Assistive Technology Resource Center
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Converting to Accessible PDF with Adobe Acrobat X - Quick Start Guide

Overview

It is possible to create PDF files directly from programs such as Word and PowerPoint, but not all PDFs are created equally. This Quick Start Guide walks you through the most important aspects of improving your converted PDFs. Following this guide will help you make accessible PDFs that interact well with text-to-speech and screen reading software used by people who need or prefer to listen to the text.

Before Conversion

### Make the Source Document Accessible First

When converting from Microsoft Office 2010, make the document accessible in the original format first (See other Quick Start Guides for how to do this in Word 2010 and PowerPoint 2010). Many of the steps taken with the original document will carry over to the PDF when it is created.

Configure the Acrobat Toolbar Options

1. Before converting a document, make sure the following setting is checked in your Acrobat toolbar. Click on the tab labeled **Acrobat** on the Microsoft Office Ribbon.
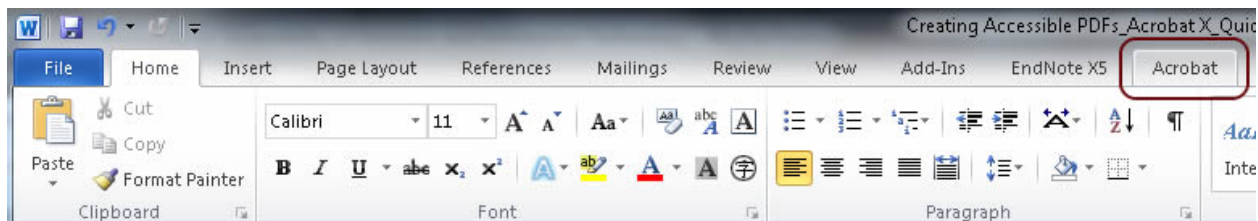
2. On the Acrobat ribbon, **Click** on the Preferences menu.
3. **Check** the checkbox that says "Enable Accessibility and Reflow with tagged Adobe PDF."
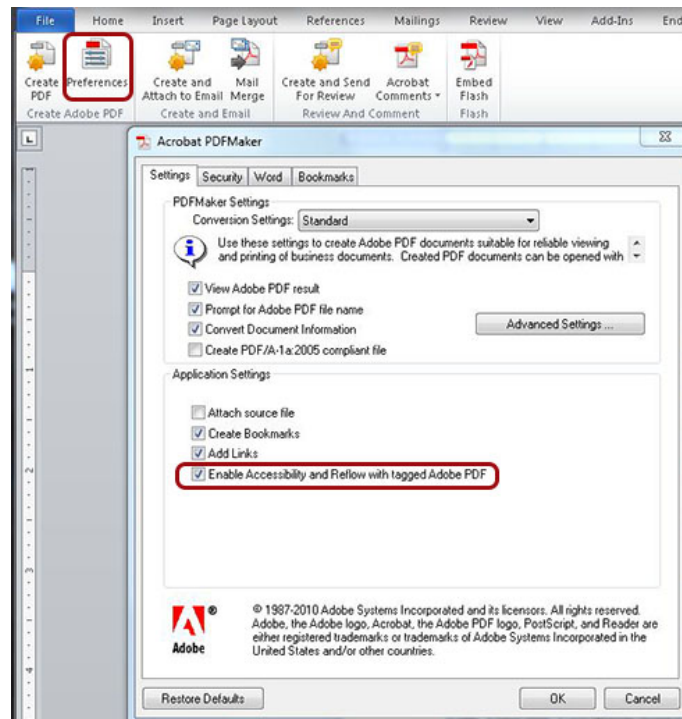
Convert to PDF

There are three ways to convert to PDF using the Acrobat plugin in Office 2010. Only two of these maintain the work that you have put into your original document.

Avoid "Print to PDF"

The "Adobe PDF" printer that shows up along with your other printers is a bad option for accessibility. It does not save any of the work you have done in the original document. Use one of the two following options instead.
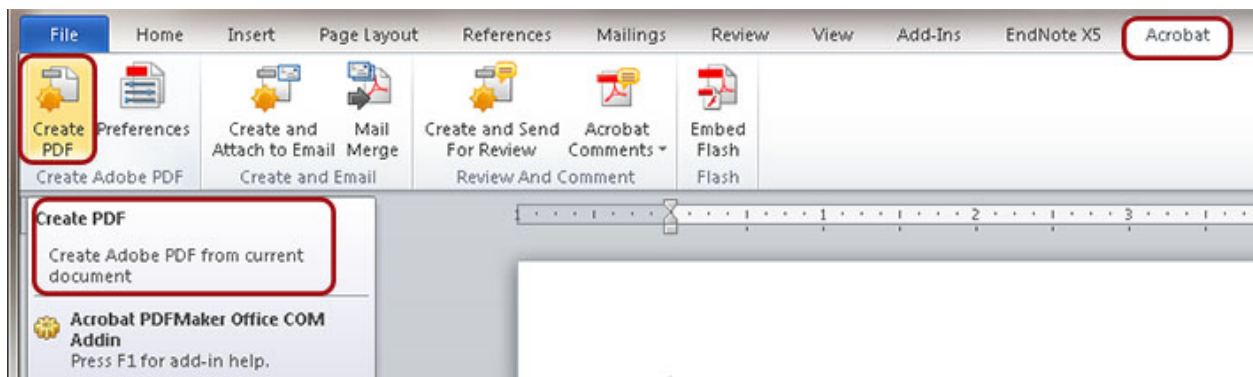
Use "Save as Adobe PDF"

The "Save as Adobe PDF" option is located in the **File Menu** just under "Save As."

Use "Create PDF"

"Create PDF" is a button on the **Acrobat Ribbon**. Switch to the Acrobat toolbar ribbon and select "Create PDF."

Clean Up After Conversion

Once your PDF is created, it should open automatically in Adobe Acrobat. There are usually a few items to fix after conversion.

Set the Document Language

Screen readers look at the document properties to determine the pronunciation they should use while reading the document. In order to set the language of your pdf:

1. Click on **File** and select **Properties**.

2. In the **Advanced** Tab of the Properties window, use the **Language Drop-down Menu** to select the language.
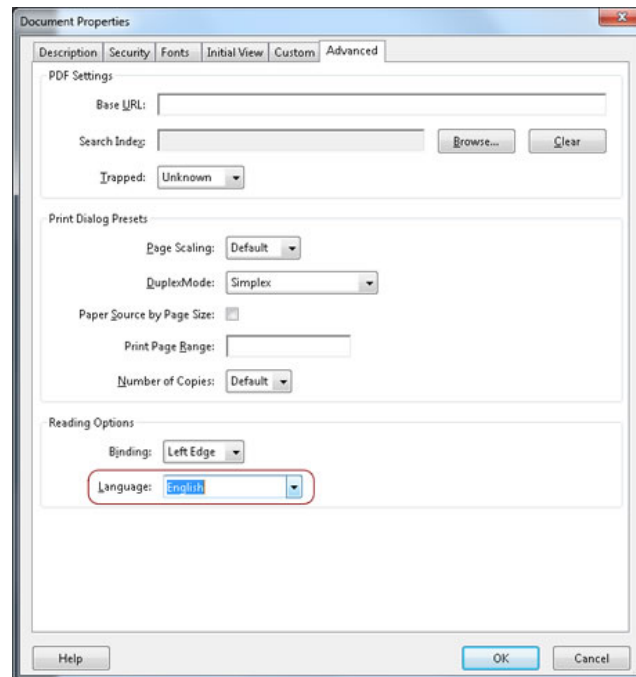
Note: If your document contains more than one language, set the overall document language to the one most commonly used. You can still mark individual passages to be read in another language. How to do this is beyond the scope of this Quick Start Guide.

Set the Tab Order

The Tab Order is the order in which a keyboard user will go through the information on the page. The tab order does not always make sense compared to the way you read a document visually, so you need to specify that it should match the document structure (which we will also be checking in a moment).
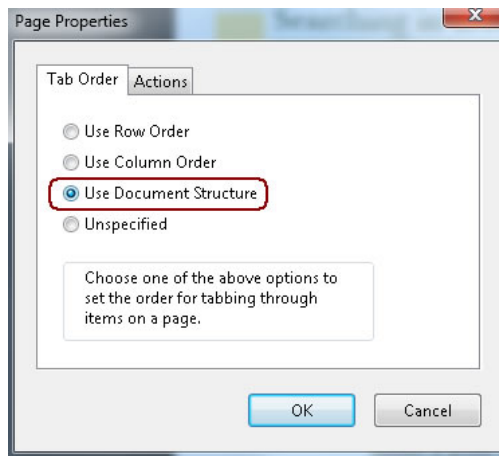
1. In the Page Thumbnails navigation pane on the left side of the document, select all pages. You can do this by **Clicking** on one of the thumbnails, then simultaneously pressing the **Ctrl** and **A** keys.
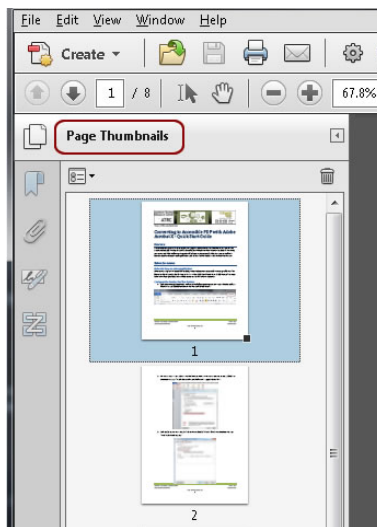
2. **Click** on the Page Thumbnail dropdown menu in the navigation pane.
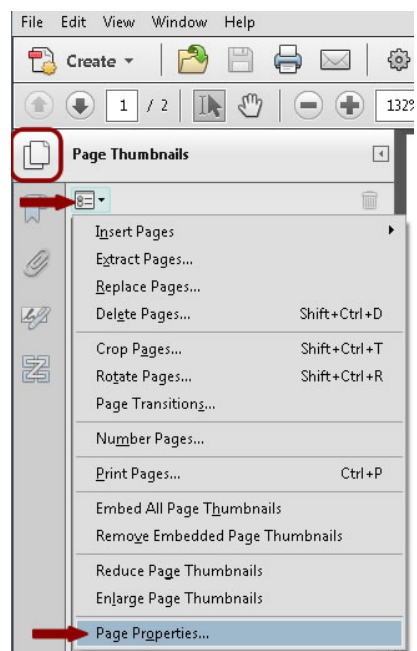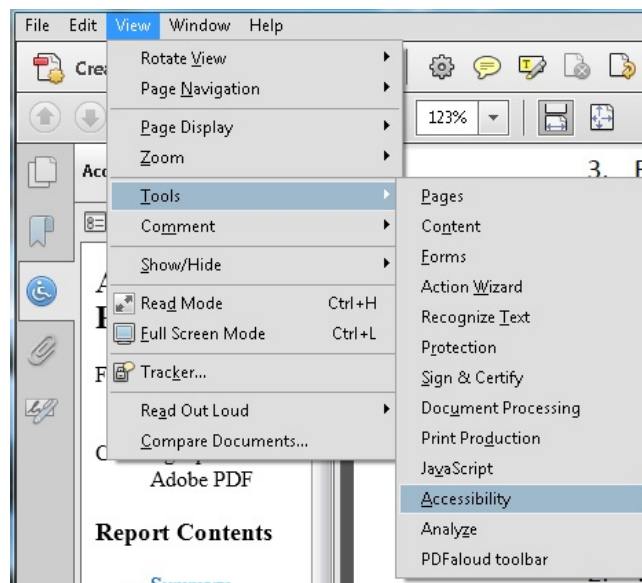

3. **Select** Page Properties
4. **Select** the Use Document Structure option:

Run an Accessibility Report

Adobe Acrobat has an accessibility checker that will tell you about most problems with the document. It also gives instructions on fixing any issues detected.

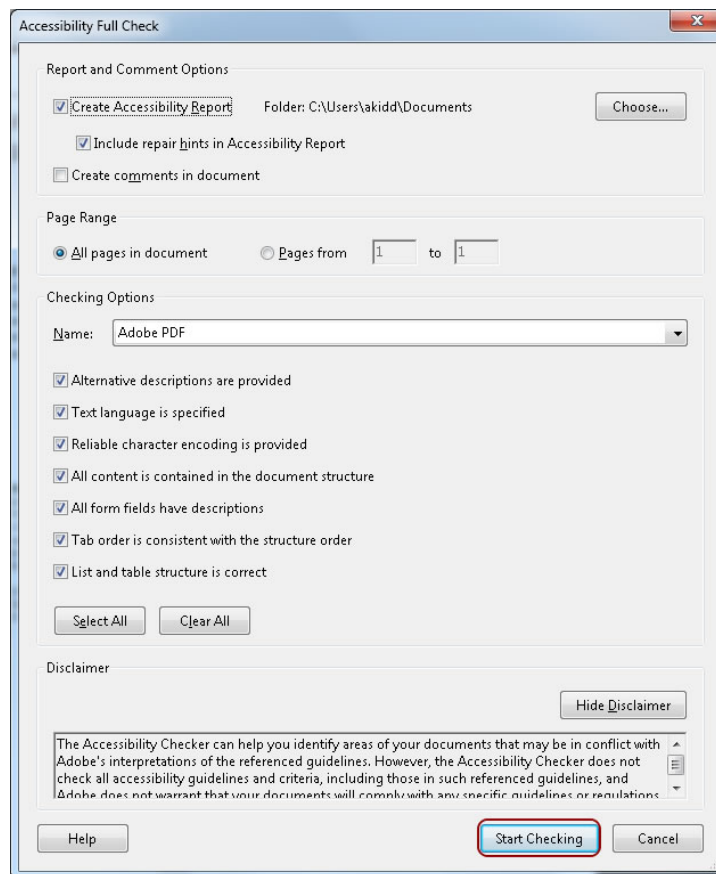1. Activate the Accessibility Toolbar. Click on **View > Tools > Accessibility**.

2. The Accessibility Toolbar will open on the right-hand side of the screen.

3. Select the option **Full Check**. (Don't use the Quick Check report as it does not detect problems!)
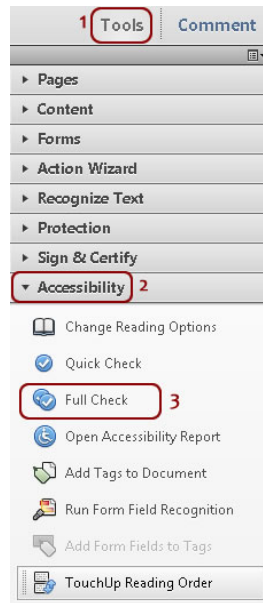
4. Accept the default options for the search and click **Start Checking**.

5. Follow the instructions in the report to fix any issues. Hopefully by the time you reach this point you won't have many errors, given the steps you've already taken.

Check the Reading Order (Tag Order)

Screen readers and text-to-speech software look at the Tags of a PDF to determine the correct reading order of the page. Tags define the Document Structure, the Tab Reading Order, and also generate a Table of Contents.

Unfortunately, Tags generated during conversion are not always in the correct order, and the Accessibility Report *does not* catch the problem.
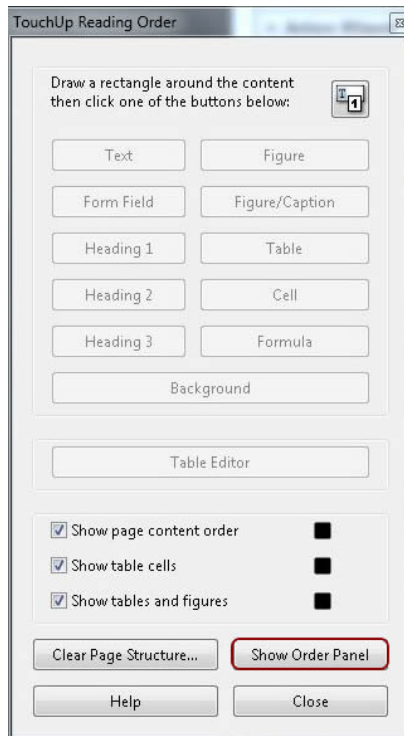
To check the Reading Order, use the **Check Order Panel** in the Accessibility Toolbar.

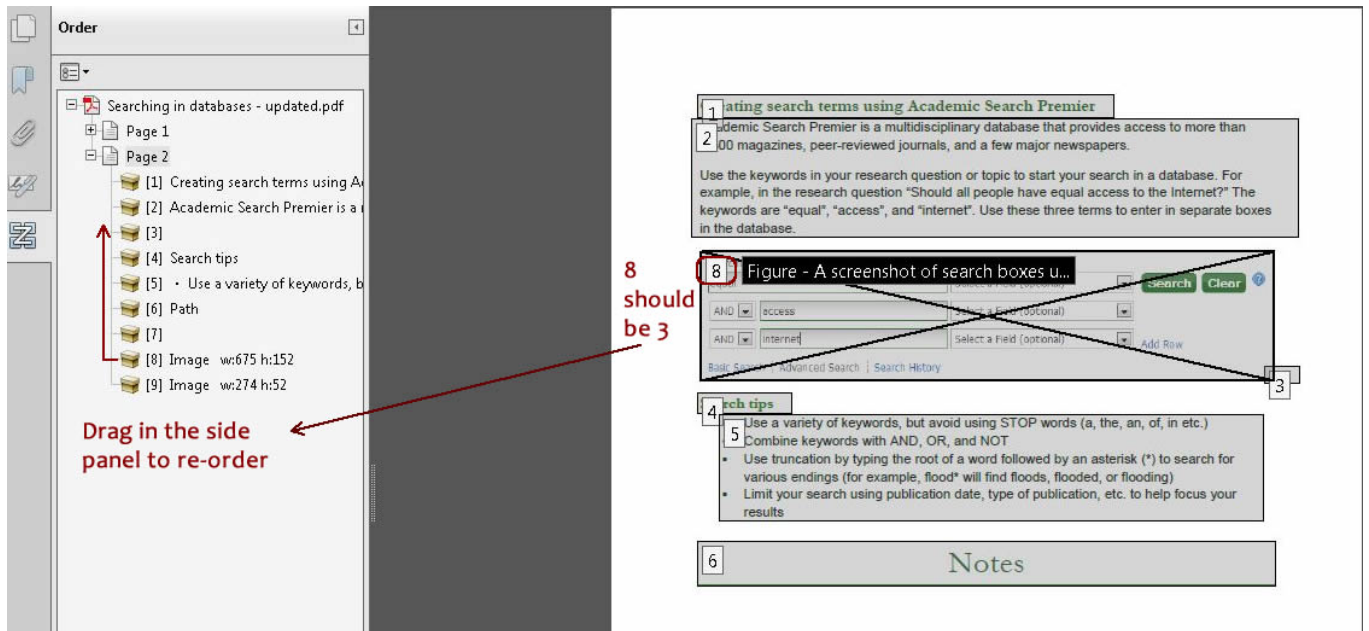1. In the Accessibility Toolbar, click on **TouchUp Reading Order**.
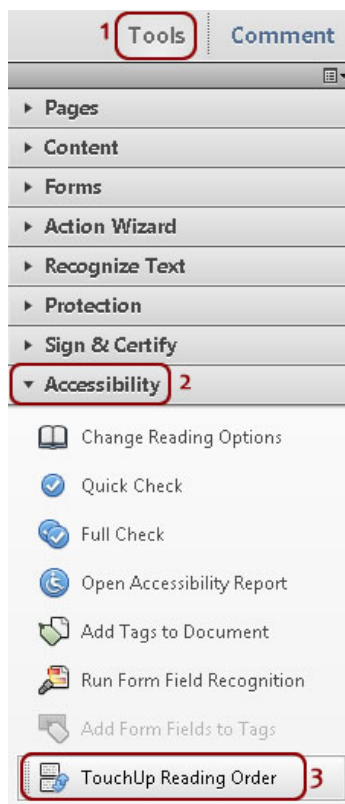
2. In the new window that pops up, click on **Show Order Panel**.

3. The Order Panel should show up in the Navigation Pane on the left side of the screen.
4. Your page should fill with sections that are numbered. If they are not in the correct order, **Select** and **Drag** the numbers into the right order using the Order panel.


5. Check each page in the document.
6. Keep the Order Panel open for the next step.

Set Decorative Images as Background

Images need alternate text so that a screen reader can describe them to a listener. In Word or PowerPoint, leaving the alt text blank on decorative images means they will be skipped by a screen reader. In Acrobat, they will not be skipped unless you set them as "Background."

1. In the Order Panel, select a decorative image.
2. When the image is highlighted, **Select** the "Background" button on the TouchUp Reading Order Panel.
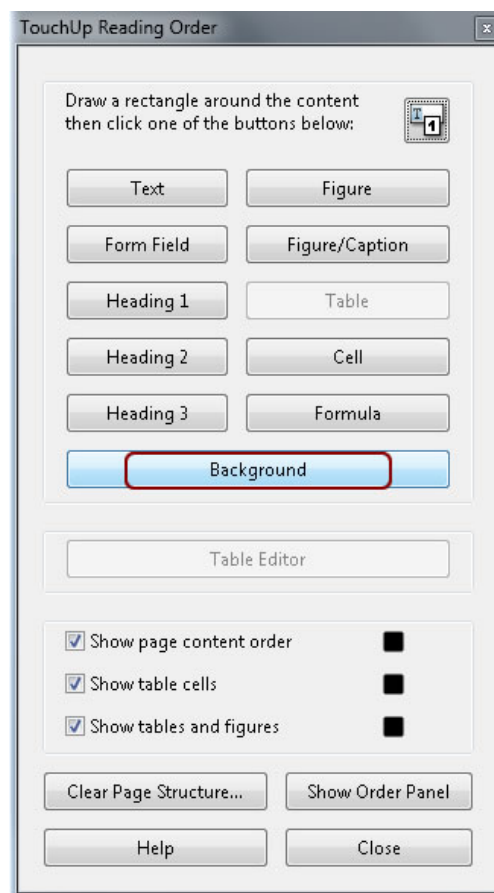
3. The image should no longer have a numbered section assigned to it. This means it will be skipped by a screen reader.

Further Resources

Accessibility By Design (http://accessibility.colostate.edu)

Access Project (http://accessproject.colostate.edu/udl/modules/pdf/mod_pdf.php)

WebAIM (http://webaim.org/techniques/acrobat/)