

What is PAC PDF Checker?

PAC (PDF Accessibility Checker) is a free tool used to test whether a PDF is accessible for users with disabilities—especially those using screen readers. It evaluates a PDF against accessibility standards and gives:

- Pass/fail results
- Error listings
- A visual preview of the document structure

Step-by-Step: How to Check a PDF in PAC

1. Open the PAC app (Windows OS only)
2. Load Your PDF
 - a. Click “Open File” (or drag-and-drop the PDF into the tool).
 - b. PAC will automatically begin analyzing the document.
3. Review the Results Screen
 - a. Once the check is complete, you’ll see:
 - i. A summary status (Pass / Fail)
 - ii. Three key result categories:
 1. PDF/UA
 2. WCAG
 3. Quality
 - iii. You can click into each section to see detailed issues.
4. Use the Screen Reader Preview
 - a. Click “Screen Reader Preview”
 - b. This shows:
 - i. Reading order
 - ii. Headings
 - iii. Alternative text
 - c. Use this to simulate what a screen reader user experiences.
5. Examine Tags and Structure
 - a. Use the **logical structure view**
 - b. Confirm:
 - i. Headings are in order (H1 → H2 → H3)
 - ii. Lists are properly tagged
 - iii. Tables have headers

6. Interpret Errors and Fix in Source

- a. **Important:** PAC does NOT fix PDFs—it identifies issues. You must correct problems in the original source file (Word, InDesign, etc.) or a PDF editor like Acrobat Pro.

Understanding the Three PAC Result Categories

PAC separates results into **three distinct areas**, each serving a different purpose.

Category	Purpose	Strictness	Focus
PDF/UA	Standards compliance	High	Technical structure
WCAG	Accessibility usability	Medium	User experience
Quality	Best practices	Low	Optimization

PDF/UA (Technical Compliance)

What It Is

- PDF/UA stands for: **PDF/Universal Accessibility (ISO 14289)** — the official accessibility standard for PDFs.

What PAC Checks Here

- This section verifies **strict technical rules**, such as:
 - Proper tagging structure exists
 - Document has a defined language
 - Title is set
 - All content is tagged (no untagged elements)
 - Figures have alternative text
 - Tables are correctly structured
 - Logical reading order is defined

How to Interpret Results

- Pass** = Meets formal accessibility standard
- Fail** = Violates required technical rules

Things to Know about PDF/UA

- PDF/UA is **binary** — either compliant or not.
- Even one issue can cause a failure.
- Even if something is technically correct, it still may not contain useful content for the user

Examples of PDF/UA Failures

- Missing document title
- Untagged content
- Incorrect heading hierarchy
- Tables without header tags

WCAG (User Experience Compliance)

What It Is

- WCAG stands for: **Web Content Accessibility Guidelines**
- Even though it's designed for web content, PAC maps PDF accessibility issues to WCAG principles.

What PAC Checks Here

- This section focuses on user experience and usability, including:
 - Text alternatives for images (WCAG 1.1.1)
 - Proper reading order (WCAG 1.3.2)
 - Meaningful structure
 - Sufficient contrast (sometimes indirectly)
 - Link descriptions

Differences between PDF/UA and WCAG

You may notice when reviewing the results of the PDF document PAC scan that the requirements under each category cross over easily between PDF/UA and WCAG, although they have different compliance objectives.

PDF/UA	WCAG
Technical, strict	User-focused
Binary pass/fail	Emphasizes usability
PDF-specific	Broader accessibility principles

Things to Know

- WCAG answers the question: "Can a user actually understand and navigate this content?"
PDF/UA's only concern is whether the content passes the requirements of digital accessibility, not if the content is user friendly or relevant.

Examples of WCAG Issues

- Link text like "Click here"
- Missing alt text
- Poor reading sequence
- Lack of headings for navigation

Quality (Best Practices)

What It Is

- The Quality category goes beyond compliance. It highlights:
 - Issues that may not break standards—but still impact usability.

What PAC Checks Here

- Suspicious tagging (e.g., empty elements)
- Unclear structure
- Incomplete metadata
- Artifacts that may confuse assistive tech
- Potentially poor reading experience

How to Interpret Results

- These are warnings (⚠), not failures
- The document may still pass PDF/UA

Things to Know

- Quality results help you move from is it technically accessible to is it truly usable.

Examples of Quality Issues

- Overuse of generic tags (e.g., too many “P” instead of headings)
- Empty tags
- Poor logical grouping of content
- Inconsistent structure

Important Tips for Beginners

- Always fix issues in the **original document**, not just the PDF when possible
- A **green checkmark doesn't always equal a great experience**
- Combine PAC testing with **manual review**
- Pay special attention to:
 - Reading order
 - Headings
 - Alt text

Recommended Workflow

- Start with PDF/UA
- Fix all failures first (required for compliance)
- Review WCAG findings

- Improve usability and meaning
- Check Quality
- Refine document for better user experience
- Use Screen Reader Preview
- Validate real-world usability

Final Takeaway

A truly accessible PDF Passes PDF/UA, Supports WCAG principles, and minimizes quality warnings.

- **PDF/UA = Must pass (compliance)**
- **WCAG = Should pass (usability)**
- **Quality = Improve further (excellence)**