
Accessibility Checks: PDFs



In accordance with Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), all digital content must be carefully reviewed to ensure compliance with digital accessibility guidelines. When creating a resource in an authoring program (e.g., Microsoft Word), it should be checked for compliance using the program's built-in accessibility features. (See Accessibility checklists and instructions for running accessibility checks on our [Customer Support and Internal Training](#) webpage.)

After ensuring compliance within the authoring program, if the resource is saved as a PDF for electronic distribution, the PDF must also be reviewed for compliance.

The following steps outline how to use Adobe Acrobat's built-in tools to complete an automated accessibility check and note the accessibility standards that must be reviewed manually.

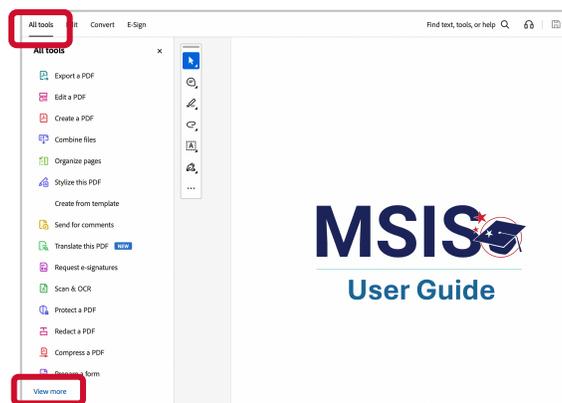
Automated Accessibility Checker

Adobe Acrobat includes integrated tools that flag common accessibility barriers.

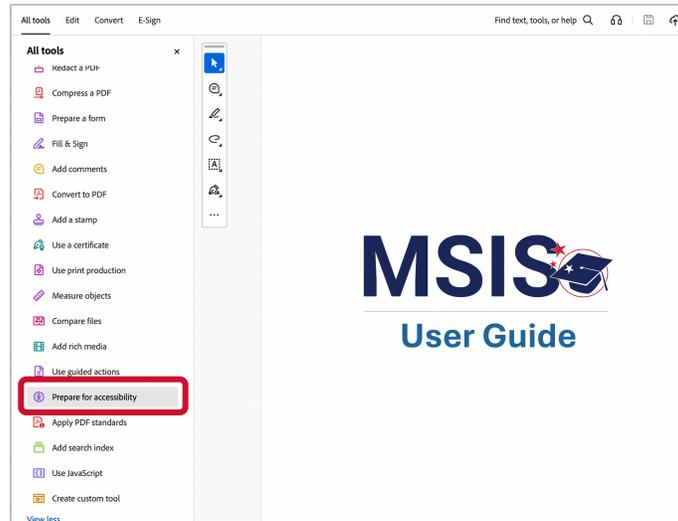
Acrobat Reader (i.e., the free version) can perform the needed accessibility checks. However, Acrobat Pro is required to correct issues in the PDF that may be flagged for compliance concerns. Employees can email mdenet@mdek12.org to request access to Acrobat Pro.

Step 1: Open a PDF file using Adobe Acrobat Pro.

Step 2: Click "All tools". Click "View More" to see all tools.



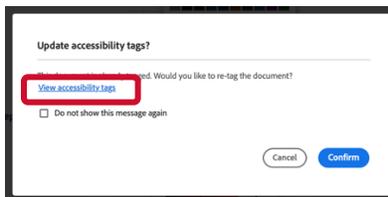
Step 3: Click **"Prepare for accessibility"** to open the accessibility tools.



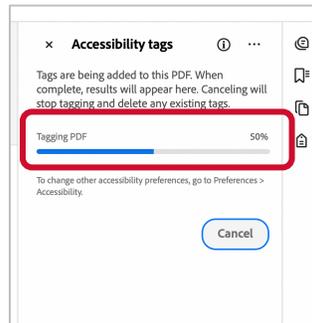
Step 4: PDF tags are hidden markers that define the structure and meaning of the content within a document. They identify headings, paragraphs, lists, tables, and images, making PDFs accessible to screen readers and easier to navigate across different devices.

Click **"Automatically tag PDF"** to have Acrobat automatically tag elements in the document to help determine document structure and reading order.

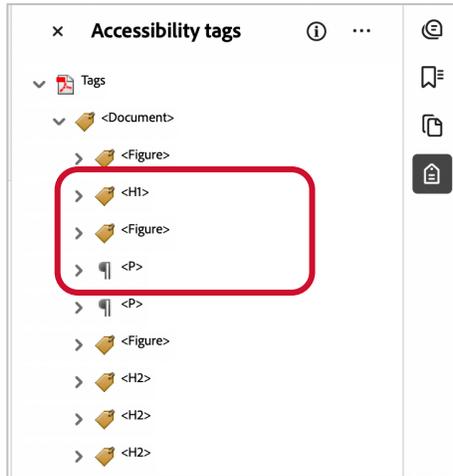
NOTE: Depending on the authoring tool used to create the original document, the PDF may already be tagged. A warning message will appear if the PDF already contains tags. Click **"View Accessibility Tags"** to view the tags.



For larger documents, a status bar will be displayed in the right panel to track tagging status, as it can take a few minutes. Shorter documents may not display the status bar.

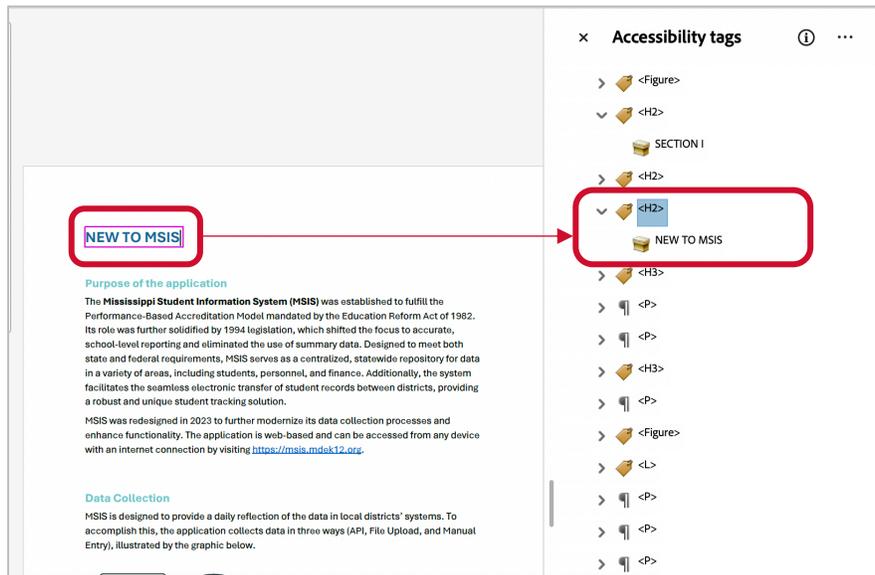


When the tagging process is complete, an expandable list of document tags will be displayed on the right panel of the document window.

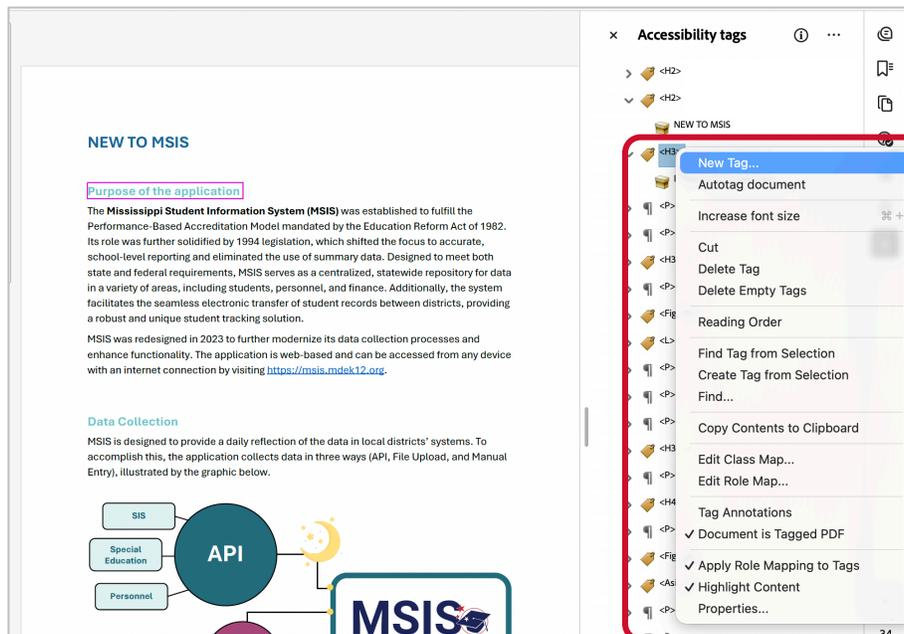


Common PDF Tags	Explanation
Document (< Document>)	Serves as the first element that contains all other tags in the PDF.
Heading (<H1>, <H2>, <H3>...)	Organizes content structure, allowing screen reader users to navigate by heading levels.
Paragraph (<P>)	Identifies standard body text.
Figure (<Figure>)	Tags images, which must include alternative text to describe the image content.
Table (<Table>, <TR>, <TH>, <TD>)	Identifies a table and structures data within the table. <TH> identifies table headers, <TR> identifies table rows, and <TD> identifies data cells.
List (<L>, , <LBL>, <LBody>)	Defines lists, with <L> as the parent, as items, <LBL> for bullets/numbers, and <LBody> for text.

Step 5: Review the tags to ensure they are correct. Click the **down arrow** to expand a tag to review the contents. The contents of the tag will be outlined in magenta in the document for reference.

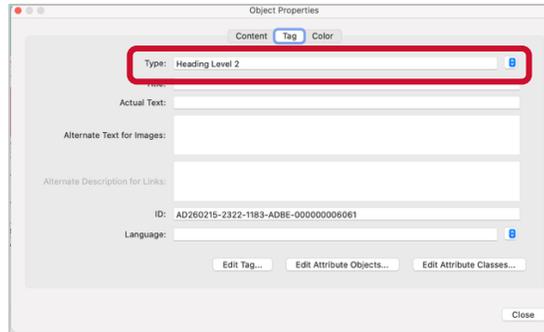


Step 6: If a tag needs to be deleted or adjusted, right-click on the tag and the available menu options will appear.

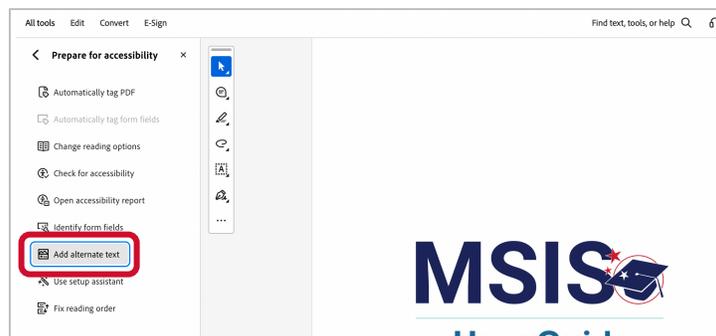


“Delete Tag” removes the tag from the element, and the screen reader will skip over it.

If the tag needs to be edited, click **"Properties."** Click on the drop-down menu for Type and select the appropriate tag.



Step 6: In the accessibility toolbar, click **"Add alternative text."**



A "Set Alternate Text" window will show the first compliance issue in the document. The affected image in the document will be highlighted.



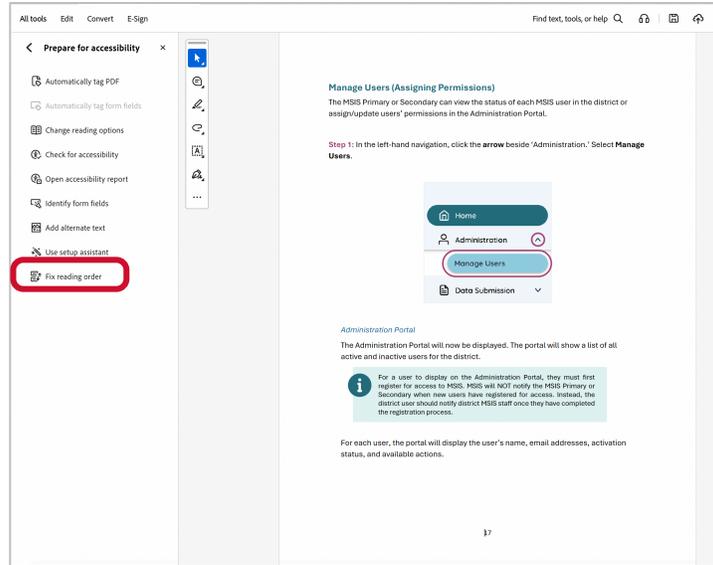
Step 7: If no alt text has been provided, **add appropriate alt text** for the image. If the image does not require alt text, mark it as a **“decorative figure”**. (See [Accessibility: Alt Text](#) for more information on writing appropriate alt text.) Use the arrow buttons to navigate through the images in the document.



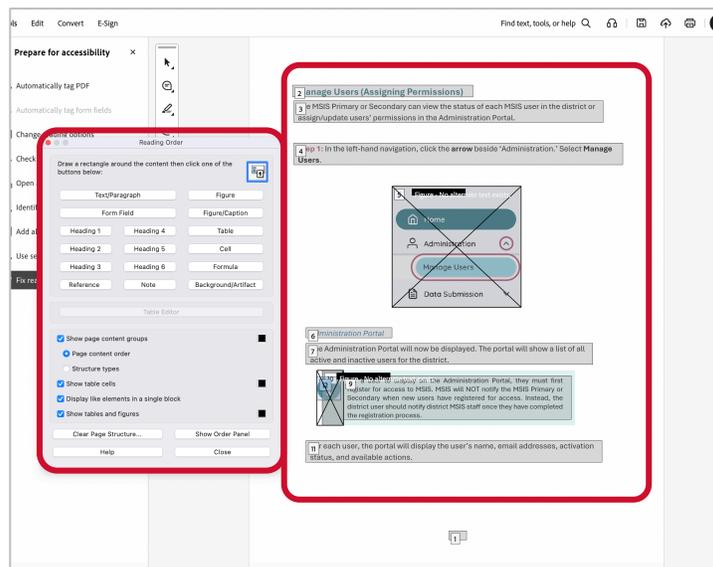
Step 8: Click **“Save & Close”** when all alt text has been provided.



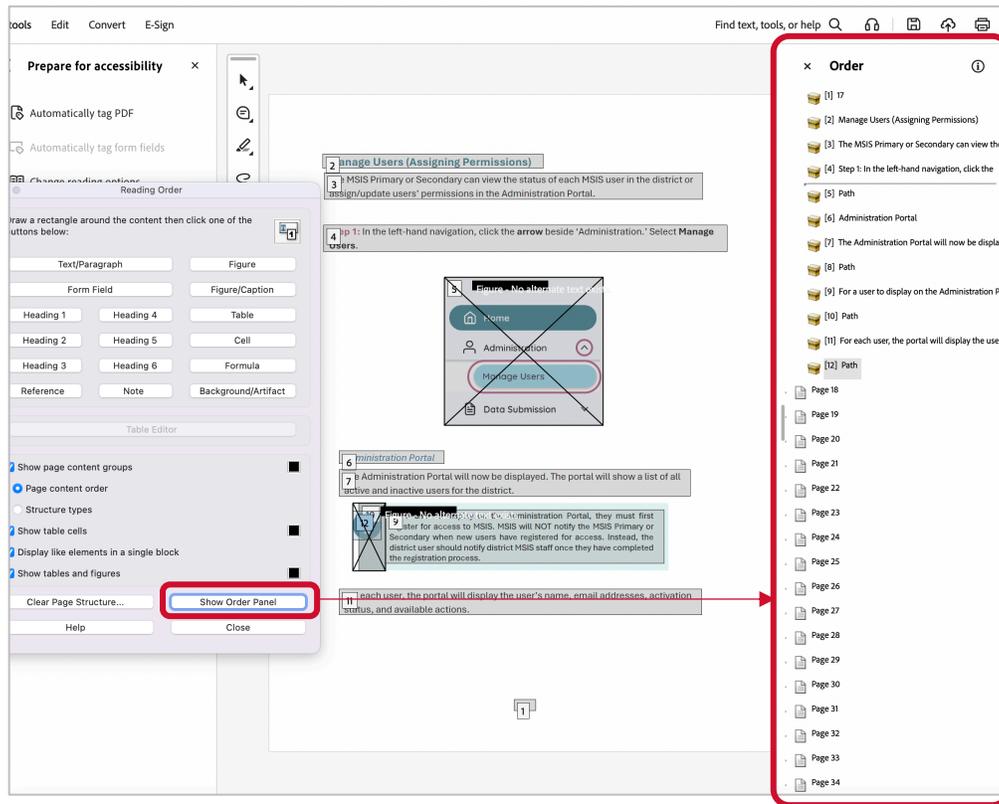
Step 9: In the accessibility toolbar, click **“Fix reading order.”**



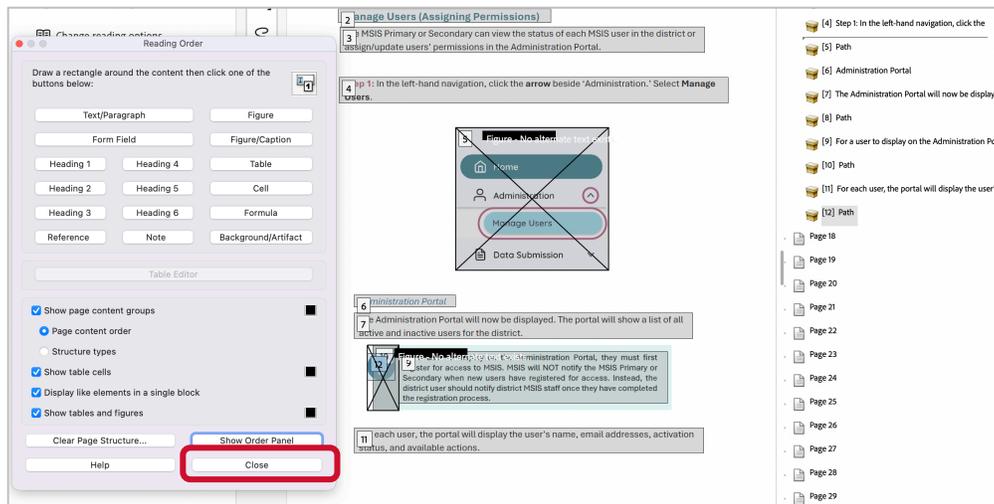
A “Reading Order” dialog box will appear. (You may need to move the box to the side so you can see the document underneath.) Items on the page will be highlighted in **gray** and **numbered** in the proposed reading order.



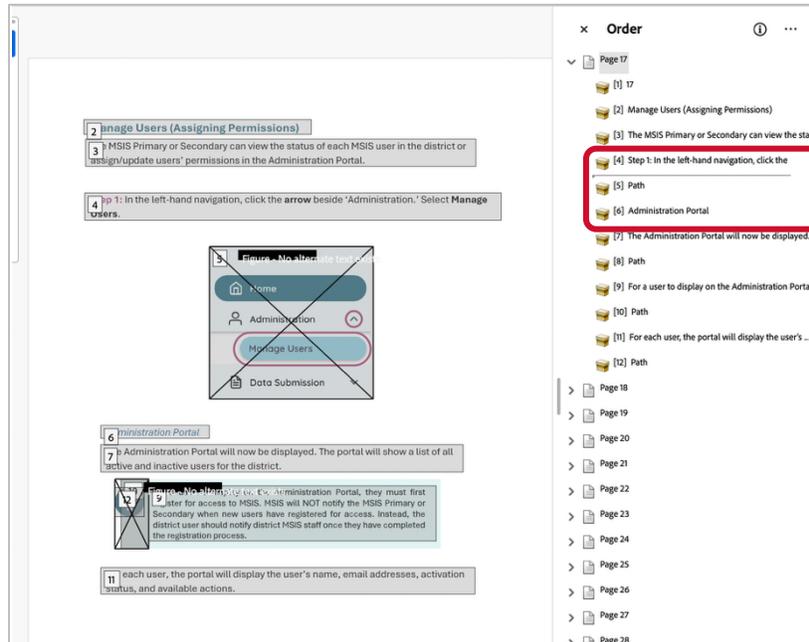
Step 10: Click **“Show Order Panel”**. A reading order panel will appear on the right side of the document window.



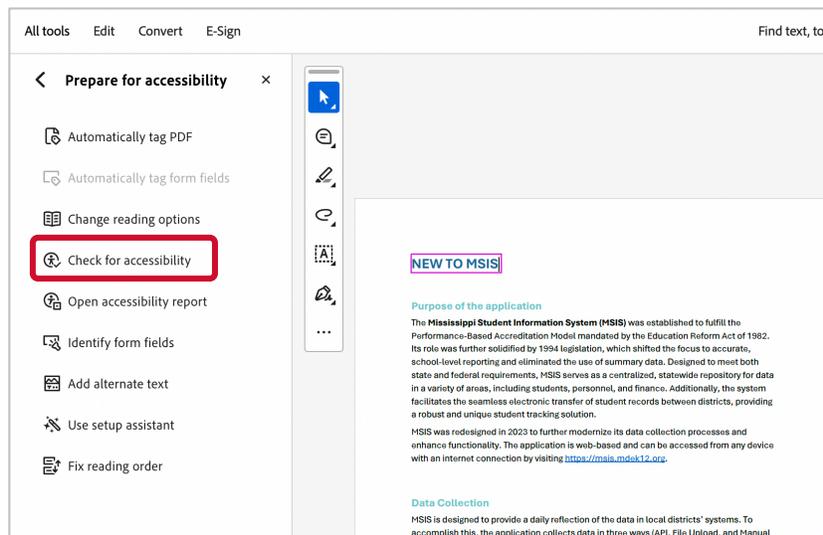
Step 11: Click **“Close”** to close the Reading Order window. The reading order panel will remain open.



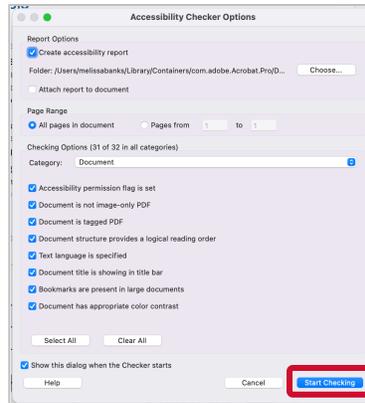
Step 12: Carefully review the reading order. If objects are out of order, click (and hold) on the name in the order panel and **drag it up or down** to the appropriate order.



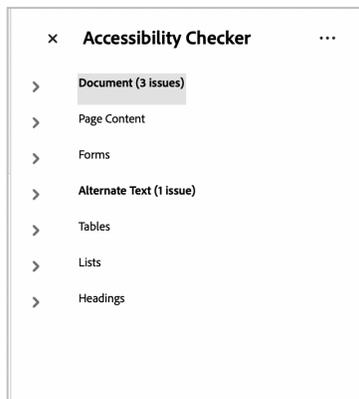
Step 13: Once tags, alt text, and reading order have been addressed, click **“Check for Accessibility”** in the accessibility toolbar to run the full accessibility compliance check.



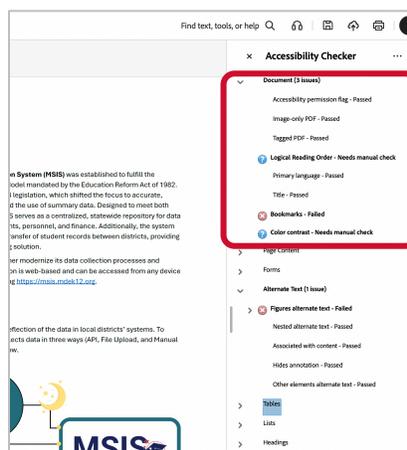
Step 14: An Accessibility Checker Options window will appear. Click **“Start Checking”**.



When the checking process is complete, an expandable list of compliance checks will be displayed on the right panel of the document window.



Step 15: Review compliance results. Click the **down arrow** to expand a compliance area to review the contents.



Most compliance issues should have already been corrected in the authoring program (e.g., Word) or when working through the previous steps (e.g., Add Alternate Text or Fix Reading Order).

If a compliance check passes, it will not be bolded and will display a “passed” message.

If a compliance check fails, it will be **bolded**, noted with the number of issues (e.g., 3 issues), and marked with a red “X”.

Most common “Failed” check:

- Alternate Text (see Step 6).

If a compliance check cannot be completed, it will be **bolded**, noted with the message “needs manual check”, and marked with a blue “?”.

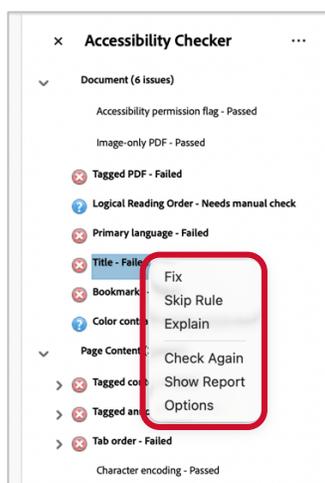
Most common “Needs manual check”:

- Reading Order (see Step 9).
- Color Contrast

NOTE: Contrast should have already been verified by the Accessibility checks in the authoring program (e.g., Word) and should not need to be verified again. (See [Color Contrast Checker](#) for more information.)

Step 16: For any items that require manual checks, complete the checks and make any necessary adjustments.

Step 16: For any items that fail, **right-click on the item**. A drop-down menu will appear with more options. Click “**Fix**” (if available) to correct the issues. Click “**Explain**” to learn more about the problem and possible solutions.



Step 18: Go to File > **Save As**. Save your newly compliant PDF as desired.