

# [DRAFT] Exporting Accessible PDFs with InDesign

NYU Digital Accessibility: [digital-accessibility@nyu.edu](mailto:digital-accessibility@nyu.edu)

This is a living document. Fee free to make suggestions and comment, so that the instructions improve.

## Major steps

- [Step 1: Before you begin in InDesign](#)
- [Step 2: While composing the document](#)
- [Step 3: Exporting to PDF within InDesign](#)
- [Step 4: Within Acrobat Pro](#)

### **Note:**

Each step ends with a Checkpoint.

Ensure you have completed the checkpoint list before moving on to the next step

## Step 1: Before you begin in InDesign

### A. Set the title and the author for document

In File > File Info: type in the document title and author. This will transfer to the PDF and be the title that appears in the browser tab when the PDF opens, what search engines will discover, and what blind people hear when they open the PDF.

File Information for Untitled-1.indd

**Basic**

Document Title:

Author:   
i Semicolons or commas can be used to separate multiple values

Author Title:

Description:

Rating: ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

Description Writer:

Keywords:   
i Semicolons or commas can be used to separate multiple values

Copyright Status:

Copyright Notice:

Copyright Info URL:

Creation Date: 2/14/2020 10:28:19 AM  
Modification Date: 2/14/2020 10:32:37 AM  
Application: Adobe InDesign 15.0 (Windows)

Powered By **xmp**

Preferences Template... OK Cancel

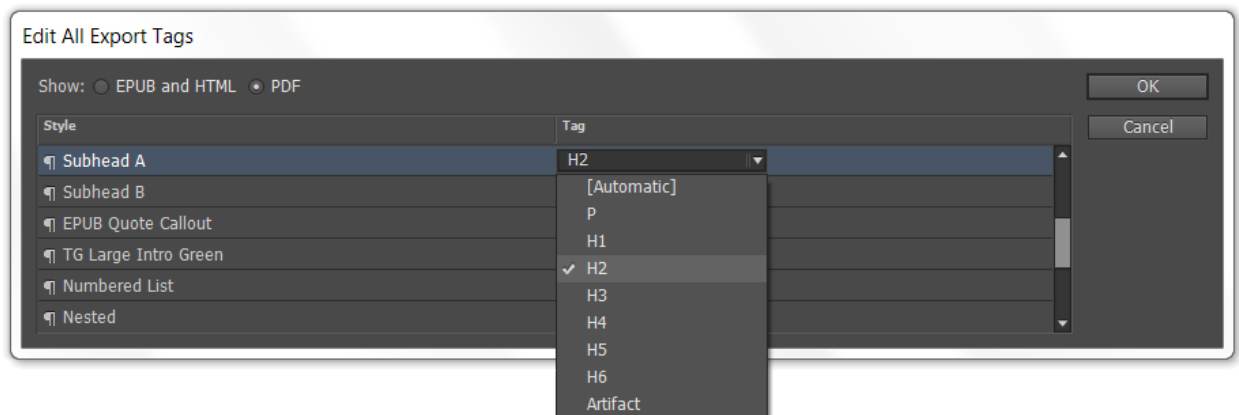
## B. Set Paragraph Styles for headings

1. Ensure the Paragraph Styles panel is open (Type > Paragraph Styles)
2. Input six separate text areas with “Heading 1”, “Heading 2”, etc for headings 1 through 6 using the Typing Tool. Style the headings as you see fit. This will be the template for that heading level. (Hint: stick with names like “Heading 1”)
3. For each styled heading:
  - a. select the text area with a styled heading
  - b. navigate to the Paragraph Style pane
  - c. select the pane fly-out menu (☰) > New Paragraph Style

## C. Edit all export tags

Now that you have set your Paragraph Styles for headings, you need to set how those styles will export to the PDF tags.

1. Find the Paragraph Styles panel (Type > Paragraph Styles)
2. select the pane fly-out menu (☰) > Edit All Export Tags
3. For each style, you created, select the corresponding Tag:



If you thought ahead, then it should be as simple as “Heading 1” matches “H1”, and so on.

### Checkpoint: “Before you begin in InDesign”

Before you begin composing your document, make sure you have:

- [Set the title and author for the document](#)
- [Added Paragraph Styles for Headings 1 through 6](#)
- [Set your Export Tag settings](#)

## Step 2: While composing the document

### A. Use paragraph styles

Use the paragraph styles to identify the major headings in the document as you create it. Identify heading semantically and not by look:

- Heading 1: Title of the document (use once)
  - Heading 2: Major topic/idea (can be used multiple times)
  - Heading 3: Items that topically are children of heading 2 (can be used multiple times)
- And so on...

#### To apply the heading style

Select the heading text > Paragraph Styles pane > select the appropriate heading style

#### Note:

You can visually change how the heading looks after you set the paragraph style.

### B. Use built-in lists

Make sure to use the [built-in lists that come with InDesign](#). The time-savings will be considerable.

### C. Use built-in tables

Make sure to use the [table options provided with InDesign](#).

Even with best practices, you will still have to do some work in Acrobat Pro. To minimize how much work you need to do, avoid spanned (merged) cells. Spanned cells can be made accessible later, but it is usually not an easy process.

### D. Add alt-text to your essential images

You can [add alt-text \(descriptions for the blind\) to any image](#) you deem essential.

To determine if an image is essential, ask yourself: “If the image were removed for all users, then would any critical information be lost?” If the answer is “yes”, then provide alt-text for only that information that is lost. It is not necessary to provide aesthetic information if it is not critical. When in doubt, either keep the description minimal or don’t describe it.

#### Example of critical information/imagery:

- Dates
- Images of text not provided in the actual text
- Icons that indicate a warning or highlight something that isn’t conveyed in the text
- Imagery that provides tone or meaning that is not otherwise conveyed in the text.

- Logos of institutions, departments, and sponsors
- Photographs of people that do not have a text caption or label

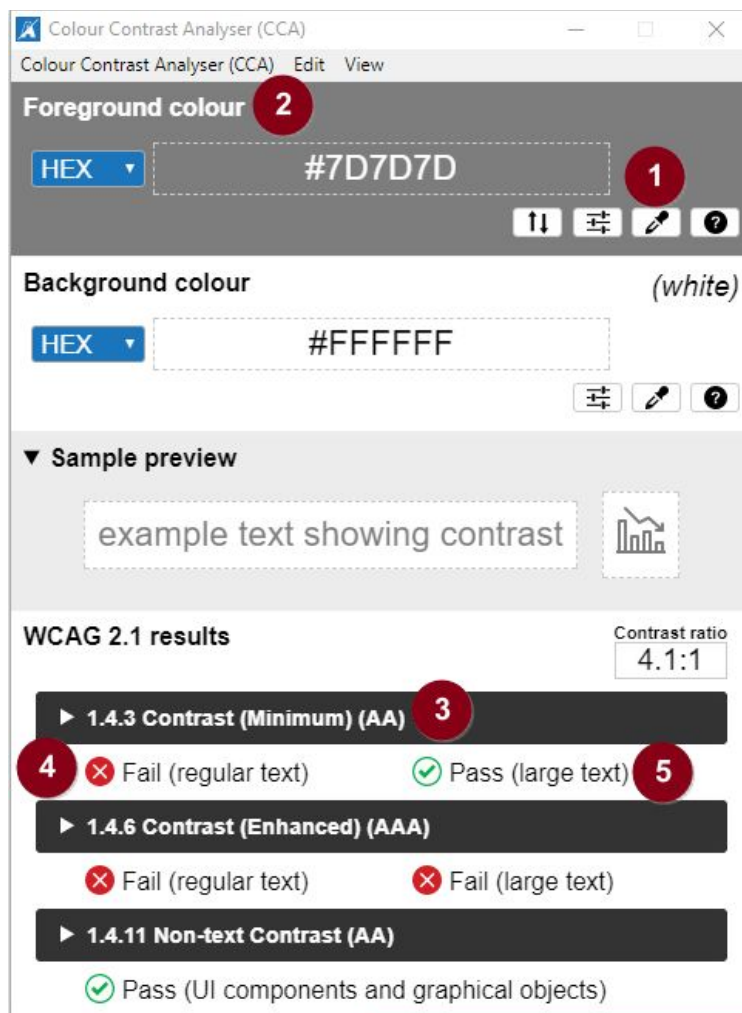
### Examples of non-critical information/imagery:

- Most stock photos
- Horizontal separators
- Clip art
- Background colors
- Purely aesthetic icons
- Photographs of people that have a text caption or label

## E. Check the color contrast of the document

Use the [Colour Contrast Analyser](#) to check if your color contrast passes the accessibility standard for NYU.

### Interpreting the results



1. Use the eyedropper for fast results, or input the HEX code from InDesign
2. Foreground means the text color

3. You only need to comply with **1.4.3 (Minimum) (AA)**
4. **Regular text:** <18pt or <14pt bold
5. **Large text:** ≥ 18pt or ≥14pt bold

### Checkpoint: “While composing the document”

Before you move on, make sure you have:

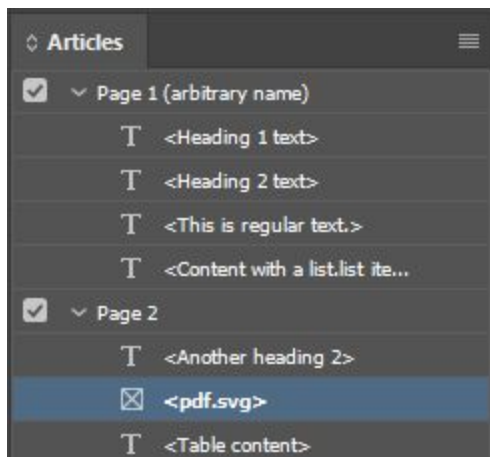
- [Marked all headings with the correct paragraph style](#)
- [Used in-built lists \(numbers and bullets\)](#)
- [Used in-built tables](#)
- [Added alt-text to all essential images](#)
- [Checked the document color contrast](#)

## Step 3: Exporting to PDF within InDesign

### A. Add content to Articles

Now that you have all the content you want in the document, it's time to decide which content should be available in the PDF tags.

1. Open the Articles panel: Window > Articles
2. **Critical:** Select the pane fly-out menu (☰) > Use for Reading Order in Tagged PDF should be checked. If you don't do this, then nothing will carry over.
3. Create an article for each page: pane fly-out menu (☰) > New Article.  
Note, what you name the article will not affect accessibility; it's just for your reference.
4. Drag content from the document into the Articles pane under each page article in the order it should read. This includes headings, text, lists, tables, and images. Note you only need to drag in essential images you described.

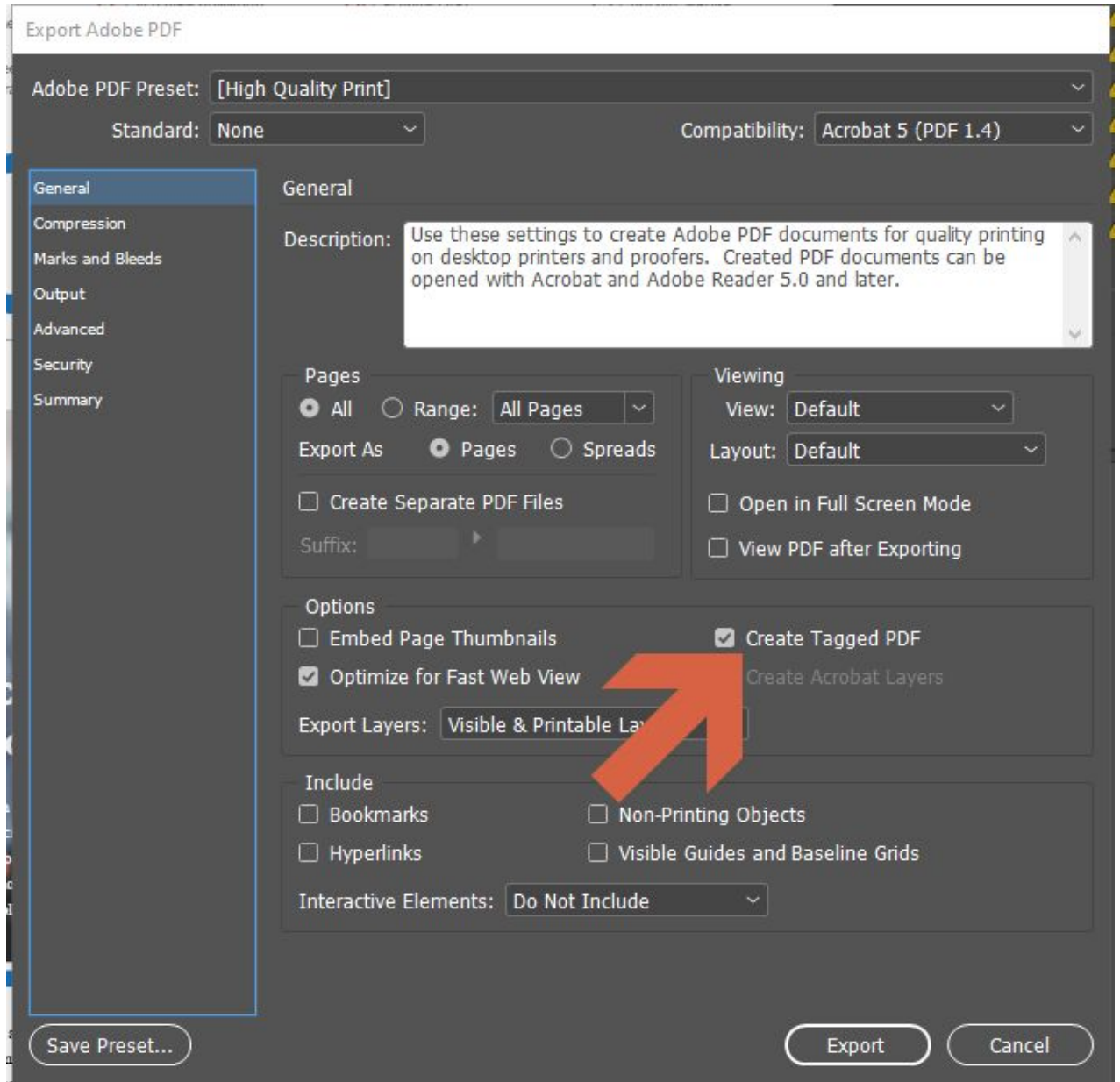


Everything you drag in will have a “T” label, even if it is a heading style, list, or table.

### B. Export to PDF

1. When you export to PDF (File > Export), you can choose either Adobe PDF (Print) or Adobe PDF (Interactive).

2. In the Export Adobe PDF modal dialog, ensure that “Create Tagged PDF” is selected



### Checkpoint: “Exporting to PDF within InDesign”

Before you move on, make sure:

- ["Use for Reading Order in Tagged PDF" is checked](#)
- [All essential content is in the Articles pane and in order](#)
- ["Create Tagged PDF" is checked with exporting to PDF](#)



## Step 4: Within Acrobat Pro

### A. Tables

#### Mark column and row headers

If you followed the above steps, then you should only need to address tables within Acrobat pro.

[How to mark header rows/columns in Acrobat Pro](#)

- “Touchup Tool” is also known as the “Reading Order Tool”:  
Tools > Accessibility, and then choose Reading Order in the right pane
- How to find the [Document Tags](#)

#### Note:

For simple tables, it is usually OK to just identify column headers.  
However, for larger, complex tables, you will also need to identify row headers.

### B. Run the Accessibility Checker

Your last accessibility check will occur in the [Adobe Acrobat Pro Accessibility Checker](#)

If you followed the steps listed above, then there should be no outstanding accessibility issues.

If there are no outstanding issues, then the document is ready to post on a public resource.

#### Note:

Logical Reading Order and Color contrast will always be flagged by the Accessibility Checker each time the checker is run.

#### Checkpoint: Before you share the PDF

Before you share the PDF, make sure to:

- [Add headers to tables](#)
- [Verify accessibility in the Acrobat Pro Accessibility Checker](#)