

Exploring the world of PDF with the  
creators of Win2PDF

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## PDF/A – the PDF file for Archiving

Posted on [February 13, 2012](#)

Since we added PDF/A support in our most recent Win2PDF 7 release, we've had some questions about this new type of PDF file. First, the basics.

### What is PDF/A?

*It's basically a subset of the PDF file format used to archive data for long-term storage (the **A** stands for **PDF/Archive**). It is an ISO standard ([ISO 19005-1:2005](#)) that does not need to depend on external programs or information to be displayed, all information is entirely self contained. It does not permit the inclusion of any executable scripts, audio, video and/or encryption. In contrast, a regular PDF file may substitute fonts (because not all fonts are saved in the original file), and may have these other types of data "linked" within the PDF file, but not "contained" within the PDF file.*

For a longer description, please check out the [Wikipedia entry on PDF/A](#).

### Why is it increasingly being used in government (and courts in particular)?

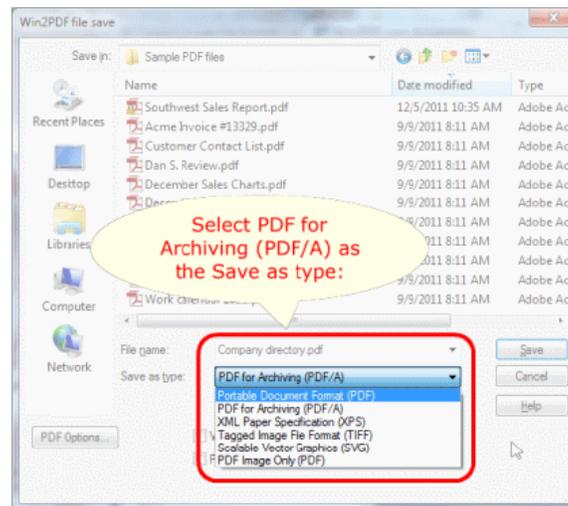
1. *It's an ISO standard file format. Regardless of what application creates the PDF/A file, all PDF/A files will conform to the same rules. Which is good for...*
2. *Archiving. Since these files are self contained buckets of information, the file will be able to be viewed in the future and look exactly as it did when it was created. If the PDF file linked to external information, there is no guarantee that information would be accessible in the future.*
3. *It's more secure and readily accessible. Again, since it doesn't allow encryption it keeps the document accessible, and since it doesn't allow external links to data sources, it prevents security exploits. And finally...*
4. *It's mandated in many situations. The Administrative Office of the US Courts [identified the potential risk](#) of not being able to reliably access archived digital files in the future in 2010. Since then, many district Courts now mandate the PDF/A standard for court documents. It is also mandated by law in several European countries.*

There's other interesting information on the [Legal Case for PDF/A](#) from the PDF Association's web site ([www.pdfa.org](http://www.pdfa.org)).

### How do I make a PDF/A file?

With Win2PDF 7, just [select "PDF for Archiving \(PDF/A\)"](#) as the Win2PDF file save type. It will still have a .pdf file extension, and it is just as easy to create a PDF/A file as it is to create a normal PDF file.

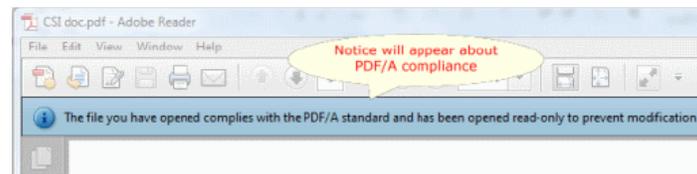
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Win2PDF file save window - Save as PDF/A

## How do I verify a PDF/A file?

First, make sure you have the [latest version of Adobe Reader](#) installed. Then, open the PDF file and you'll see a notice in Adobe Reader that states: "The file you have opened complies with the PDF/A standard and has been opened read-only to prevent modification."



PDF/A file in Adobe Reader

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## Signed, Sealed, Delivered – Digital Signatures vs. Electronic Signatures

Posted on [January 30, 2012](#)

We frequently get questions about our product (Win2PDF) and its support of digital signatures. While we have investigated adding this as a feature, there are many variations in implementation and some general misunderstandings of what "digital signatures" really are that makes it difficult to provide a universal solution to this problem.

Generally, when people speak of 'signing a document' they mean to apply some form of electronic signature to the PDF, and this can be done either simply (typically called an *electronic signature*), or in a way that is more advanced (typically called a *digital signature*). A brief explanation of both:

- An **electronic signature** is a general method of signing an electronic document, and it typically works by associating a marker (such as a .JPG representation of a person's hand-written signature) to a PDF file. An electronic signature is easy to implement, but also offers fewer protections and can be easier to forge.

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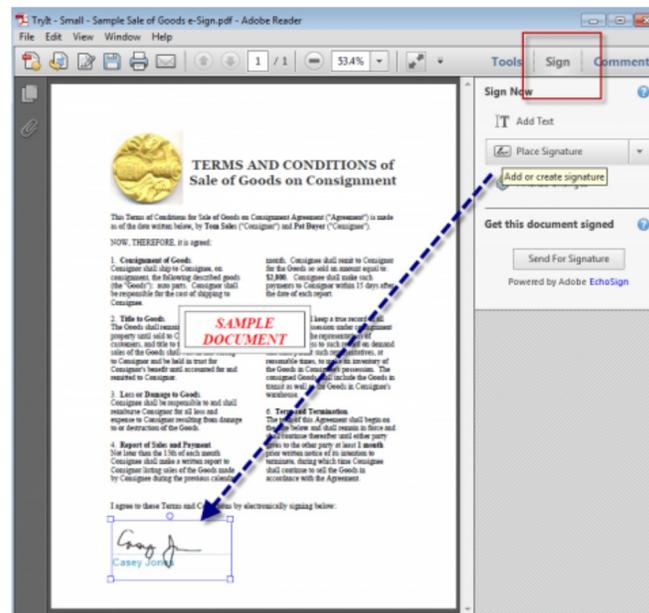
- A **digital signature** is a more sophisticated implementation of electronic signatures that associates an encrypted “fingerprint” on a PDF file. This “fingerprint” is unique to both the document and the signer and ensures the authenticity of the signer. If the PDF is changed after it is signed, it invalidates the signature. Generally, it is a more secure method of protecting the integrity of a signed PDF file.

If you're interested, more details can be found at this [FAQ about digital signatures](#).

There are several different approaches to signing PDF files, and different organizations may require different levels of sophistication in their files. A legal document sent by a lawyer, for example, may have a more stringent requirement for authentication than, say, a document that just needs an ‘sign-off’ by a manager for a particular internal process.

So, which version will you need? That will require some more investigation on the type of solution that best fits your business needs. One interesting recent development is that the latest version of Adobe Reader has announced some native support for “electronic signatures”. While this isn't an advanced digital signature solution it may suffice for many users. And because the basic signing capability is included with Adobe Reader the implementation is easy.

[Adobe acquired Echosign](#) (a company specializing in signature technology) in July of 2011, and earlier this month they announced that the [native Echosign functionality](#) was included in the latest Adobe Reader application. This integration will allow users to *electronically sign* any document in Adobe Reader (with a new “Sign” button) and then send the document out for others to sign through the [Echosign web site](#). Here's a screen shot of the new Adobe Reader interface.



Adobe Digital Signature

There are some free capabilities for a single user, but to effectively use this electronic signature capability within an organization requires a [subscription to Echosign](#).

This is an interesting development for many users, but it still may not be the right solution for all companies. Other companies offering digital signature solutions include [Identrust](#), [Applicant](#), [Arx](#), and [DocuSign](#).

Back to the discussion of incorporating the digital signature feature into Win2PDF? Well, because of the variety of solutions available, and the different requirements for different organizations, we've found it best to provide a method to integrate with other solutions instead of trying to create a solution that will fit every user's needs. We do this by providing a [mechanism to a launch an external application after creating the PDF file](#) with Win2PDF.

Actually, if you are interested in this Win2PDF mechanism, send an e-mail to [support@win2pdf.com](mailto:support@win2pdf.com) and ask for more details. We have a [Win2PDF Admin Utility](#) that can make this a little easier, but we don't have it fully documented... yet.

Signing off...

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## Welcome to PDF Blog

Posted on [January 16, 2012](#)

Welcome to first post of PDF Blog – a new blog exploring the world of PDF (Portable Document Format).

Before we get started discussing topics related to PDF, here's a few links to use to familiarize yourself with PDF...

- A [history of Adobe PDF](#)
- [Wikipedia entry on PDF](#)

Next up?... Stay tuned to find out.

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