button. It contains four input fields: 'Title' (with the text 'Data Curation Primer: SPSS'), 'Subject', 'Author', and 'Keywords'. Below each input field is a checkbox labeled 'Leave As Is'. The 'Leave As Is' checkbox for 'Title' is unchecked, while the others are checked. At the bottom are 'OK' and 'Cancel' buttons.

Check the [Page Content](#) section



A common assessment by accessibility checker is that **Navigation links** need to be manually checked. These are any hyperlinks in the document that direct readers to webpages or other documents. Check all links manually and this section can be skipped or ignored.

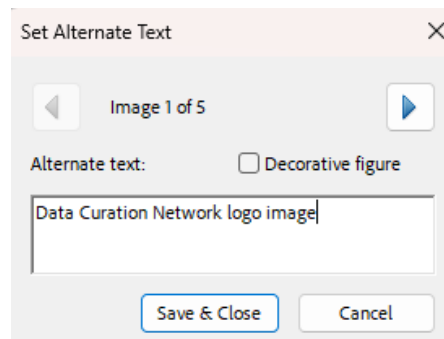
Check the [Alternate Text](#) section



This section indicates all images or document objects that do not have alt-text.



Right-click [Figure 1](#) and select [Fix](#)



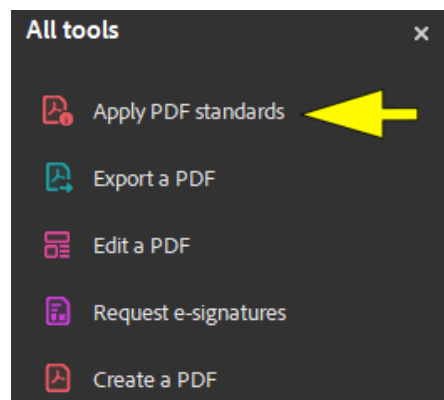
A window will appear allowing you to add alternate text to a figure, mark it as decorative (which screen readers will take as a cue to ignore), and navigate between all images in the document. It is advisable to mark images as decorative or add text, as figures without either will still be identified by assistive technologies as images, which may be disruptive to readers.

Once the user is satisfied with corrections to the document, it is time to save it as a protected PDF/A.

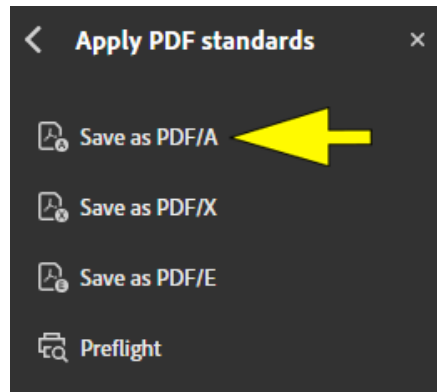
## Part Two: Saving a PDF/A

Saving a PDF as a PDF/A helps ensure that the document will be as interoperable as possible over a long period of time. It also ensures that the document is ADA-compliant, secure, and allows for features like embedded fonts and annotations. There are many iterations of PDF/A, with PDF/A-2 being perhaps the most common for basic documents. This guide covers the basic process of applying PDF/A standards to a PDF. Features like Preflight, which dive deeper into the minutiae of PDF standards, will not be covered.

Click [Apply PDF Standards](#)

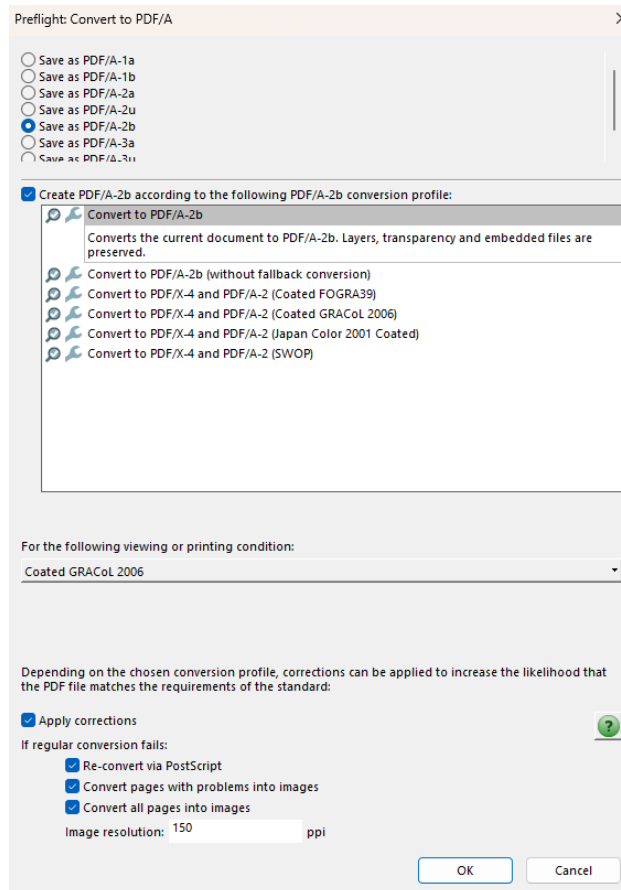


Click **Save as PDF/A**



At this point you will be prompted to choose a location and file name for their newly saved PDF/A-compliant document. It is highly recommended to *not* overwrite the original PDF.

You may also click **Settings** in the save screen to inspect some of the options for customizing the type of PDF/A to be saved. The default settings are almost always acceptable for most documents.



Finally, click **Save**

After some processing the document will be locked for editing, as noted by the light blue banner at the top of the screen. Enabling editing will require you to re-apply PDF/A standards to remain in compliance.

This file claims compliance with the PDF/A standard and has been opened read-only to prevent modification.

Enable Editing

# DATA CURATION NETWORK

## Data Curation Primer: SPSS

Topic	Description
File Extensions	.sav .por .sps .spv/.spo
MIME Type	application/x-spss-sav application/x-spss-por

## Appendix: Further Reading

The following are online resources to assist you further in learning more about PDF accessibility and the tools therein.

- [Adobe Acrobat: Create and verify PDF accessibility](#)
- [WebAIM: Defining PDF Accessibility](#)
- [US Government Services Administration Section 508: Create Accessible PDFs](#)
- [LOC Digital Preservation: Format description for PDF/A](#)
- [Washington University St. Louis: Alternative Text for Images](#)
- [WebAIM Contrast Checker tool](#)
- [Adobe Acrobat Pro](#): (virtually the only viable solution for checking PDF accessibility)
- [Microsoft Office accessibility checker](#) (helps make documents accessible before creating PDFs)

Created by [Matthew C. Mariner](#), Data Curator Librarian, University of Rochester Libraries

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