

## Basic Computer Skills

### What is a PDF File?



# What is a PDF file?

**Adobe PDF** files—short for **portable document format** files—are one of the most commonly used file types today. If you've ever downloaded a printable form or document from the Web, such as an **IRS tax form**, there's a good chance it was a PDF file. Whenever you see a file that ends with **.pdf**, that means it's a PDF file.

## Why use PDF files?

Let's say you create a newsletter in Microsoft Word and share it as a **.docx file**, which is the default file format for Word documents. Unless everyone has Microsoft Word installed on their computers, there's no guarantee that they would be able to open and view the newsletter. And because Word documents are meant to be edited, there's a chance that some of the formatting and text in your document may be shifted around.

By contrast, PDF files are primarily meant for **viewing, not editing**. One reason they're so popular is that PDFs can **preserve document formatting**, which makes them more shareable and helps them to look the same on any device. Sharing the newsletter as a **PDF file** would help ensure everyone is able to view it as you intended.

## Opening PDF files

Opening and viewing a PDF file is pretty simple. Most modern web browsers will open PDF files **directly in your browser window** instead of downloading them to your computer. If your browser can't do this, it should prompt you to download the file instead. Try clicking [this link](#) to see how it works on your computer.

If you need to view a PDF file just once, it's usually easiest to open it in your web browser. If you need to access the PDF later, you'll want to save a copy to your computer. This process will vary depending on your web browser, but in the example below the **Save PDF button** can be found near the upper-right corner.

2015 Form 1040 1 / 2

Form **1040** Department of the Treasury—Internal Revenue Service (99) **2015** U.S. Individual Income Tax Return OMB No. 1545-0074 IRS Use Only—Do not write or staple in this space.

For the year Jan. 1–Dec. 31, 2015, or other tax year beginning , 2015, ending , 20

Your first name and initial Last name Your social security number

If a joint return, spouse's first name and initial Last name Spouse's social security number

Home address (number and street). If you have a P.O. box, see instructions. Apt. no. Make sure the SSN(s) above and on line 6c are correct.

City, town or post office, state, and ZIP code. If you have a foreign address, also complete spaces below (see instructions).

Foreign country name Foreign province/state/country Foreign postal code

**Filing Status** 1 ☐ Single 4 ☐ Head of household (with qualifying person). (See instructions.) If the qualifying person is a child but not your dependent, enter this child's name here. 2 ☐ Married filing jointly (even if only one had income) 3 ☐ Married filing separately. Enter spouse's SSN above and full name here. 5 ☐ Qualifying widow(er) with dependent child

Check only one box.

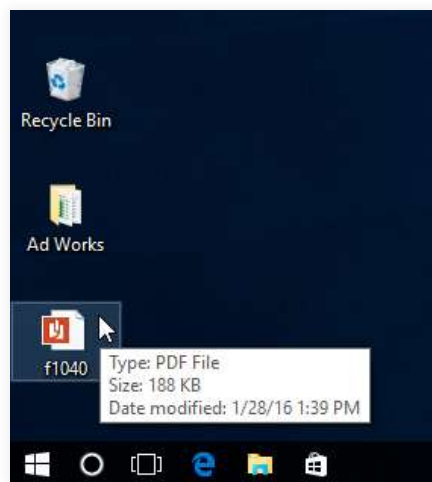
**Exemptions** 6a ☐ Yourself. If someone can claim you as a dependent, do not check box 6a. b ☐ Spouse

**Dependents:** (1) First name Last name (2) Dependent's social security number (3) Dependent's relationship to you (4) ☐ If child under age 17 qualifying for child tax credit (see instructions)

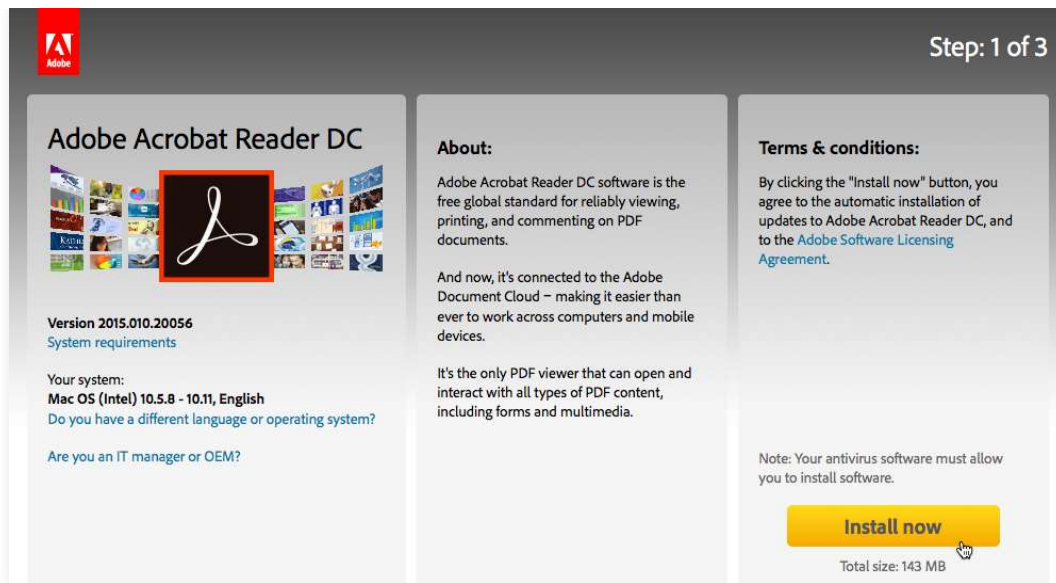
If more than four dependents, see instructions and check here ☐

**Income** 7 Wages, salaries, tips, etc. Attach Form(s) W-2 7 8a Taxable interest. Attach Schedule B if required 8a 8b Tax-exempt interest. Do not include on line 8a 8b

If the PDF file is already on your computer, you can simply **double-click to open it** with the default PDF application.

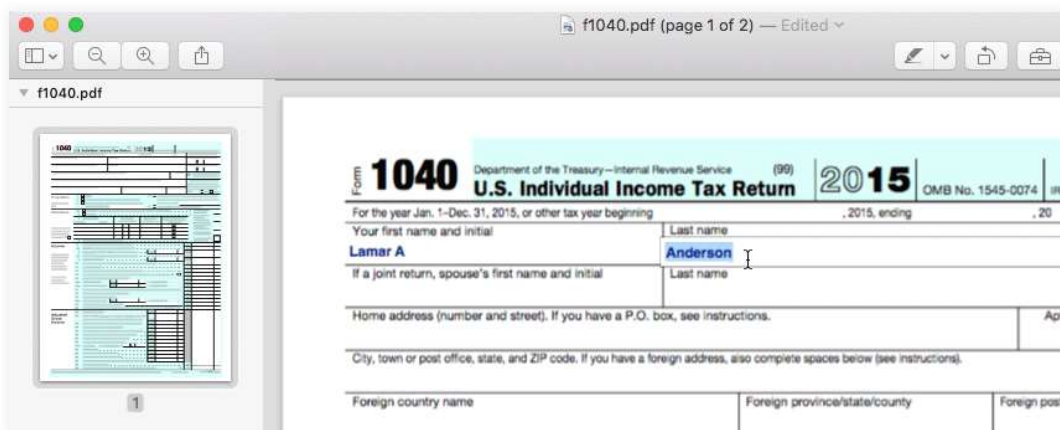


If your computer uses Windows 7 or earlier, you may need to download a free PDF viewer (such as **Adobe Reader**) before you can view PDF files.



## Editing PDF files

As we mentioned earlier, PDFs are primarily meant for viewing, not editing. However, there may be times when you encounter a PDF that allows you to enter certain information, like name and address. These PDFs use a special feature called **form fields**, which allow you to type new information into the document and save your changes. For example, [this PDF](#) contains several form fields for entering your name, address, and other information.

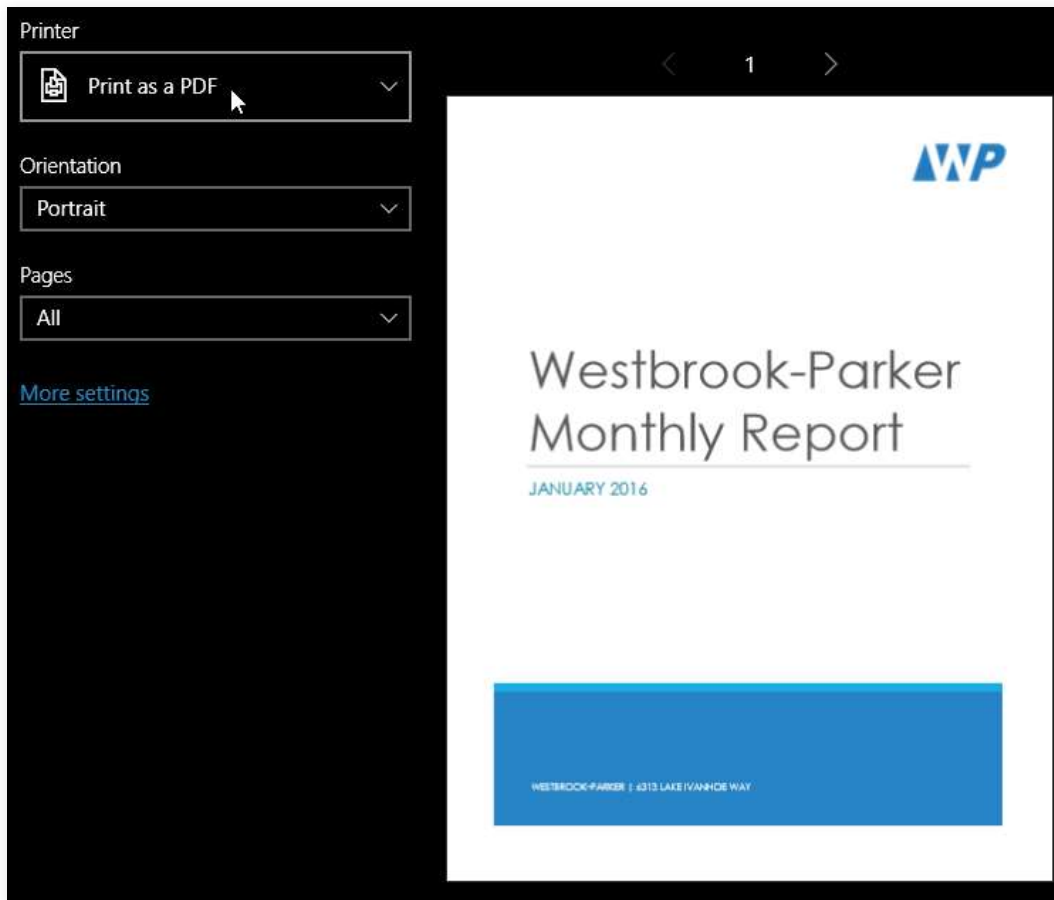


This feature is not supported in all web browsers, so you may need to download the PDF before you can use form fields to add your information.

There may also be times when you want to make **small edits** to PDF files, like adding a comment or highlighting text. To learn more about editing PDF files, check out our lesson on how to [edit and merge PDFs](#).

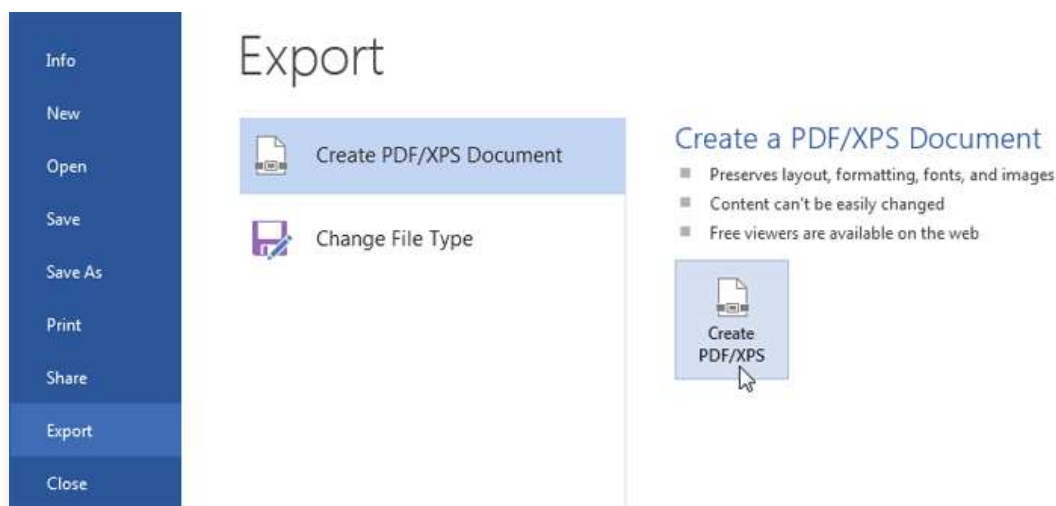
## Creating PDF files

There are several ways to create PDF files, but the method will largely depend on the device you're using. For example, if you're using Windows 10 you can go to the **Print dialog box**, then **select PDF from the list of printers** at the top. This allows you to create a PDF of anything you would normally be able to print, including documents, emails, and webpages.

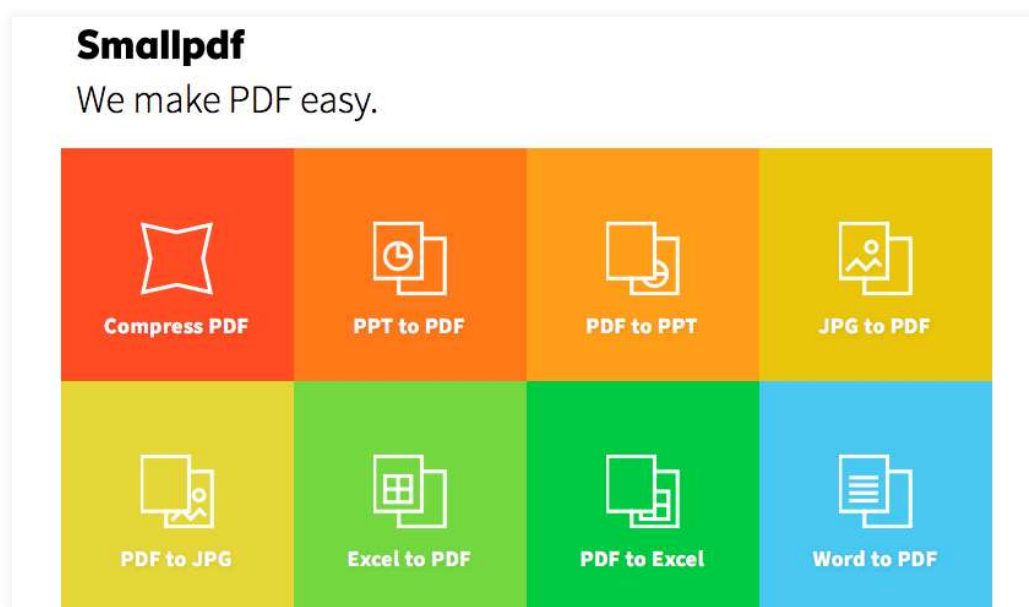


If you're on a Mac, the Print dialog box has a PDF menu that allows you to save a file as a PDF.

If your computer has Windows 8 or earlier, you have a few options. The simplest method is to use software that supports a **PDF export**, such as Microsoft Office or Google Chrome.



Another option is to use a **PDF converter** like [Smallpdf](#), which is a free app that runs in your web browser. Smallpdf can convert various file types—such as Microsoft Office documents—into a PDF format.



OK, those are the basics of PDF files!