

3.8 PDF Accessibility Troubleshooting – Tables of Contents I

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Tagging Tables of Contents

Tag Structures for Tables of Contents

As tables of contents are essential for navigating a document, it is important for their structure to be appropriately tagged and accessible to all users. Tables of contents are assorted in the tag tree in the same way as lists and sub-lists. A table of contents is typically structured within a single parent ‘TOC’ tag, much like a list would be contained in a single list tag. Each section or chapter in the table is tagged as a table of contents item or TOCI (equivalent to a list item) that is nested directly under the parent TOC tag. If additional subsections or heading levels are presented in a table of contents, they should be tagged within a secondary table of contents tag. The secondary TOC will function like a sub-list as it remains nested within the higher-level TOCI tag.

To Tag and Arrange a Secondary Table of Contents:

1. Select the higher-level TOCI tag in which the secondary table of contents will be nested. Navigate to the **Tags** ‘Options’ menu and select ‘New Tag’. In the ‘New Tag’ window, change the ‘Type’ to ‘Table of Contents’ and press ‘OK’. The new TOC tag should appear next to the TOCI tag.
2. Move the table of contents items that represent subsections under the higher-level table of contents item into the newly created TOC tag. To maintain their order, select each sublevel TOCI while holding ‘Ctrl’ and then drag the selection into the TOC tag.
3. Drag the new TOC tag into the higher-level TOCI tag in which the secondary table of contents will be assorted. Now expand the higher-level TOCI tag. Drag the new TOC tag to appear below all other elements nested in the TOCI tag.

The secondary table of contents is now properly assorted in the tag tree. Repeat these steps for all other table of contents items with associated sub-sections. The heading level structure can now be fully understood when read by assistive technology. A screen reader can identify which table of contents items are the major sections of the PDF and which are subsections.

Tag Structures for Table of Contents Items

The automatically generated tag structure of a table of contents item will largely depend on the age and source of the PDF. Documents can be converted into PDFs with a variety of applications, all of which are continuously being updated and replaced. Authoring programs like Microsoft Word will have built-in software that can convert content into PDF format, all with varying outputs based on the installed operating system and software version. Further, Acrobat has ‘PDF Maker’ software (which has evolved from the earlier ‘Adobe Acrobat Distiller’) purposed for the same task of PDF conversion. Due to a plethora of conversion methods, automatically tagged table of contents items will vary greatly in their composition and structure. Let’s examine the most common TOCI tags.

Table of Contents Items May Be Automatically Tagged with the Following:

- **Label** (or an ‘Lbl’ tag, which designates list numbers or bulleted symbols if they are present with the table of contents).
- **Link** (and/or an ‘OBJR’ tag, to indicate the presence of the internal hyperlink for that table of contents item).
- **Title** (which could alternatively be a ‘Reference’ or ‘Span’ tag; the text container for the title is located here, while other tags like the link tag may be nested here).

- **Leader** (or a ‘Dot Leader’ tag, where ellipses or other types of separators for the table of contents items are held).
- **Page** (a tag for the page number).

Any or all of these tag types will be located within each TOCI tag. As labels, dot leaders and page numbers are meaningless to screen readers, these elements should be artifacted and their tags should be removed. Use the methods covered in *2.10 Designating PDF Artifacts* for guidance on rapidly artifacting content. In the interest of time and efficiency, the rest of this generic tag structure can be left as is and will still pass for accessibility, assuming the link and title tags are in a logical reading order. At minimum, a TOCI tag should contain an object reference tag for the internal hyperlink and title of the corresponding section or chapter in the PDF. If either of these elements are missing or the TOCI tag itself is missing from the tag tree, manual tag creation or assortment will be required to restore that table of contents item.

Manually Tagged Table of Contents Items Should Include:

- **OBJR Tag** (which is the Object Reference tag for that table of contents item; it will be nested as the first element within the TOCI tag).
- **Title Container** (or the text content container that announces the table of contents item; this will be nested as the second element within the TOCI tag).

In many cases, this simple format can be achieved by creating any missing tags and then assorting the correct tags and containers for the table of contents item. However, if a table of contents item’s OBJR tag is not misplaced but missing in the tag tree, further steps will need to be taken to remediate the table of contents. Before progressing to a troubleshooting solution, review *2.13 Formatting Hyperlinks in Acrobat* for the basics behind restoring links, editing page destinations and assorting object reference tags.

Conclusion

In this module, we’ve studied the appropriate tag structure for general tables of contents and for the table of contents items within them. In the next module, we’ll continue with tables of contents and cover the process for restoring them into fully accessible tools for document navigation.