

H1: This is an accessibility test document

So it seems that a few months ago (roughly sometime in April of 2025, from what I can tell), Google (finally) enabled accessibility tagging for PDFs exported directly from Google Docs. Which is great!

But.

How comprehensive is the tagging, and how well do they do?

Let's try a few things to find out.

H2: Starting the testing with headings

I'm adding a few headings to the document. For clarity, each type of heading starts with noting the heading level.

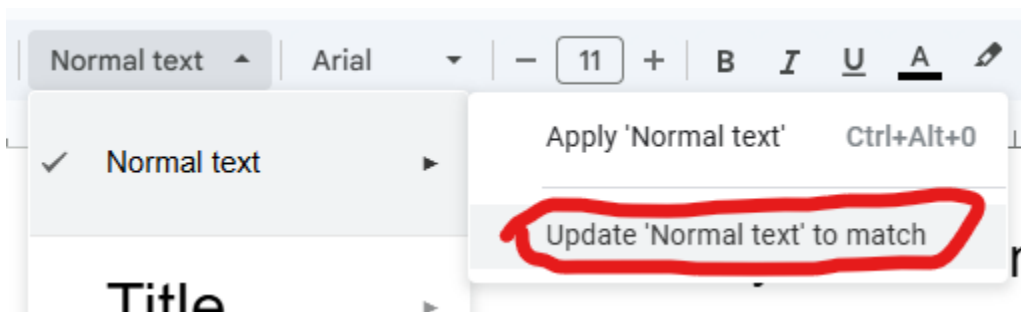
Paragraph text is just the "Normal text" style, only adjusted to give extra space between paragraphs. Google really should update the "Normal text" style to do this by default, to discourage people from [using blank lines between paragraphs](#). But until they do, that still has to be done manually.

H3: How to do that manually

It's easy enough. In the toolbar, click on the "Line & paragraph spacing" icon – that's the one that's three horizontal lines with a vertical double-headed arrow to the left.



Choose "Add space after paragraph" to...well, to do what it says. Then go to the style chooser menu (the one that normally says "Normal text"), and use the submenu to select "Update 'Normal text' to match".



From now on, all your paragraphs will have some space between them, and you won't be tempted to add unnecessary blank lines between paragraphs. I hope. 😊

And as a bonus, because I included a couple screenshots – with alt text, of course – we get to check whether alt text tagging works properly.

H4: And now begin the unnecessary heading levels

This is going to be the exciting part of the document. (No, not really.) I want to check all of the standard first through sixth heading levels. So we're just adding some headings and some filler text between them.

H5: Really, how often do you get five heading levels deep

I mean, it happens, but it's not terribly frequent.

H6: And finally, heading level six

Even more rare, but not entirely unheard of. Generally, though, if you're getting this deep in the outline structure – and especially if you're tempted to go any deeper – I recommend re-thinking your document's organizational structure.

Plus, many academic papers are written in APA format, which [only specifies five heading levels](#). By sticking with the convention of using one and only one H1 heading for the title of the document, we still have five remaining heading levels to use (H2 through H6) while remaining within APA standards.

H2: Okay, back to a reasonable heading level

So that covers the basics. We have a document that's been given a title (not with the "Title" style that should be ignored, but by entering a document title at the top left of the window next to the Google Docs icon). It has several paragraphs of text, and has been divided into several sections using proper heading styles. There are even a couple links, written properly as [descriptive links](#) (ooh, look, there's another one).

Now for some slightly more advanced stuff.

H3: Let's try lists

Lists are commonly used in all sorts of documents. Let's try a few.

- This is an unordered list (or "bulleted" list, in Google speak)
- It has several items which aren't ranked in any particular order
- Just a list of things
 - Though you can indent levels to create lists within lists
 - Which happens pretty frequently
- And here's one last item in the list

Okay, one down.

1. This is an ordered list

2. Items are numbered instead of bulleted
3. This implies an order or hierarchy of importance, or maybe in which order things should be done
 - a. These lists can also have lists within lists
 - b. Sub levels may be numbered, or use letters, or Roman numerals, or some other form of ordinal
4. And again, one last item in the list

How about a weird one?

- ☐ Google also has a checklist option
- ☐ This is a specialized, non-standard form of list
- ☐ I don't expect much from the tagging here, but I am curious

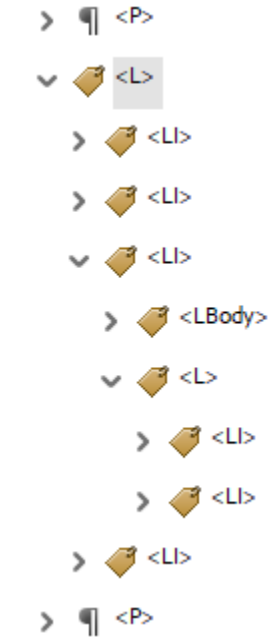
H3: We're putting a table here

Note 1: When I first created this document, I inserted a simple blank table. I then came back after exporting a PDF and reviewing the tags and filled out the information presented below.

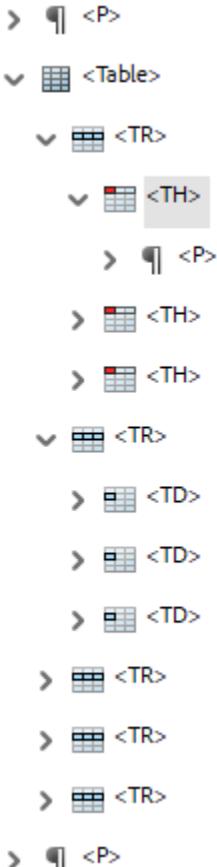
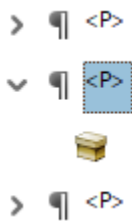
Note 2: Anytime I say "Yes" for whether an item is tagged correctly, that's based on my current and still-developing knowledge, and may not be entirely correct. It's more of a "Yes...I think..." than an unequivocal "yes".

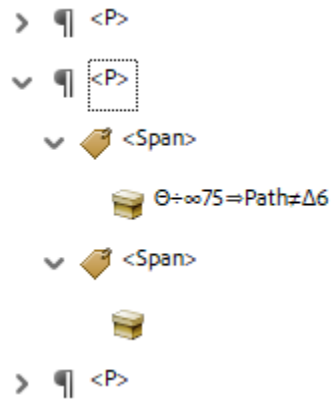
Feature	Tagged?	Correctly?
Basic text	Yes	<p>Not bad. Standard paragraphs are <P> tags with the text object. Paragraphs with links get tags added around various parts of the text, and have a Path object for the link underline.</p> <pre> > <H2> <P> I'm adding a few headings to the docur <P> <Link> Path <H3> </pre>

Feature	Tagged?	Correctly?
Headings	Yes	Yes
Images	Yes	<p>Yes, though inline images are wrapped in <P> tags, which I don't think is strictly necessary, but doesn't break anything, and end with a blank object inside a for the carriage return that I think should be artifacted. Alt text is correctly set.</p> <pre> > ¶ <P> ✓ ¶ <P> > 📦 <Figure> ✓ 📦 📦 > ¶ <P> </pre>
Links	Yes	<p>Yes, though I'd argue that the Path object should be artifacted.</p> <pre> > ¶ <P> ✓ ¶ <P> ✓ 📦 📦 Plus, many academic papers are wr ✓ 📦 <Link> ✓ 📦 📦 only specifies five heading levels 📦 Link - OBJR ✓ 📦 📦 - ✓ 📦 📦 By sticking with the convention of u 📦 Path > 📦 <H2> </pre>
Lists	Yes	<p>Yes...ish? Sub-lists are children of the proper tag but outside the <LBody></p>

Feature	Tagged?	Correctly?
		<p>tag, and I'm not sure if that's right, wrong, or indifferent. Also, list item makers such as bullets or ordinals are not separately tagged with <LBL>, but are included in the <LBody> text object. While not technically correct, this is also how Word tags lists, so it's a common issue and doesn't seem to break things.</p>  <p>The screenshot shows the XML tags for a list and a checklist in Word. It starts with a paragraph tag <P>, followed by a list tag <L>. Inside the list tag, there are several list item tags . One of the list items is a checklist, which is tagged with <LBody> and contains a checkbox tag <L>. The list ends with a paragraph tag <P>.</p> <p>Checklists are tagged as lists. The checkboxes are tagged as a Path object and a spacer object preceding the text.</p>

Feature	Tagged?	Correctly?
		<div><div>> ¶ <P></div><div>▼ 📦 <L></div><div>▼ 📦 </div><div>▼ 📦 <LBody></div><div>▼ 📦 </div><div>📦</div><div>📦 Path</div><div>▼ 📦 </div><div>📦 Google also has a checklist o</div><div>> 📦 </div><div>> 📦 </div><div>> 📦 <H3></div></div>
Tables	Yes	Partially. It may be that Google Docs only does simple tables, but that may also mean that they seem to be getting the tagging mostly correct. The table header cells do not have scope (row or column) defined, but they are at least tagged with <TH>.

Feature	Tagged?	Correctly?
		 <p>Note: That screenshot was taken from my first version of this document before I added content to the table and added a number of rows.</p>
Horizontal Lines	No	<p>Partially. Horizontal lines appear to be properly artifacted. They do end up creating a paragraph with an empty object, though.</p> 
Columns	Yes	Yes. There's no special tagging for columns; the text

Feature	Tagged?	Correctly?
		within the column was properly tagged as paragraphs in the correct order.
Drawings	Yes	Yes. Tagged as images as noted above (with alt text, wrapped inside a <P> tag).
Charts	Yes	Yes. Tagged as images as noted above (with alt text, wrapped inside a <P> tag).
Symbols	No	Yes? No special tagging, they're just characters in the text string.
Equations	Yes	<p>No. Admittedly, my equation isn't a real equation and is meaningless, but it came through just as a standard paragraph and text string, with the radical symbol entirely dropped and some symbols replaced with the text "Path". It also ends with a around an empty object, just as images do.</p> 

This is the first time I've created a table in Google Docs. I'm not terribly impressed. The closest thing I can find to being able to define a header row (required, or at least strongly recommended, for best accessibility) is to turn on the "Pin header row" option, which I've done. But that makes it unclear whether the top row would be a header row if it wasn't pinned, and I had no idea if it will be tagged as a header row or not. (It was!)

For the record, though, this table has (should have) a header row. Ideally I'd like to make that first column a header column as well, but there doesn't seem to be a way to do that. Already, I'm leaning towards not recommending creating tables within Google Docs unless you only need *really* simple tables.

H3: Columns

Okay, so here's a more advanced thing: How well do multi-column layouts work? This should be interesting; I've not tried this in Google Docs before.

The idea is simple: This section of the document has a single column. I'm going to insert a continuous section break, add some text, and then a second continuous section break. For the section in which I added some text, I'll define that as two columns. Let's see what happens.

Your Honour, the courtroom is a crucible. In it we burn away irrelevancies until we are left with a pure product, the truth for all time. Now, sooner or later, this man or others like him will succeed in replicating Commander Data. And the decision you reach here today will determine how we will regard this creation of our genius. It will reveal the kind of a people we are, what he is destined to be. It will reach far beyond this courtroom and this one android. It could significantly

redefine the boundaries of personal liberty and freedom, expanding them for some, savagely curtailing them for others. Are you prepared to condemn him and all who come after him to servitude and slavery?

Your Honour, Starfleet was founded to seek out new life. Well, there it sits. Waiting. You wanted a chance to make law. Well, here it is. Make a good one.

And back to a standard single-column section. See, isn't that nifty? Google Docs doesn't put nearly enough space between the sections, so it's crowded and a little difficult to see where the two-column section ends and the single-column section begins without some other indicator, but hey, it's a thing. But that's why I put the horizontal lines in. Also, another thing to test.

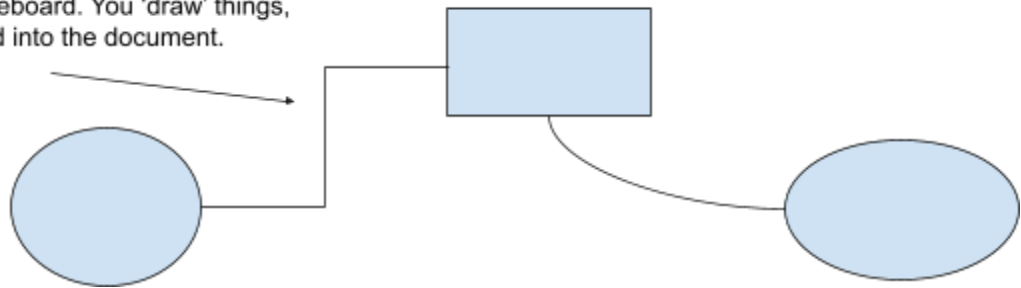
H2: Other weird stuff

Google lets you add other things to documents that I don't know much about. Let's play.

H3: Drawing

What's the difference between an image and a drawing? I dunno. Let's find out.

Oh...it's like a whiteboard. You 'draw' things, and it gets dropped into the document.

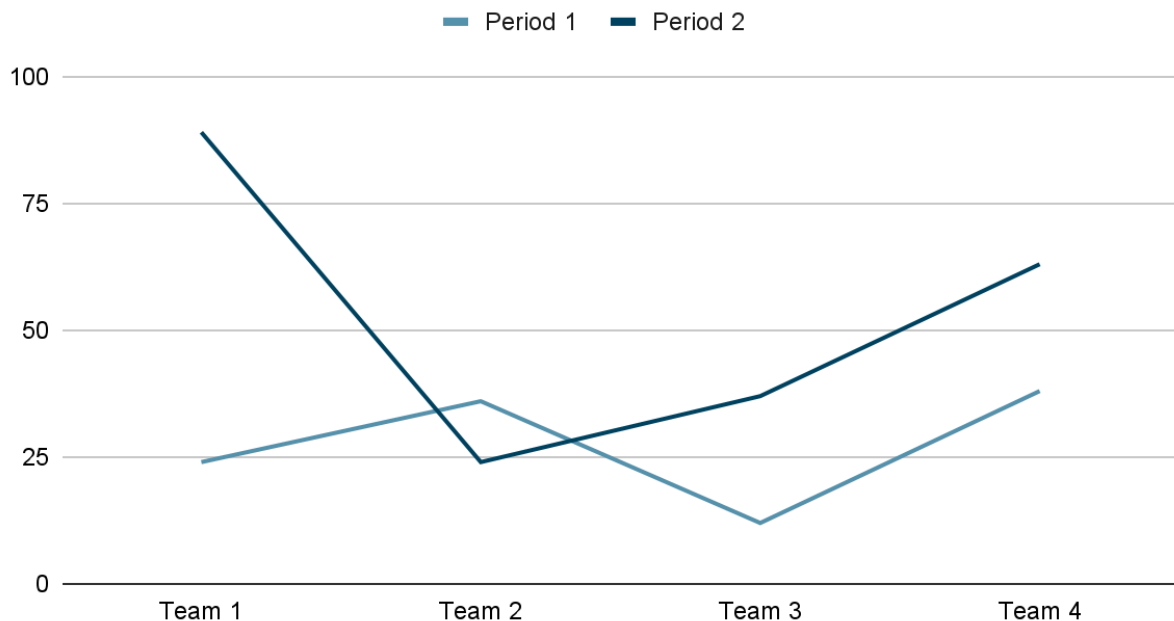


And you can even add alt text to the drawing, though it's not super-obvious how. Right-clicking on the object doesn't have an alt text option, but if you select it and then choose the vertical three-dot menu to open the "All image options" pane, the alt text field is in there.

H3: Chart

We can also insert charts.

Points scored



This is just the default chart that gets dropped in, I didn't create it or any of the data. Sports. Of course it's sports. Sigh. But again, the Image options pane does allow you to add alt text.

H3: Symbols

Let's add some symbols!

We can choose from emoji (😊 or 🙌 or many others), special characters (⇐ or ℹ or many others), or even...

H4: Equations

Oh, this should be interesting. More so if I had a better STEM background and could come up with equations to test with.

$$\Theta \div \infty\sqrt{75} \Rightarrow \neq \Delta 6$$

I'm sure that's absolutely meaningless garbage, but hey, it looks equation...ish.

H2: Wrapping this up

Okay, that's enough for now.

At this point, I generated the PDF and filled out the table above.

H2: Conclusion

Actually, this went better than I thought it would. For straightforward documents, with basic formatting properly applied, even including simple tables, Google Docs is now outputting reasonable workable accessibility tags when downloading a PDF. Not perfect, and I'm sure there are a lot of other tests and scenarios that I didn't think to test here. But it's a lot better than it was not long ago, when downloaded PDFs had no accessibility tagging at all.

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