Accessibility Guidelines

Division of Strategic Communication and Engagement
Office of Accessibility and Disability Resources

AZUSA PACIFIC
U N I V E R S I T Y

The Value of Making Accessibility a Priority

By making your website, newsletter, social media, PDFs, etc., accessible using best practices, you are ensuring that all of your potential users, including people with disabilities, have a good user experience and are able to easily access your information.

Accessibility can:

Drive Innovation: Accessibility features in products and services often solve unanticipated problems.

Enhance the Brand: Diversity and inclusion efforts that are so important to business success, and to fostering a sense of belonging and value of all, are accelerated with a clear, well-integrated accessibility commitment.

Extend Market Reach: The global market of people with disabilities is more than 1 billion individuals with a spending power of more than $6 trillion. And accessibility enhancements often improve the online experience for all users.

Minimize Legal Risk: This issue is of increasing legal concern, with many countries having laws requiring digital accessibility.

The Division of Strategic Communication and Engagement and the Office of Accessibility and Disability Resources recognize the critical nature of accessibility, and to that end have collaborated to produce this document, which gives an overview of best practices in accessibility for digital media—websites, PDFs, emails, images, and social media. Following these guidelines will greatly enhance your digital communication, making it available to a wider audience and improving brand reputation. We encourage you to familiarize yourself with the content in this document, created in practical support of the university's Electronic Information Technology Accessibility Policy.

Legal and Foundational Standards

This toolkit aligns with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.2 Level AA. This is the primary industry standard, and is explicitly mandated for public universities by the ADA Title II final rule (April 2024), which requires public-facing websites and mobile apps to meet WCAG 2.1 Level AA by April 2026 or 2027. We have adopted WCAG 2.2 as a proactive measure, providing a robust framework for digital accessibility, particularly for mobile accessibility and cognitive impairments.

Other Key Accessibility Standards

Though WCAG is the primary standard for this toolkit, we also draw foundational accessibility principles from the following:

Revised Section 508 Standards: These federal standards for information and communication technology (ICT) align with WCAG 2.0 Level A and AA. Our toolkit ensures compliance with these requirements for federal agencies and, by extension, provides strong guidance for all digital content.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Title II Final Rule (April 2024): This crucial update explicitly mandates WCAG 2.1 Level AA as the technical standard for web content and mobile applications for state and local government entities, including public universities. Azusa Pacific University must ensure that its public-facing digital content meets this standard by April 24, 2026 (for larger entities), or April 26, 2027 (for smaller entities).

Please keep in mind that this document provides only a general introduction to creating accessible digital content and does not capture all accessibility guidelines or detailed instructions for the many computer programs available to users.

Accessible Images

Images are an important part of many types of digital communication, from websites to emails to social media posts. But inaccessible images are of no benefit to disabled users, and may drive them away from your content. According to Click-Away Pound, 71% of disabled customers with access needs will click away from a website that they find difficult to use, and more than 90% of customers who have trouble navigating a website either will not, or cannot, contact the organization. To best serve disabled users, adhere to the following guidelines:

- Images containing text should be avoided if at all possible. The exception is for images in which the text is an intentional piece of the visual design of the element:
  - Logos
  - Badges
  - Event flyers or posters

  Note, however, that in these cases, the content included in the image should be presented alongside the image (e.g., a picture of the related event flyer while you're talking about the event). *You cannot work around this practice by using an image of the flyer as the page's header image to meet the no-text rule.*

- Make sure every image has an appropriate `alt` attribute. Because images are a visual-only medium by definition, they can cause problems when used as part of the content of a page; visually impaired readers may not be able to receive the content the images are presenting. Alternative (alt) text resolves this issue by describing the image for readers (and computer systems) who cannot see it.

- If you set an empty alt attribute (e.g., `alt=""`), this means that the image is visual decoration only, and has no bearing on the actual content of the page—for example, a custom-designed section separator, or a visual version of text content that already exists on the page.

- Otherwise, you should describe the image to the reader as helpfully as possible:
  - If it's a photo, describe the content of the photo: "Two students carry furniture into Trinity Hall on move-in day."
  - If it contains important information that doesn't exist anywhere else in the page content (e.g., an org chart), describe the point it's trying to make: "Jim manages the project committee and reports to Jill, who reports to the board."
  - If it's one of those special elements described earlier, like an event flyer, you can say something like, "ScholarFest flyer." Keep in mind that any information on the flyer should also be included in the content of the page or caption to allow all readers to see the information.
  - View the section on "Writing Good Alt Text" for additional tips and guidelines.

- Make sure the image will resize correctly on all screen widths (e.g., desktop, mobile, etc.) without making any wrapping text difficult to read. This means it should be configured with the appropriate width percentage and max-width. Because this can be a complex process that must take additional context into account, contact stratcomm@apu.edu for assistance from the web team.

Images and Email Platforms

Depending on which email platform you are using, you might be able to enter alt text by manually editing the HTML in your email. First, if your email program allows, enable the HTML editor in your email or newsletter platform. After the URL for each image, add the alt attribute followed by the equals sign and the alternative text in quotations (e.g., `alt="text goes here"`).

- Use helpful descriptions in alt tags within your images.

Checking for High Color Contrast

Using effective color contrast in your campaigns is generally a good design choice, but it's especially important for people with color blindness.

Use the following helpful tools to check the contrast ratio between text and background:

webaim.org/resources/contrastchecker
contrast-ratio.com

Do

Don't

Accessibility of Social Media

Accessibility within social media platforms is essential to ensuring that your content can be experienced by all users. For example, X (formerly Twitter) studies note that photos average a 35% boost in retweets and videos get a 28% boost in retweets—but disabled users may counter that success if they're frustrated. From adding alt text to images to ensuring that videos have captions, the following guidelines can help you build stronger connections with your audience.

Need for Accessibility of Social Media

"If you consider the spending power of the disability community, you're talking about a half-a-trillion-dollar industry: $490 billion. That's what people with disabilities spend a year in consumption. So why wouldn't you want to be one of the brands that cater to that demographic? Parallel to that, it is well known that people within the disability community are one of the most, if not the most, loyal brand advocates. A lot of companies do not cater to them, so when they find a company catering to their needs, they are very loyal, often becoming brand ambassadors."

Daryn Harpaz
Website Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG)
Compliance Specialist
Founder and CEO, ZenythGroup, LLC

Using Alt Text in Social Media

- 85% of consumers feel that how a brand handles issues on its website or social channels is a good indicator of its quality of support, according to Liveops. This is why alt text is so important.

- As a rule, every image in your social posts should have alt text. If you don't accommodate users who need alt text, you likely won't know they've missed your point if they simply disregard your organization instead of taking the time to complain.

- If you are unable to add alt text to the image within the social media platform, you can instead describe the image in the body of the post.

- View additional tips for adding alt text by platform below.

Writing Good Alt Text

Alt text should be clear, concise, and informative. When writing alt text, reflect on the purpose of the image and provide the who, what, and where.

Images with Text
Avoid images that contain important text, such as a flyer. If an image with text is used, the exact text in the image **must** also be provided as regular text in the post or on the webpage. For logos or badges, the alt text should be the name of the organization or logo.

Writing in Plain Language
Use plain, clear language. Avoid jargon, and use short sentences and paragraphs. Use the active voice. This makes the content easier to process for all users, including those with cognitive disabilities.

Best Practices
- If the image is decorative and adds no meaning (e.g., a custom section separator), use empty alt text (alt="").

- For photos, describe the content (e.g., "Two students carry furniture into Trinity Hall on move-in day.").

- For complex images such as charts, provide a brief description in the alt text and a full explanation in the surrounding text.

A 2019 Carnegie Mellon University study resulted in researchers identifying five guidelines people should keep in mind when writing alt text in order to best translate an image's humor:

- Explain characters' actions.

- Explain emotions.

- Explain facial expressions.

- Identify the source (such as TV or film).

- Describe anything distinct about the background.

Creating Clear Captions

- Within social media post captions, lead with your main message.

- Put hashtags and @mentions at the end of a post. This is very important for screen reader users.

- If a post contains a link to an image, video, or audio, indicate this at the beginning of the content using the prefix [PIC], [VIDEO], or [AUDIO] so screen reader users can anticipate what they will find when they follow the link.

- Also, if a post includes one of these items, be sure to link back to the webpage that contains the image, video, or audio with captions and a transcript.

Using Hashtags and Emojis

- For hashtags with multiple words, capitalize the first letter of each word to make it easier to read visually and for screen readers. For example, use #BackToSchool not #backtoschool.

- Limit your use of emojis. While they are a fun addition to captions, too many emojis can hinder the readability of your content for screen readers. Followers using a screen reader hear descriptions of the emojis, which can slow down and disrupt the flow of your message.

- When using emojis, limit use to 1-3 per caption. It's also best to save emojis for the end of your message.

Accessible Links in Social Media and Email

Use meaningful link text (avoid using link text such as "here" or "click here").

X (formerly Twitter): Adding Alt Text

- Image description functionality is not enabled by default.
  1. Navigate to Settings and Privacy.
  2. Click Accessibility.
  3. Click the checkbox next to Compose image descriptions.
- After you've enabled image descriptions, the next time you attach an image to a tweet:
  1. Click Add Description.
  2. Enter your alt text.
  3. Click Done.
- Note: The image description is limited to 420 characters. Using clear, concise captions is best.

Facebook: Adding Alt Text and Video Captions

- Facebook tries to recognize common objects and concepts in photos and automatically generates alt text.
- Of course, as with anything autogenerated, you want to proofread and edit it to make sure the image's intent is conveyed:
  1. Select Edit Photo.
  2. Select Alt Text.
  3. Review the content, and click "Override generated alt text" to edit.
  4. Make any necessary changes and click Save.
- For videos, Facebook makes it simple to add captions to videos via the .srt file format. If you don't know how to create an .srt file, you can upload your video to YouTube first and use their captioning feature.
- Once your video is uploaded and ready to view, follow these steps to add captions:
  1. Navigate to your video, click Options.
  2. Click Edit This Video.
  3. Under Captions and Upload SRT Files, click Choose File to upload an .srt file with your captions.
  4. Click Save.

Visit the Facebook Accessibility Help Center for additional information.

Instagram: Adding Alt Text and Video Captions

- To instantly become more accessible on Instagram, don't use the Stories feature for primary business messaging purposes. Stories do not allow you to add alt text, captions, or a descriptive audio track to help visually impaired users know what you're trying to communicate.
- Just like Facebook, Instagram tries to recognize common objects and concepts in photos and automatically generates alt text. It's important to proofread this autogenerated alt text. A better option is to add your own descriptive alt text:
  1. Select Advanced Settings.
  2. Select Write Alt Text under Accessibility.
  3. Add your alt text.
  4. Select Save.
- For videos, Instagram does not allow users to add alt text, closed captions, or audio descriptions from within the app.
  1. Write a detailed caption that describes what is happening in the video. If the video is short, you can include a transcript of what is said if there's dialogue.
  2. Another option is to use a different app to caption your videos before uploading them to Instagram (rather than recording them directly in the app). This option is best for longer-form IGTV videos.

Contact Information

It's also important to make sure your contact information is available on your social media accounts, so people can easily reach out if they come across inaccessible posts. List a primary phone number and/or email address, or provide a link that lists the appropriate contact information.

Additional Social Media Resources

- "Add alternative text to images for accessibility" (LinkedIn)
- "Social Media Accessibility: Inclusive Design Tips for Marketers" (Hootsuite)
- "10 guidelines to make social media posts more accessible" (Sprout Social)

Accessible Websites

APU Logo

The Division of Strategic Communication and Engagement provides downloadable versions of the APU logo in JPEG and PDF formats. By downloading the university trademark and logotype, you agree to adhere to guidelines outlined in the APU Graphics Standards Quick Guide (PDF). The JPEG files are high-resolution, 300 dpi Photoshop files used primarily for websites and Microsoft Word documents. The PDF/EPS files are Adobe Illustrator vector files used on print materials, T-shirts, giveaways, etc. Download the logos.

Headings

- Headings are ranked <h1> through <h6>, with <h1> being the largest and thus representing the most important idea on the page, with subsections organized with <h2> headings. These subsections can then be divided with <h3> headings, and so on. All pages should have only one <h1>, giving the title of the page.

- Use headings to categorize information and allow people to scan your page easily. Screen reader users can also benefit from headings, as they can navigate a page according to its headings, listening to a list of all headings and skipping to a desired heading to begin reading at that point.

- Do not skip heading levels to be more specific (for example, do not skip from <h2> to <h5>). It is, however, permissible to skip headings in the other direction if the outline of the page calls for it (for example, from <h5> to <h2>).

- Do not select heading levels based on their appearance. Select the appropriate heading rank in your hierarchy.

- Do not use bold instead of a heading.

- Most content on web pages should be organized into sections. When pages are organized into sections, a heading should be present with each section.

Heading level 1

It's the large title at the top of the page. Use only one <h1> element per page or view.

Heading level 2

This is the title of each main subsection, and each main subsection can be further broken up into smaller sections using <h3> through <h6> as follows:

Heading level 3

Heading level 4

Heading level 5

Heading level 6

Text, Lists, Tables, and Media

- Include alt text for images.
  - Use alternative text (alt text) for images, logos, drawings, and other graphic elements. Without alt text, screen reader users just hear "image." Some images automatically include alt text, so it's a good idea to check that the alt text is what you want. Read more about it in the "Accessible Images" section of this document.
  - Check for high color contrast.

- To make your site easy to read, use large, left-aligned text when possible. Full-justified text is more difficult to read because of the extra space it creates between words.

- Use numbered and bulleted lists.

- Tables are structured sets of data that help people understand the relationships between different types of information. Use the caption element to provide a title for the table.

- Media includes content such as prerecorded and live audio and video. Make sure your media do not autoplay.
  - Check to see that all media can be paused.
  - Confirm the presence of captions for videos.
  - Confirm that transcripts are available for audio.

Accessibility Testing and Validation

A robust accessibility strategy involves a combination of automated and manual testing. Automated tools catch only about 30%-50% of issues, so manual review is essential to ensure a good user experience.

Recommended Automated Tools

- [WAVE Browser Extension](): An on-page visual checker that highlights accessibility issues such as missing alt text and low contrast.
- [W3C Markup Validation Service](): Verifies that your website's code is valid, which is the foundation of accessibility.

Crucial Manual Testing Methods

- **Keyboard-Only Navigation:** Test the entire page using only the Tab, Shift + Tab, and Enter keys. Ensure that every interactive element is reachable and operable, and that a clear focus indicator is always present.
- **Screen Reader Testing:** Use screen readers such as VoiceOver (on Mac) and NVDA (on Windows) to navigate your content. Listen to how the content is announced to ensure that it makes sense and is easy to navigate.
- **Browser Zoom:** Test your pages at various zoom levels (up to 200%) to ensure that content reflows properly without horizontal scrolling or loss of content.

New Standards and Interactive Elements

In addition to the guidelines for headings, text, and media, the following best practices are now required in order to meet the latest standards:

- **Keyboard Accessibility:** All interactive elements must be fully operable using a keyboard. When a user tabs to an element, there must be a **visible focus indicator** with sufficient contrast. (WCAG 2.4.11 and 2.4.12)
- **Target Size:** Interactive targets such as buttons and links should have a minimum size of **24x24 CSS pixels**. This is crucial for touch interfaces and for people with motor disabilities. (WCAG 2.5.8)
- **Dragging Movements:** If a feature uses a drag-and-drop mechanism, an alternative method that doesn't require dragging must also be available. (WCAG 2.5.7)
- **Forms and Authentication:** Forms must be accessible. Authentication processes should not rely solely on a cognitive test (such as a puzzle) unless an accessible alternative is provided. Also, do not require users to enter the same information more than once. (WCAG 3.3.7 and 3.3.8)

Additional Resources

[ADA Standards for Accessible Design]()

[Making Audio and Video Media Accessible]()

Creating Accessible PDFs in Adobe Acrobat Pro

There are many programs (Word, Excel, etc.) whose documents can be converted to PDFs, and directions for doing that can be found in various places on the internet. Once you've created a PDF and would like to make it accessible, we recommend opening it in Adobe Acrobat Pro and following these steps:

1. Open PDF file.

2. Go to: **File → Document Properties → Description**.
    Make sure Tagged PDF: Yes.
    (It must say yes to be an accessible PDF.)
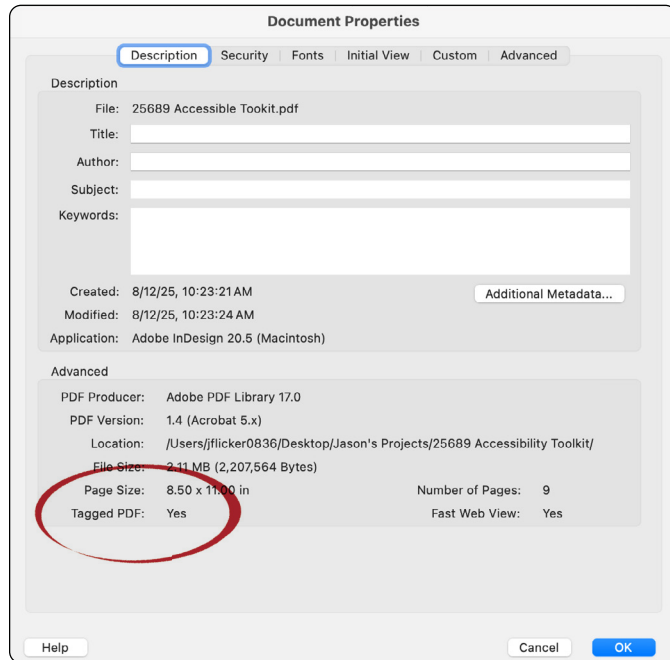
Under **Advanced**, select English as the language, then click **OK**.
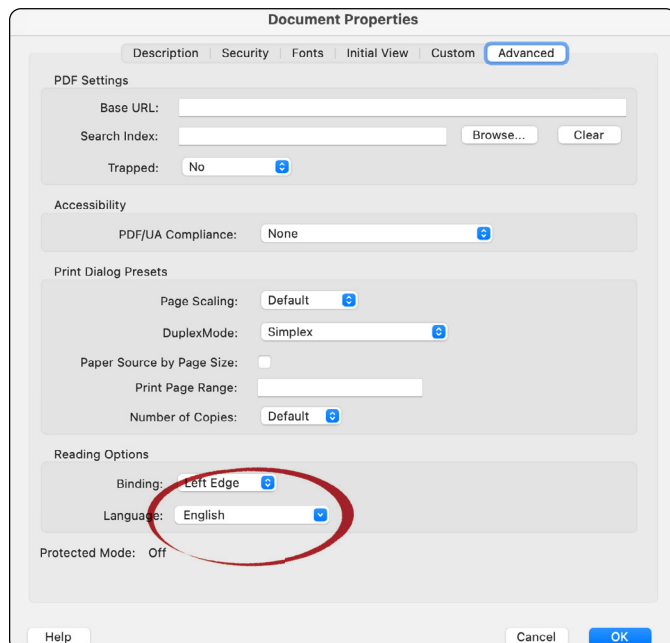
3. **View → Zoom → Reflow** to see the order things are read. Then turn Reflow off once examined.

4. Go to: **Tools Pane → Prepare for Accessibility → Reading Order → Show Order Panel**. In the Reading Order window, make sure "Display like elements in a single block" is unchecked.
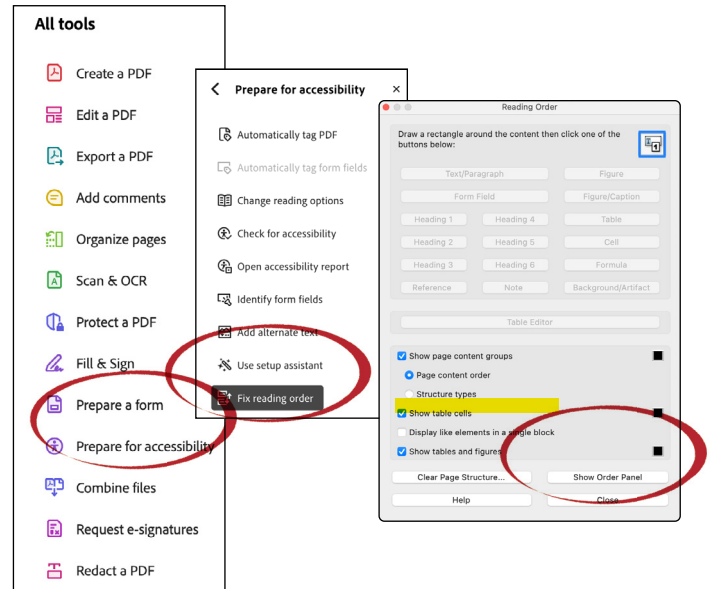
In the Order Panel, make sure the reading order is correct.

If not, click and hold any item in the order panel and drag it to the correct position in the panel.

5. Right click on each element in the Order Panel to assign it the proper tag.

- The very first header of a document should be tagged as **heading 1** (<h1>). Note: There can only be one <h1> per document, similar to a webpage.

- Secondary headings should be tagged as **heading 2** (<h2>). Tertiary headings within this space should be tagged as **heading 3** (<h3>) and so on.

- Background or decorative elements (graphics not containing vital information) should be tagged as **background/artifact**.
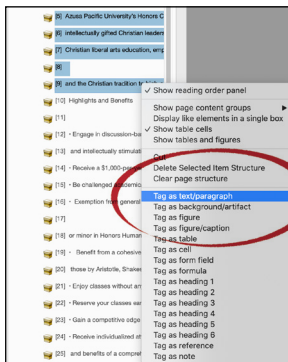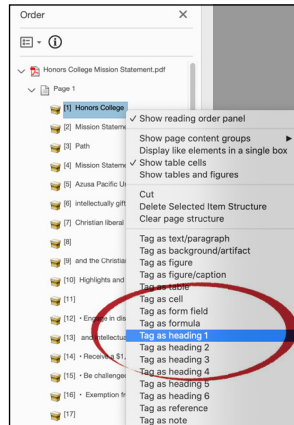
- Sentences of a similar nature should be grouped together as a paragraph. Select the first sentence of the paragraph, hold down the shift key, and select the last sentence of the paragraph. Once your entire paragraph is selected, right click and **tag as text/paragraph** (P).

6. Tag images with vital text as **figure/caption**. Afterward, go to: **View → Show/Hide → Side Panels → Accessibility Tags** and open the Accessibility Tags panel. Locate the image you just tagged, and right click → **New Tag**. This will open up a dialog box where you can enter alternate text to make the image meaningful to those who use a screen reader.
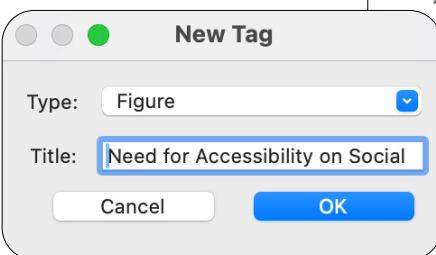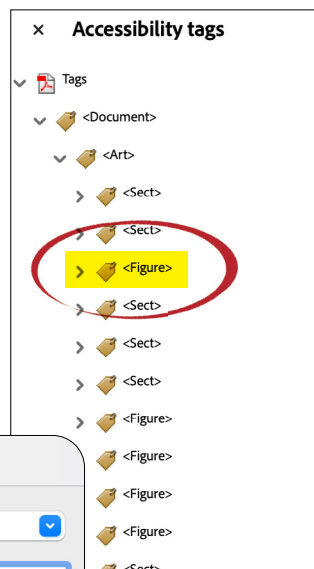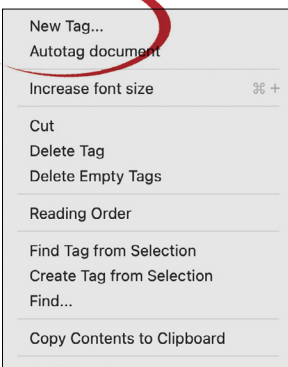
7. Review your tags. Go to: **View → Show/Hide → Side Panels → Accessibility Tags** and open the Tags panel. Expand the Tags palette by clicking the arrow next to tag to see the structure of the document. If nothing is in there, then the document is not tagged.
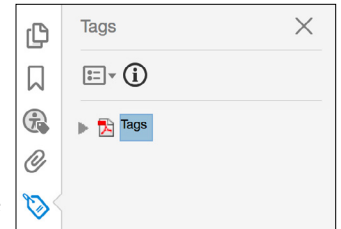
8. Once your tag order is satisfactory, preview the screen reader experience. Go to: **View → Read Out Loud → Activate Read Out Loud**. Then, starting on your document's first page, go back to **View → Read Out Loud → Read to End of Document**. Listen for any inconsistencies or incorrect reading order. Note: you can change the voice speed in *Preferences*.

9. Full Check

   Make sure the boxes are checked like below and click **Start Checking**. If there are issues, right click on the issue and click fix; this should give you options on how to fix the issue.
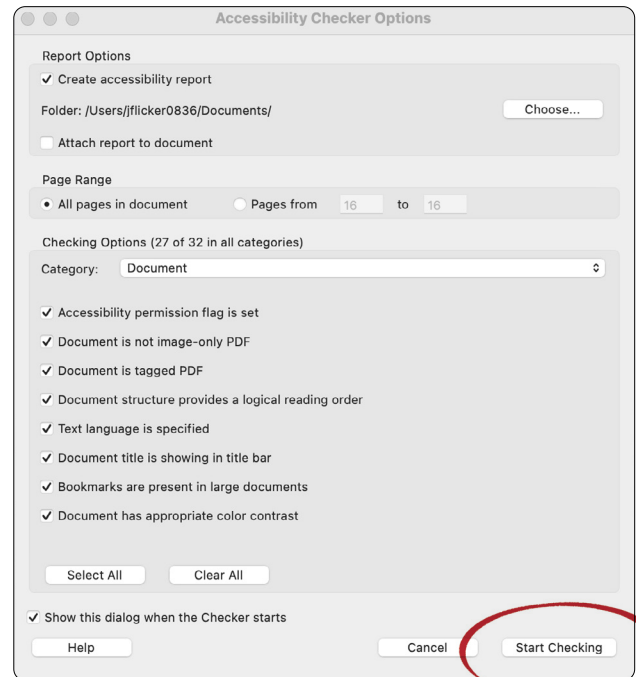
10. Once all the issues are fixed, **save the document**.

Video

Accessible videos have some main elements that make them [section 508 compliant and accessible](#):

- Captions – The audio parts of your video appear as text at the appropriate time to give access to people who are hearing impaired or deaf.

- An audio description – A description of a video's visual elements gives access to people who are blind or visually impaired.

- A 508-compliant video player – On the user side, it's important that people who require keyboard navigation or an assistive device have access to a compliant video player to easily navigate to the window where the video plays.

Things to Consider During Storyboarding and Postproduction

- Avoid anything that flashes more than three times in any one-second period, as this can trigger seizures.

- Consider speaker visibility: Some people use mouth movement to help understand spoken language. When feasible, ensure that the speaker's face is visible and in good light.

- For any overlay text used on screen, consider the font family, size, and contrast between the text and background to ensure it is readable. [Download the Color Contrast Checker tool](#) to assist with this.

- Plan for audio description of visual information: Using description provides context for people who are blind and others who cannot see the video adequately. It describes the visual information needed to understand the content, including text displayed in the video. Plan to either:
  - Integrate description into the main audio content, or
  - Record the audio and video with timing to accommodate separate description.

Add Captions and Subtitles

Captions and subtitles ensure that content is available for people who are deaf and others who have difficulty hearing the audio. Captions are also used by people who process written information better than audio. The terms "captions" and "subtitles" are used to describe this text in different regions of the world. This resource uses:

- "Captions" when referring to the same language as the spoken audio.

- "Subtitles" when referring to spoken audio translated into another language.

Some regions use "subtitles" for the same language as the audio and for the translation. Sometimes they are distinguished as intralingual subtitles (same language) and interlingual subtitles (different language). Subtitles are implemented the same way as captions. Subtitles/interlingual subtitles are usually only for the spoken audio (for people who can hear the audio but do not know the spoken language). They can also be a translation of the caption content, including nonspeech audio information.

Captions are needed for accessibility, whereas subtitles in other languages are not directly an accessibility accommodation.

Does My Video Need Captions?

Video only (no audio content):

- For prerecorded and live:
  - Captions are not needed, because there is no audio information.

Video with audio content:

Does the video have audio information that is needed for the audience to understand what the video is communicating?

If no (for example, it is just background music):

- Captions are not needed; however, if the title of the background music or the tone of the music is critical to the emotional arc of the piece, it may be wise to include that information in a caption.

If yes:

- For prerecorded and live:
  - Captions are required to provide the audio content to people who are deaf or hard of hearing.
  - Recommended resource for creating ADA-compliant captions: [rev.com](#)

References

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.2: https://www.w3.org/WAI/WCAG22/quickref/

Section 508 Standards: https://www.section508.gov/

ADA.gov (Americans with Disabilities Act): https://www.ada.gov/

Siteimprove Accessibility Platform: https://www.siteimprove.com/

WAVE (Web Accessibility Evaluation Tool): https://wave.webaim.org/extension/

NVDA Screen Reader: https://www.nvaccess.org/

Contact Us

If you have questions or would like more information about issues related to accessibility, contact the Office of Accessibility and Disability Resources at disabilityservices@apu.edu or the Division of Strategic Communication and Engagement at stratcomm@apu.edu.