U.S. Department of Transportation
Federal Highway Administration

Disclaimer: *FHWA is committed to making its Information and Communication Technology (ICT) accessible by meeting the requirements of Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. The tools, resources, criteria and other items provided herein are for internal use by FHWA for ICT it procures, develops, maintains, and utilizes. The U.S. Government assumes no liability for the use by third parties of the information contained in this document.*

Creating Section 508 Conformant PDFs Checklist
FHWA-HAD-21-002

This checklist is a companion to "Creating Section 508 Conformant PDFs." See that documentation for detailed discussion on any checklist item.

Tagged PDF

- The file is tagged.
- "Document is Tagged PDF" is checked.

Document Properties

- The title is correct and complete.
- The author is FHWA (Agency guideline).
- "Content Copying for Accessibility" is allowed.
- The "Open to page" is set to open to the first page of the file.
- The document title is set to show instead of the file name.
- The default language matches the language of the document.

Sensory Characteristics

- Content is not referenced solely by color, shape, size, sound, or location.
- Text on a background meets minimum color contrast requirements.

Text as Text

- Text is rendered as text, not as an image unless an exception applies (e.g., logo, flowchart, infographic).

Bookmarks

- Documents with more than nine pages contain bookmarks that are accurate and representative of the document structure.

Page Numbering

- The page numbering found in the PDF viewer matches the page numbering in the document.

Logical Tab Order

- The tab order for each document reads in a meaningful and understandable order.

Tags

Tagging Meaningful Content

- All content conveying meaningful information is tagged.
- Content not conveying meaningful information is untagged.

Content Order Within Tags

- Content within each tag is in logical order.

Tag Order

- Tags are in logical reading order.

Split Content

- Split content is merged into one tag.

Semantically Correct Tag Usage

- All meaningful content is tagged in semantically correct tags per the checklist items below.

Container Tags

Document tag

- The "Document" tag is the main container tag.

Other Container Tags

- Where other container tags used to subdivide large content into semantically smaller sections under the <Document> tag, they are used consistently.

Title

- The title and subtitle, as applicable, of a document are tagged as paragraph.

Headings

- All visual headings are tagged with heading tags.
- The headings are used in hierarchal order.
- The content within the heading is text.

Paragraph

- One paragraph is contained in a single paragraph tag.

Table of Contents

- Tables of contents are tagged and nested correctly.

Lists

- All lists are tagged and nested correctly.

Tables

- Tables are properly tagged.
- The table tag does not contain alt text.
- The document does not contain irregular tables.
- Table tags are not used for layout.
- The tags for the outlines of cells are removed.

Figures

- All non-text content conveying information contains alt text.
- The alt text does not repeat the caption or surrounding text.
- The alt text does not contain information not in the non-text content.
- The alt text describes the non-text content in a level of detail matching the level of detail the figure is conveying in context.
- The alt text describes the meaning, not the look of the figure.
- The alt text does not start with "This is a figure of…" or the like.
- Alt text and actual text are not used in the same tag.
- Actual text is used where text is a graphic (e.g., a symbol converted as an image, text not recognized in a scanned document).
- Equations and symbols rendered as images contain alt text or actual text.
- Equations and symbols containing incorrect text contain alt text or actual text.

Caption

- Table and figure titles are tagged in caption tags.
- Caption tags are not nested under the parent table or figure tag.
- Caption tag content is limited to a description of the table or figure and does not contain other information such as an image source.

Links

- Links meet contrast requirement as needed.
- Nested under the link tag are the words in the document associated with the link and a Link-OBJR.
- Only one link tag is used per link.
- Alt text is not needed for links where the text nested in the link tag is descriptive of the link location, destination, or purpose. If alt text is used on text links, ensure it is correct.
- Ambiguous or repetitive links contain alt text describing the link destination, function, or purpose.

- Figures are not nested under link tags. When unavoidable, the figure alt text is the same as the link destination.
- Link tags containing only a nested figure tag contain alt text.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

- When using acronyms and abbreviations in alt text, do not add spaces between the letters.
- Acronyms and abbreviations do not need to be redefined in the alt text.

Footnotes and Endnotes

- Tag footnotes and endnotes using Reference and Note tags.
    - The cross-reference in the body text is nested in a reference tag.
    - The footnote/endnote is nested in a note tag.
- "Notes" and "References" in the document are not tagged as a note or reference because it says "note" or "reference" in the text.

Header/Footer/Watermark Content

- Page numbers are not tagged.
- Any meaningful header, footer, and watermark content, except page numbers, not tagged in the body of the document, is tagged once.

Nonstandard PDF Tags

- Nonstandard tags are mapped to the correct PDF tag.

Language of Parts

- The language of a word or phrase different from the default language is tagged with the correct language.

Flashing

- The document is free from any blinking or flashing content.

Zoom

- All content is readable when zoomed in to 200 percent except for images of text (if included) and captions.

Optical Character Recognition (OCR)

- Scanned text converted to text using an optical character recognition (OCR) is recognized correctly or is tagged using actual text.

Forms

- The document is free of forms and form-fillable fields.