

2.9 Creating Alternative Text in Acrobat

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How Alternative Text is Relevant

Alternative text, or ‘alt text’ for short, is designed to fit into the reading order of non-text content. In other words, the tagged content type, such as ‘Link’ or ‘Figure’ will be announced prior to the alt text description that has been added for that tag. It is important to keep this in mind when writing alt text descriptions, as avoiding descriptions that start with ‘Link of’, ‘Figure of’, etc. will prevent repetition of relevant information by the screen reader.

Adding Alternative Text

Figures

All figures such as photos and diagrams that appear within a PDF document need text alternatives to describe their purpose and content. This means alt text should effectively relay information not only about visual elements or objects of a figure, but also any titles, text or characters displayed within the image.

To Add Alternative Text to a Figure:

1. Open the **Tags** menu, found on the **Navigation Pane**. Find and select the tag that pertains to the image, which should be labelled as ‘Figure’.
2. Open the ‘Options’ dropdown menu, found on the **Tags** menu, and select ‘Properties’. An ‘Object Properties’ window will open. Select the ‘Tag’ tab in this window.
3. Select within the ‘Alternative Text’ field and type a meaningful description of the image. As a note, ensure any acronyms and non-quantitative numbers (such as a serial number or phone number) shown in the image are typed with spaces in between each character or number. This will ensure screen readers can properly relay this information to a user.

Select ‘Close’. The figure now has alternative text that can be read or spoken by assistive technology.

Hyperlinks

Alternative text is added to links within a document to allow screen readers to circumvent confusing, lengthy and ambiguous link names by providing short descriptions of the link’s purpose.

To Add Alternative Text to a Hyperlink:

1. Open the **Tags** menu, found on the **Navigation Pane**. Open ‘Options’ and select ‘Read Order’. Use the available cursor to highlight the entire link.
2. From the tags ‘Options’ menu, select ‘Find Tag from Selection’. Ensure there is a ‘Link’ tag corresponding to the link. For more specific instructions on tagging hyperlinks, see the later module, ‘Formatting Hyperlinks in Acrobat’.
3. With the ‘Link’ tag selected, open the tags ‘Options’ menu again and select ‘Properties’.
4. An ‘Object Properties’ dialogue window will open. From this window, open the tags tab and select within the ‘Alternative Text’ box. Type a short description of the link destination or purpose.

Select ‘Close’. Assistive technology will now identify the link purpose even with lengthy or unreadable link names.

Table of Contents Links

It is important to note that not all tagged links will involve webpage links leading out of the document. Some links (often for table of contents items) will lead to specific areas within the document. Alternative text can be set for these and all other ‘intra-document’ links through the same process as hyperlinks.

Conclusion

In this module, we've covered the basics of adding alternative text to non-text elements within a PDF. Alt text procedures will be later revisited for specific elements, such as tables, in later modules.