

Introduction

Files of the Portable Document Format (PDF), developed by Adobe, can be made accessible but it very much depends on how the original source document is designed. If it is a poster created in a publishing application, scanned or saved from a Word document and locked for copyright reasons and then saved as PDF, it is liable to act in the same way as a picture. This means the text cannot be read by a screen reader or adapted for easier reading.

It is appreciated that the concept of the PDF is to ensure that printed or saved versions of a document remain as the author intends, but there are ways to help the reader who uses assistive technologies or requires different formats of the text and graphics.

Considerations

- **If you save as PDF from a Microsoft Office 2007 document** add 'alt tags' to pictures or diagrams (menu - format picture) and these will be carried over as will the use of style sheets with headings or templates, page numbers and tables that have headers with the main information e.g. in a calendar the days of the week would go along the top. These features may not work when you print to PDF – see WebAIM and TechDis links below for further instructions. Also be sure to select the accessibility options from the Options screen, in the Save as PDF dialog box.
- **If you use one of the many free converters when working with a previous version of Microsoft Word** make sure you follow the instructions above and then check accessibility and offer alternative formats in HTML and RTF. Mac OSX users do not need these tools as it is possible to print to PDF, but accessibility may remain an issue.
- **If you save the PDF from a publishing application or it has been scanned and is in picture format** make sure you offer an alternative in HTML or RTF. There is also the possibility of adding alternative text and helping the reader to follow the correct reading order in an original PDF by adding appropriate tags etc if you have Adobe Acrobat Professional – see TechDis link below for further instructions.
- **Adobe Acrobat Professional may not be available to staff** but if you are using it, follow the advice in the 'Accessibility Setup Assistant' under the 'Advanced' menu. This contains guidelines for tags to describe pictures, structure, form fields and reading flow when magnified. If you need to scan in a document, use the Optical Character Recognition offered in the latest versions – use the Accessibility Check with 'Create Accessibility Report' and 'Include repair hints in the Accessibility Report' boxes checked – see TechDis link below for further instructions.
- **Test your document by using the Accessibility Quick Check under the Document menu in Adobe Reader** and the Read Out Loud feature under the View menu. If you have made your document available on-line you can also use the URL with Adobe converter to HTML or text.
- **Offer alternative formats such as HTML and RTF** or Office documents in their original format if they are available.

Additional Resources

- TechDis: Making the most of PDFs
<http://www.techdis.ac.uk/resources/sites/accessibilityessentials4/index.html>
- TechDis: Comparison of accessibility options when using free PDF software for Microsoft Office 2003 and other applications.
http://www.techdis.ac.uk/index.php?p=3_20_2_2
- Adobe Accessibility Training Resources - reading and creating accessible PDF documents – a set of animated tutorials that are easy to follow.
<http://www.adobe.com/enterprise/accessibility/training.html>
- **Online Adobe PDF Conversion for documents**
http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/access_onlinetools.html
- Add the 'Save as PDF' feature for Microsoft Word 2007
<http://tinyurl.com/v46jc>
- WebAIM: PDF Accessibility
<http://www.webaim.org/techniques/acrobat/>
- RNIB Adobe Acrobat PDFs - Web Access Centre
http://www.rnib.org.uk/xpedio/groups/public/documents/publicwebsite/public_adobeacrobatpdf.hcsp