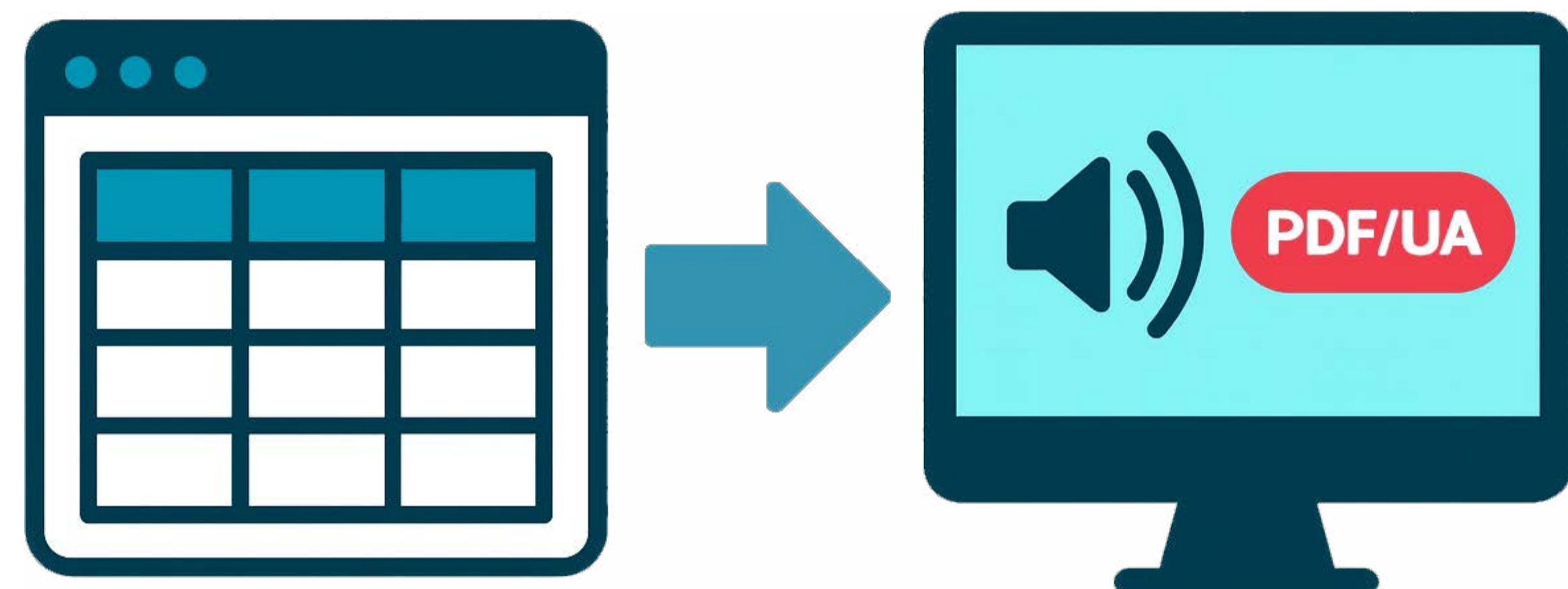


# Tagging Complex Tables for PDF/UA Compliance

*Challenges, Best Practices, and Pitfalls*

## WHY TAGGING TABLES MATTERS

**Accessibility first** – Assistive Technologies rely on correct table semantics.



Without proper tagging → screen readers don't understand relationships

## ESSENTIAL TABLE ELEMENTS

### Tags

<Table>	Defines the start of a <b>table structure</b>
<THead>	(optional) Encapsulates a set of table rows <TR> indicating the <b>header of a table</b>
<TBody>	(optional) Encapsulates a set of table rows containing <b>data / content cells</b>
<TFoot>	(optional) Encapsulates a set of table rows <TR> indicating the <b>footer of a table</b>
<TR>	Defines a <b>row</b> of cells in a table, which can include both header and data cells
<TH>	Defines a <b>header cell</b> in a table, which is header for (at least one) other cell(s)
<TD>	Indicates a cell that contains <b>data</b>
<Caption>	Brief <b>description</b> of table contents. Must be first or last child of the <Table> (optional but recommended)

### Attributes

Summary	A summary of the table's <b>purpose and structure</b> (optional, only PDF 1.7)
Short	A <b>short form</b> of the content in <TH> cells (optional, only PDF 2.0)
Scope	Defines the ' <b>direction</b> ' for which this TH cell serves as a header. Possible values are 'Column', 'Row', or 'Both'.
Headers	Define which header cell <b>relates</b> to this cell. Requires unique IDs defined on all cells. Headers (Array) lists all <b>associated cells</b> which serve as a header for this cell.

## BEST PRACTICES

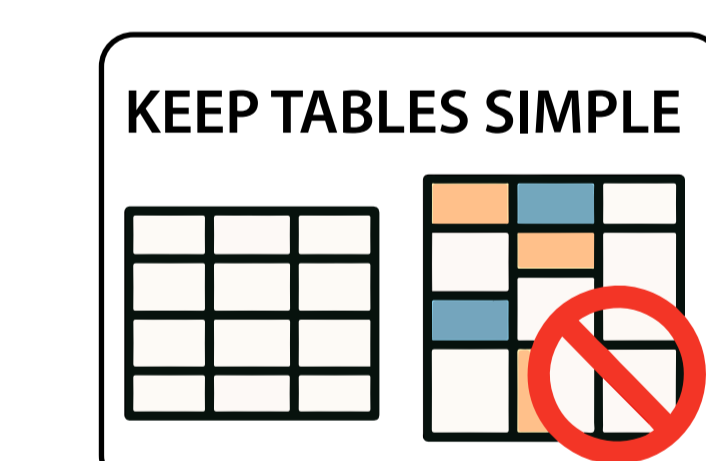
**Use <Table> tag** – where appropriate

**Use** correct table tagging  
→ Accessibility + Compliance

**Define headers** – almost all tables need headers defined. Use /Scope wherever possible and /Headers (headers+IDs) wherever needed. Cells referenced by /Headers are always <TH>.

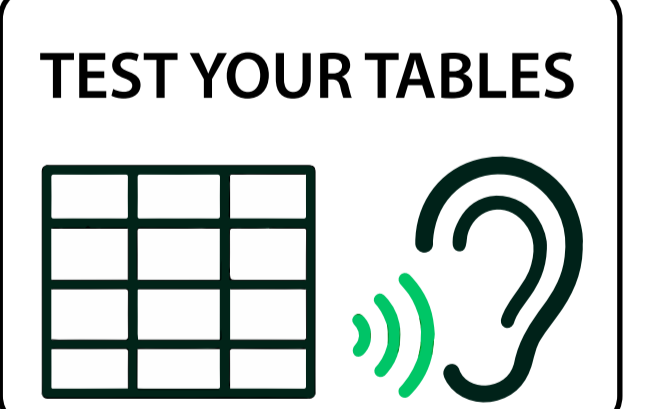
**Empty cells** – are always <TD>

**Avoid empty columns/rows** – don't use table cells to separate content visually.



**Comprehensible** – keep complexity as low as possible. Tables that are visually hard to understand also create challenges when tagging and consuming via screen readers.

**Verification** – use screen readers to test your tables and verify it is set up and read as expected.



## PITFALLS

**Layout tables** – in authoring tools tables are often used for easier alignment, but such structures must not be tagged with table tags

**Complex tables** – (multi level, nested) – can be hard to keep track of the association of headers and subheaders

**Repeating headers** – when tables spanning multiple pages, headers might be repeating on the document pages, but in tagging only a single <THead> is allowed

## CHALLENGES

**Merged cells** – extensive use of rowspan/colspan can lead to misalignment

	A	B	CD
X			
Y			
Z			

**Data matrix** – don't use color to convey information

	A	B	C
X			
Y			
Z			

Yes No Maybe

**Empty cells** – different ways to approach, AT dependent



**Tagged PDF**  
Best Practice Guide

