# Fixing documents in Acrobat: common errors and solutions

*Updated August 2020*

PAD has provided a list of common errors and advice on how to fix them within Acrobat.

For any further problems, see [Adobe’s own PDF guidance](https://helpx.adobe.com/acrobat/using/create-verify-pdf-accessibility.html).

## Error types

### Document

* Image-only PDF
  + flags if the PDF is a scan, and therefore an unreadable image – use **Fix**
* Tagged PDF
  + if this is a problem, you haven’t run Autotag – use **Fix**
* Logical Reading Order (reflowing text)
  + [see below for detailed notes on logical reading order](#_Logical_Reading_Order)
* Primary language
  + Flags if language hasn’t been set – use **Fix**
* Title
  + flags if PDF hasn’t been given a title (but not if it has an unhelpful title, so it’s worth checking anyway) – use **Fix** OR file > Properties and copy the text from the ‘File’ field into the ‘Title’ field.
* Bookmarks
  + flags if document has 21+ pages and no bookmarks – use **Fix**
* Colour contrast
  + Needs manually checking. If your document is black and white, it’s fine – use **Pass**
  + If your document has colours, check there’s enough contrast using a tool like <http://colorsafe.co>, <https://contrast-finder.tanaguru.com/> or <https://contrastchecker.com/>

### Page Content

* Tagged content
  + as long as you’ve tagged the PDF and haven’t added any additional text/images after tagging, this shouldn’t flag
  + if you have added untagged content, [see ‘tagged content’ below](#_Tagged_content)
* Tagged annotations
  + [see ‘tagged annotations’ below](#_Tagged_annotations)
* Tab order
  + Use **Fix**
* Tagged multimedia
  + [See ‘tagged content’ below](#_Tagged_contents)
* Navigation links
  + [see ‘navigation links’ below](#_Navigation_links)

### Alternate Text

* Figures alternate text
  + Use **Fix**

### Tables

* [See ‘tables’ below](#_Tables)

### Lists

* [See ‘lists’ below](#_Lists)

### Headings

* [See ‘headings’ below](#_Headers)

## Fixing problems when ‘Fix’ doesn’t work

### Logical Reading Order (reflowing text)

**Ctrl+4 or View -> Zoom -> Reflow**

will reflow your document into text, removing columns and other text structures. Check that the order of your text is correct (especially that images, headings, footnotes etc are where they ought to be in relation to the text).

If it is correct:

* right-click the error and select **Pass**.

If it isn’t correct

* open **Accessibility -> Reading Order** to make sure all items on your page have been tagged correctly as headings/text/tables etc
  + uncheck ‘display like elements in a single block’ to make it easier to tag nearby items separately
  + when text is a tricky shape, use ctrl+drag to remove things from the selection and shift+drag to add them
* open Order panel
  + page by page, drag items into the correct reading order for each page. You may have to tag elements that haven’t been tagged before; see ‘[Tagged content](#_Tagged_content_1)’ below.

### Tagged content

Use Order panel to see order of text and images on each page, which will show you any content which hasn’t been tagged.

Open Reading Order, select untagged content by drawing a box around it and select the type of content in Reading Order (you might need to repeat this in stages if you have a heading and some text or an image).

You’ll probably need to redo the reading order of the content on the page after tagging, as it’ll just be added to the end of the reading order – see ‘[Logical Reading Order](#_Logical_Reading_Order)’ above.

### Tagged annotations

When you use the Links tool to add a hyperlink on a tagged PDF document, Acrobat tags each URL by adding a document content tag to the tag tree. It does not also add a <Link> tag nor a <Link - OBJR> tag; without all three the link is inaccessible to assistive technology. To add the missing tags:

* Open Tags panel
* In the Options menu, click Find
* In the Find Element dialog box, select Unmarked Annotations from the drop-down menu
* Select ‘Unmarked Annotations’
* Select ‘Search Document’ radio button
* Click Find: the first unmarked link is highlighted
* Click Tag Element
  + In the New Tag box which pops up, select Link for the type (you can leave Title blank) and OK
* Repeat the last step until no further unmarked links are found

### Tagged content

This fails when there is content in the PDF that is not tagged. If there are items that aren’t necessary in terms of content, eg headers/footers with physical page numbers on them or logos, then it is best to tell Acrobat that they do not need to be read by assistive software. Select the object’s tag in the Tags panel, right click on it and select ‘change tag to artifact’ and the category (usually ‘Layout’); the content tag will disappear and then you can delete the tag. Alternatively, use the Reading Order pane to identify the object as ‘Background/Artifact’.

### Navigation links

You need to check manually that all links actually point to the right places by clicking on them or hovering your mouse over them. This is only likely to be a problem if your link crosses a line boundary.

Acrobat has a habit of including punctuation inside links – if your link is in brackets or followed by a full stop, you might find that the closing bracket/full stop is now wrongly part of your URL.

To fix links, use Acrobats Tools -> Edit PDF -> Link. After making a new or revised link, you might need to retag it – [see ‘Tagged annotations’ above.](#_Tagged_annotations)

### Tables

Tables need to have a header row and/or header column and be ‘regular’ – ie have the same number of rows per column and columns per row. This is a problem when you have a table with merged cells; you have to insert empty cells to make them appear regular.

[Adobe provides detailed advice on repairing tables for accessibility](https://www.adobe.com/accessibility/products/acrobat/pdf-repair-repair-tables.html).

### Lists

Lists need four types of tag: list tag, list item tag, list item label and list item body.

* The list tag just announces that a list is coming and contains its following list items <L>
* The list item tag contains the list item label and list item body <LI>
* The list item label is a bullet point or a number and is not compulsory <Lbl>
* The list item body is the text of the list item <LBody>

To pass the accessibility test, a list tag must contain a list item and a list item can only contain list item labels and bodies.

Acrobat is usually pretty good at this, and when it fails it’s usually because it has falsely identified something as a list which isn’t. In this case, just retag the <L>, <LI>, <Lbl> and <LBody> tags as <P> for the content and delete the unnecessary and empty list structure tags (see ‘[Headings](#_Headings)’ below for details of how to redo tags).

### Headings

Headings are usually only a problem when they’re incorrectly nested – which means they skip heading levels without working through from H1 down. For some reason, Acrobat seems to read headings as one lower than the lowest one in your document – so if you use H1, H2 and H3 it quite often renders some of them H4.

This needs manually fixing in one of two ways:

* Use the Tags panel: double-click on the incorrect tag and overtype it with the right heading level OR
* Use the Reading Order panel: go through each page and redo all of the headings/text boundaries
  + You might need to update the text order in the Order panel after this