Homeland Security Investigations
National Security Investigations Division
Student and Exchange Visitor Program

U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

Guidelines for Submission of PDF Documents to the Student and Exchange Visitor Program

Contents

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Purpose

All documents submitted to the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) should be in a Portable Document Format (PDF). This guide provides recommendations for creating digital documents in PDF for submission to SEVP. Following these guidelines will help ensure the quality of submitted documents to prevent delays in processing a petition.

At a Glance: SEVP Specifications for PDF Documents

If you are familiar with how to create a PDF for submission but want to ensure you know the proper specifications for images, files and emails sent to SEVP, please refer to the following:

— All images in a PDF must be "Print Quality" i.e., 220 to 300 PPI (Pixels Per Inch).
   More information found in: Printing to or Saving as a PDF.

— All scanned images must have a resolution of 300 PPI.
   More information found in: Scanning to PDF.

— The maximum size for a single file is 50 MB.
   More information found in: File Size.

— All documents should follow the below naming convention and be no more than 120 characters:
   School Name - School Code - Document Type - Document Date.pdf
   Please note: Document Dates should follow the MM.DD.YYYY format.
   More information found in: File Names.

— All encrypted zip files must use AES 128-bit or stronger encryption.
   More information found in: Privacy Protection.

Background

The PDF format is an international standard (ISO 32000-1) for creating, viewing and sharing electronic documents across different computer platforms and environments. PDF documents can consist of text and images, as well as other media. In addition, multiple PDF documents can be combined into a single PDF document.

The creation of a PDF document can follow one of two paths:

— Creating ("Printing to" / "Saving As") directly from a word processor or other digital publishing tool.
— Scanning physical documents to PDF.

Printing to or Saving as a PDF

For a document created in a word processor, like Microsoft Word (most common) or another digital publishing tool, the preferred method of creating a PDF is to "Print" directly to a PDF file from within that application. In order to do this, the application must have the capability to print to PDF. Different applications may have multiple ways of accomplishing this action, two examples are "Print to PDF" and "Save as Adobe PDF."

Note: Anytime you "Print to PDF," "Save as Adobe PDF," or otherwise convert a file to PDF or scan a document to PDF, it is vital that you review the document to ensure that it captured all of the necessary information.

Prepare the Document

To prepare for printing to or saving as PDF, compress all images in the document for "Print" quality. This is typically 220 to 300 PPI, depending on the application's presets. Microsoft Office 2007 and 2010 generally default to these parameters. If you are unfamiliar with this procedure, please see the following:
How To: Compress Images

When "Printing to" or "Saving as PDF," embed all fonts used in the document. Some applications may not present this as an option to the user, but may instead embed fonts automatically. If you are unfamiliar with this procedure, please see the following:
How To: Embed Fonts
Note: Some font licenses prohibit embedding the font in a PDF. SEVP recommends using only those fonts that allow embedding in PDFs.

Printing to or Saving as PDF

Once you prepare the document, you can now "Print to" or "Save as a PDF." If you are unfamiliar with this procedure, please see the following:
How To: Save as Adobe PDF from Microsoft Office 2007
How To: Save as Adobe PDF using Microsoft Office 2010 and 2013
How To: Print to PDF from a Microsoft Office Document
Note: Anytime you "Print to," "Save As" or otherwise convert a document, please be sure to name your documents as outlined by this document.

Scanning to PDF

Scanning a paper document creates images of the document's pages. For documents that are only available in paper format, scan and save the document as a PDF document using any modern document scanner.

Prepare the Document

To prepare the document for scanning, do the following:
- Remove any binding (staples, paper clips, book binding, etc.).
- Unfold any pages that are creased or folded.
- Ensure that pages are in the proper order, proper orientation and facing the front of the document.
- Mend torn pages with clear, non-glossy tape.

Scan the Document

Document Resolution

The required resolution for scanned documents submitted to SEVP is 300 PPI.

Note: Specific settings, like PPI, are dependent on the particular scanning software installed on your scanner. If you have questions as to what the default settings are on your scanner or how to change them, you will have to research or contact the manufacturer's technical support for your specific scanner.

Document Color

There are three options for color when scanning:
- **Bi-tonal (black and white)**: This option produces high-contrast black and white images. SEVP recommends bi-tonal for text documents.
- **Grayscale:** This option produces images with multiple shades of gray. Grayscale is suited to text documents that also contain photographs or other graphics.
- **Color:** This option produces full-color images, but also produces the largest file size. Color is best suited to documents that convey information with color.

Two-Sided Documents

If any page in the document has information on two sides, be sure to capture both sides during the scanning process.

Optical Character Recognition

Performing optical character recognition on scanned documents is not required for submitting PDF documents to SEVP.

Additional Guidance

File Size

The maximum size for a document submitted to SEVP is 50 MB. The maximum total email attachment size is also 50 MB. When sending multiple files that total over 50 MB in size, send the attachments using multiple emails that are each 50 MB or less.

File Names

All scanned documents should be named in accordance with the following naming convention:

School Name - School Code - Document Type - Document Date.pdf

Parts of the Naming Convention

— **School Name:** This is the name of the institution. If the school name is not present enter "unknown" in its place. This is a required entry.

— **School Code:** This is a unique code assigned to each school in the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS); see the below example for the format. If a school code is not present enter "unknown" in its place. This is a required entry.

— **Document Type:** This is the type of form, evidentiary document or other document. For a list of document types, please reference the Initial Form I-17 Frequently Asked Question page on ICE.gov, under the "Evidence for Certification" tab.

— **Document Date:** This is the most recent date identified on the document being transmitted (i.e., school catalogue, Form I-20, "Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student Status" or Form I-515A, "Notice to Student or Exchange Visitor"). If this is unknown, use the earliest date in the document. Format the date as MM.DD.YYYY. For example: 03.21.2010 for March 21, 2010. This is a required entry.

Note: File names should be no more than 120 characters (including the .pdf extension).

Example
The file name of a document submitted by XYZ University may look like this:
XYZ University - ZYX123X00000000 - National Accreditation - 04.01.2008.pdf

Exception
If the document does not contain a school code, the file name could look like this:
XYZ University - unknown - Form I-17 - 04.01.2008.pdf

PDF vs. PDF/A

SEVP will accept either of the following types of PDF documents:

PDF (or "full function PDF")

The PDF file standard (ISO 32000-1) is designed to keep documents portable, but it allows for some elements that are problematic for true portability and records management. When creating a PDF document for SEVP, please do not include interactive form fields (fields which allow entry of text), embedded media (audio, video or animation), annotations or encryption. Also, please embed all fonts used in the document.
Note: This type of PDF document can be edited with a PDF editing tool.

PDF/A (or "PDF for Archive")

The PDF/A file standard (ISO 19005-1) is a special type of PDF document that allows for greater portability and better long-term archival. PDF/A does not allow encryption,

embedded media (audio, video or animation), fonts that are not embedded, transparent objects or layers, or certain types of annotations and form elements.
Note: A document created as a PDF/A cannot be edited without first being converted to PDF.

Privacy Protection

Some documents may contain sensitive information such as Personally Identifiable Information (i.e., PII), which should remain private. Sensitive information that should be protected includes (but is not limited to) the following:
— Social Security numbers and Taxpayer Identification (ID) numbers.
— Any other ID numbers (e.g., passport numbers, driver's license numbers,).
— Birthdates.
— Contact information (e.g., phone numbers, addresses, emails,).
— Financial information.
— Certain classes of admission (including trafficking victim, crime victim, etc.).

SEVP recommends protecting privacy information by zipping sensitive files and encrypting the resulting zip archive with a password. Please use AES 128-bit or stronger encryption. A zip archive can contain one or more files. When encrypting a zip archive, a password is required:
— Provide the password to SEVP in a separate email.

If you are unfamiliar with this procedure, please see the following:
How To: Zip and Encrypt a Folder with WinZip
Note: Please do not encrypt or password-protect the PDF file itself.