



Stump the PC Club is a free tech-advice column written by members of the North Orange County Computer Club, which has been in existence since 1976. Visit the club's site at nocc.org.

QUESTION: I frequently e-mail PDF's to people but I occasionally want to be able to convert them to Microsoft Word so I can modify them and convert them back to PDF prior to sending them.

PC CLUB: A PDF file (Portable Document Format) is a very popular file format for exchanging information freely between PC platforms such as Windows and Mac machines. I say freely since anyone with a PC can download and install the free Adobe Reader from <http://get.adobe.com/reader/>. Make sure you uncheck any other optional downloads such as the Google Toolbar option unless you want to install them also.

The premiere program for working with PDFs is Adobe Acrobat which is quite pricey and starts at \$299. Acrobat can convert from PDF to Word and back again but it comes at quite a price. You can even make minor edits directly to the PDF eliminating the need for conversion. However, there are several less expensive alternatives to this and some are free.

If you want to edit a PDF directly without spending \$299, there are several applications including Foxit PDF Editor available at <http://www.foxitsoftware.com/pdf/editor/> for \$99 and NitroPDF Editor available at <http://www.nitropdf.com/professional/edit-pdf.htm> for \$99. Both are available as a trial version. I've tried them both and rate NitroPDF slightly better.

What's the best way to convert a PDF to a Word document without spending a lot of money? One way is to use a free service at <http://www.pdfonline.com/pdf2word/index.asp>. You just click the Browse button to locate your PDF and click the Upload and Convert button. A message will show up informing you that it is converting. It could take several minutes, especially for a large document containing a lot of graphics. Another site for converting from PDF to Word is <http://www.pdf2word.com>. I'd try both sites and pick the best results.

When it's done converting you will see a link stating "Please right-click here to download the Word file". The downloaded file may be in a compressed Zip file format. To extract the Word document just right click the file and choose Extract. Another option is to use a Zip manager such as the free 7_Zip program available at www.7-zip.org/.

All PDFs are not created equal. For example, some programs such as Adobe Acrobat can work with a scanner and have documents scanned into it. The resulting PDF can be text, graphic images or a combination depending on how it was scanned. The point of this is if the document was scanned as just images, when converted to Word the result will be a document containing just images.

If you should want to convert a Word document back to PDF you can download and install the free PrimoPDF program from www.primopdf.com/index.aspx. Another site with free software for working with PDFs is www.pdf995.com/. They offer a suite of programs with many features. You'll most likely see some ads when you use the free software but you can upgrade to ad-free software for a modest price. Bear in mind that none of these solutions compares to the Adobe Acrobat software but they can be a good alternative. Another Web site to check out is <http://www.freepdfconvert.com/>.

Only a PDF document containing text can be converted to a Word document that is editable. It's often difficult to tell in advance what the results of a converted document will be. Sometimes you just have to experiment. Converting from one format to another is a combination of art and science. For more information see <http://bit.ly/msconvert>.

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