

---

# Chapter 1. What is QPDF?

QPDF is a program that does structural, content-preserving transformations on PDF files. It could have been called something like *pdf-to-pdf*. It also provides many useful capabilities to developers of PDF-producing software or for people who just want to look at the innards of a PDF file to learn more about how they work.

With QPDF, it is possible to copy objects from one PDF file into another and to manipulate the list of pages in a PDF file. This makes it possible to merge and split PDF files. The QPDF library also makes it possible for you to create PDF files from scratch. In this mode, you are responsible for supplying all the contents of the file, while the QPDF library takes care off all the syntactical representation of the objects, creation of cross references tables and, if you use them, object streams, encryption, linearization, and other syntactic details. You are still responsible for generating PDF content on your own.

QPDF has been designed with very few external dependencies, and it is intentionally very lightweight. QPDF is *not* a PDF content creation library, a PDF viewer, or a program capable of converting PDF into other formats. In particular, QPDF knows nothing about the semantics of PDF content streams. If you are looking for something that can do that, you should look elsewhere. However, once you have a valid PDF file, QPDF can be used to transform that file in ways perhaps your original PDF creation can't handle. For example, many programs generate simple PDF files but can't password-protect them, web-optimize them, or perform other transformations of that type.