Section 508 Compliance Checklist for Documents

Remediating accessibility issues should be guided by the impact on users with disabilities, legal risk, and the frequency and scope of the issue. Below, the checklist items are categorized as **High**, **Medium**, or **Low** priority for remediation, based on best practices and expert guidance.

High Priority Remediation

Items in this category create critical barriers to information and must be addressed first. They are essential for legal compliance and basic usability.

- **Document Structure**
  - Use correct heading hierarchy (Heading 1, 2, 3, etc.) for content navigation.
  - Ensure logical reading and tab order that matches visual order.
  - All important content should be included within the body of the document.
- **Text Alternatives**
  - Provide accurate, descriptive alt text for all meaningful images, graphics, charts, and objects. This does not apply to decorative images.
- **Tables**
  - Use header rows and proper structure; avoid merged/split cells.
  - Ensure tables have logical tagging and reading order.
- **Links**
  - Write descriptive link text (avoid "click here").
- **Color and Contrast**
  - Sufficient color contrast (minimum 4.5:1 for text). A color contrast ratio of 4.5:1 means that the lighter color is 4.5 times brighter than the darker color.
  - Ensure that information conveyed by color is also visually evident without color.
- **Language**
  - Set the document's default language in its properties.
- **Form Fields (if applicable)**
  - All form fields must be correctly labeled and accessible by screen readers.
- **Document Properties**
  - Fill out title and other metadata (author, language, subject).
- **Accessibility Checker**
  - Run and resolve all critical issues identified by Word, Adobe Acrobat, or other built-in tools.

Medium Priority Remediation

These items impact usability for some users but may not block access altogether. They are important for a better user experience and broader compliance.

- **Lists**
    - Use built-in list formatting for numbered/bulleted lists for proper tagging.
- **Bookmarks (PDFs 20+ pages)**
    - Provide bookmarks to match document headings.
- **Alt Text for Decorative Images**
    - Mark decorative images as artifacts or null alternative text.
- **Consistent Formatting**
    - Apply styles uniformly (headings, lists, tables).
- **Hyperlink Accessibility**
    - Ensure hyperlinks are active and styled accessibly.
- **Document Security**
    - Avoid document restrictions that block assistive technology.
- **Tagging for PDFs**
    - Confirm all content is tagged (no untagged objects/pages). Note: Automatic tagging may sometimes mark bolded text as a heading and needs to be reviewed to confirm it is correct.

Low Priority Remediation

Items in this group are enhancements or best practices that further improve usability and accessibility but are not typically blockers.

- **Simplified Layouts**
    - Use simple, single-column layouts where possible.
- **Table Summaries**
    - Provide summaries for complex tables.
- **Optional Doc Features**
    - Add navigation aids such as a table of contents for longer files.
- **Document File Names**
    - Use concise, descriptive filenames (avoid special characters).
- **Background Images/Watermarks**
    - Avoid or ensure they don't interfere with legibility.

- **Footnote/Endnote Accessibility**
  - Ensure notes are programmatically associated with their references.

Table: 508 Compliance Document Checklist by Priority

Priority	Checklist Components
High	Heading structure, logical order, alt text, table headers, link text, color contrast, form field labels, language, document metadata, accessibility checkers
Medium	Lists, bookmarks, decorative image handling, consistent styles, hyperlink activation, remove AT restrictions, PDF tagging
Low	Layout simplicity, table summaries, navigation aids, filename clarity, non-intrusive backgrounds, footnote accessibility

Notes

- Remediation sequence should focus on **high-impact barriers first**, especially on documents currently in use or required for public/programmatic access.
- After high and medium issues, address low-priority items as resources allow for full conformance and improved user experience.
- Re-test regularly as documents are updated—508 compliance is ongoing, not one-time.