



Designing Accessible PDFs in InDesign

Integrating Life Design Thinking



Welcome & Framing

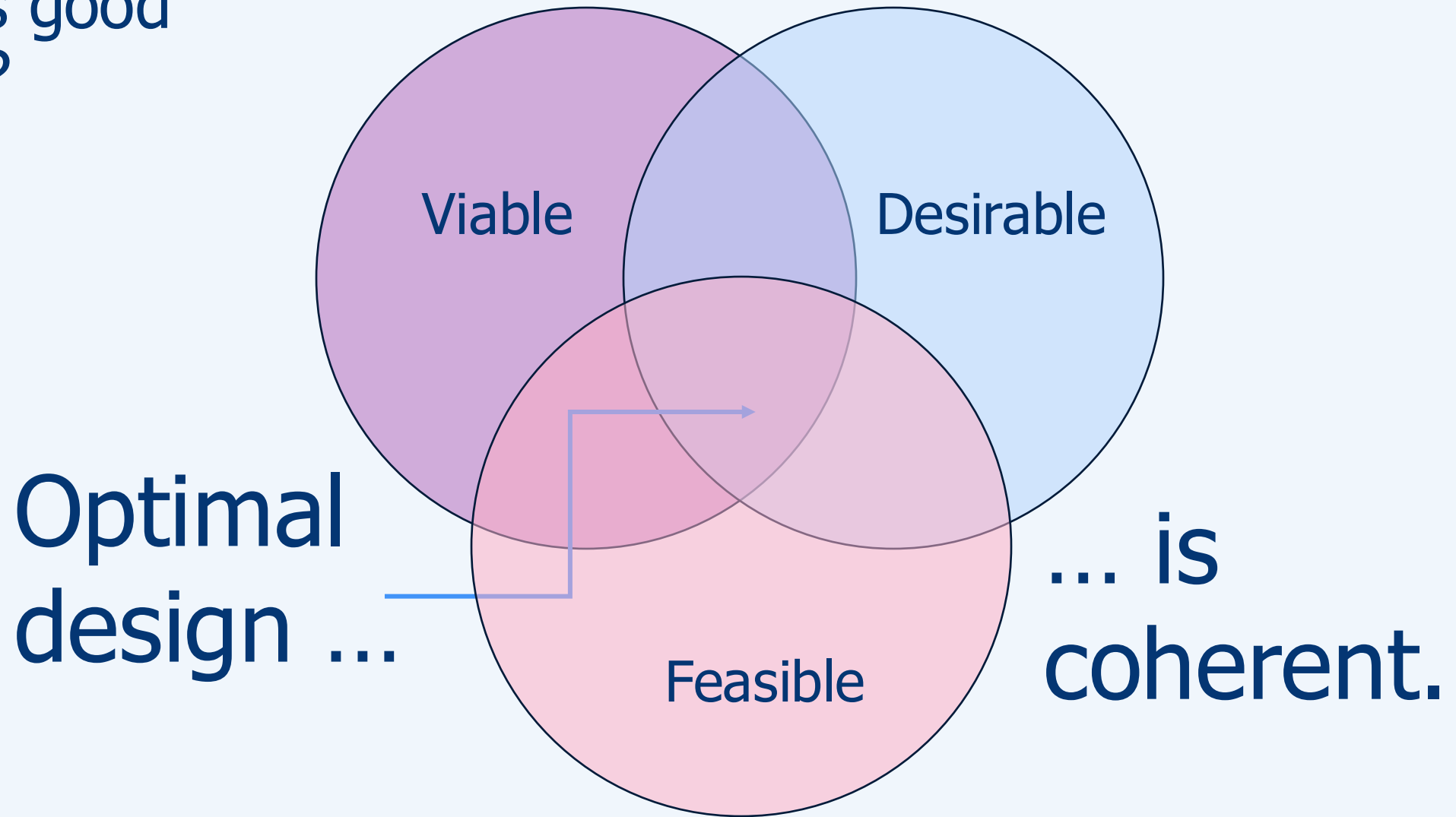
- Introduction – Kelly Cooney
- This session is about using InDesign to create accessible PDFs
- This assumes you have access to InDesign and Adobe Acrobat Pro

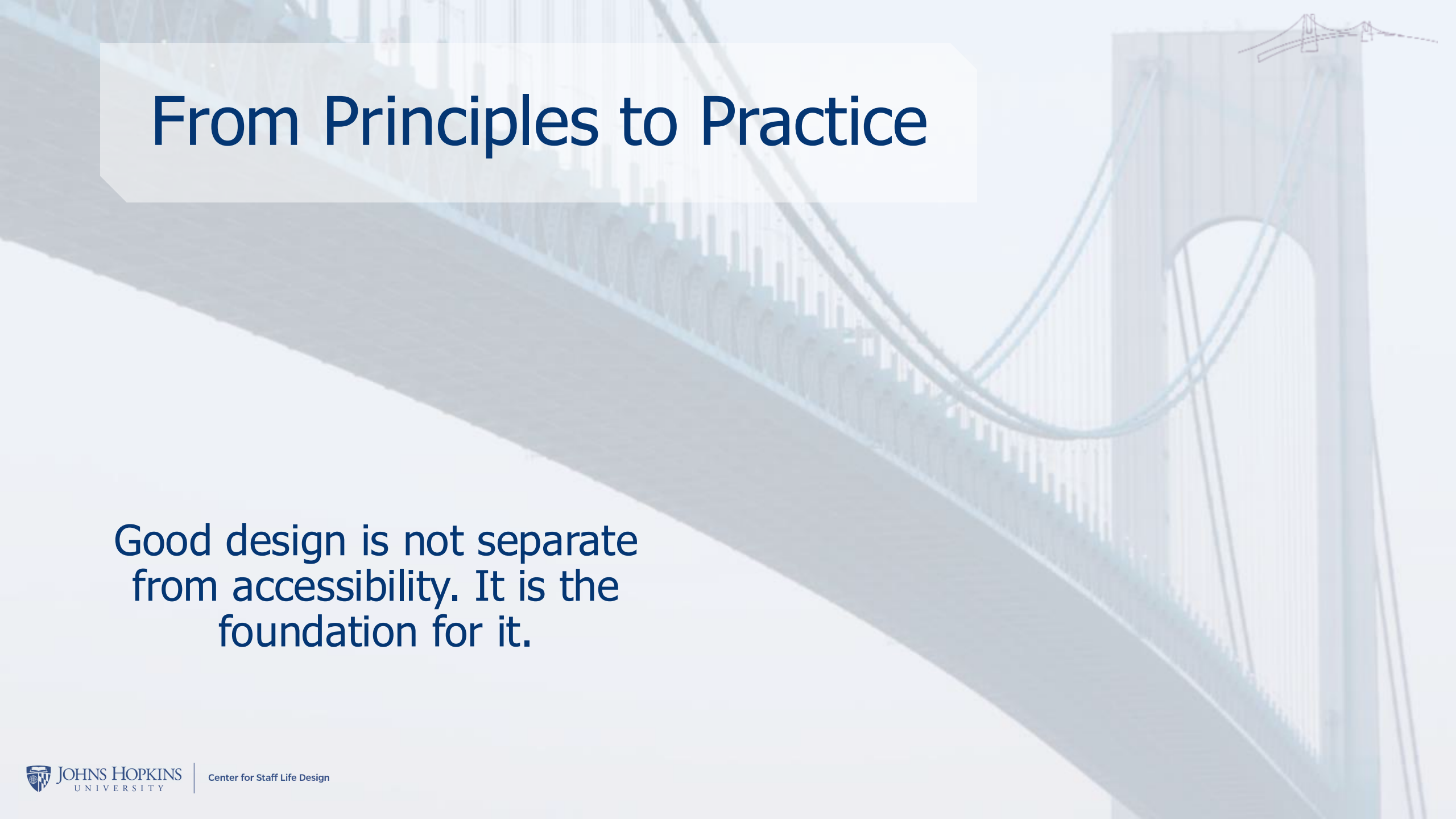


Digital Accessibility

- At JHU, websites, web applications and digital content need to meet the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1AA guidelines
- It is important to build the accessibility into your source document before conversion to PDF
- It's more difficult to fix a PDF than it is to fix your source document

What is good design?



The background of the slide is a photograph of a suspension bridge, likely the Bix Creek Creek Bridge in Baltimore, Maryland. The bridge features a large, light-colored stone or concrete tower on the right side, with two main suspension cables fanning out to support the bridge deck. The deck itself is a light blue-grey color. In the upper left corner, there is a white, semi-transparent rectangular box with slightly irregular edges, containing the title text. The overall image has a soft, slightly desaturated aesthetic.

From Principles to Practice

Good design is not separate
from accessibility. It is the
foundation for it.



Metadata

1

Document Presets

Document Setup...

Adjust Layout...

User...

File Info...

Ctr

User Settings

Package...

Ctr

Print Presets

Print...

Print Booklet...

Exit

File Information for Untitled-1

Basic

Camera Data

Origin

IPTC

IPTC Extension

GPS Data

Audio Data

Video Data

Photoshop

DICOM

AEM Properties

Raw Data

Document Title:

Creating Accessible InDesign Documents

Author:

Kelly Cooney

Semicolons or commas can be used to separate multiple values

Author Title:

Description:

Guide to creating accessible PDFs in Adobe InDesign with tags, alt text, and best practices for inclusive design.

Rating:

☆

☆

☆

☆

☆

Description Writer:

Keywords:

Accessible PDFs, Adobe InDesign, Tagged PDF, Alt Text, Screen Readers, Digital Accessibility

Semicolons or commas can be used to separate multiple values

2

JOHNS HOPKINS
UNIVERSITY

Center for Staff Life Design



Mapping Text

1

Paragraph Styles

Header 1

[Basic Paragraph]

Paragraphs

Header 1

Header 2

Header 3

2

Edit "Header 1"...

Duplicate Style...

Delete Style

Apply "Header 1"

Copy to New Style Pack

Copy to Group...

New Group from Styles...

3

Paragraph Style Options

General

Basic Character Formats

Advanced Character Formats

Indents and Spacing

Tabs

Paragraph Rules

Paragraph Border

Paragraph Shading

Keep Options

Hyphenation

Justification

Span Columns

Drop Caps and Nested Styles

GREP Style

Bullets and Numbering

Character Color

OpenType Features

Underline Options

Strikethrough Options

Export Tagging

PDF

Tag: H1

[Automatic]

P

H

4

H1

H2

H3

H4

H5

H6

Artifact



Document Structure

MENTOR-MENTEE AGREEMENT

Design Vanguard Mentoring Program - This agreement reflects our shared commitment to building a respectful, growth-focused mentoring relationship grounded in trust, intentionality, and life design principles.

Shared Commitments

By signing below, we agree to the following:

- **Confidentiality** – Maintain trust and privacy in our conversations.
- **Active Participation** – Be present, prepared, and fully engaged.
- **Reliability & Follow-Through** – Honor meeting times and follow through on commitments.
- **Mentee-Driven Conversations** – Support the mentee's goals, questions, and reflections.
- **Openness to Feedback & Learning** – Be receptive to insights and growth throughout the experience.

Communication Preferences

Preferred Method of Communication (check all that apply):

☐ Email ☐ Phone ☐ Text

☐ Microsoft Teams ☐ Other: _____

Response Time Expectation: _____

Figure - No alternate text exists.

Life Design Vanguard Mentoring Program | 6

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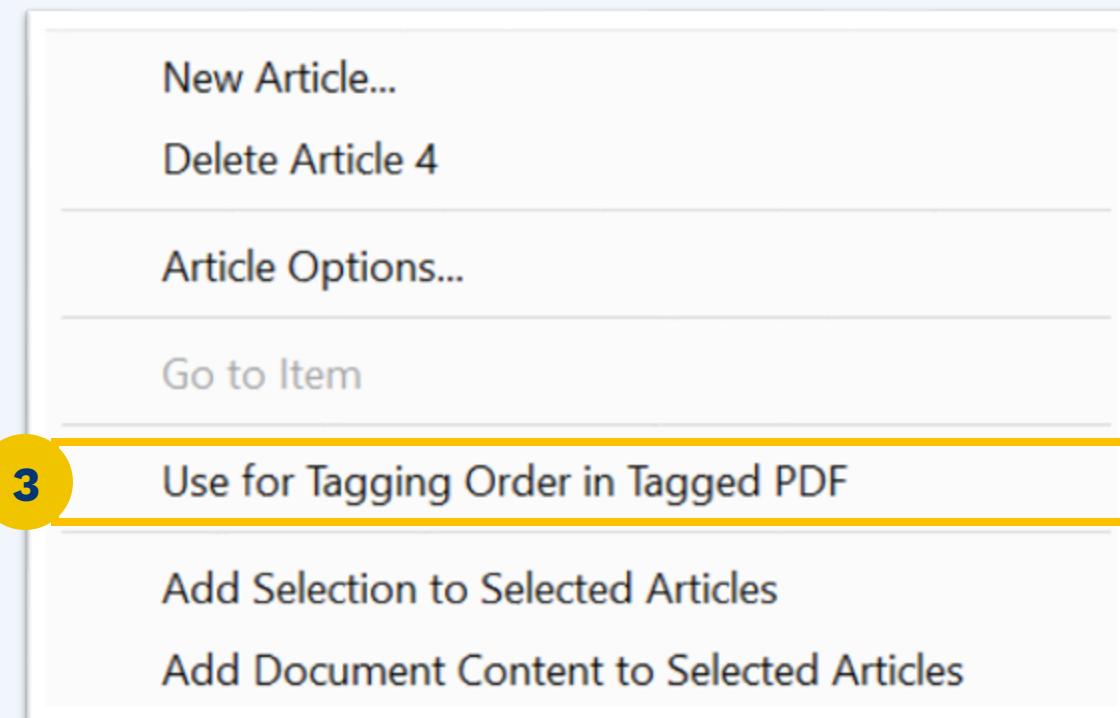
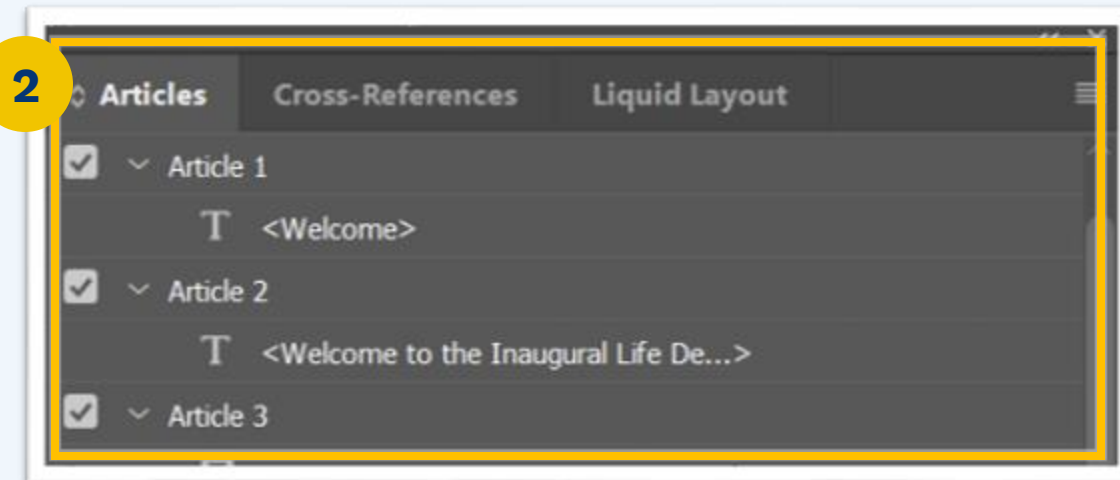
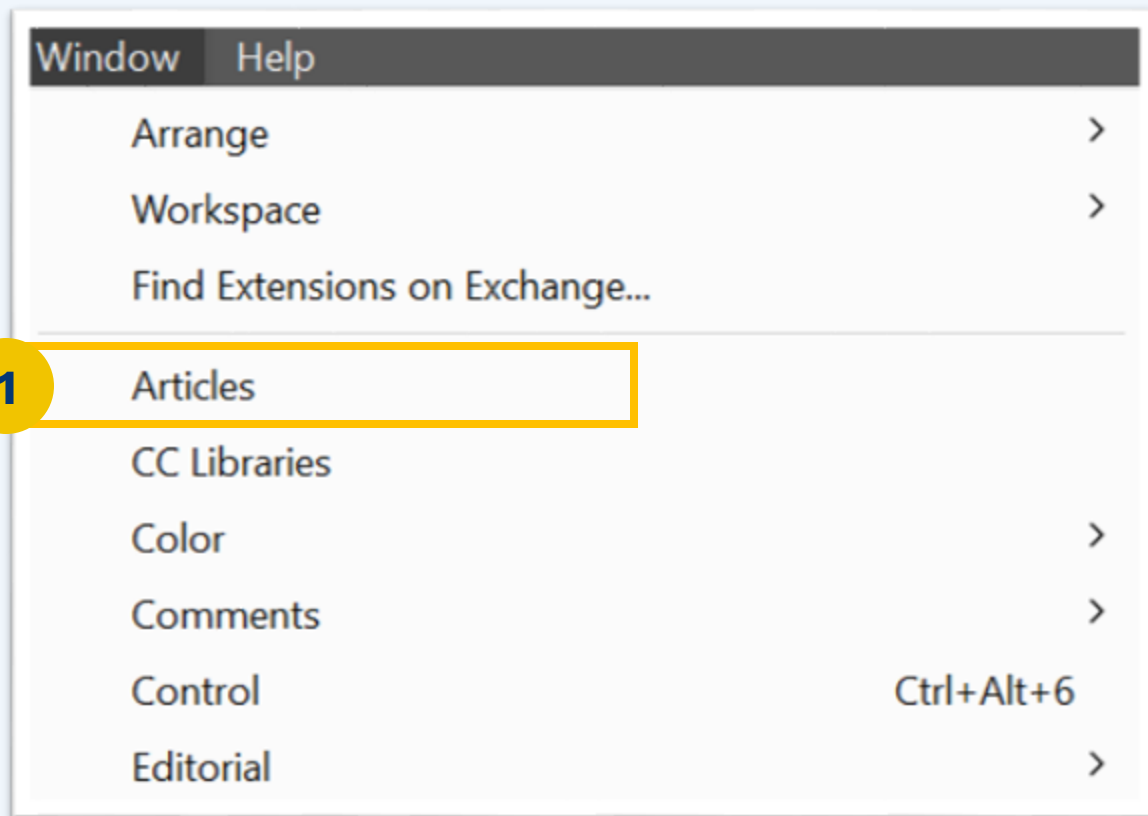
Response Time Expectation: _____

Figure - No alternate text exists.

Life Design Vanguard Mentoring Program | 6



Reading Order





Example

1 CONTENTS	
2 Interview & Key Dates	3 1
8 Monthly Guide	9 3
6 Roles & Expectations	7 5
12 Mentor-Mentee Agreement Form	13 6
18 Themes & Questions	19 8
4 Mentoring Toolkit & Instructions	5 10
10 Resources & Bibliography	11 9
16 Notes & Doodle Pages	17 0
14 Appendix: Agreement Form	15 4

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1 CONTENTS	
2 Interview & Key Dates	3 1
4 Monthly Guide	5 3
6 Roles & Expectations	7 5
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16 Notes & Doodle Pages	17 0
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Table of Contents & Bookmarks

First Page	Ctrl+Shift+Numpad 9
Previous Page	Shift+Numpad 9
Next Page	Shift+Numpad 3
Last Page	Ctrl+Shift+Numpad 3
Next Spread	Alt+Numpad 3
Previous Spread	Alt+Numpad 9
Go to Page...	Ctrl+J
Go Back	Ctrl+Numpad 9
Go Forward	Ctrl+Numpad 3
Numbering & Section Options...	
Table of Contents...	
Update Table of Contents	
Table of Contents Styles...	

Table of Contents

3 TOC Style: [Default] Title: Contents

4 Style: [No Paragraph Style]

Styles in Table of Contents

Include Paragraph Styles:

Other Styles:

Style:

Entry Style:

Page Number:

Between Entry and Number:

☐ Sort Entries in Alphabetical Order

Level:

5 Options

☒ Create PDF Bookmarks

☐ Replace Existing Table of Contents

☐ Include Book Documents

☐ Make text anchor in source paragraph

☐ Remove Forced Line Break

Numbered Paragraphs: Include Full Paragraph

☐ Run-in

☐ Include Text on Hidden Layers

OK

Cancel

Save Style...

Fewer Options



Tables

1

MONTHLY PLAN

Table 1: Mentee Key Program Dates

Event	Date	Time	Location
Program Kickoff Breakfast	Thursday September 25, 2025	10am-12pm	In-Person
Elevate Your Leadership Journey: Leveraging Life Design & <i>CliftonStrengths</i>	*Wednesday October 22, 2025	9:30am-11:00am	In-Person
Mentee Circle: Conversation, Clarity & Coherence	*Thursday November 6, 2025	12:00pm-1:30pm	Virtual
Life Design Latte Chats - Leadership Coaching (Optional)	Week of November 10 – 14, 2025	Time vary	Virtual
Mentoring Program Closing Event	*Thursday December 4, 2025	12pm-2pm	
Staff (Mentee) Mentoring Program Feedback Due	*Friday December 5, 2025		

Dates marked with an asterisk () are highly encouraged for all *mentees* to attend.

Life Design Vanguard Mentoring Program | 3

2

Table Dimensions



6



4



1



0



At Least



0.4593 in





Lists

WELCOME

There are basically three kinds of questions you should ask in any Life Design interview:

Origin Story: How did you get into doing the thing you're doing now?

Feelings: What do you love about the work you're doing? (What's most challenging about it?)

Suggestions: What advice do you have for someone who wants to learn more about what you do? (Who else could I talk to about it?)

So where do I start?

Step 1: **Get curious** – What's something you want to learn about?

Bullets and Numbering

•≡ 1≡

•≡ 2≡

Options

3

Bullets and Numbering

List Type: Bullets

List: [Default]

Level: 1

Bullet Character

•	*	◇	□						
u	u	u							

Add...

Delete

[Mixed Font Selection: Using Tahoma]

Text After: ^t

Character Style: [None]

Bullet or Number Position

Alignment: Left

Left Indent: 0.25 in

First Line Indent: -0.25 in

Tab Position:

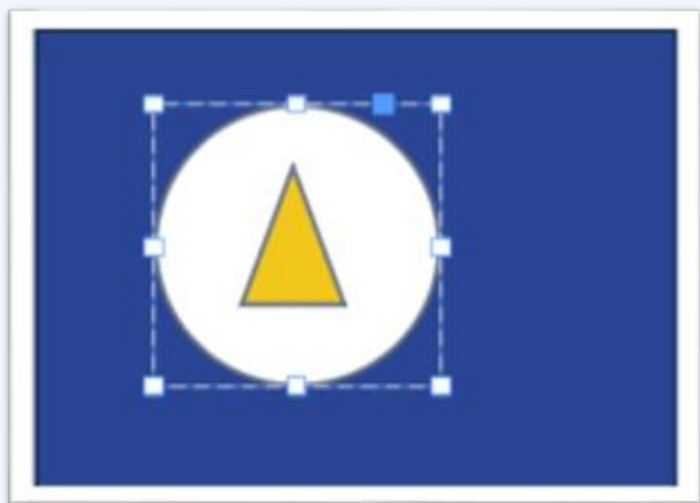
Preview

OK

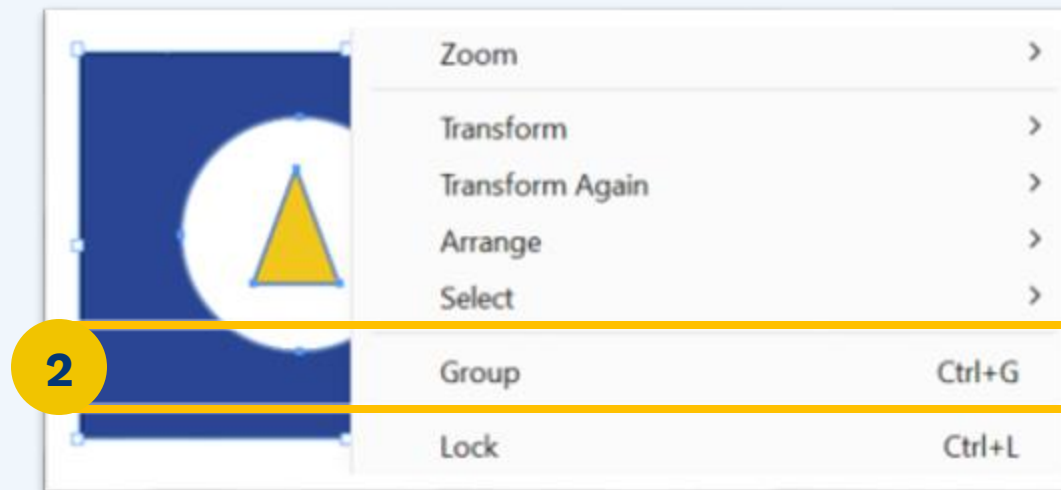
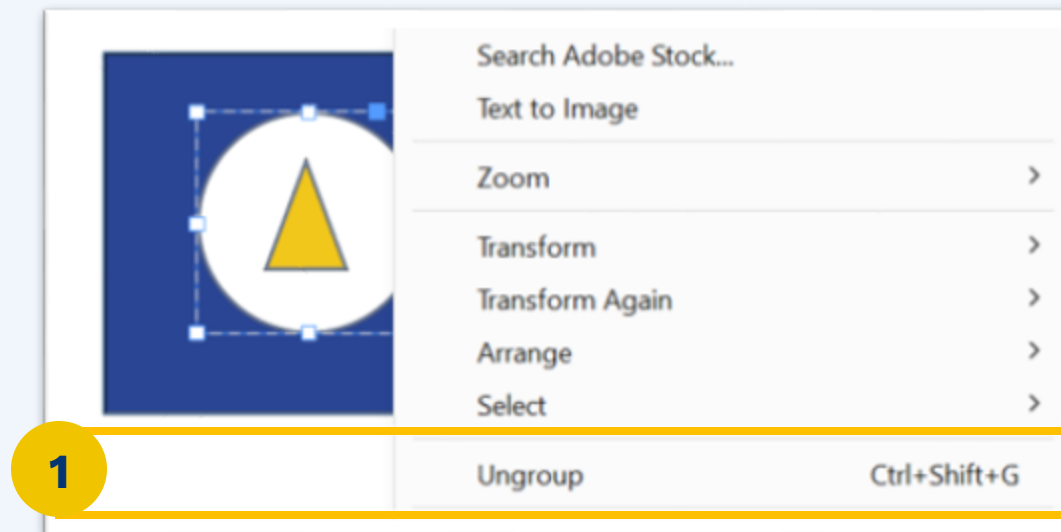
Cancel



Shapes as Objects

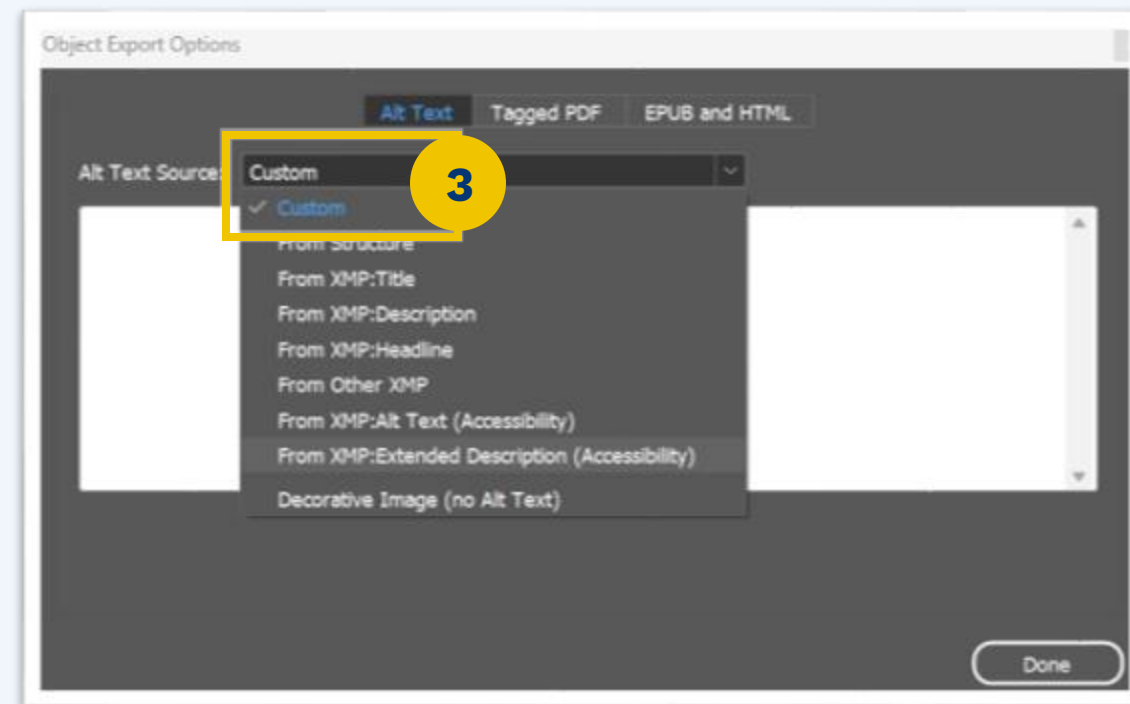
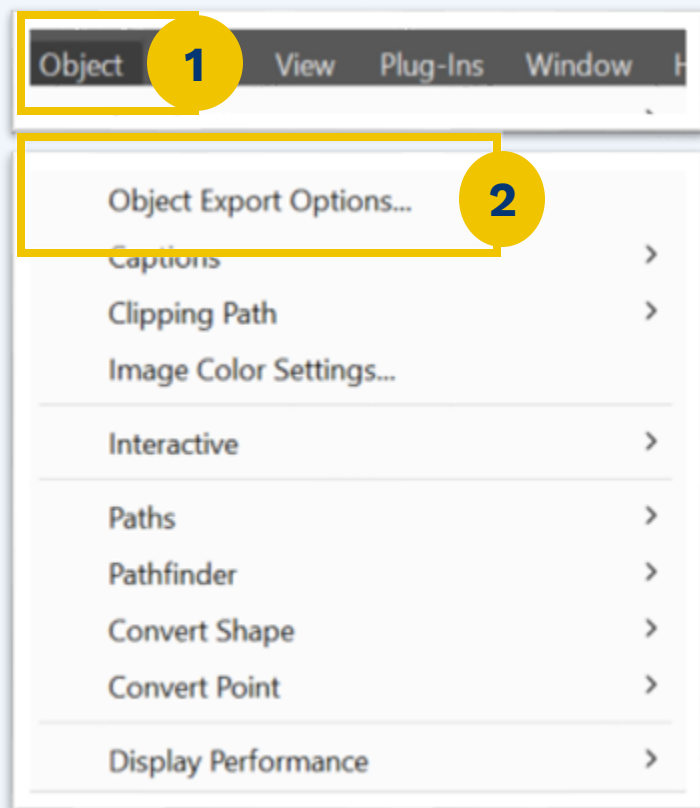


Do not embed groups within groups.





Alternative Text



AI Alternative Text Prompt:

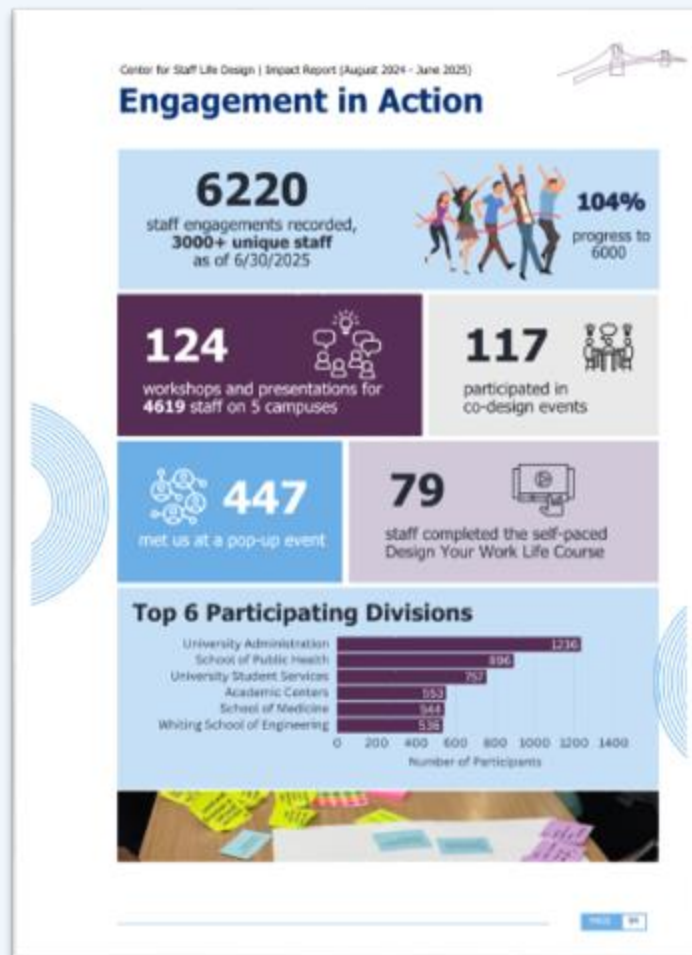
Please provide ADA compliant alternative text that is optimized for a screen reader for the attached image.



Alt Text for Infographics

Best Practices

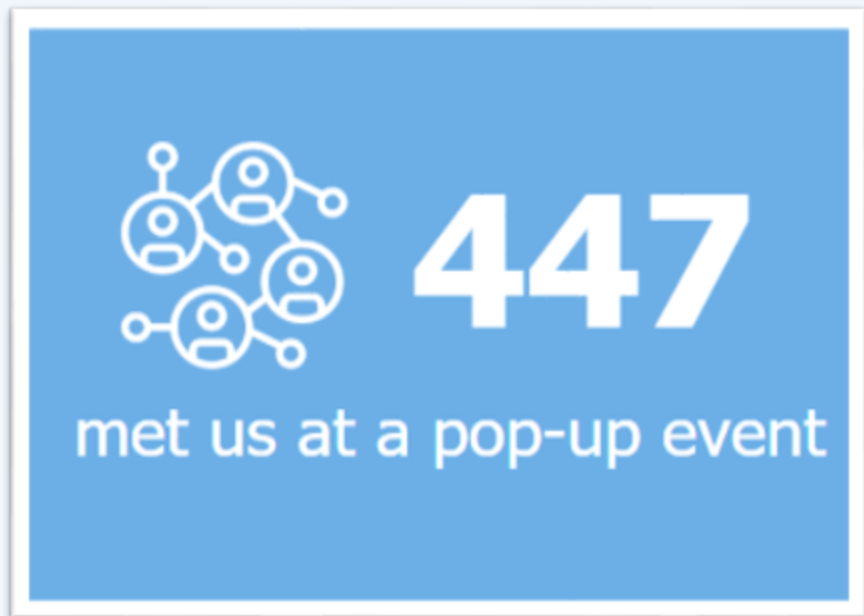
- Provide a detailed textual summary before or after the graphic
- Export as a single image



As described in the accompanying text, this image visually represents staff engagement metrics from the Center for Staff Life Design's Impact Report (August 2024 – June 2025), including total engagements, workshop participation, co-design and pop-up event attendance, course completions, and top participating divisions.



Color Contrast



- > **18 pt font** should have contrast ratio of at least 3:1
- < **18 pt font** should have contrast ratio of 4.5:1

Foreground
Hex Value
#FFFFFF
Color Picker
Alpha
1
Lightness

Background
Hex Value
#68ACE5
Color Picker
Lightness

Contrast Ratio
2.43:1
[permalink](#)

Normal Text
WCAG AA: **Fail**
WCAG AAA: **Fail**
The five boxing wizards jump quickly.

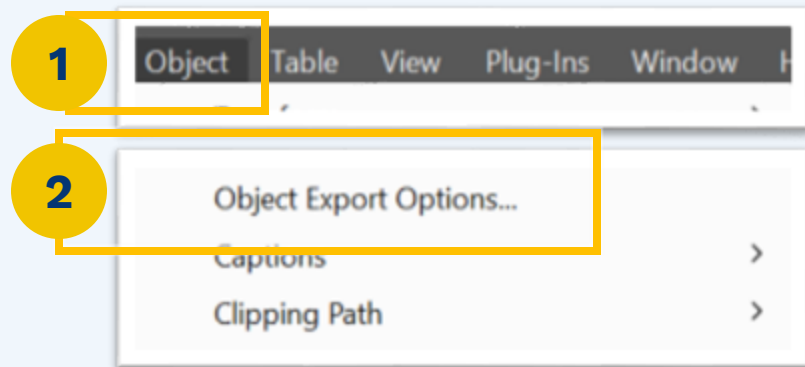
Large Text
WCAG AA: **Fail**
WCAG AAA: **Fail**
The five boxing wizards jump quickly.

Graphical Objects and User Interface Components
WCAG AA: **Fail**
★
Text Input

[WebAIM.org](https://webaim.org)

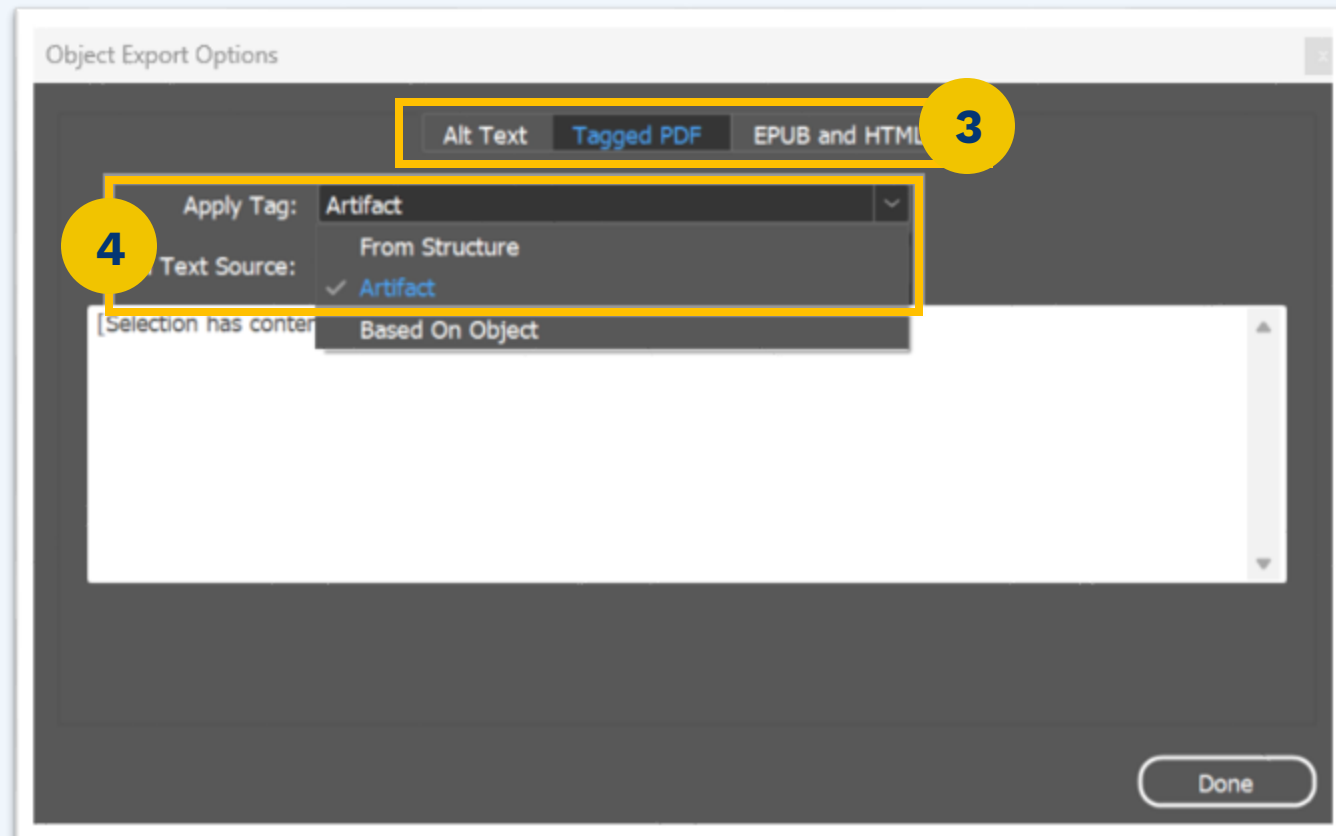


Artifacts



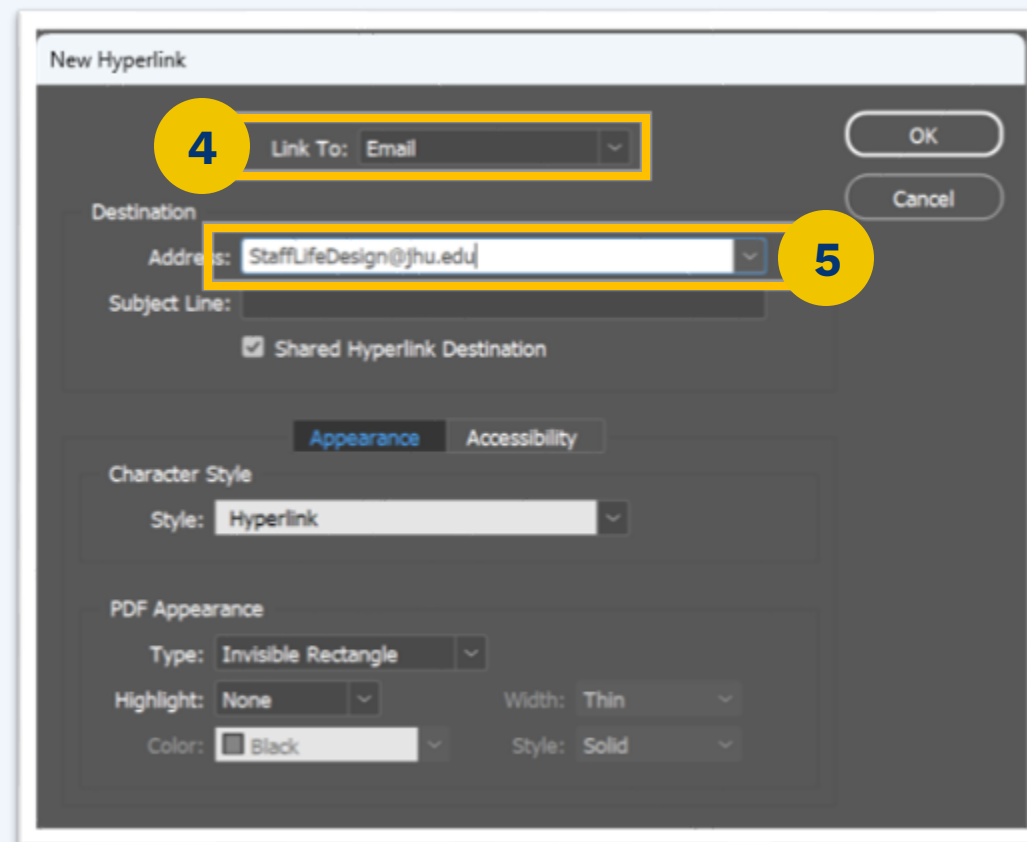
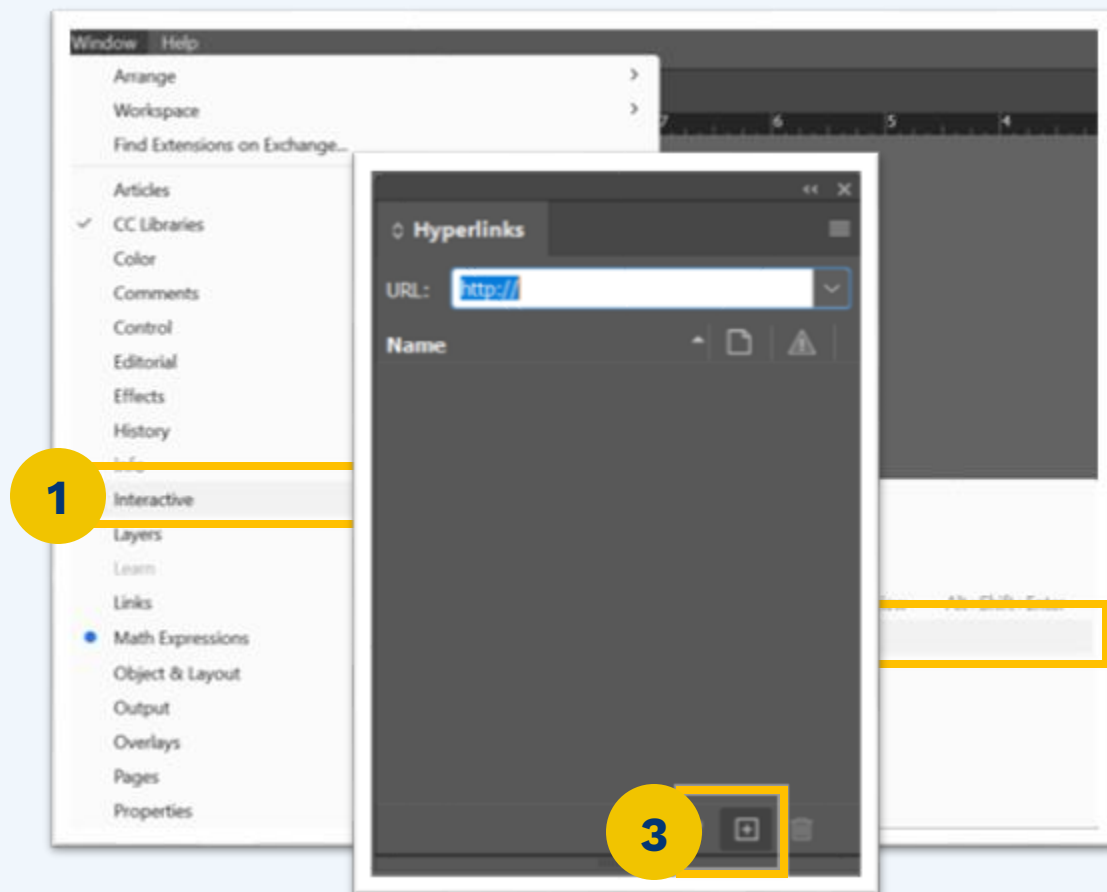
NOTE:

Master page items are automatically marked as artifacts.





Hyperlinks: Built-in





Export to Accessible PDFs

Settings for you to consider



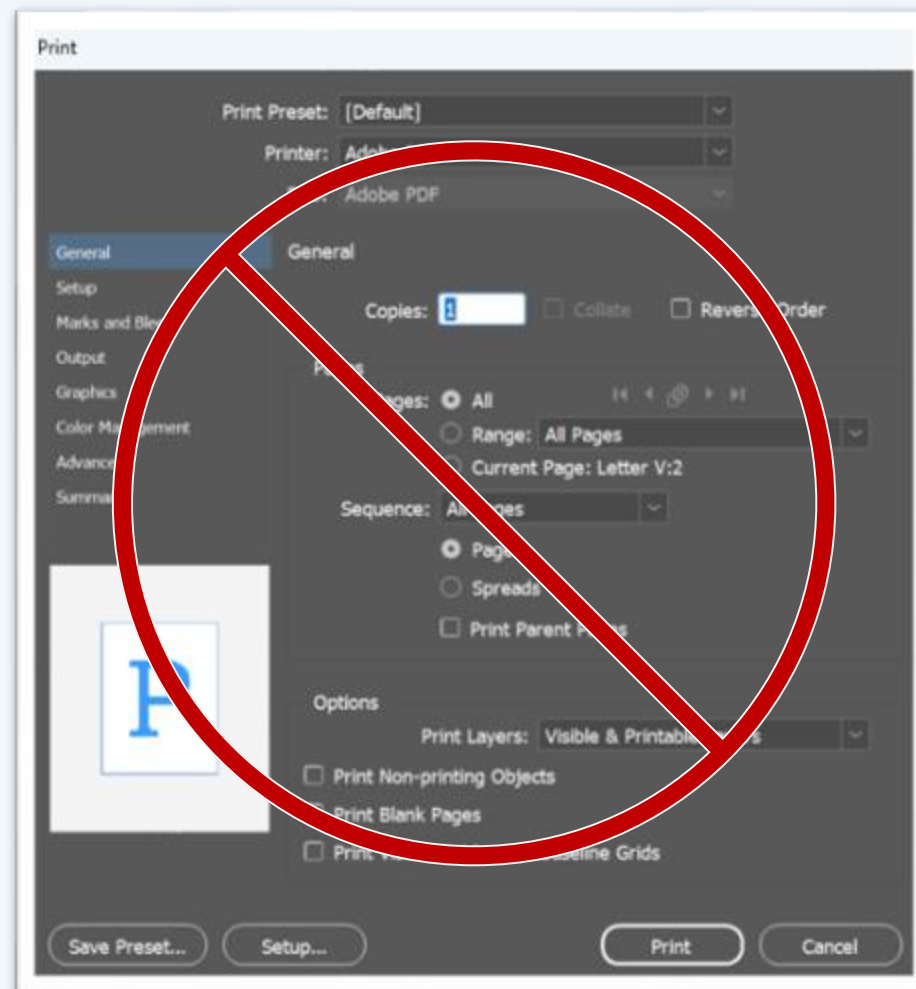
What NOT to Do...

IMPORTANT

Don't use

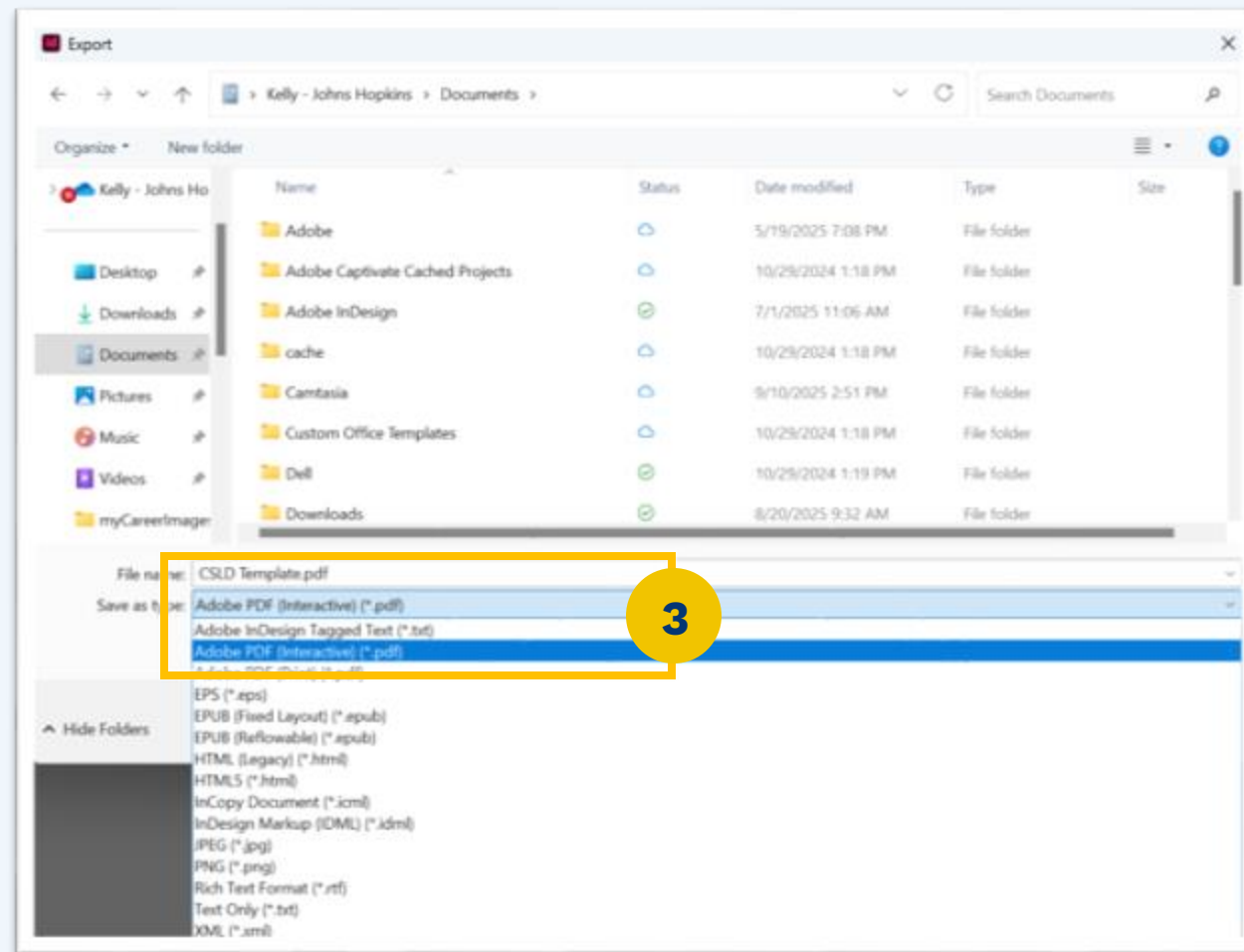
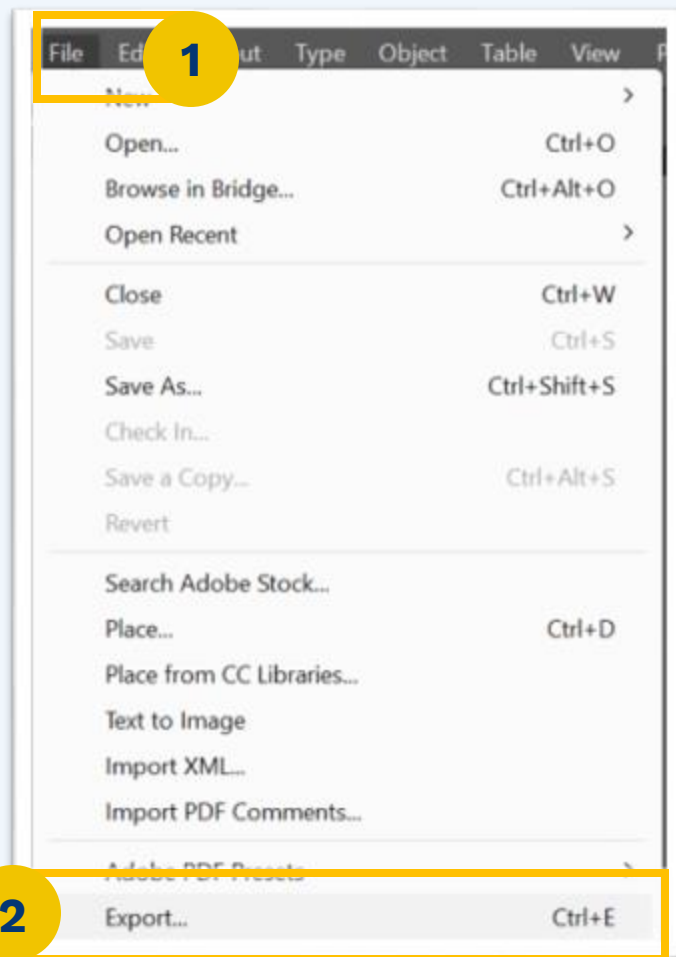
Print > Adobe PDF Printer

You will lose all the accessibility that you just built into your document.

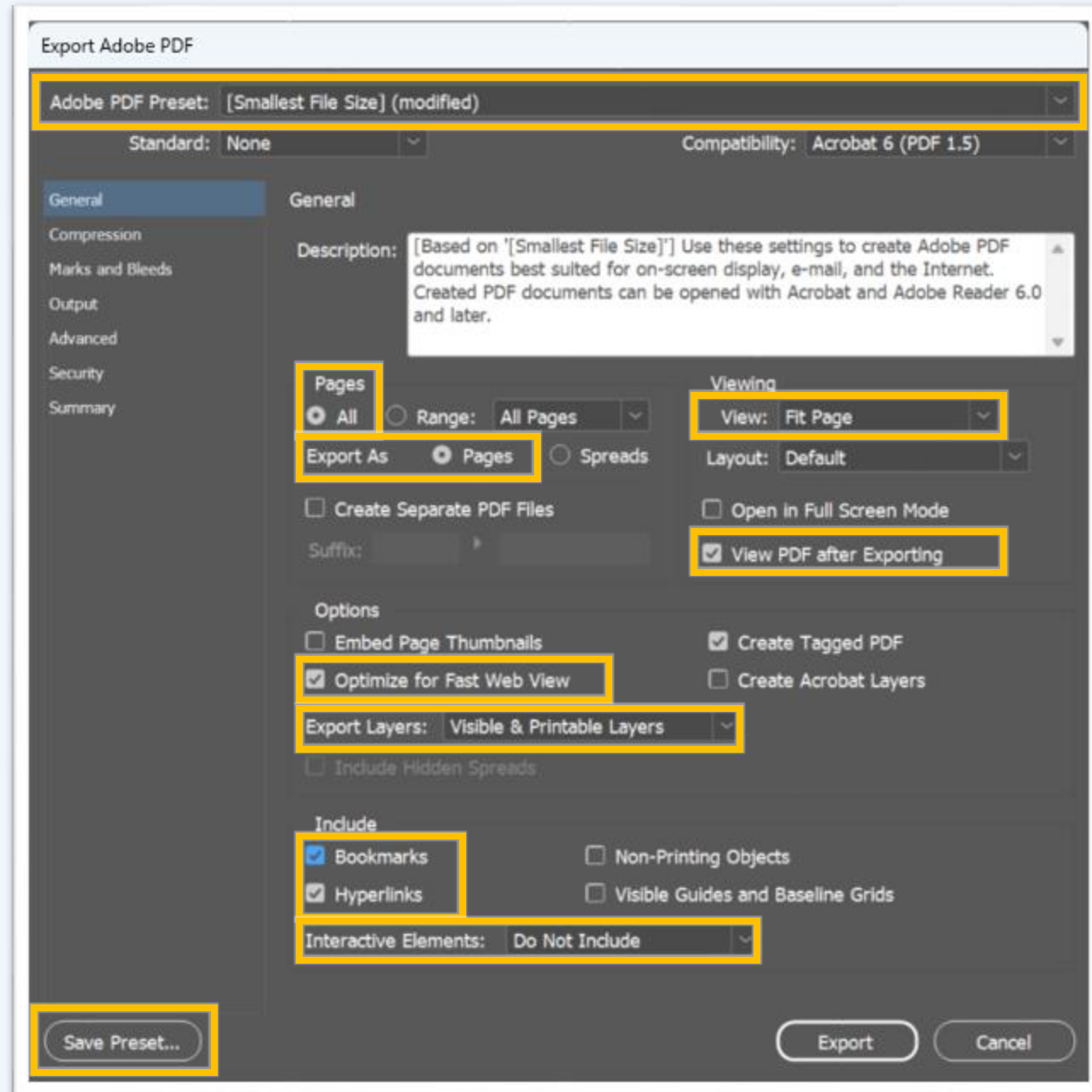




Exporting Your InDesign Materials



Print PDFs



Export Adobe PDF

Adobe PDF Preset: [Smallest File Size] (modified)

Standard: None Compatibility: Acrobat 6 (PDF 1.5)

General

Description: [Based on '[Smallest File Size]'] Use these settings to create Adobe PDF documents best suited for on-screen display, e-mail, and the Internet. Created PDF documents can be opened with Acrobat and Adobe Reader 6.0 and later.

Pages

☒ All ☐ Range: All Pages

Export As ☒ Pages ☐ Spreads

☐ Create Separate PDF Files

Suffix:

Viewing

View: Fit Page

Layout: Default

☐ Open in Full Screen Mode

☒ View PDF after Exporting

Options

☐ Embed Page Thumbnails

☒ Optimize for Fast Web View

☒ Create Tagged PDF

☐ Create Acrobat Layers

Export Layers: Visible & Printable Layers

☐ Include Hidden Spreads

Include

☒ Bookmarks

☒ Hyperlinks

☐ Non-Printing Objects

☐ Visible Guides and Baseline Grids

Interactive Elements: Do Not Include

Save Preset...

Export Cancel

Interactive PDFs

Export to Interactive PDF

General

Compression

Advanced

Security

Pages

☒ All ☐ Range: All Pages ☐ Export As ☒ Pages ☐ Spreads

☐ Create Separate PDF Files Suffix:

Viewing

View: Fit Page

Layout: Default

Presentation: ☐ Open in Full Screen Mode

☐ Flip Pages Every: 5 seconds

☒ View After Exporting

Page Transitions: From Document

Options

Forms and Media: ☒ Include All ☐ Appearance Only

☒ Embed Page Thumbnails

☐ Create Acrobat Layers

☐ Include Hidden Spreads

☒ Create Tagged PDF

☒ Use Structure for Tab Order

Export Cancel



Advanced Settings

Advanced

Accessibility Options

Display Title: Document Title

Language: English: USA

Description

Hover over an option to view description.



Where Design Meets Practice

Small Business Startup Help

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Lorem ipsum
+0 (000) 000-00-00

SMALL BUSINESS STARTUP HELP

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Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed do eiusmod tempor incididunt ut labore et dolore magna aliqua. Ut enim ad minim veniam, quis nostrud exercitation ullamco laboris nisi ut aliquip ex ea commodo consequat veniam, quis.

Small Business Startup Help

“ Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed do eiusmod tempor incididunt. ”

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SMALL BUSINESS STARTUP HELP

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Designing an Accessible Training Guide





Applying Accessibility through Life Design



What **one action** could you take in your **daily workflow** to make accessibility part of your design routine?



Reference Materials for You

- [Digital Accessibility website](#)
- [Digital Accessibility events page](#) (contains upcoming events and recordings of past trainings)
- [Digital Accessibility Teams site](#) for any JHU staff member to share information and be informed of upcoming events
- [Creating Accessible PDFs from Adobe InDesign](#) (document from Tufts)



Connect with me!

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*Learning Engineer,
Center for Staff Life
Design*

Johns Hopkins University

