

ADA-Compliant PDF Creation Guide

1. Start With a Real Source File

Use built-in styles such as Headings, Lists, and Paragraphs.

Avoid screenshot-based PDFs.

2. Use Proper Headings and Structure Tags

Heading levels (H1, H2, H3) provide navigation for screen readers.

3. Tag Everything Correctly

Ensure headings, lists, tables, and images have proper tags.

Check the tag tree for correct structure.

4. Add Alt Text to Images

Describe meaningful images succinctly.

Mark decorative images as artifacts.

5. Verify Reading Order

Screen readers follow the reading order panel.

Ensure logical top-to-bottom flow.

6. Use Real Lists

Avoid typing dashes or asterisks manually.

Use true list formatting tools.

7. Build Accessible Tables

Use table headers and avoid merged cells when possible.

8. Ensure Strong Color Contrast

Minimum: 4.5:1 for normal text; 3:1 for large text.

9. Make Text Searchable

Apply OCR to scanned PDFs.

10. Use Descriptive Links

Links should explain their destination or action.

11. Choose Accessible Fonts

Use clean fonts like Arial, Helvetica, Verdana, etc.

12. Set Document Language

Screen readers rely on this for pronunciation.

13. Label Form Fields

Every field needs a clear name, tooltip, and tab order.

14. Add Metadata

Always set title, author, and subject.

15. Test with Accessibility Tools

Use Acrobat's Accessibility Checker or a screen reader preview.

16. Offer Alternative Formats

Provide HTML or text-based versions when possible.