

## 3.3 PDF Accessibility Troubleshooting – Signatures

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## ***Introducing the Content Panel***

Past modules featuring the standard PDF remediation process have primarily focused on managing the structure of content within the **Tags** panel and the logical reading order in the **Order** panel. All content containers can be directly viewed in a third panel called **Content**, which may be needed to remediate a PDF signature. Access this panel by right-clicking the **Navigation Pane** and selecting ‘Content’.

### **A Warning When Using the Content Panel**

Elements that are mistakenly rearranged, altered or deleted in the **Content** panel could result in the permanent disarrangement or deletion of those elements in the PDF, which are irreversible even with Acrobat’s ‘Undo’ feature. The **Content** panel should therefore be used sparingly and, in most cases, only to view or locate content in a PDF.

#### *Before Accessing the Content Panel:*

- **Save a copy of the PDF.** This will create a failsafe for any mistakes or errors that occur when using the **Content** panel.
- **Complete all other remediation processes.** Doing so ensures that changes to the document and tag tree (which alter content containers) will take place before using the **Content** panel.

### **Applications of the Content Panel**

The **Content** panel allows a user to view and manipulate PDF content at the object level. For instance, components that were converted from the paragraphs, figures and lines of formatting in a Word document have been programmed into distinguishable ‘Text’, ‘Image’ and ‘Path’ objects. If a document has been tagged appropriately, these objects will be packaged into the content containers that are assorted in the **Tag** tree. The **Content** panel can be used to view the objects of a content container as well as its current tag placement (which is enclosed within carrot symbols, next to the ‘container’ name). This is especially useful for finding content that is unmarked or entirely unreachable from the **Tags** panel, as will be seen later on with certain signatures.

## ***Distinguishing and Tagging Signatures***

Legal papers, procedural forms, official letters and other documents may contain signatures that need to be made accessible. A signature can be physically written or created electronically as an ‘eSignature’ using software like Acrobat’s **Fill & Sign** tool. Regardless if signatures are physically written or in eSignature form, they are considered relevant to the document and therefore cannot be set as artifacts. Let’s explore the different tagging procedures involved with each signature type.

### **Custom eSignatures**

An eSignature that is custom-made has been manually ‘drawn’ within Acrobat or another program. When created, a custom signature will most likely be invisible to the **Tags** panel and the ‘Find’ feature that is normally used to locate unmarked content. For this scenario, the **Content** panel will need to be opened in order to locate the signature for tagging.

#### *To Locate and Tag a Custom eSignature:*

1. Open the **Content** panel. Select the root of the content tree that contains the eSignature, which can be identified by an Acrobat symbol and name of the current document. This will specify where Acrobat will look for the highlighted eSignature.

2. Navigate to the **Tags** panel and open the **Tags** ‘Options’ menu. Select ‘Reading Order’. Use the ‘Reading Order’ cursor to highlight the eSignature.
3. Again, open the **Content** panel and the **Content** ‘Options’ menu. Select ‘Find Content from Selection’. An ‘Image’ object should be expanded from within one (or several) ‘Form’ objects, all within an ‘Adobe Fill Sign’ content container. Verify the highlighted content represents the eSignature by selecting a random content container and then reselecting the ‘Image’ object. The eSignature should be re-highlighted in the document viewing window.
4. In the Content tree, select only the ‘Adobe Fill Sign’ content container in which the form objects and image are nested. The signature can now be tagged and made visible in the tag tree. Navigate to the **Tags** panel and open the **Tags** ‘Options’ menu. Select ‘Create Tag from Selection’.
5. A ‘New Tag’ window will appear. Open the ‘Type’ dropdown menu, select ‘Figure’ and press ‘OK’ to tag the element.

The eSignature should now be visible in the tag tree and nested under a ‘Figure’ tag. Assort the signature into its proper placement in the tag tree. Lastly, the logical reading order should be verified in the **Order** panel.

### Written Signatures

Physically written signatures, those that have been signed onto paper with ink, will have been placed into a PDF either as an adjustable image or as a document scan that effectively leaves the signature ‘burned’ into a document. Images of signatures will be tagged just like any other figure or image.

#### *To Tag an Image of a Written Signature:*

1. Open the **Tags** ‘Options’ menu and select ‘Reading Order’. Use the ‘Reading Order’ selection cursor to highlight the image of the signature.
2. In the ‘Reading Order’ window, select the ‘Figure’ button to tag the signature as an image. Place the new ‘Figure’ tag in its proper location in the tag tree. The written signature image is now properly tagged.

If a written signature is not in the form of an image file and is instead scanned in with the original document, more steps will need to be taken to make it accessible. This will include using the **Scan & OCR** tool to identify the signature as an element. The features of **Scan & OCR**, previously named ‘Enhanced Scans’, are covered in the module, *Managing PDF Scanned Elements*. Review this module for more information on unrecognized text elements. In the simplest case, a signature will be recognized as a single element that can be easily tagged as a ‘Figure’. However, it is common for the **Optical Character Recognition** software to identify a single signature as a set of multiple elements.

#### *To Tag a Scanned Signature Represented by Multiple Elements:*

1. Open the **Tags** ‘Options’ menu and select ‘Reading Order’. Use the ‘Reading Order’ cursor to select and observe all elements identifying the signature. In this case, the unique signature has been split into multiple elements.
2. While holding the ‘Ctrl’ key, click the first element representing the signature to deselect it. While all other elements are still selected, tag them as ‘Background/Artifact’ in the ‘Reading Order’ window.

3. Now that only one content container represents the signature, reselect the remaining element and tag it as a 'Figure' in the 'Reading Order' window. Place the 'Figure' tag into its intended order in the tag tree.
4. Open the **Edit PDF** tool to change the dimensions of the newly tagged figure element. Adjust the size and placement of the element to encapsulate the entire signature.

The user and assistive technology can now access the signature as a single element.

### ***Assigning Alternative Text to Signatures***

Like images and figures, signatures cannot be read as text elements. They need to be given an alternative text description that, one, identifies the element as a signature and, two, communicates who is signing. Before proceeding, ensure the signature is appropriately tagged as a figure.

#### **Alt Text for Signatures**

*To Add Alternative Text to a Signature:*

1. Open the **Tags** panel and find the signatures 'Figure' tag. Right-click the 'Figure' tag and select 'Properties'.
2. In the 'Object Properties' window, open the 'Tag' section and select within the 'Alternate Text' field. Type the alt text description, 'Signature of', and then add the full name of the signee. All inputs will automatically be saved to the tag in this window.

Keep in mind that if the signature includes a printed name of the individual that provides credentials or additional information, this also may be worthy of including in an additional sentence of the signature's alt text description. Additionally, for written signatures in scanned documents, the signature itself may have overwritten or obscured nearby text. The possible inclusion of such elements, either in alternative text or separately tagged content containers, should be left to the user's discretion.

### ***Conclusion***

In this module, we've discovered the **Content** panel and learned how to make different electronic and written signatures accessible in a PDF. Remediation processes surrounding a third type of signature, a digital signature created by the Adobe **Sign** application, will be covered in a later module, *Managing Signatures Created with Adobe Sign*.