PDF Accessibility Check Guide

Digital accessibility ensures that everyone, including people with disabilities, can access and use digital content and services. Adobe Acrobat Pro's full accessibility checker includes 32 options. Thesis and Dissertation Services' initial goal is to pass five key accessibility checks in the Adobe Accessibility Checker. These five accessibility standards help ensure your manuscript is accessible to a wider audience when published in OakTrust. We understand that not all graduate students have access to Adobe Acrobat Pro. That's why our Word Template and Walkthrough provide formatting and step-by-step guidance to ensure accessibility upon conversion to PDF. We are also developing a LaTeX Template and Walkthrough to achieve the same accessibility standards.

Importantly, these 5 checks can be remediated directly in the PDF, regardless of whether the original document was created in Word or LaTeX. **Though, it is best to add figure alt text in the native file before creating the PDF to avoid repeating the process if revisions are needed.**

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Checking if Your PDF Meets Accessibility Standards

Students may utilize the Accessibility Report tool in Adobe Acrobat to ensure their manuscript meets accessibility standards.

Before running the Acrobat Accessibility Checker, make sure you've finished all your edits to your manuscript in the software you used to write it.

First you will need to pin the Accessibility Full Check tool in Adobe Acrobat:

1. Open the PDF version of your manuscript in Adobe Acrobat Pro.
2. Select the Add/Edit Tools button (indicated by the arrow in Figure 1).
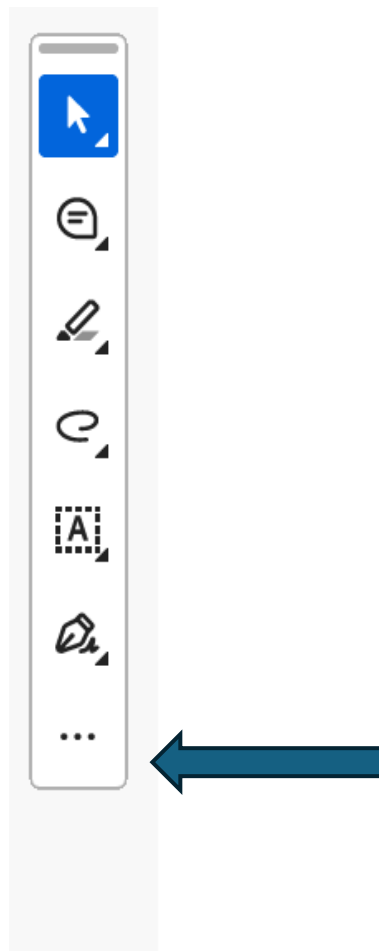
Figure 1

3. Select 'Customize Toolbar'.

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4. Scroll down through the options until you see the drop-down selection for "Prepare for Accessibility" (see Figure 2).
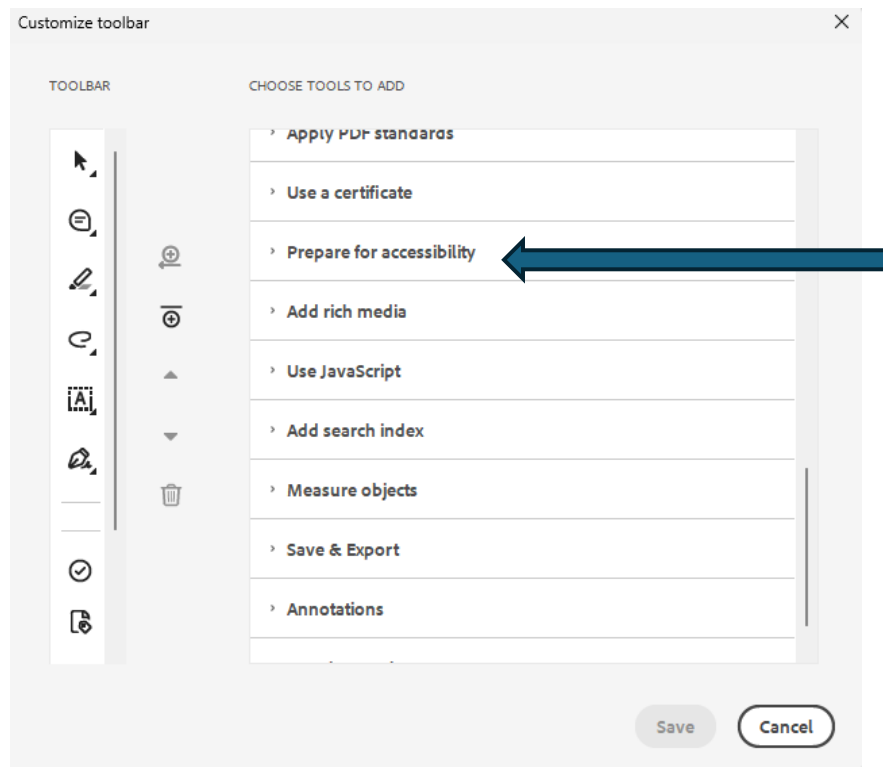

Figure 2

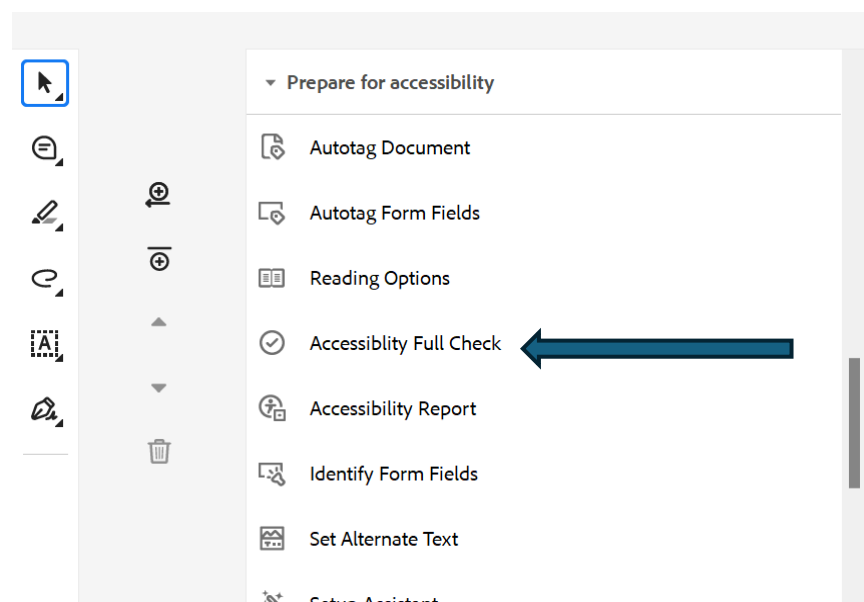5. Locate and select the 'Accessibility Full Check' tool (See Figure 3)

Figure 3

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6. After selecting 'Accessibility Full Check', click the Add Tool button (indicated by the red box in Figure 4) to pin it to your taskbar. Once added, a checkmark will appear next to the tool, and it will be visible on your toolbar (indicated by two green boxes in Figure 4).
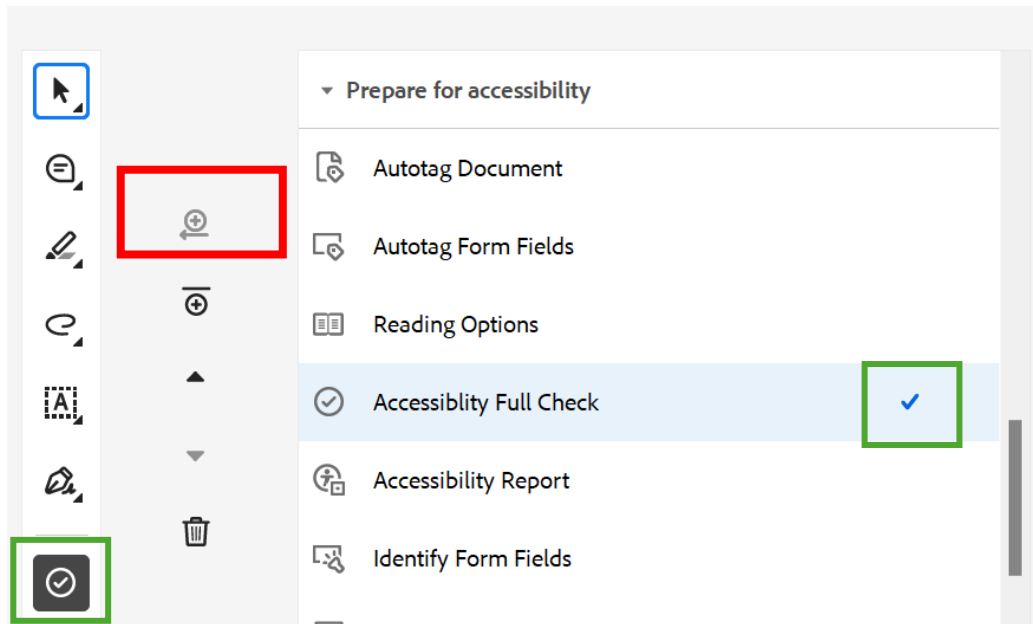

Figure 4

7. Click save to confirm and permanently add the tool.

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Now that you have your toolbar set up, you will run an accessibility check before you submit your manuscript in Vireo. Please note, there are 32 options in 4 categories (see area in green box in Figure 5). Checking all options constitutes a Full Check. We encourage students to try the Full Check to maximize accessibility of their document.

Currently, the Graduate School recommend accessibility based on five specific checks. These checks are explained in detail and illustrated in the figures below. Each of these five checks can be remediated directly within the PDF file, without needing to return to the original document creation environment.
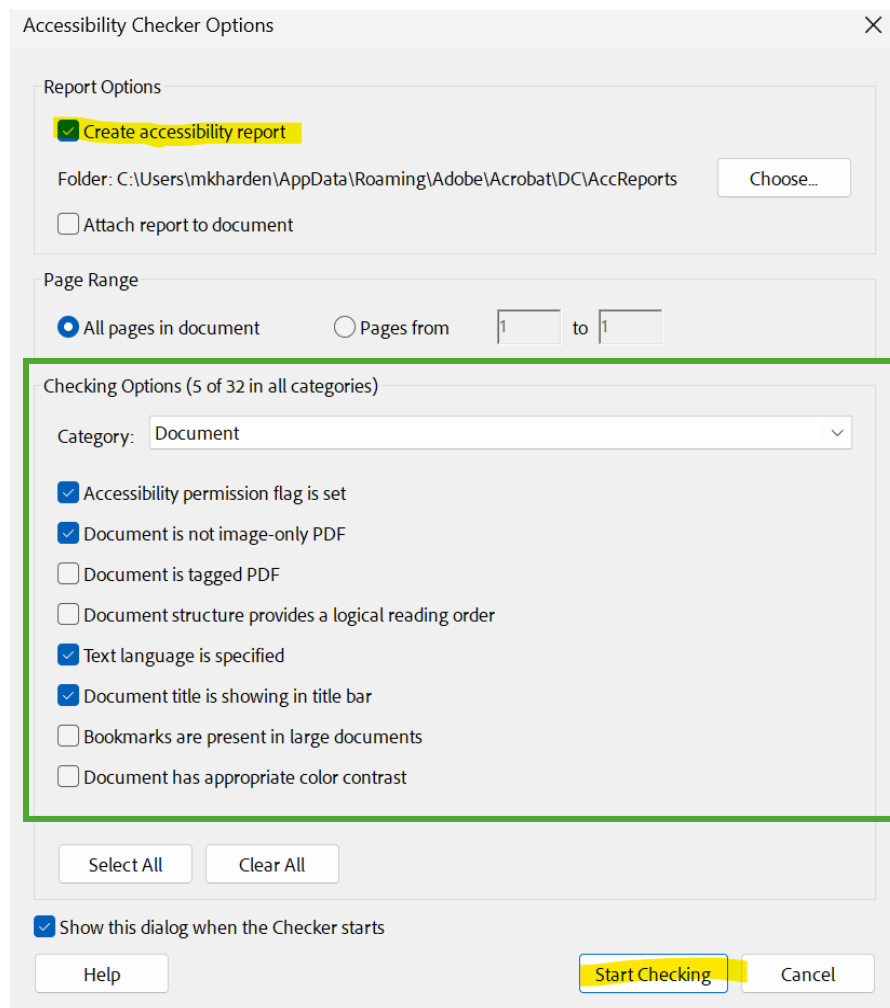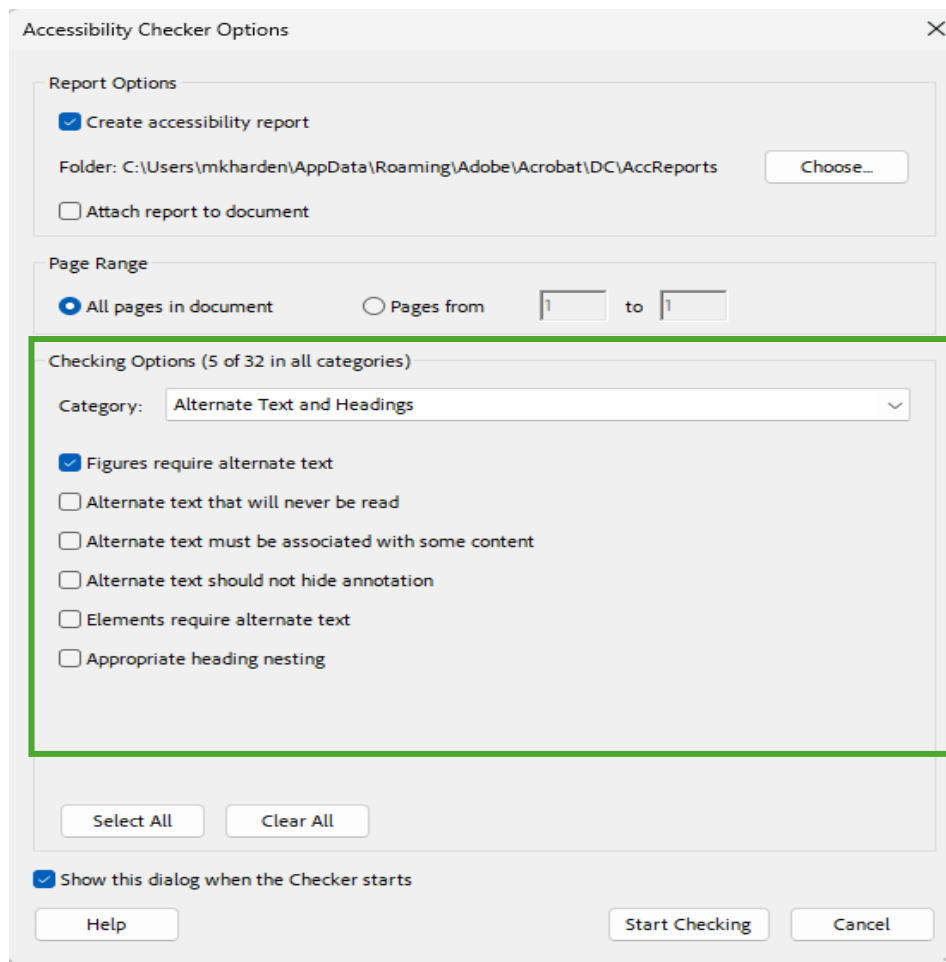

Figure 5

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Figure 6

1. Select the Accessibility Full Check tool (icon: checkmark inside a circle, see Figure 4).
2. In the dialog box under the Report Options section, ensure Create Accessibility Report is checked (see highlighted section in Figure 5).

3. In the Checking Options section, this is where you choose what types of accessibility checks Acrobat will run. To meet the minimum accessibility standards for your manuscript, make sure to select all the checkboxes under each of the four categories in the dropdown menu. These are as follows:

   a. Document (Check the following, see Figure 5)

      i. Accessibility permission flag is set

      ii. Document is not image-only PDF

      iii. Text language is specified

      iv. Document title is showing in title bar

   b. Page Content (No checks)

   c. Forms, Tables, and Lists (No checks)

   d. Alternate Text and Headings (see Figure 6)

      i. Figures require alternative text

4. Select 'Start Checking'.

5. Review any flagged issues and investigate them carefully. If any of the 5 checks fail, an X inside a red circle will appear (see Figure 7 for an example). Remediation of any of the 5 checks can be done in the PDF (see section: Interpreting Checker Results)
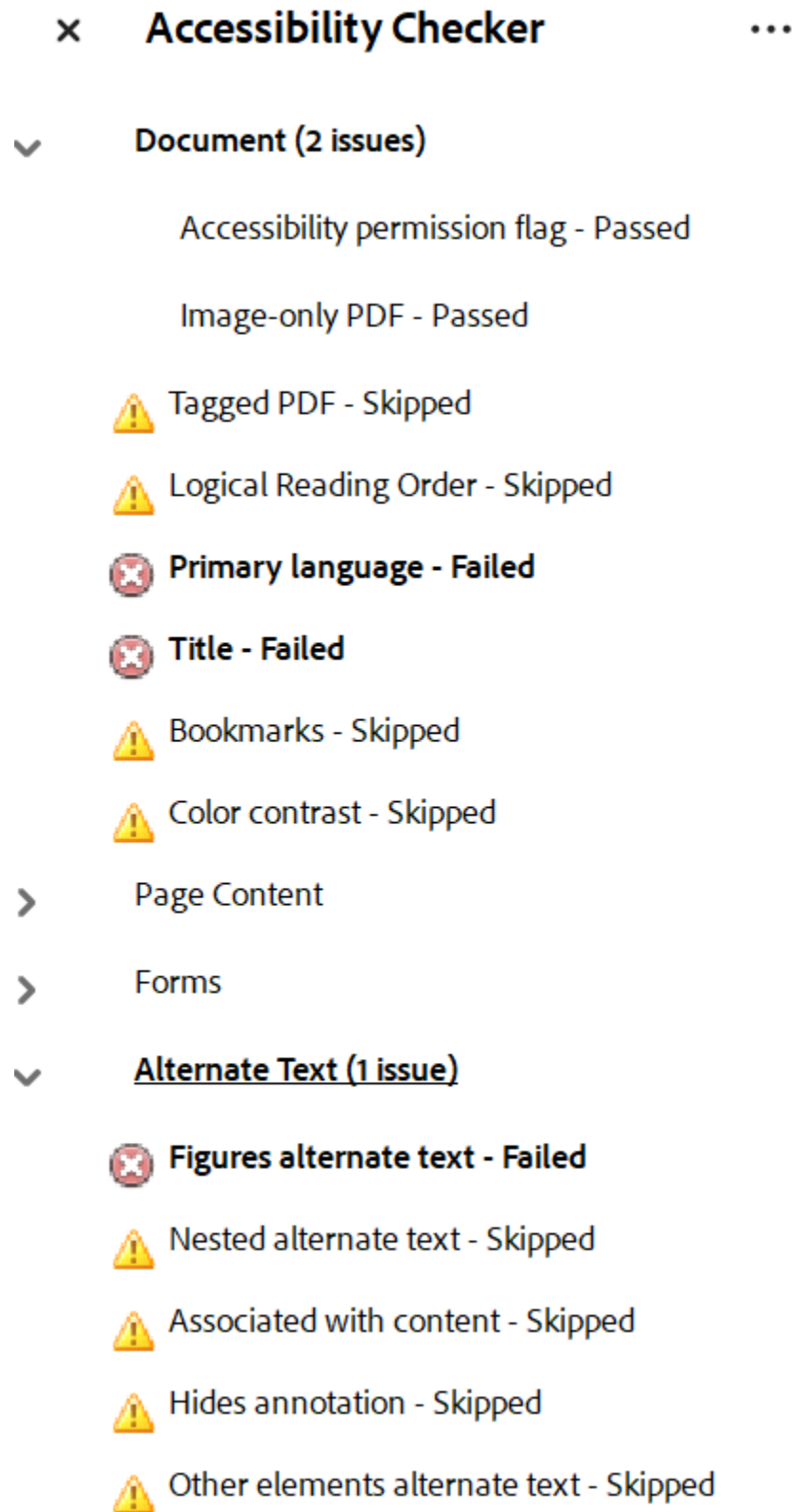
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Accessibility Checker

Document (2 issues)

Accessibility permission flag - Passed

Image-only PDF - Passed

⚠ Tagged PDF - Skipped

⚠ Logical Reading Order - Skipped

❌ **Primary language - Failed**

❌ **Title - Failed**

⚠ Bookmarks - Skipped

⚠ Color contrast - Skipped

Page Content

Forms

Alternate Text (1 issue)

❌ **Figures alternate text - Failed**

⚠ Nested alternate text - Skipped

⚠ Associated with content - Skipped

⚠ Hides annotation - Skipped

⚠ Other elements alternate text - Skipped

Figure 7

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6. Below is an example of a passed accessibility check. Note the yellow warning signs were "skipped" as they were not selected in the accessibility check. The 5 checks that passed are indicated with arrows in Figure 8.
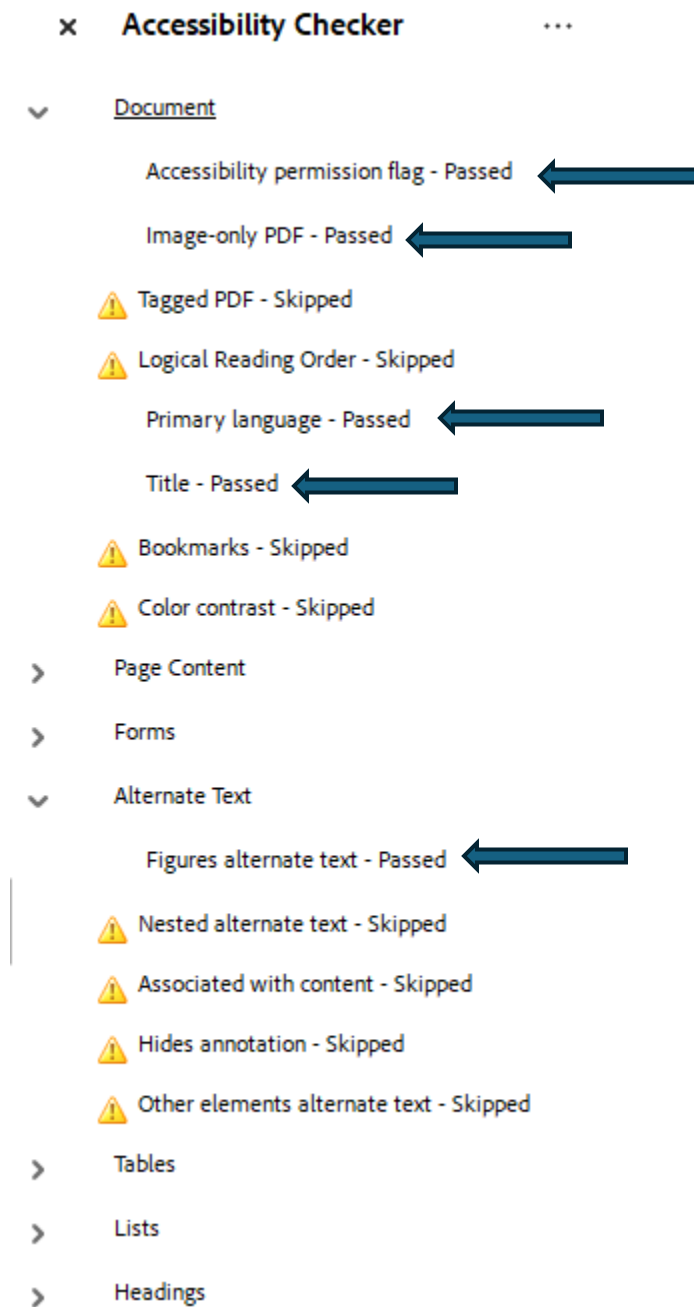

Figure 8

7. Once your manuscript passes the accessibility check, you may proceed to upload it to Vireo.

Interpreting Checker Results

1. Yellow Warning Symbol – Skipped
   a. This symbol indicates that certain items were not evaluated by the accessibility checker.
2. Red X – Failed
   a. This symbol indicates that the accessibility checker has identified an error that requires manual correction. Typically, this means that certain digital accessibility criteria were not addressed prior to running the checker.

Remediation of Failed Checks

Accessibility Permission Flag

- Failure: A document's security setting can interfere with a screen reader's ability to read the document. Your current security settings may cause this check to fail.
- Fix: Select the hamburger menu pictured in Figure 9 (PC) or File menu (Mac) and go to 'Document Properties'.
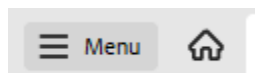
Figure 9

- o In the Document Properties dialogue box
  - ▪ Select the Security tab
  - ▪ From Security Method drop-down, select 'No Security' (See Figure 10)
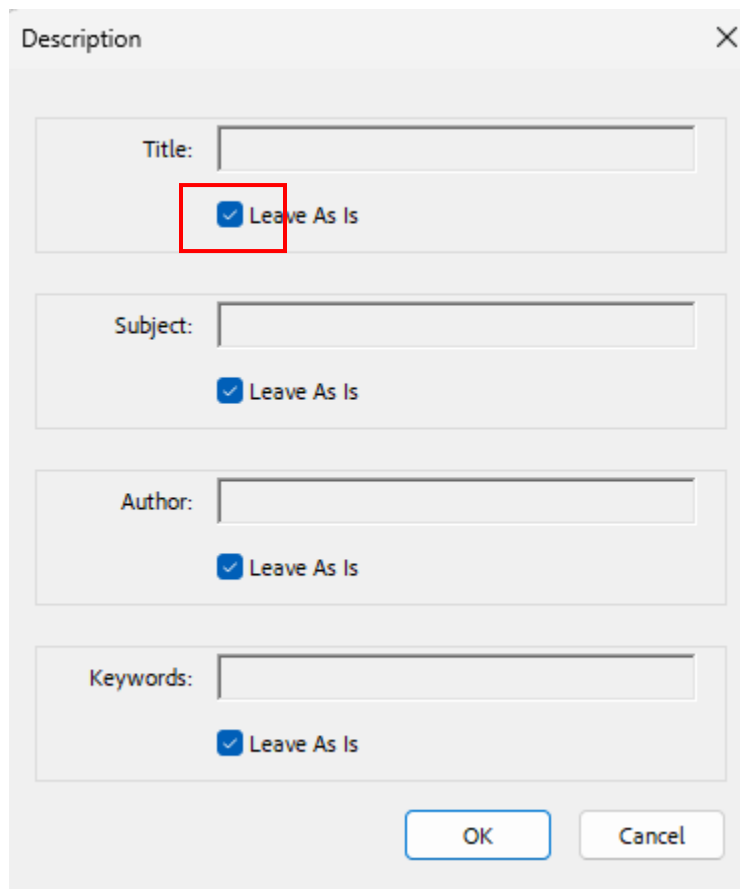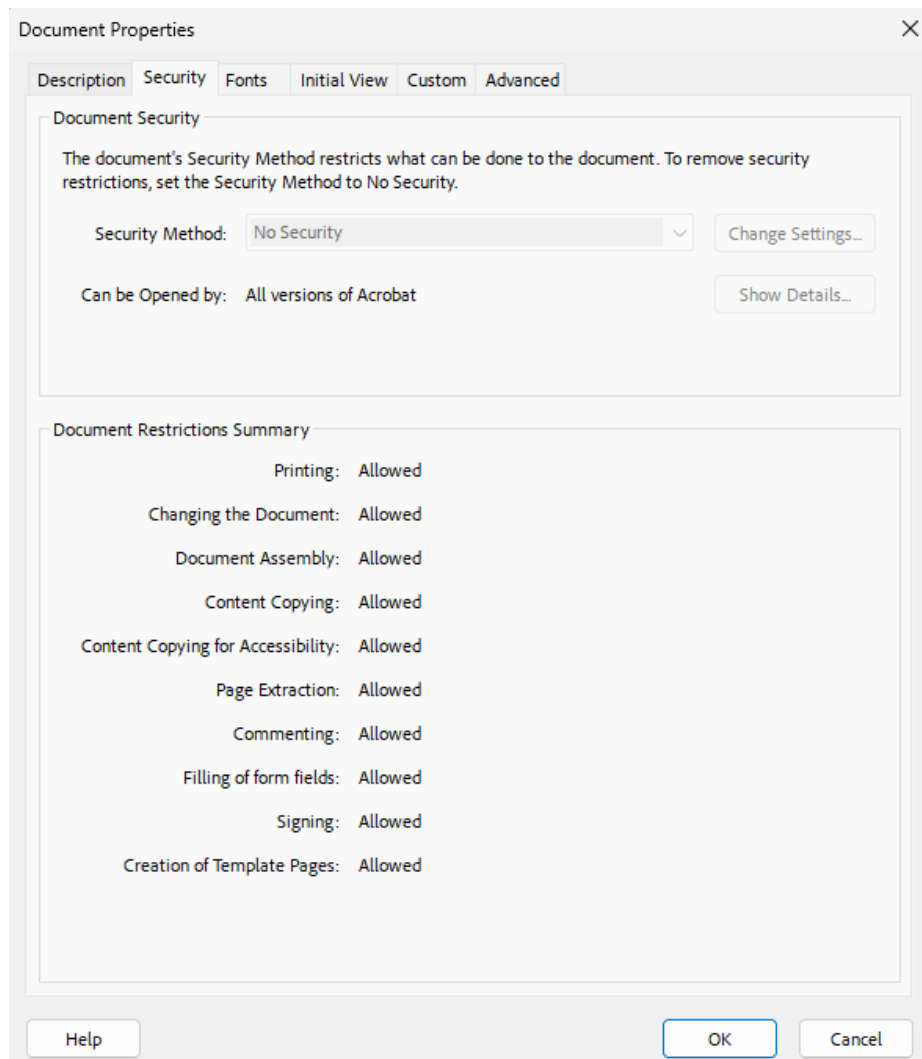
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▪ Select OK

Figure 10

Image Only PDF

- Failure: An image-only PDF is a type of PDF file that contains scanned pages or images of text, rather than actual, selectable or searchable text

- Fix: Make sure you did not use "Print to PDF" when converting your manuscript. This option creates an image-only PDF, which isn't accessible. Instead, go back to your original Word document and follow the instructions in the Template Walkthrough to "Save As." This method keeps your text searchable and supports accessibility features.

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Primary Language

- Failure: The document does not have a primary language set.
- Fix: Right-click the failure in your report
    - Select 'Fix'
    - Set the language to 'English'
    - Click 'OK'.

Title Not Set

- Failure: The document is missing a title.
- Fix: Right-click the error
    - Enter the title of your dissertation or thesis in the title box.
    - You may need to uncheck the 'Leave as is' box (Figure 11) to enable editing.

Figure 11

o   Click 'OK' to save.

Alternative Text

- Issue: Images or figures lack descriptive text.
- Fix: Right click the Red X
  - o   Select 'Fix'
  - o   Provide a short description of the image

    Note: Further information on appropriate Alt Text for accessibility can be found on [WebAIM](#).

Note: After making corrections in Acrobat, be sure to **save the document** to retain the changes. **Although Figure Alt Text can be remediated in the PDF, it is advisable to do so in the native file used to create the PDF to avoid having to repeat the process if you have revisions on your original manuscript.**

Important Read Before Submitting to Vireo

1. If the above information does not resolve one or more accessibility checks, students should consult the [TAMU IT accessibility website](#) for resources on meeting accessibility.

2. In many cases, it is easier to address accessibility issues (such as missing alternative text for figures) directly in the native document (MS Word or LaTeX) before converting the document to PDF. Making corrections in the native document allows for smoother remediation and helps ensure that accessibility features are properly retained during the conversion process. Remediating directly in the PDF can be more time-consuming and complex.

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