Everything you wanted to know about PDF files
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 *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 noccc.org. And don't forget to stop by the Gadgetress' home for the PC Club, at ocregister.com/link/pcclub, to find out how to ask a question and read past answers.*

Hello readers.

I wanted to try something different today. Questions on PDF's come up from time to time and many are the same. So I'm devoting a column to this subject to answer the questions and discuss the benefits of using this file format. One of the key benefits of PDF' files is that it's a simple way for people — Mac and PC users, Firefox and Internet Explorer fans — to view and share the same file. But more on this below.

Here are a few of the questions:

- What are PDF's and why do people send them to me?
- How can I use them?
- Can I create PDF's?
- Which programs do I need to install on my PC if any and what do they cost?

But first some definitions:

PDF: Portable Document Format. A file that can be read by both PCs and Macs. PDF files retain their formatting so they look and print exactly as they were created, regardless of the PC being used.

Adobe: The company that created the PDF format.

Adobe Reader: Free software that enables anyone to view and print PDF's.

Adobe Acrobat: Not to be confused with Adobe Reader, this commercial software package allows you to create your own PDF's as well as read them. Adobe Acrobat can convert a word processing or desktop publishing file, and many other file types, into a PDF.

To get the most out of PDF's, you'll need software to both read them and to create them. One program, Adobe Acrobat, will do it all for $449. This is a little pricey for most of us but there is a free alternative if you don't mind using two software products. You can use the free Adobe Reader, available on Adobe's site, to read PDF's and then use free PrimoPDF creator, available at www.primopdf.com, to create them. Of course you will not have as extensive a feature set compared to Adobe Acrobat but you will have more than enough if you are the average user.

When you install either Acrobat or PrimoPDF software, it installs an option to print to a PDF file. This doesn't mean your computer will print out an a PDF file on the printer. Rather, this is a software conversion. Files are converted to the Adobe format for easier sharing online — as long as others have installed the free Adobe Reader. Make sure after you install PrimoPDF that your default printer is set to the one you want.

Here are a few examples of what you can do with PDF's:

- Print a Word document to PDF. This allows anyone with a Windows PC or Mac to open it and read it regardless of the software installed on their system.
- Save a web page or receipt that you are viewing in the browser to PDF for archiving.
- Print a group of pictures to a PDF to create a slide show. With XP you can use the Task Pane to do this and with Vista you can open the Photo Gallery to print several photos.

There are several uses for the resulting PDF as follows:

- Attach it to an e-mail. Anyone can open the PDF and print any portion of it.
- The PDF can be opened in Photoshop Elements and the pictures can be extracted
- You can e-mail many pictures in a single PDF file
- You or your recipients can view the pictures as a slide show in the PDF. The view can be changed to Full Screen mode and the Page Up and Page Down keys will allow you to navigate through the pictures.

- Ed Schwartz, NOCCC member. View his blog at www.edwardns.com/blog.