

Section 508 Compliance Guidance

For Documents Originating in Microsoft Word
April 2026



Section 508 Compliance Guidance

For Documents Originating in Microsoft Word

This document provides guidance for making documents compliant with Section 508 accessibility requirements. The guidance is designed for documents originating in Microsoft Word, although error resolution steps may be applicable to other document types. Guidance is provided for errors found in Microsoft Word, Adobe Acrobat, and the PDF Accessibility Checker.

Contents

1	Section 508 Background.....	4
1.1	Why is Accessibility Important?	4
1.2	Elements of an Accessible Document	5
2	General Recommendations.....	5
3	Key Terms.....	6
4	Software Accessibility Tools.....	7
4.1	Microsoft Word	7
4.2	Adobe Acrobat	8
4.3	PDF Accessibility Checker (PAC)	8
5	Document Settings Errors.....	9
5.1	Adobe Error: Document Language is Not Set	9
5.2	Adobe Error: Document Title is Not Set	9
5.3	Adobe Error: Security Settings	10
5.4	PAC Error: PDF/UA Identifier is Missing	10
6	In-Text Formatting Errors.....	10
6.1	Adobe Error: Spacing	10
6.2	Adobe Error: Bookmarks	11
6.3	Adobe Error: List Items	11
6.4	Adobe Error: Tab Order	11
7	Errors In Headings.....	12
7.1	Word Error: No Headings in Document	12
7.2	Adobe Error: Logical Reader Order (Manual Check)	12

7.3	Word Error: Missing Table Header	12
7.4	PAC Error: Numbered Heading Skips One or more Heading Levels	13
7.5	PAC Error: Document does not Contain Headings	13
8	Errors in Tables.....	14
8.1	Word Error: Use of Merged or Split Cells	14
8.2	Adobe Error: Rows	14
8.3	Adobe Error: Blank Cells	15
8.4	Adobe Error: Regularity	15
8.5	PAC Error: Table Header Cell Assignments	16
8.6	PAC Error: Table Header Cell Has No Associated Sub Cells	16
9	Errors in Figures.....	17
9.1	Word Error: Missing Alt Text	17
9.2	Word Error: Image or Object Not Inline	18
9.3	Word Error: Hard-to-Read Text Contrast	18
9.4	Word Error: Color Contrast	18
9.5	Adobe Error: Color Contrast (Manual Check)	19
9.6	Adobe Error: Missing Alt Text	19
10	Errors With Tags.....	20
10.1	Adobe Error: Appropriate Nesting	20
10.2	Adobe Error: Tagged Content and/or Tagged Annotations	20
10.3	Adobe Error: Tagged PDF	21
10.4	PAC Error: Text Object Not Tagged	21

11	Other Errors (Identified Only in PAC).....	22
11.1	PAC Error: ID Missing in Note Structure Element	22
11.2	PAC Error: Link Annotation is not Nested Inside a Link Structure Element	22
11.3	PAC Error: Alternative Description Missing for an Annotation	23
11.4	PAC Error: Link in Text does not have a Link Element	23
11.5	PAC Error: Figure Element on a Single Page with no Bounding Box	24
11.6	PAC Error: ID Missing in Note Structure Element	24
11.7	PAC Error: “Contents” Entry on an Annotation Exists, but is Comprised of Whitespace	24
12	Version History.....	26

1 Section 508 Background

The purpose of this guidance document is to outline common errors, summarize strategies and solutions, and guide the creation of Section 508 passable Microsoft Word and PDF documents. Section 508 is an amendment to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 that requires federal agencies to make all electronic information accessible to people with disabilities. Section 508 applies to federal departments and agencies, state governments when they receive federal funding, and organizations with institutional 508 requirements or federal grants.

Section 508 requires compliance with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), which is an international set of guidelines on making content more accessible to people with disabilities, including websites, applications, and other digital content. WCAG was developed by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI).

The WCAG has three levels of conformance: A, AA, and AAA; A is the minimum level and AAA is the highest. Each federal agency has discretion on which WCAG level they meet and which tools to use to confirm compliance. Accessibility reviews for this guidance followed WCAG Level AA.

This document discusses Microsoft Word (Word), Adobe Acrobat (Adobe), and the PDF Accessibility Checker (PAC) 2026 version. Text documents created in Word should be checked for accessibility in Word first, then Adobe, and finally PAC. Users should fix all errors in Word that are possible, even if those errors are flagged in Adobe or PAC – any errors fixed directly in Adobe will need to be redone if the base Word text changes during the review process. Errors cannot be fixed in PAC; any errors flagged in PAC need to be fixed in Word or Adobe.

Note that errors, solutions, programs, and guidelines change over time and should be verified at the time of application.

1.1 Why is Accessibility Important?

Digital accessibility increases access to electronic documents for many different groups of people including those with disabilities, elderly people, people in rural areas, and people in developing countries. Accessibility is also beneficial to people without disabilities because it improves clarity, consistency, and usability for all users. For example, it provides flexibility for users with temporary impairments, such as an injured hand or situational limitations like noisy surroundings.

While the primary goal of Section 508 compliance is to ensure accessibility for all users, it also helps agencies avoid potential legal and financial risks associated with non-compliance.

1.2 Elements of an Accessible Document

Accessible documents meet certain technical criteria and can be accessed by assistive technologies such as screen readers, which read a document to listeners in a way that

makes it fully understandable without needing physical visualization. Other types of assistive technologies include screen magnifiers, text-to-speech software, speech recognition software, alternative input devices, and Braille embossers.

Accessible documents also implement features such as alternative text descriptions for images and colors that are perceivable to those with low vision or color blindness.

Common elements that create accessibility issues include:

- Inadequate color contrast
- Improper or missing heading structure
- Missing embedded document titles
- Improper use of lists or manual formatting instead of built-in styles
- Missing alternate text descriptions for images
- Tables without designated headers
- Complex tables with merged cells or blank table cells

2 General Recommendations

- The best way to avoid accessibility errors is to begin the process with the source document. For example, starting with an accessible Word document before converting the file into a PDF can prevent errors from compounding in Adobe and PAC. If errors are not first addressed in Word, Adobe or PAC will find the same errors and they will be more difficult to resolve. Similarly, it is often (but not always) most efficient to first resolve errors found in Adobe (either in Word or Adobe, as appropriate) before using PAC. PAC is not used to resolve errors; it only finds them. They must be resolved in Word or Adobe.
- Save documents frequently when resolving errors, re-check work after every attempt at a new resolution, and always save backup copies of the final document and after resolving each category of errors to ensure no additional errors are produced in the next round of resolutions. Some errors require repetitive manual fixes to potentially hundreds of errors, and if a copy is not frequently saved, progress can be lost. Note that a working copy and a backup copy should both be kept and updated frequently.
- Certain programs export PDFs in ways that Adobe Acrobat and PAC cannot fully interpret. For example, Adobe Illustrator may output text as outlines or annotations instead of real, readable text, leading to accessibility failures. When exporting, ensure settings are enabled to preserve live text and avoid flattening or outlining.
- Accessibility checks should be completed only when the document is completely finalized. Comments, tracked changes, and highlighted or colored text may cause accessibility checkers to produce false errors. Accessibility best practices should be utilized during document creation, such as by using appropriate heading and spacing structures.
- Scanned pages and images cannot be read by accessibility checkers.

- Graphics created in ArcMap or other software should be checked for accessibility early in the process to help ensure color schemes are acceptable and reduce rework later.
- Tables that are inserted as images instead of full text cannot be read by accessibility readers. Alternative Text can be added to these images, but accessibility readers cannot interpret the actual data in the table.
- There are some errors that can only be addressed in Adobe. Any time the document is re-PDF'd, those errors would need to be addressed again, resulting in more effort and time.
- Warnings are different than errors. Accessibility checks may pass with warnings present but cannot pass with errors present. The responsible agency will determine if warnings are acceptable.
- Resolving errors can be complex and unintuitive. It is often helpful to visualize the resolution process; there are YouTube channels and blogs dedicated to showing how to resolve accessibility errors.
- In Adobe, errors can be right-clicked and a drop-down menu will appear; click Explain to be linked to an Adobe explanation page. Clicking Fix when available can expedite the resolution process. In PAC, errors can be clicked when in the Results in Detail tab to begin an internet search for the error.
- Reduce the number of extra images, such as logos, which need to be flagged as objects or have descriptive text added.
- PDFs are commonly split and recombined, or an updated page is spliced back into the original PDF. If changes are made to the Word document after manual fixes are applied in Adobe, individual pages can usually be re-inserted into the PDF without needing to redo all manual fixes. Occasionally, this will produce new errors, so if possible, avoid returning to Word after beginning edits in Adobe.

3 Key Terms

- **Alternative Text (Alt Text):** Alt Text is a brief written description that conveys the purpose or meaning of an image, chart, or other non-text element for users who cannot see it. Assistive technologies, such as screen readers, read Alt Text aloud to provide similar access to visual information. All meaningful images must include accurate and concise Alt Text, while decorative images can be marked as artifacts to be skipped by assistive technologies.
- **Bookmarks:** Bookmarks are navigational links that allow users to move quickly to specific sections or headings within a document. Bookmarks must accurately reflect the document's structure and hierarchy.
- **Content Panel:** In Adobe, the content panel displays the physical order of elements on each page, such as text blocks, images, and vector graphics. It represents how objects are visually arranged—not how they are read by assistive technologies. While the tags panel defines the logical reading order for

accessibility, the content panel controls the visual stacking order of page elements. If the content panel is not visible by default, follow the following path:

- Menu → View → Show/Hide → Side Panels → click Content
- **Table Editor:** In Adobe, the table editor is a tool used to inspect and correct the tagging structure of tables within a PDF. It shows the logical arrangement of rows, columns, and headers as recognized by assistive technologies. The table editor allows users to identify missing or incorrect tags and to ensure tables have proper scope, structure, and reading order.
- **Tag:** Tags are structural elements that identify the logical reading order and type of content such as headings, paragraphs, tables, lists, and images. Tags allow assistive technologies such as screen readers to interpret and present the document's structure and content accurately to users with disabilities. In Adobe, tags are displayed in a tags panel. If the tags panel is not visible by default, follow the following path:
 - Menu → View → Show/Hide → Side Panels → click Accessibility Tags

4 Software Accessibility Tools

4.1 Microsoft Word

When creating Section 508 passable documents, many of the errors encountered in Adobe and PAC can be prevented by first completing an accessibility review in Word. Furthermore, many of the errors identified in Adobe and PAC are most efficiently resolved in Word, even if Word does not flag them as issues.

The Word accessibility tool can be found at the following path:

- Word → Review → Check Accessibility

Once the Check Accessibility tool is initiated, the errors will display in a panel on the right side of the screen. Click the drop-down button on the item categories to see the individual errors. Clicking on an error will display additional information about the error as well as links to the recommended solutions.

4.2 Adobe Acrobat

Even if a document created in Word passes the Word accessibility checker, additional errors may be flagged in the Adobe checker, described below. It is important to utilize the proper way to convert a Word document to an Adobe PDF.

Otherwise, additional errors may be produced. Utilize the below path:

- File → Save As → Use the panel at the top to change the document type to PDF. Alternatively, click Browse and change the document type from Word to PDF in dropdown menu in the File Explorer pop-up. DO NOT use the Save as Adobe PDF feature, or it may generate new errors (do not use File → Save as Adobe PDF). Additionally, do not generate a PDF by using the Print feature.

Once in the Adobe software, the accessibility review can be found at the following path:

- All tools → Prepare for Accessibility → Check for Accessibility → Start Checking
PDFs are commonly split and recombined, or an updated page is spliced back into the original PDF. If changes are made to the Word document after manual fixes are applied in Adobe, individual pages can usually be re-inserted into the PDF without needing to redo all manual fixes. Occasionally, this will produce new errors, so it is important to save multiple copies of documents and always have a backup, and, if possible, avoid returning to Word after beginning edits in Adobe.

Note that some of the Adobe accessibility tools are difficult to use, or may not work as expected. In those instances, creativity and perseverance are required. There is often more than one way to address an issue, and sources such as YouTube provide many ideas. Best practices applied to the Word document will reduce effort required in the Adobe document.

4.3 PDF Accessibility Checker (PAC)

PAC is a free downloadable software that scans documents to ensure they match PDF/UA and WCAG requirements. Users upload their PDF document to PAC, run the program, and review the error report. Ensure use of the most recent version of PAC, as it is frequently updated.

The PDF Accessibility Checker (PAC) tool can be found at the following path:

<https://pac.pdf-accessibility.org/en>

Errors cannot be fixed in PAC. Errors need to be addressed in Adobe or Word and then reuploaded to PAC for further scanning. It is usually most efficient to run PAC after accessibility checks have been reviewed in both Word and Adobe. However, PAC will occasionally find errors that are more easily fixed in Word than Adobe, so it can be beneficial to begin with PAC, especially for users new to Section 508 who are still learning best practices in Word.

Additionally, while documents can pass Word and Adobe accessibility checkers, this does not mean that they will pass PAC. Most errors can be fixed before using PAC, but there are some common errors that occur regardless. When uploading a PDF to PAC, there is an option to refresh the file— instead of reuploading it—to more quickly evaluate if an error has been properly corrected or not.

5 Document Settings Errors

5.1 Adobe Error: Document Language is Not Set

Summary: Documents must have a set language.

Solution: Documents need to have the language set within the metadata of the file. The language should match the language that the document is written in.

Path to fixing in Word:

- File → Options → Language, select a language

Path to fixing in Adobe:

- Open PDF in Adobe → Menu → Document Properties → Advanced → Language, select a language

5.2 Adobe Error: Document Title is Not Set

Summary: Documents must have a set title. This title automatically becomes the name that appears when the PDF is opened.

Solution: Documents need to have titles set within the metadata of the file. It is preferred for the title to match the in-text title of the document.

Path to setting a title in Word:

- File → Info → Title.

Path to fixing in Adobe:

- Open PDF in Adobe → Menu → Document Properties → Description → Title, enter a title

5.3 Adobe Error: Security Settings

Summary: Documents may not be able to be checked for accessibility if certain security settings are in place. This may include documents that have been electronically signed, among others.

Solution: Only sign documents after the accessibility check is complete.

5.4 PAC Error: PDF/UA Identifier is Missing

Summary: Each document must be manually reviewed to ensure proper tag structure, including correctly tagging items such as headings, lists, and tables. However, this flag also refers to the compliance of the overall document structure, such as reading order, artifacts, and language setting.

Solution: The PDF/UA ID attests that the PDF is ISO 14289 (PDF/UA) compliant, and generally should be fixed as the final step.

- Open PDF in Adobe → All Tools → Use Print Production → Preflight
- At the top of the Preflight window, select Acrobat Pro DC 2015 Profiles → Click the wrench icon
- In the search bar, type UA → Expand the Document Info and Metadata tab → Select Set PDF/UA-1 entry
- Click Fix at the bottom right of the window → When prompted, save the new file
- The new file created will have the error resolved

6 In-Text Formatting Errors

6.1 Adobe Error: Spacing

Summary: White space, extra spacing, or empty paragraphs may be flagged in Adobe and PAC because of entries from the tab, space, and enter keys. For example, pressing Enter repeatedly to move text to a next page will result in an error.

Solution: Use the Page Break feature (Ctrl + Enter) to move text to a new page instead of pressing Enter repeatedly. Use hard returns (Enter) only to start new paragraphs and soft returns (Shift + Enter) only to break lines within the same paragraph.

6.2 Adobe Error: Bookmarks

Summary: The document has bookmarks that do not parallel the document structure. This error may refer to there being no bookmarks in a large document, or that the document has a heading structure but the associated bookmarks are out of order.

Solution: This check fails when the document has 21 or more pages but does not have bookmarks that parallel with the document structure.

- Open PDF in Adobe → open the Bookmarks panel → select Bookmarks → choose Fix from the options menu
- In the Structure Elements dialog box, select the elements to use as bookmarks → click OK
- Alternatively, select the text that should be linked to the bookmark → Open the Bookmarks panel → click the three dots → New Bookmark. This will link the bookmark to the selected text. Drag and drop to rearrange bookmarks.
- Bookmarks can also be manually created and nested.

6.3 Adobe Error: List Items

Summary: All list items need to be tagged so that screen readers recognize them as part of a list, as opposed to a series of unrelated paragraphs.

Solution: Formatting lists with the built-in List tool in Word will correctly tag lists when converting to a PDF. Otherwise, they can be manually tagged in the Tags panel:

- Open the PDF in Adobe → Tools → Prepare for Accessibility → Fix Reading Order
- Draw a box around the content to select it → open the Tags panel by clicking the Tag icon on the right side of the screen → click the three dots at the top → Find Tag from Selection
- This will open the tag in the Tags panel
- Right-click the tag → Properties → Type → List

6.4 Adobe Error: Tab Order

Summary: Ensure the tab order of interactive elements, such as links and form fields, corresponds with the reading order of the document to ensure the tab key correctly navigates the document.

Solution: In Adobe, set the tab order to match the document's reading order (e.g., by page structure or manually adjusting in the Page Thumbnails panel). Review all interactive elements to ensure proper navigation. This error can also occasionally be fixed automatically by right clicking the error and clicking Fix.

7 Errors In Headings

7.1 Word Error: No Headings in Document

Summary: This occurs when the formatting of text has been manually altered instead of using the styles developed in Word. This error also can occur when headings styles are not used in the correct order (i.e., skipping heading levels). The document reader needs the metadata associated with preprogrammed styles to differentiate between different elements within a document.

Solution: Ensure all headings, subheadings, captions, and body text use Word's preset styles. Apply the correct heading style for titles and section headings rather than manually formatting text (bolding, centering, changing font size, etc.). Maintain hierarchical order of headings: Heading 1 → Heading 2 → Heading 3 → Heading 4. Do not skip levels (e.g., Heading 1 → Heading 3).

- Select the text you want to format
- Navigate to the Home tab → Styles Group
- Choose the appropriate heading style (Heading 1, Heading 2, etc.)
- Repeat for all headings throughout the document, ensuring proper order
- Heading styles can be modified by right-clicking the style and selecting Modify

7.2 Adobe Error: Logical Reader Order (Manual Check)

Summary: This flag appears automatically in every PDF accessibility check and must be reviewed manually in Adobe. It indicates potential issues with the document's reading order.

Solution: Confirm that the display order in the Tags panel matches the intended logical reading order of the document. Similar to the color contrast check in Word, this error cannot be automatically resolved and should be manually passed once verified. Complete all other edits first, then run through the document to ensure the logical reading order is correct before finalizing.

7.3 Word Error: Missing Table Header

Summary: A table without a correctly tagged header row will result in an error. This may only appear as an error in Adobe and PAC but should be fixed in Word first.

Solution: All tables must have a tagged header row. They must also repeat on new pages, when applicable.

- Select the header row → Table Design tab → check Header Row
- Right-click table → Table Properties → Row → Select Repeat as Header Row at the Top of Each Page

7.4 PAC Error: Numbered Heading Skips One or more Heading Levels

Summary: Headings must always be used in hierarchical order (1, 2, 3, 4), not (1, 3, 4).

Solution: In Word, ensure that all headings, subheadings, captions, and body text use Word's preset Styles. Headings must always follow a hierarchical order (1, 2, 3, 4) and not skip levels (e.g., 1 → 3). In Adobe, heading order can also be manually adjusted.

- Open PDF in Adobe → All Tools → Prepare for Accessibility → Fix Reading Order
- Draw a box around the content to select it → open the Tags Panel by clicking the tag icon on the right side of the screen → click the three dots at the top → Find Tag from Selection
- Right-click the tag → Properties → Tag → Type → Select the correct numbered heading

7.5 PAC Error: Document does not Contain Headings

Summary: This occurs when an author has manually modified the formatting of text instead of using Styles developed in Word. This error also can occur when headings styles are not used in the correct order (i.e., skipping heading levels). The document reader needs the metadata associated with preprogrammed Styles to differentiate between different elements within a document.

Solution: Ensure that all headings, subheadings, captions, and body text use Word's preset Styles. Apply the correct heading style for titles and section headings rather than manually formatting text (bolding, centering, changing font size, etc.).

Maintain hierarchical order of headings: Heading 1 → Heading 2 → Heading 3 → Heading 4. Do not skip levels (e.g., Heading 1 → Heading 3).

- Open PDF in Adobe → All Tools → Prepare for Accessibility → Fix Reading Order
- Draw a box around the content to select it → open the Tags Panel by clicking the tag icon on the right side of the screen → click the three dots at the top → Find Tag from Selection

- Right-click the tag → Properties → Tag → Type → Select the correct numbered heading

Repeat for all headings throughout the document, ensuring proper order

8 Errors in Tables

8.1 Word Error: Use of Merged or Split Cells

Summary: This warning appears when a table contains merged or split cells, which can make it difficult for screen readers to interpret the table correctly.

Solution: Tables should not have merged or split cells. However, if merged or split cells are unavoidable, they must be properly tagged as header cells or data cells in Adobe (see Adobe Acrobat Common Errors and Solutions). Please note, empty cells will also result in an error that needs to be resolved manually in Adobe.

8.2 Adobe Error: Rows

Summary: Each row in the table must be correctly tagged to correspond with the applicable table header so that screen readers know which header corresponds to each row. This may only appear as an error in Adobe and PAC and can be fixed manually in Adobe, but this issue is more easily avoided by using the Table Design tab in Word to mark headers.

Solution: Ensure that all tables have properly defined header rows in Word before saving as a PDF. This helps Adobe automatically tag table rows correctly. If the error still appears, manually adjust the row tags in Adobe using the Table Editor.

Path to fixing in Word:

- Select the header row → Table Design tab → Check Header Row

Path to fixing in Adobe:

- Open PDF in Adobe → All Tools → Prepare for Accessibility → Fix Reading Order
- Draw a box around the table to select it
- Open Table Editor by either right clicking the selected table or using the Fix Reading Order panel (sometimes this option is grayed out)
- Verify each row is tagged correctly and associated with the proper header:
 - Right-click each header cell → Table Cell Properties → Select Header Cell or Data Cell as appropriate. If the header is on the top of the table, select Column. If the header is on the side of the table, select Row.
- If Table Editor does not work, delete the table from the Word document and recreate it

8.3 Adobe Error: Blank Cells

Summary: Blank cells in a table will result in an error.

Solution: Do not create tables that have empty cells. If an empty cell is necessary, it will need to be tagged appropriately:

- Open PDF in Adobe → group Tools → Prepare for Accessibility → Fix Reading Order
- Draw a box around the table to select it → open Table Editor (right-click or use Fix Reading Order panel)
- Select the blank cell → Right-click → Table Cell Properties → tag it as a Data Cell
- Repeat for all necessary blank cells
- Note, Table Editor can be difficult to use; consider updating the Word table to remove unnecessary blank cells if possible

8.4 Adobe Error: Regularity

Summary: All tables must have the same number of columns in each row and rows in each column. This may only appear as an error in Adobe and PAC but must be fixed in Word.

Solution: Ensure all tables have the same number of columns in each row and rows in each column. If this is not possible, follow these steps:

- Open PDF in Adobe → All Tools → Prepare for Accessibility → Fix Reading Order → right-click on the table → Table Editor
- For each Header cell:
 - Right-click → Table Cell Properties
 - Set Type to Header Cell
 - Set Scope Property as None
 - Enter a unique identifier in the ID box
 - If the cell spans multiple rows/columns, set Row Span and/or Column Span as needed
 - Click OK
- For each Data cell:
 - Right-click → Table Cell Properties
 - Next to Associated Header Cell IDs, click the + symbol
 - In the Add Table Header ID dialog, select the appropriate Header ID(s) for this data cell
 - If the cell spans multiple rows/columns, set Row Span and/or Column Span as needed
 - Click OK
- Repeat for all header and data cells until the table structure is fully tagged and all associations are correct
- Occasionally, this error will appear even if tables have the same number of columns in each row and rows in each column. In these cases, deleting and reinserting or remaking the table can fix the error.

8.5 PAC Error: Table Header Cell Assignments

Summary: This error occurs when a table's header cells are not properly identified or associated with the correct data cells.

Solution: Apply a unique ID to each Header cell and associate it with each applicable Data cell.

- Open PDF in Adobe → All Tools → Prepare for Accessibility → Fix Reading Order → right-click on the table → Table Editor
- For each Header cell: Right-click → Table Cell Properties
 - Set Type to Header Cell
 - Set Scope Property as None
 - Enter a unique identifier in the ID box
 - If the cell spans multiple rows/columns, set Row Span and/or Column Span as needed
 - Click OK
- For each Data cell:
 - Right-click → Table Cell Properties
 - Next to Associated Header Cell IDs, click the + symbol
 - In the Add Table Header ID dialog, select the appropriate Header ID(s) for this data cell
 - If the cell spans multiple rows/columns, set Row Span and/or Column Span as needed
 - Click OK
- Repeat for all header and data cells until the table structure is fully tagged and all associations are correct

8.6 PAC Error: Table Header Cell Has No Associated Sub Cells

Summary: Tables, headers, and rows must be correctly tagged and associated with each other. Header cells do not have to be in the top row; their placement depends on the table structure. Any cell that provides descriptors for associated data cells should be set as a header cell. This can include cells in the top row, bottom row, leftmost column, rightmost column, or even within the table itself as needed.

Solution: If the table has split or merged cells, a unique ID must be applied to each Header cell and be associated with each applicable Data cell.

- Open PDF in Adobe → All Tools → Prepare for Accessibility → Fix Reading Order → right-click on the table → Table Editor
- For each Header cell:
 - Right-click → Table Cell Properties
 - Set Type to Header Cell
 - Set Scope Property as None
 - Enter a unique identifier in the ID box

- If the cell spans multiple rows/columns, set Row Span and/or Column Span as needed
 - Click OK
- For each Data cell:
 - Right-click → Table Cell Properties
 - Next to Associated Header Cell IDs, click the + symbol
 - In the Add Table Header ID dialog, select the appropriate Header ID(s) for this data cell
 - If the cell spans multiple rows/columns, set Row Span and/or Column Span as needed
 - Click OK
- Repeat for all header and data cells until the table structure is fully tagged and all associations are correct

9 Errors in Figures

9.1 Word Error: Missing Alt Text

Summary: This occurs when graphical objects (e.g., images, charts, and other shapes) do not have an Alt Text description and are not marked as decorative. Images must include a description that fully conveys what is being shown, while objects that do not serve a necessary function (such as logos) can be marked as decorative.

Solution: All images, objects, and other shapes need to have an Alt Text description or be marked as decorative. Alt Text should be brief and explain the takeaway from a graphical object. For example, rather than describing every line and number on a chart, the Alt Text should explain the pattern or comparison that the author wants the reader to learn from this object. It is not necessary to describe every line and color on an image. Some images will auto-generate Alt Text. These descriptions are not sufficient for Section 508 compliance and must be reviewed.

In Word, right-click on the object and select Edit Alt Text. A menu will appear on the right side of the screen where Alt Text can be entered or the object can be marked as Decorative. Occasionally, an error will still appear in Adobe even if Alt Text was properly applied in Word. In these cases, deleting and reinserting the image and Alt Text can fix the error.

Grouping images/objects/textboxes will make them act as one object, and a combined Alt Text can be used where appropriate. However, Adobe and PAC do not always recognize these objects as a single group, and grouping certain features may produce new errors. (For example, if a text box is part of a group, it may cause a separate error.) To avoid these issues, grouped objects may be exported as an image and then reimported as a single image with a single alternative text.

9.2 Word Error: Image or Object Not Inline

Summary: This occurs when images and objects are wrapped in any way other than Inline.

Solution: All images and objects must be placed Inline with text in the document. However, this will position the images above or below the text rather than wrapped within a body of text. Images and objects placed within a Wrap Text layout will trigger the error. For best visibility, images and charts should be the full width of the page where feasible.

9.3 Word Error: Hard-to-Read Text Contrast

Summary: Text may be flagged if the color does not have enough contrast against the background.

Solution: Unlike other errors that have a specific fix, poor color contrast requires a manual check. The user should manually check color contrast and adjust colors as necessary. Colors in graphs and images will also need to be manually checked. Ensure colors chosen meet accessibility guidelines by using a contrast checker tool and inputting both colors. Use the Hex number of the color to identify the exact color code, as opposed to selecting a similar color on the color wheel:
<https://webaim.org/resources/contrastchecker/>

9.4 Word Error: Color Contrast

Summary: The contrast between different colors, such as colored shapes and images on a colored background, may produce accessibility errors. This might not be flagged as an error and will instead need to be checked manually, especially for images.

Solution: Ensure colors chosen meet accessibility guidelines by using a contrast checker tool and inputting both colors. Use the Hex number of the color to identify the exact color code, as opposed to selecting a similar color on the color wheel:
<https://webaim.org/resources/contrastchecker/>

9.5 Adobe Error: Color Contrast (Manual Check)

Summary: This flag appears automatically in every PDF accessibility check and must be reviewed manually, even if the document passed the Word color contrast check. It refers to whether there is sufficient contrast between text, background, and other visual elements.

Solution: Verify that all text, figures, and objects meet proper color contrast requirements. This error cannot be automatically resolved and must be manually confirmed. As best practice, always review charts, images, and design elements to ensure they maintain adequate contrast for accessibility.

9.6 Adobe Error: Missing Alt Text

Summary: All images, objects, and other shapes need to have an alternative text description or be marked as decorative. Images must include a detailed description that fully conveys what is being shown, while objects that do not serve a necessary function can be marked as decorative. This error should be addressed first in Word, but Adobe will produce this error for any scanned pages, signatures, and various other items.

Solution: In Adobe, add or edit alternative text through the Set Alternate Text tool, or mark elements as decorative if they do not convey meaningful content. Review scanned content, signatures, and figures carefully to ensure they are either described appropriately or excluded from the reading order.

- Open PDF in Adobe → All Tools → Prepare for Accessibility → Fix Reading Order
- Draw a box around the figure to select it → open the Tags Panel by clicking the tag icon on the right side of the screen → click the three dots at the top → Find Tag from Selection → right-click → Properties → Tag → Alternate Text for Images
- Enter a description
- Occasionally, an error will still appear even if Alt Text was properly applied in Word. In these cases, deleting and reinserting the image and Alt Text can fix the error.

10 Errors With Tags

10.1 Adobe Error: Appropriate Nesting

Summary: The document must have correct structural organization of tags within tables and lists to prevent screen readers from announcing cells out of order.

Solution: This error occurs when headings are not nested properly. To fix, right-click the failed element in the Accessibility Checker panel and selected Show in Tags. Then, either create a new heading element, change the types of elements, or rearrange the existing elements by dragging them.

- Open PDF in Adobe → Tools → Prepare for Accessibility → Fix Reading Order
- Draw a box around the content to select it → Open the Tags panel by clicking the Tag icon on the right side of the screen → click the three dots at the top → Find Tag from Selection. This will open the tag in the Tags panel.
- When viewing the Tags panel, each item represents a structural element in a nested, branching format. The tags must be rearranged by dragging and dropping from the incorrect tag structure to the correct structure. The goal is to ensure that tags are placed in the correct location to reflect the document's visual and logical organization. For example, a heading level 2 (<H2>) should be nested under a heading level 1 (<H1>), and table data cells (<TD>) should appear within table row (<TR>) and table (<Table>) tags. If elements are tagged

incorrectly—such as a <TD> appearing outside of a <Table> or a list item not contained within a <L> (list) tag—an error will be produced.

- This may take multiple attempts to determine which structure is correct, and it will vary based on the situation. It is recommended to save a copy of the document before attempting to resolve the errors.

10.2 Adobe Error: Tagged Content and/or Tagged Annotations

Summary: All content in the document, including text, images, and tables, needs to be tagged or marked as an artifact. Tags help screen readers identify what content is and how it fits into the document structure for reading. Artifacts are content that do not provide meaningful information and can be skipped by readers, like page borders and logos. Text should be automatically tagged by Word if correct styles are used. All images and objects should be marked with Alt Text or as decorative in Word. If any object is unable to be marked in Word, it may be able to be marked as an artifact in Adobe. Tables require proper header row tagging in Word. Additionally, all annotations in the document, such as links, need to be tagged or marked as an artifact.

Solution: Ensure that all content in the document is either included in the tags tree or marked as an artifact.

To mark as artifact, use the following path:

- Open PDF in Adobe → open the Content panel → select content to mark as artifact → Create Artifact from menu

To tag content, use the following path:

- Open PDF in Adobe → All tools → Prepare for Accessibility → Fix Reading Order
- Draw a box around the content to select it → open the Tags Panel → click the three dots at the top → Create Tag from Selection
- The tag will then need to be properly formatted
- Alternatively, draw a box around the content to select it → right-click → select the appropriate tag type

10.3 Adobe Error: Tagged PDF

Summary: The document should be tagged to specify the reading order so that items such as headings, tables, and images are read in the correct sequence.

Solution: This error can be avoided by using proper style formatting in Word but may need to be manually verified in Adobe. This error can also occasionally be fixed automatically by right clicking the error and clicking Fix.

10.4 PAC Error: Text Object Not Tagged

Summary: The content is not currently tagged and cannot be read.

Solution: To tag content, use the following path:

- Open PDF in Adobe → Highlight the content → open the Tags Panel → click the three dots at the top → Create Tag from Selection → OK
- Right-click the tag → Change Tag to Artifact → OK

11 Other Errors (Identified Only in PAC)

11.1 PAC Error: ID Missing in Note Structure Element

Summary: This error occurs when a footnote or note element in the PDF is missing a unique identifier in the Tags structure. Screen readers rely on these IDs to correctly associate note references with their content.

Solution: This error generally occurs when footnotes are present.

- Open PDF in Adobe → Open the Tags Panel → Right-click the Note tag → Properties
- In the Tag tab of the Object Properties dialog, enter a unique identifier in the ID field
- Use a clear and consistent identifier, such as Footnote 1 or simply 1
- Repeat for each Note tag missing an ID

11.2 PAC Error: Link Annotation is not Nested Inside a Link Structure Element

Summary: Links can be incorrectly tagged and nested in the document structure when using the Adobe auto-tag tool.

Solution: This error generally occurs when there is text in the document that links to external pages or other parts of the document. This error can also sometimes be avoided by saving correctly.

- First, attempt to save the document properly:
- File → Save As → Use the panel at the top to change the document type to PDF. Alternatively, click Browse and change the document type from Word to PDF in dropdown menu in the File Explorer pop-up. DO NOT use the Save as Adobe PDF feature (do not use File → Save as Adobe PDF). Additionally, do not generate a PDF by using the Print feature.

If this solution does not work, each error may need to be resolved individually in Adobe: Open PDF in Adobe → All Tools → Prepare for Accessibility → Fix Reading Order

- Draw a box around the content to select it → open the Tags Panel by clicking the tag icon on the right side of the screen → click the three dots at the top → Find Tag from Selection
- Right-click the content → New Tag → Link → Drag and drop the previous link structure and content under the new link. Ensure the structure is fully within the new link, as opposed to being just in line with the link tree.

11.3 PAC Error: Alternative Description Missing for an Annotation

Summary: This error occurs when annotations don't have alternative descriptions.

Solution: For elements such as citations or a table of contents that contain meaningful information but do not require further alternative descriptions, the error can be fixed in Adobe Preflight.

- Open PDF in Adobe → All Tools → Use Print Production → Preflight
- At the top of the Preflight window, select PDF Standards → Click the wrench icon
- Under Interactive Elements and Properties, select Create Content Entry for Link Annotations → Fix
- Save the new version of the document

11.4 PAC Error: Link in Text does not have a Link Element

Summary: This error occurs when a hyperlink in the PDF text is not properly tagged as a link. Screen readers rely on the link tag to announce hyperlinks correctly, so missing link tags can make the link inaccessible.

Solution: Manually fix the broken tags in Adobe.

- Open PDF in Adobe → All Tools → Prepare for Accessibility → Fix Reading Order
- Draw a box around the content to select it → open the Tags Panel by clicking the tag icon on the right side of the screen → click the three dots at the top → Find Tag from Selection
- In the Tags panel, select the tag corresponding to the hyperlink
- Right-click the tag → New Tag → Select Link as the tag type
- Drag the original text tag into the newly created Link tag to nest it correctly
- Test the link with a screen reader or keyboard navigation to confirm it is recognized as a hyperlink

11.5 PAC Error: Figure Element on a Single Page with no Bounding Box

Summary: This error occurs when a figure tag is present in the PDF's tag tree but is not associated with any visible content on the page. This issue typically occurs when an image has been removed from the document or was not correctly tagged during the tagging process.

Solution:

- Open PDF in Adobe → All Tools → Prepare for Accessibility → Fix Reading Order
- Draw a box around the content to select it → open the Tags Panel by clicking the tag icon on the right side of the screen → click the three dots at the top → Find Tag from Selection

- Right-click the image tag nested in the figure tag → Change Tag to Artifact
- Delete the figure tag
- All Tools → Prepare for Accessibility → Fix Reading Order
- Draw a box around the image to select it → open the Tags Panel by clicking the tag icon on the right side of the screen → click the three dots at the top → Find Tag from Selection
- Right-click the tag > Properties > Type > Change the type to Figure
- If figures are being nested in a <p>, follow the steps above but manually drag and drop the figure created out of the nest and place it into correct location

11.6 PAC Error: ID Missing in Note Structure Element

Summary: The note tag is not associated with its reference.

Solution: Assign a unique ID.

- Open PDF in Adobe → All tools → Prepare for Accessibility → Fix Reading Order
- Draw a box around the content to select it → open the Tags Panel → click the three dots at the top → Find Tag from Selection
- Right-click → Properties → Enter any unique ID

11.7 PAC Error: “Contents” Entry on an Annotation Exists, but is Comprised of Whitespace

Summary: This error occurs when annotations don’t have alternative descriptions.

Solution: For elements such as citations or a table of contents that contain meaningful information but do not require further alternative descriptions, the error can be fixed in Adobe Preflight.

- Open PDF in Adobe → All Tools → Use Print Production → Preflight
- At the top of the Preflight window, select PDF Standards → Click the wrench icon
- Under Interactive Elements and Properties, select Create Content Entry for Link Annotations → Fix
- Save the new version of the document

12 Version History

Date Updated	Summary of Changes
March 17, 2026	Added solutions for new PAC errors and revised recommendations for saving documents.