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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA IN HUNTSVILLE

PDF Decision Tree

Use this guide to choose the best format for sharing and maintaining accessible content.

If you are publishing content online, especially for students, employees, or the public, ask yourself: Does this need to be a PDF? In most cases, the answer is no.

Question	If Yes	If No
1. Is the PDF currently used?	Continue to Question 2.	Consider deleting or archiving the document.
2. Is the document content updated or changed at least once per year, or more often?	Do not use a PDF. The PDF must be rechecked and fixed each time it changes, which makes PDFs inefficient to maintain. Consider Word, Excel, PowerPoint, or HTML (Canvas Page) instead.	Go to Question 3.
3. Was the original file created in Microsoft Office?	Continue to Question 4.	Go to Question 5.
4. Do you have access to the original source document for the PDF?	Recommendation: share, post, or publish the original Microsoft Office file after verifying it is accessible . It is much easier to make these files accessible than it is to remediate them as PDFs. If you are using a PDF because the file needs to be distributed in a locked format, you can share Microsoft files as read-only or designate it as protected .	Consider converting or exporting the document to Word using Adobe Acrobat Pro . After reviewing and remediating the file with the Word Accessibility Checker , share the accessible version.
5. Is this a text-based document that can live on a website or Canvas page?	Transfer the content to a web page or Canvas page. This is often easier for updating, linking, and sharing.	Continue to Question 6.
6. Is this content from a third-party resource or textbook?	Contact the publisher for an accessible ePub or eBook version. You can also check whether the library or publisher already provides an accessible alternative.	Continue to Question 7.

Question	If Yes	If No
7. Is this a scanned document?	Consider exporting it to Microsoft Word using Adobe Acrobat Pro or generating an OCR-overlaid PDF using Panorama. If copyright is a concern, U.S. copyright law generally permits modification that is necessary to provide an accessible format without changing the original content.	Continue to Question 8.
8. Is this PDF a form?	Continue to Question 9.	Continue to Question 10.
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10. Is the file being used as an infographic or flyer?	If distributing the PDF as an attachment, include the text and important information in the body of the email, web page, or Canvas content so everyone can access it.	If you still have questions about requirements for your document, be prepared to assist. If you want help making your document accessible email helpdesk@uah.edu .