

Making sure your PDF is accessible

If you are starting from scratch, please first make an accessible document in MS Word, InDesign, etc. Be sure to export the document to PDF with accessibility settings enabled.

[Help making your Word doc accessible](#)

For help with InDesign or other source software, please email webaccessibility@brandeis.edu

Open your PDF with Adobe Acrobat Professional

Make sure you are using **Adobe Acrobat Professional** and not Adobe Reader. Both programs open PDFs, but only Acrobat allows you to edit the document (free download available to members of the Brandeis community on the [LTS KnowledgeBase](#)).

Locate the Accessibility Tools

Depending on your version of Acrobat, the tool might be in a few different locations. If you can't find it, make sure you have upgraded to professional version XI, DC (Digital Cloud) or above.

Click **FULL CHECK**

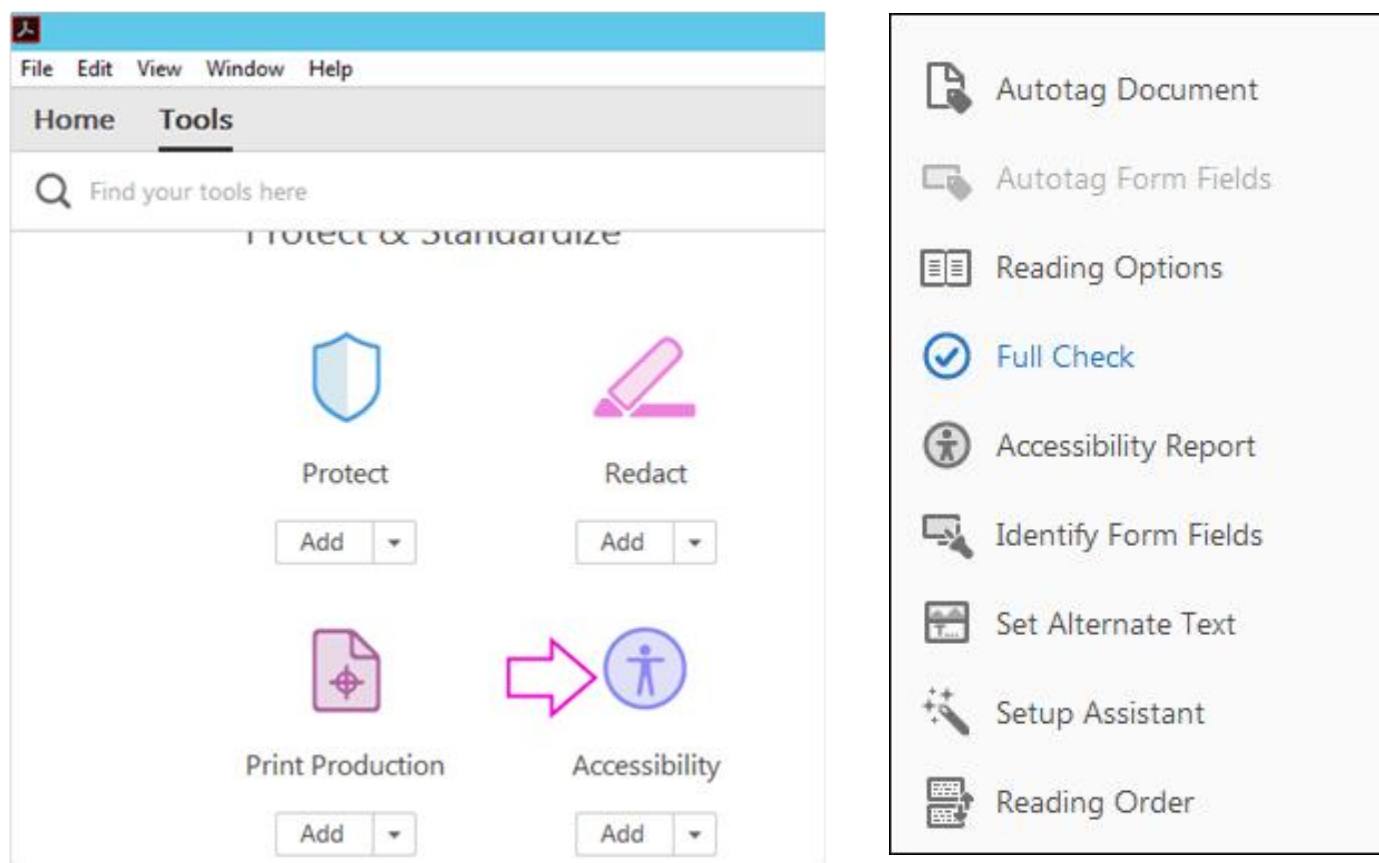


Figure 1: Tools menu and accessibility tools in Acrobat Pro DC

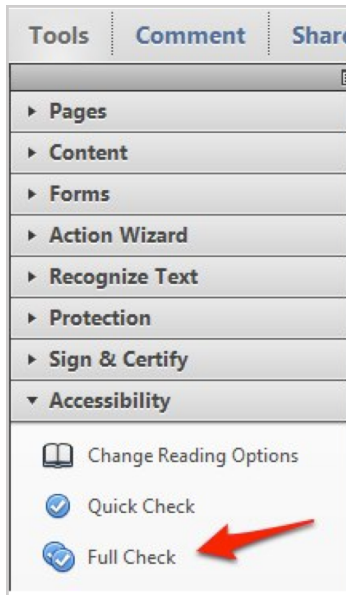


Figure 2: Tools menu showing accessibility tools in Acrobat XI

Accessibility Checker Options

The options window should pop up when you click on Full Check. Leave everything on its default setting and click ok/start checking. You may uncheck the first box "Create an Accessibility Report," if you wish. If left checked, this setting will create a log on your computer.

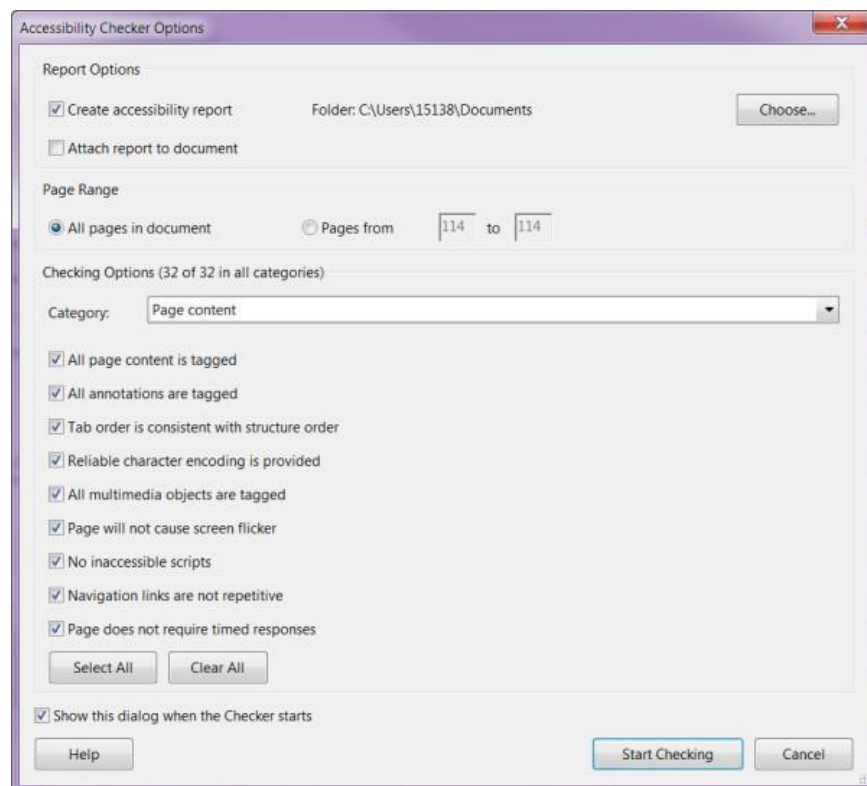


Figure 3: Accessibility Checker Options

Assessing your document

Accessibility Checker Results

Now turn your attention to a sidebar that should have appeared to the left of your document. It contains the results of your Full Check.

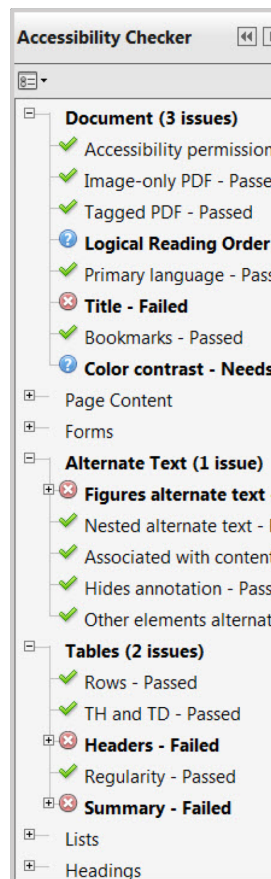


Figure 4: Accessibility Checker Results

Categories that are bolded contain flagged items. Expand those categories. Even if you exported your PDF from an accessible Word doc, you will always have at least 2 items flagged: Logical Reading Order and Color Contrast. This is because the computer can't check those for you; they need to be checked manually. Instructions on how to do that will follow.

Start with "Document"

Under the category "Document," you could have any of the following items flagged:

- **"Accessibility Permission"** you must be able to alter the document to make it accessible. If it is locked, you will not be able to continue.
- **"Image-only PDF"** you need to first [convert your PDF to text](#).
- **"Tagged PDF"** right click on this line and click "Fix." Amazingly, this should actually fix most of your other flags, so **always check this flag early on!**

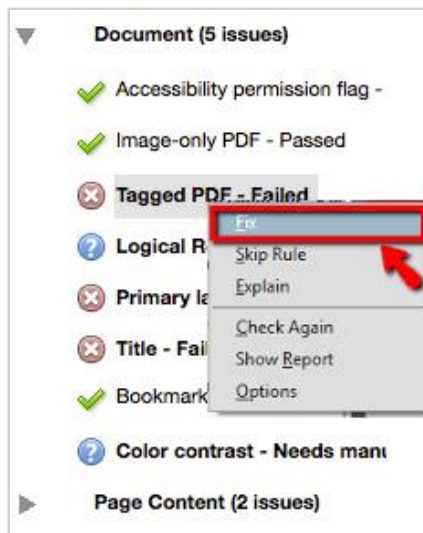


Figure 5: Fixing a "tagged PDF" fail

- **"Logical Reading Order"** we'll come back to this one in the [advanced section](#).
- **"Primary language"** right click on the item and click "Fix." A window should pop up asking you in which language your document was written. Answer it and the flag should disappear.
- **"Title"** right click and then click "Fix." A window should pop up with several fields. The title field is the first one. If you can't type in it, be sure the "leave as is" box is not checked. If the box does not appear, click on "File" then "Properties." You will be able to add the title in the Properties box. If your title field was filled by the program and is unhelpful (sometimes it will use the filename or "created in Microsoft Word"), replace the title with something that makes sense. **Please note, this title field does not change your file name, nor the title showing on your actual document.** This title shows on the tab of some browsers or versions of Adobe reader, when multiple PDFs are open.

Figure 6: Adding a title in Acrobat Pro

- Skip **Bookmarks** for now, we'll get back to that one in the [advanced section](#).
- **"Color Contrast"** is a manual check. If you have followed the [best practices for contrast](#) when creating your document, you may right click and select pass. If some text is not high-contrast enough, you can try to change the color in the Edit PDF tools. More often, you will need to go back to your original document to change the colors.

Page Content & Forms

If you have any flags under page content or forms, please skip these issues. When you have fixed as many of the other items as you can, save your PDF and send it to webaccessibility@brandeis.edu. We'll do our best to improve these more complicated elements. **Make sure you have already fixed "Tagged PDF" in the Document list in the checker (see above), as that fix often fixes Page Content and Forms issues automatically.**

Alternate Text

Figures Alternate Text

If you have flags in the Alternate text category, expand it. Most often the errors will be in the "Figures Alternate Text" section. If any of your images do not have alternate text, you will get a flag for each one. Right click on the "Figure 1" flag and select "Fix." Adobe will bring you to the image in question and highlight it. It will also give you a dialogue box that will walk you through each image that is missing alt text. Simply type in the description of the highlighted image and click the next arrow. When you are done with all of the images, click "Save and Close." If an image is truly not imparting any useful information to a sighted user, you may check off "Decorative Figure" and click the next arrow.

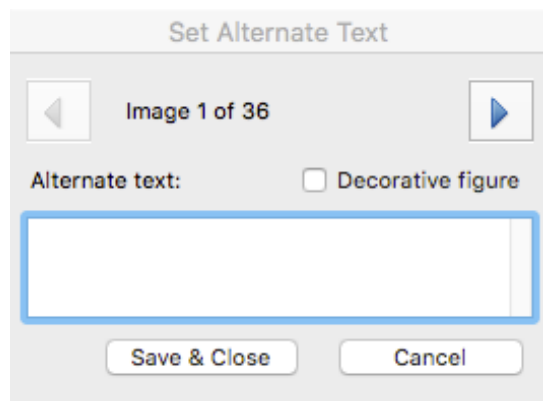


Figure 7: Fixing alt text errors in Acrobat Pro

Other Alt text errors

If any of the other categories under alternate text are flagged, please fix as many of the other items as you can, save your PDF and send it to webaccessibility@brandeis.edu. We'll do our best to improve these more complicated elements.

Tables & Lists

If you have any flags under tables or lists, please skip these issues. When you have fixed as many of the other items as you can, save your PDF and send it to webaccessibility@brandeis.edu. We'll do our best to improve these more complicated elements.

Headings

We will deal with these errors in the [advanced section](#).

Advanced Errors

If you've gone through everything above, but still have errors, there are a few more you may be able to fix on your own. If at any point, you feel you might do more harm than good to your document or you just don't feel comfortable getting deeper into Acrobat, save your PDF and send it to webaccessibility@brandeis.edu. Please keep in mind that we have a large community and a small accessibility team. Be sure to provide a week's notice (1-5 page document) to 2 week's notice (documents longer than 5 pages) prior to the date on which you need your finished PDF.

Headings

If you've followed best practices in creating your document, your headings should be logically nested. In order to find out if Acrobat is recognizing your heading, go back to the Accessibility tools where you originally clicked on Full Check. Now click "[Touch up] Reading Order" (the name of this tool varies slightly by version).

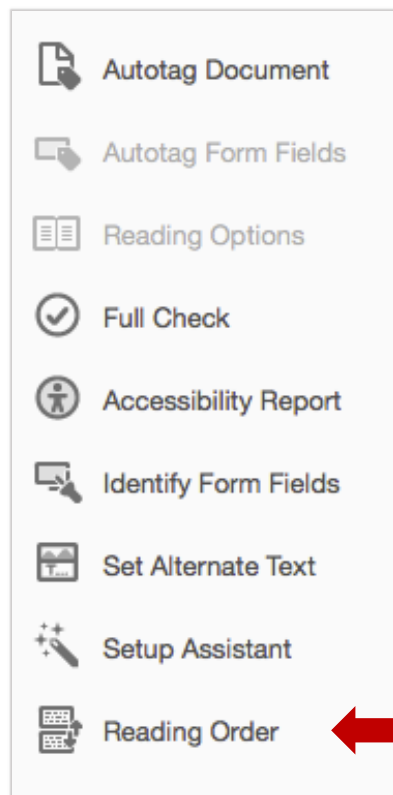


Figure 8: Reading order tool in the accessibility tools list

When you activate that tool, a window will appear. This window will be used for both headings and logical reading order.

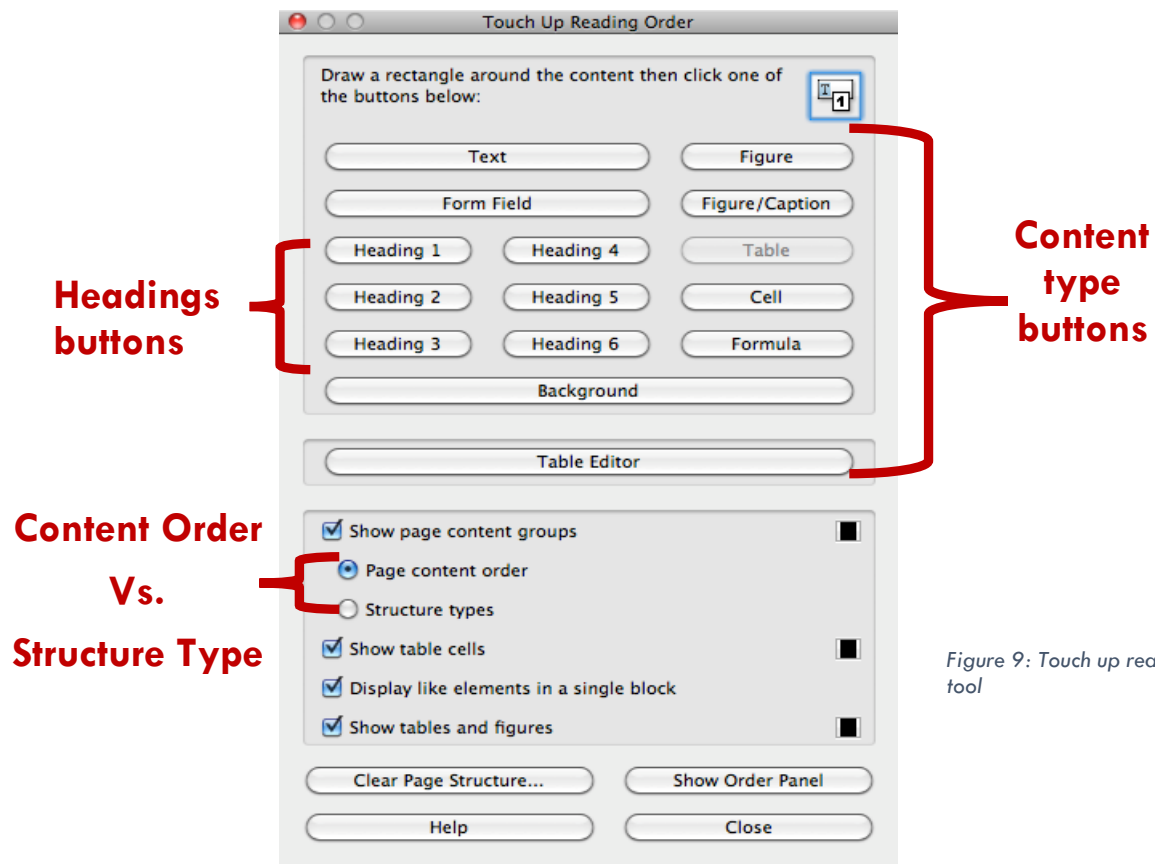


Figure 9: Touch up reading order tool

When checking headings, you want to be sure the radio button "Structure types" has been selected. This will label all of the blocks of content in your document as image, text, heading, etc.

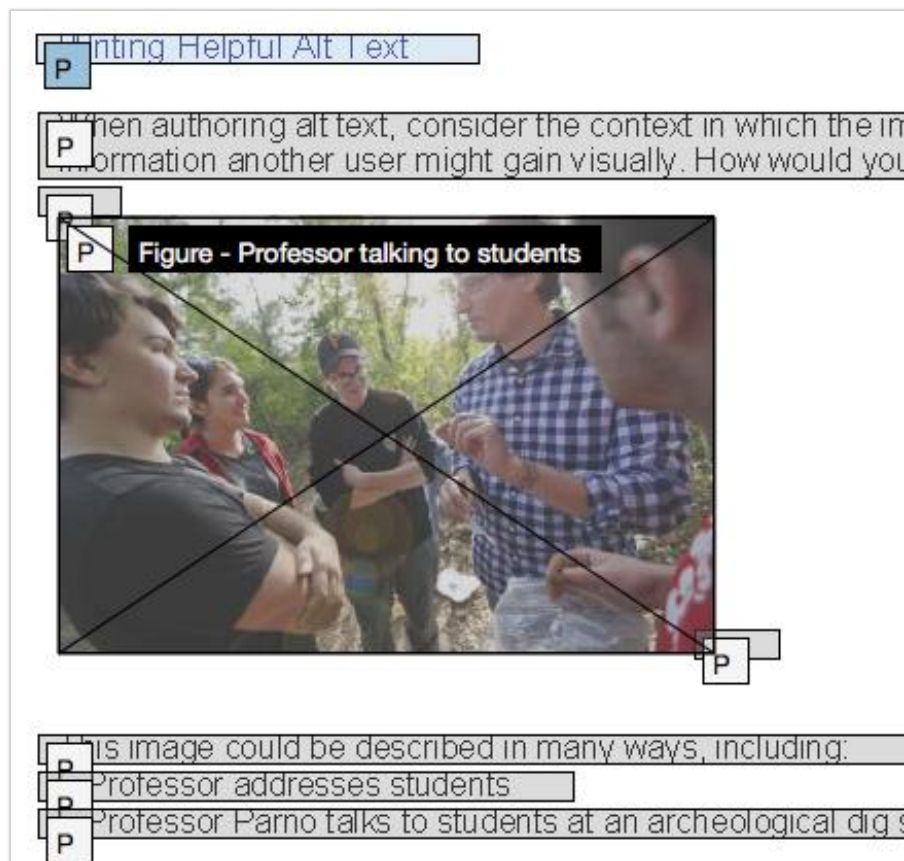


Figure 10: Sample of a document showing the content structure types

You may select any individual block, which will highlight in blue. When a block is selected, you may change its content type by clicking one of the content buttons on the Reading Order tool. Usually the default content label is "P" for paragraph or "SPAN" which represents text. Unless "P" is also followed by "Table," "List," "Figure," etc., it is assumed the content is only text. In the example above, the Content Block containing "Writing Helpful Alt Text" is selected. It is marked P, so it is currently text. To make Adobe understand that we'd like it to be considered a heading, once highlighted, we would click the appropriate heading button. The label should change to reflect that modification. As always, be sure to follow [logical nesting/hierarchy best practices](#) with your headings.

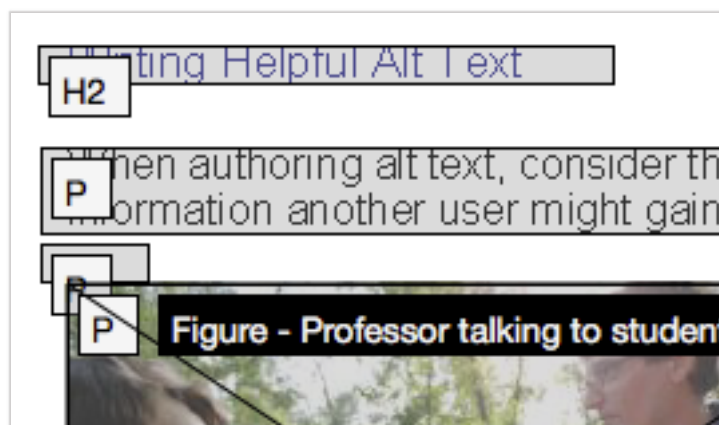


Figure 11: Content structure type is now H2

Bookmarks

Once your headings are being recognized and are correctly labeled, you can turn your attention back to Bookmarks. Bookmarks are only necessary in a long document (helpful in a document longer than 5 pages, required in a document over 20 pages). If your accessibility checker is showing the bookmarks failed flag, right click on it and select "Fix."

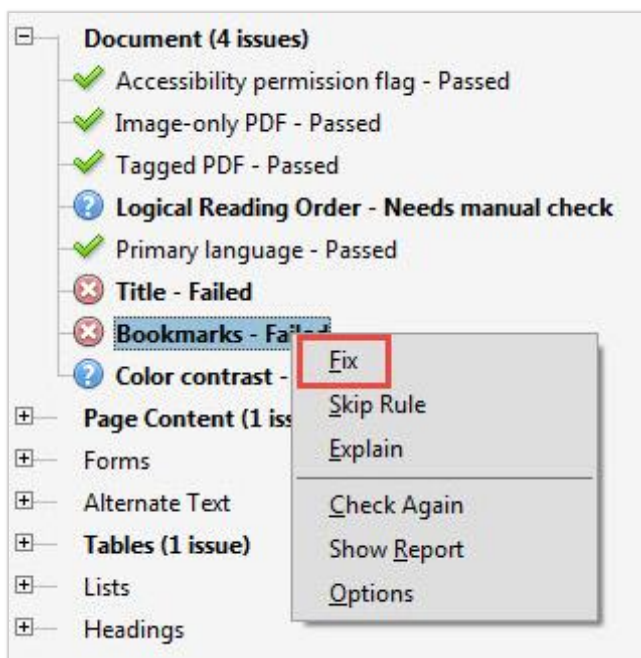


Figure 12: Bookmarks Failed flag

A window will appear asking you how you'd like to determine where bookmarks will be located. Usually selecting H2 and H3 will be sufficient. After completing this step, the bookmarks flag should disappear.

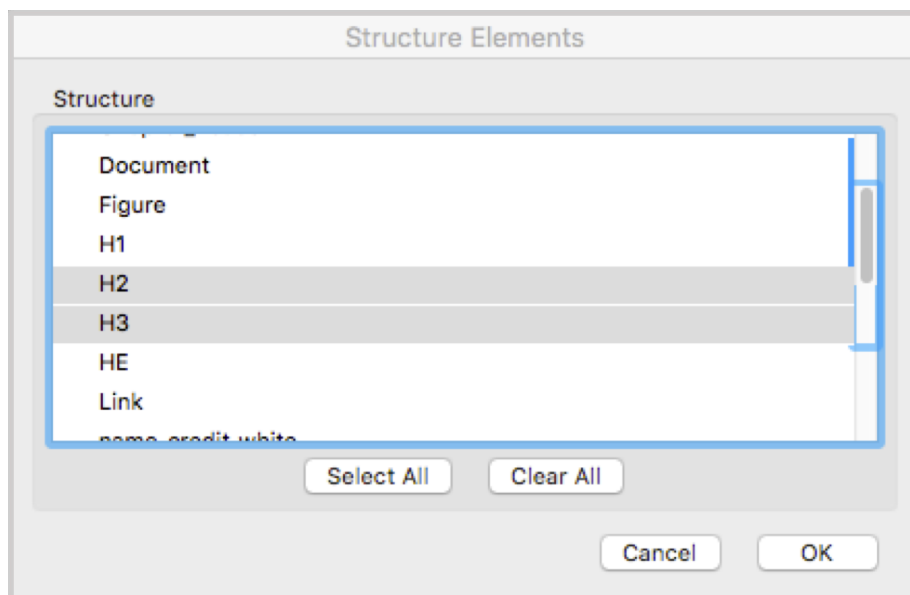


Figure 13: Selecting location of Bookmarks

Logical Reading Order

Reading order is the order in which the document will be read aloud by a screen reader. Logical reading order is always flagged as a question mark. This is because Adobe can't actually tell if the reading order is logical, that requires human judgement.

To see how your document would currently read, open the Touch Up Reading Order Tool again. This time, select the Page Content Order radio button.

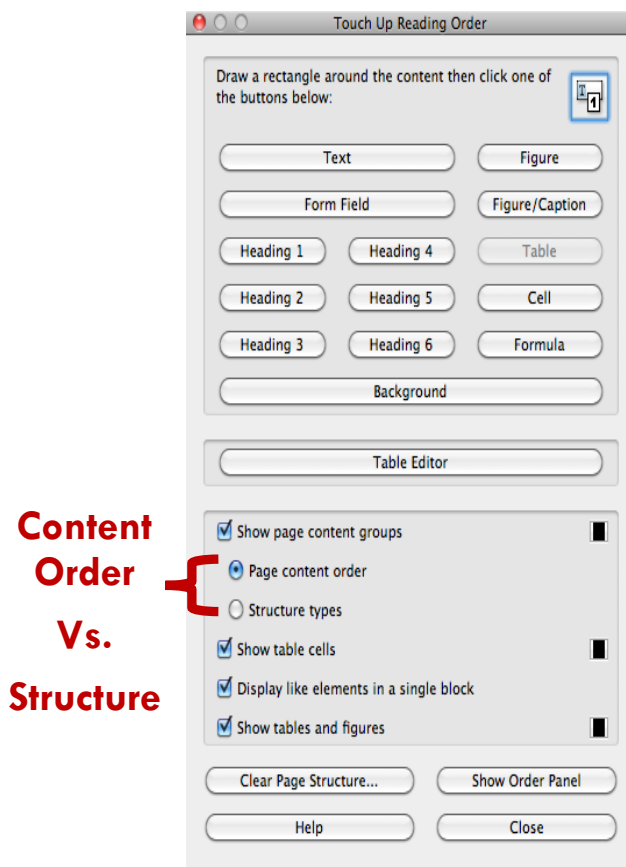


Figure 14: Reading order tool highlighting content order versus structure type radio buttons

Your Content Blocks should no longer be labeled "P," "H2," etc. Now they should be numbered.



Figure 15: Example of reading order

If the order shown is how you would logically read the content, then you have passed the requirement. If the order is illogical, please save your PDF and send it to webaccessibility@brandeis.edu. If you also have the source document (Word or InDesign version, for example) it is helpful to send that, as well.

If you've gone through everything above, but still have errors, save your PDF and send it to webaccessibility@brandeis.edu. We will make your PDF as accessible as we can.

To learn more about web accessibility, visit our [web site](#).

Note: If you received this document as a paper copy, a version with active hyper-links is available at www.brandeis.edu/web-accessibility/how-to-guides.html