

General FAQ relating to PDF/A and some practical examples on how to create PDF/A files or convert existing PDF files to PDF/A

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1) What is the PDF/A format all about?

PDF/A is an ISO standardised version of the PDF format that restricts features that can be used in a normal PDF, optimising it for exchange and long-term reproducibility of the file content.

2) What is the benefit of using a PDF/A file for submission compared to a normal PDF file?

As PDF/A is a long term preservation format it can simplify processes because no separate conversion of your e-dossier to an archiving format is needed. This reduces risk and protects your organisation in case of court disputes as your electronic archive will contain exactly the same files as submitted, both on industry and agency side, and long-term readability of these files is assured.

In addition, simply by saving a source document as a PDF/A file you will automatically cover most file format requirements for VNeS submissions, specifically font embedding and prohibited PDF features (encryption, JavaScript and executable file launches, external content references, dynamic content which can include audio, video, 3D content).

3) There are different PDF/A formats available – which one should I use?

The lowest PDF/A level, i.e. Level B ("basic") conformance (PDF/A-1b, PDF/A-2b or PDF/A-3b) is sufficient and the easiest to comply with. If possible PDF/A-2 or PDF/A-3 formats should be preferred as these support additional useful features like transparency in graphics (PDF/A-2b or PDF/A-3b). For hardscans PDF/A-1b is fully sufficient.

Using Level U ("Unicode") conformance in addition provides searchable Unicode text (PDF/A-2u or PDF/A-3u) which is helpful for unique identification of characters, but this Level is not possible to be met by hard-scans.

Using Level A ("Accessible", PDF/A-1a, PDF/A-2a or PDF/A-3a) covers additional structural or semantic properties like reading order and is fully acceptable when creating from electronic source documents (e.g. MS Word) however it is not possible to be met by hard-scans and very difficult to bring a PDF in conformance when converting existing PDFs.

4) How can I identify whether a file is PDF/A compliant?

To identify PDF/A files you may use the VNeS checker which identifies non PDF/A compliant files in the validation report.

An individual PDF/A document may also be identified as such through its PDF/A-specific metadata. For example in Adobe Acrobat such properties can be viewed by choosing "File > Properties", then click the Description tab, click "Additional Metadata" and finally select "Advanced" from the list on the left.

Depending on the individual configuration a PDF tool may also show a message / banner stating PDF/A compliance after opening that document.

5) How do I create a PDF/A document from off-the-shelf software like Microsoft Office?

1. Open a document that you wish to conform to PDF/A.
Note : document type can be .doc, .docx, .txt, .rtf
2. Choose File> Save As
3. The Save As Window appears, choose PDF from the Save As type list at the bottom of the window.
4. Click on Options
5. Check off under PDF Options, "ISO 9005-1 compliant (PDF/A)", click on OK
6. Click on Save

6) How do I create a PDF/A file from OpenOffice/LibreOffice?

1. Open a document that you wish to conform to PDF/A.
Note : document type can be .odt, .ods, .odp
2. Choose File> Export as PDF
3. The PDF Options Window appears, choose PDF from the Save As type list at the bottom of the window.
4. Check off under General tab, "ISO 9005-1 compliant (PDF/A)"
5. Click on Export

7) How do I convert an existing PDF file to a PDF/A file with a PDF writer software? (Example: Adobe Acrobat Pro (IX or higher))

1. Open a PDF file that you wish to conform to PDF/A
2. Choose File> Save As
Note : You can also choose File> Save As> More Options> PDF/A
3. The Save As Window appears, choose PDF/A from the Save As type list at the bottom of the window.
4. Choose File> Save As> More Options> PDF/A
5. The PDF/A version can be set under "settings"
6. Click on Save
Note : If successful, a banner will appear stating that the file is in compliance with PDF/A