PDF Documents

Summary

The Portable Document Format (PDF) file format is highly popular because it retains precise formatting across viewing platforms. In order to do this, PDFs render content as images. However, whether or not a given PDF is accessible is a matter of how it was created and the attention to accessibility given during the creation process.

Accessibility Problems

- many times, a PDF file is not necessary when a web page or MS Word document would be sufficient and more easily made accessible.
- untagged PDFs are not accessible because screen readers cannot read the PDF image; tags are used by screen readers to interpret text and images.
- the application used to create a PDF file must be capable of creating an accessible PDF.

Accessibility Features

- OCR[1] scanned print documents are accessible ready.
- Adobe Acrobat Pro has accessibility tools and options when authoring a document.
- MS Word files designed with accessibility in mind convert well to PDF format when saved as tagged PDFs (note: Office for Mac does not support Accessibility Checker).

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[1] Optical Character Recognition. This form of electronic conversion of print documents allows scanned text to be interpreted as text instead of an image, which enables screen readers to read PDFs.