

Converting PowerPoint Speaker Notes to Tagged PDF.



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Background

Recently I was asked to provide information on the best way to save a presentation with speaker notes as a tagged PDF that is readable and usable by those of us using adaptive technology...basically, how to make speaker notes accessible in a tagged PDF document.

Along the way I discovered major intentional barriers to accessing tagged PDF documents by the major stand alone PDF conversion tools (Microsoft Save As PDF, Adobe Acrobat Pro DC, Foxit PDF Editor 11 and Kofax Power PDF).

First, lets deal with the best way to make speaker notes available in tagged PDF to those of us using adaptive technology.

Comments in PDF: Just Say NO!

Kofax PowerPDF, Foxit PDF Editor 11 and Adobe Acrobat Pro DC all convert the speaker notes to comments. This is a check box in the preferences dialog for each application through their Ribbons in PowerPoint. There is no option to save the Notes pages.

Problem 1: Comments in PDF documents are not accessible.

The Commenting Pane in Adobe Acrobat Pro is still not accessible even after we've been asking for this since Acrobat Pro 6...but then neither is the Find tool.

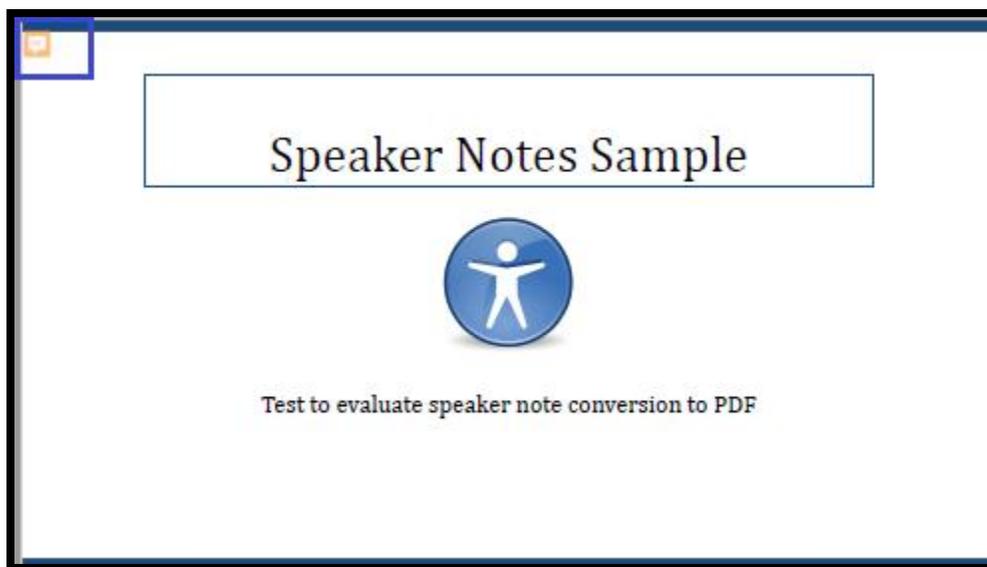


Figure 1 Slide showing sticky note balloon in upper left.

A sticky note is placed on the slide in the upper left corner and we can navigate to it using the Tab key or by getting a list of form controls from our screen readers in the PDF.

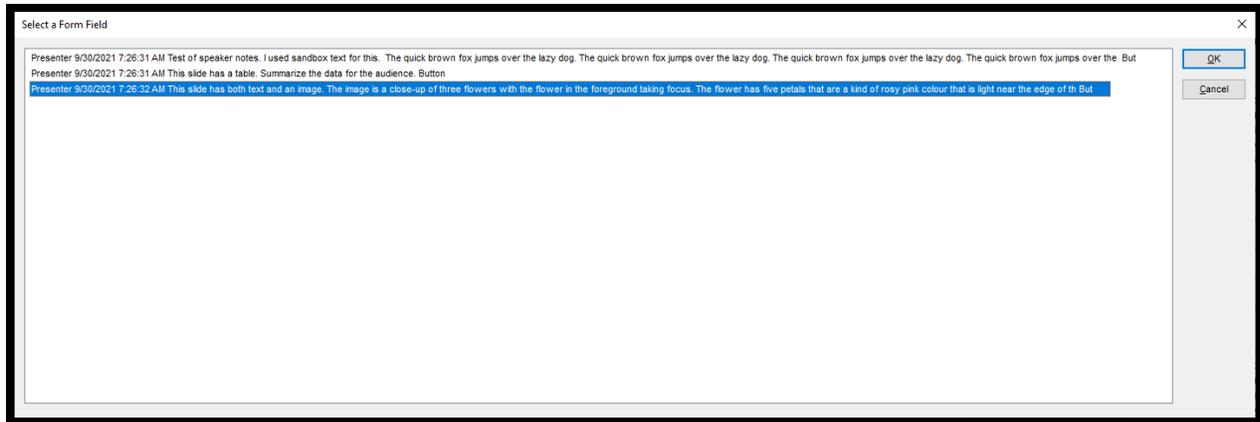


Figure 2 List of form controls in a PDF document from the JAWS screen reader.

Problem 2: We are not told there are buttons on the slide in the upper left when the PDF document opens. If we don't know they are there we can't navigate to them. It is not intuitive to start looking for form controls if the PDF is not a form. The confusion is compounded by the fact that the comment/sticky note is identified as a "button".

Problem 3: We either read all of the notes or none of them. At times we are able to move word by word through the sticky note content but this access is not reliable and is tedious if we have a large amount of speaker note content. Additionally, unlike the Microsoft ability to save Notes pages of a presentation, lists are not recognized in comments/sticky notes.

This is the experience for Adobe Acrobat pro DC, Kofax PowerPDF and Foxit Editor 11. All convert speaker notes to comments/sticky notes.

Summary: This is not an accessible solution to convert speaker notes from a PowerPoint presentation to tagged PDF.

Converting Notes Pages to Tagged PDF (Microsoft Office)

This feature has been around since our ability to create tagged PDF from Office applications using the Microsoft conversion tool. However, as with slide layouts, we often just accept the defaults and never look at our options.

Using the Microsoft ability to save the Notes pages as a tagged PDF is the best option for converting speaker notes to tagged PDF although there are still some glitches. I suspect the glitches are related to the inappropriate tagging I'm seeing at the present time from ALL of the conversion tools which I will deal with after this topic.

Either press F12 to launch the Save As dialog or go through File, Save As (Alt + F, A). Give your file a name and choose PDF as the Files of Type.

If you've gone through the File area you'll have to activate the More options link to get the Save As dialog.

In the Save As dialog, activate the Options button.

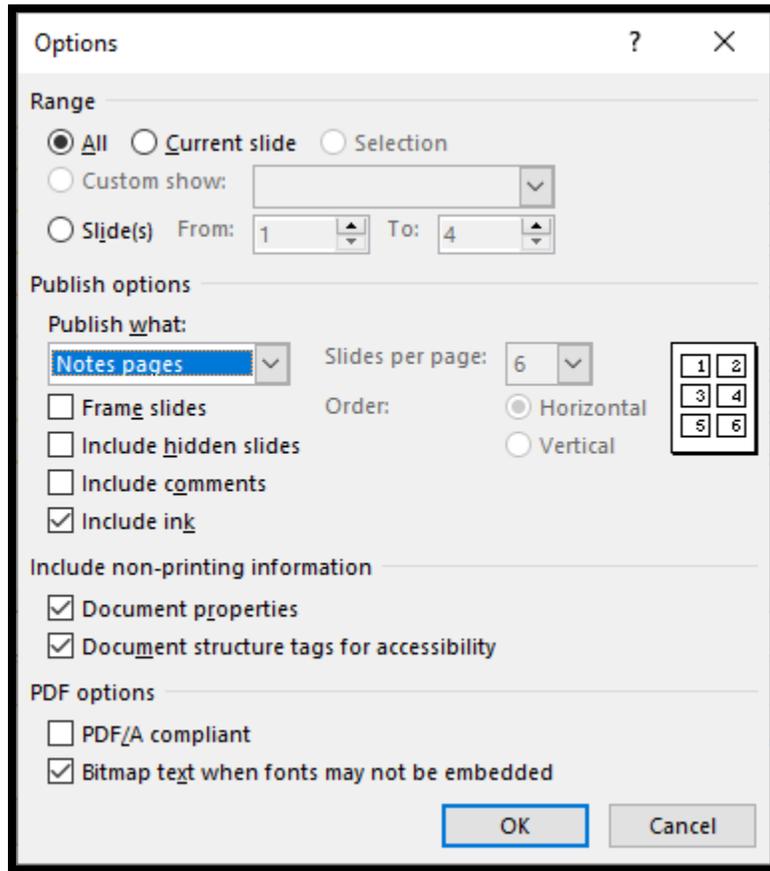


Figure 3 Options dialog for PowerPoint presentation conversion to tagged PDF (Microsoft).

In the Options dialog, choose “Notes pages” to convert speaker notes to tagged PDF. Do not include comments even if your presentation has comments due to the barriers created that are identified in the previous topic.

Once the Notes pages are converted, your PDF will have a page with the slide at the top and the speaker notes just under the slide.

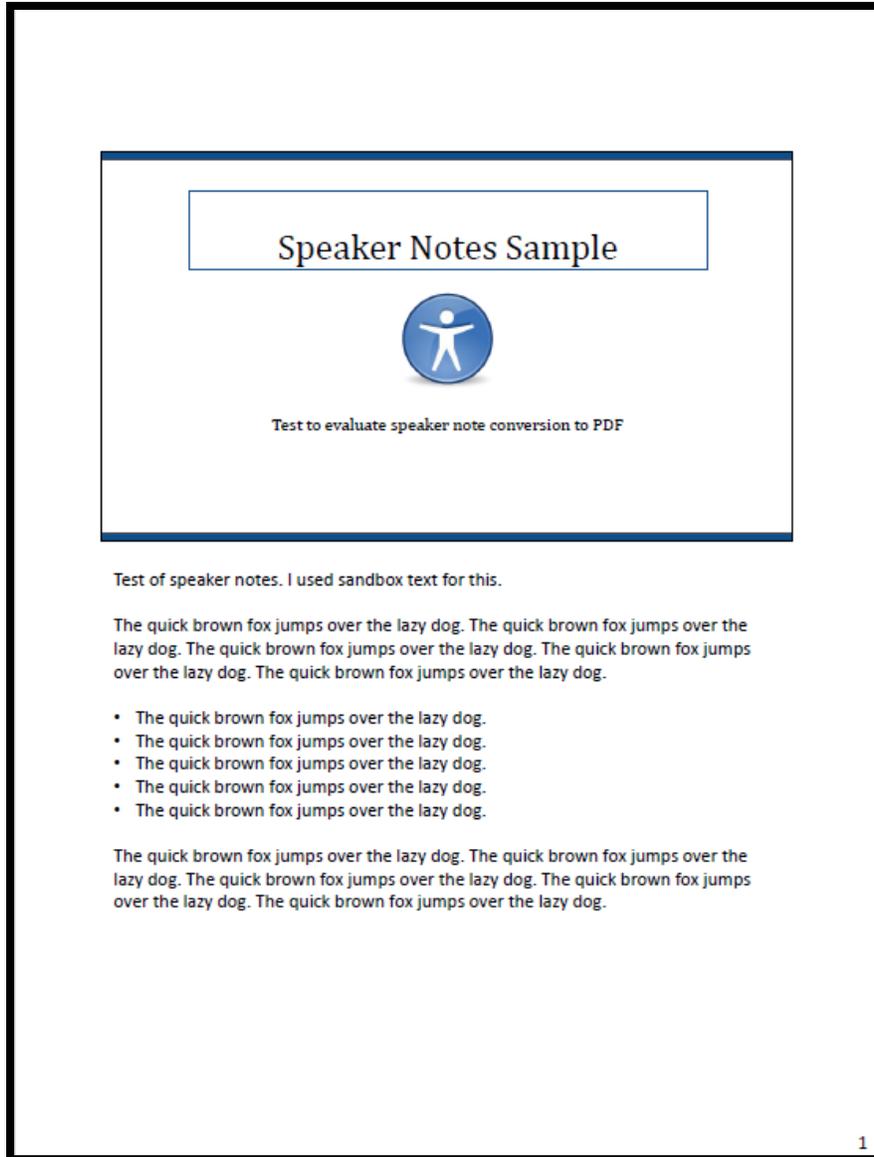


Figure 4 Note page as a tagged PDF document.

In previous versions of PowerPoint the slide came through as an image that would require Alt text once the conversion was complete. With the current version of Office 365 the contents on the slide are not only tagged but the slide titles are tagged as headings which provide navigation from slide to slide.

The lists in the speaker notes are tagged as lists and are read correctly.

Since the speaker notes area is a basic text editor, you can't use headings and other structural elements, you can't add a table or image. However, since the slide itself is now accessible and tagged, the speaker notes function as they should in a tagged PDF...with a couple of glitches.

Problem 1: For some reason, the last bulleted or numbered list item is being read by both JAWS and NVDA as having no spaces between words. I tested this by adding an additional list item and resaving the Notes pages and got the same result. All of the list items are read correctly except the last one.

Problem 2: There is no break in reading from the end of the slide content to the start of the speaker notes. Even though the tags are correct, the speaker note content is stuck to the bottom of the slide and can't be separated. You can move line by line and word by word but you can't use Ctrl + Up or Down Arrow to move through the contents of the speaker notes. For the list items, you can navigate to each list item but the entirety of the speaker notes are stuck to the last element of the slide.

Summary: This is the most accessible means of converting PowerPoint speaker notes to tagged PDF despite the glitches. I'm working on discovering why the last list items are being read as if there are no spaces between words when clearly there are in the tags tree; and why the speaker notes are stuck to the last element on the slide. This could be a result of the inappropriate tagging I've encountered.

Intentional Accessibility Barrier Created by Adobe

A few years ago I heard that in the digital space we had created "unintentional barriers" for those of us with disabilities. The concept was that those who were creating content and digital environments such as Learning Management Systems or applications didn't know how to create accessible digital environments so were creating unintentional barriers and should, for lack of a better phrase, "get a pass" since the barrier was unintentional.

Unfortunately that doesn't help those of us who have a right to an education and a right to employment just as everyone else does. We are still locked out of learning and employment opportunities and the situation isn't getting any better. In fact, even among those who "know better" intentional barriers are being created on a daily basis.

For example, Adobe just released a version of Acrobat Pro Dc where decorative images were tagged in the Tags Tree with an <Artifact> tag. As an additional "bonus" the images are being announced with gibberish: P S Y U".

Problem 1: There is no <Artifact> tag. There "might" be in PDF/UA - 2 but PDF/UA - 2 is not a published standard. It is nowhere near publication and things that are discussed in ISO meetings are not supposed to be implemented outside of a published standard.

Problem 2: In PDF/UA - 1 there is an Artifact attribute that puts decorative images into the background so that those of us using adaptive technology like a screen reader don't have to listen to them or skip over something like "graphic, image 3 inches by 6 inches" or "graphic, decorative". Having to listen to things in a document that have no meaning other than visual "bling" wastes our time and interrupts our concentration. It is a serious lack of understanding of how we access content. We don't have all day to let text dribble on in a

document or to constantly have our concentration interrupted by what can best be described as “visual bling”.

Problem 3: As remediators we can't artifact the <Artifact> tag so that the PDF documents are read correctly by adaptive technology.

Problem 4: Current versions of the screen readers and Text-to-Speech tools don't know what to do with an <Artifact> tag and are not reading PDF documents with these tags in a coherent manner.

Problem 5: Since all the other conversion tools (Kofax PowerPDF, Foxit Editor 11 and the Microsoft conversion tool follow the Adobe example, we are seeing these tagging errors and intentional barriers in all of the conversion tools in varying stages of implementation.)

Problem 6: It is not only the <Artifact> tag that is causing barriers. Tags are now being nested inside other tags that violate PDF/UA - 1. For example a <Figure> tag might have a <P> tag in it or a <P> tag might have the contents of a <Figure> tag in it without the <Figure> tag. Since it would not be “legal” in PDF/UA - 1 to have a <Figure> tag inside a <P> tag, this creates barriers for the adaptive technology. It is as if any tag will do on any type of content.

PDF/UA - 1 IS the current standard for accessible PDF documents.

PDF/UA - 2 is several years away from being published and several more years away before being adopted by legislation and incorporated into other standards such as Section 508 in the US, EM 395 450 in the European Union, the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act in Ontario Canada or the Accessible Canada Act.

We should not be seeing these intentional accessibility barriers in the PDF conversion tools or the resulting tagged PDF documents.