



Making pdf Files for Fellowship Applications

There are tricky parts to this. Try the process early. Software snags will not be reasons for extending application deadlines.

Whenever possible, don't scan paper into pdf file; use software to turn electronic documents into pdf files. Scanned files become images, which are large files that are unwieldy to read. Converted electronic documents are much smaller files, and generally much easier to use.

If you are a Mac user, you may have a pdf creator built into the operating system software. It works through the print menu, so any file that can be printed can be printed as a pdf file.

If you don't have a built-in pdf creator, there are two basic options:

Option 1: Use Adobe Acrobat

The full Adobe Acrobat program (not the Acrobat Reader) can turn just about any kind of file into a pdf document. You can also use it to merge several pdf files into one large one, and control the order in which the component files are put together.

You can use Adobe Acrobat for free at many computing centers, such as the one in Cox Hall.

Acrobat also allows you to reduce the file size:

- Document > Reduce File Size will automatically reduce the size
- Advanced > PDF Optimizer will allow you to control how the file size is reduced in some detail – you can manipulate image resolution, font inclusion, and other variables.

Option 2: Download and use free pdf creator software

Among the free programs are...

- PDF Creator from SourceForge.net (<http://sourceforge.net/projects/pdfcreator/>)
- PrimoPDF (<http://www.primopdf.com/>)
- doPDF (<http://www.dopdf.com/>)
- CutePDF (<http://www.cutepdf.com/Products/CutePDF/writer.asp>)

There are many more programs out there. Their levels of functionality and reliability vary a great deal, but just about any one of them should be able to handle the simple tasks required for fellowship applications. I have seen PDF Creator endorsed by people with computer savvy, but have never used any of them myself.

Scan Responsibly!

There may be some items you simply have to scan – transcripts and teaching evaluations, for example. If you do scan, you will face two issues: getting the scanned items into pdf format, and managing the size of the resulting file(s).

Getting to pdf format:

- Many scanners allow you to scan directly to pdf.

- If you can't scan directly to pdf, then scan to a file format that your pdf creation software can convert into pdf. Many pdf creation programs – including Adobe Acrobat – can convert any file format that can be printed, because they can work through the print menu of whatever program you use to open the scanned file.
- If you find yourself in file incompatibility purgatory, there are roundabout paths: first print your file to Microsoft Imagewriter, then convert the resulting file; or paste your scanned file into a Word document, then convert the Word document.

Managing file size:

- Use scanner settings to control the resolution of your scanned image – the larger your dpi (dots per inch), the larger the file. 1200 dpi is too much, 600 dpi is plenty, and 300 dpi is usually enough (it depends a little on the nature of the scanned document).
- Use scanner settings to control the size of the scanned image – your image should be 8.5 x 11, or letter size.
- Note that resolution and image size are different settings: resolution determines how many distinct points per inch are used to create an image, and image size determines how many inches the image measures. Together, the two settings determine the size of a file.
- Don't go by what you see. Even if you open a file and it shows up as an 8.5 x 11 page on your screen, check the resolution and image size. Sometimes the program you open the file in displays it in a standard page size by default, even if the underlying image is much larger.
- Use scanner settings to scan black-and-white text. If the scanner is set to scan a color image – even if the only colors are black text and white background – that file will be larger than if you set it on black-and-white. If the scanner is set to scan a photo, the image will be larger than if it is set to produce a text document.
- Use the pdf software to reduce the size of the resulting file – Adobe Acrobat, at least, allows you to do that (see above).

A special note on transcripts:

Transcripts present a special problem because they are usually printed on special paper with extensive background watermarking. Scanning tends to reduce the contrast between text and watermark, and produce an image where text and background blend together.

To avoid this problem, experiment with scanner settings – photo vs text document, color vs black-and-white, high versus low contrast – to see which setting produces the most readable result. In my experience, scanning in black-and-white, with a text document setting and at higher than normal contrast produces the most readable result. But scanners differ, so your best bet is to try several different ways.

Remember that while most reviewers will read your file on screen, some may print it, most likely on a black-and-white printer. The file you submit should work well both ways.

If you learn things that may be helpful to others, contact me at ulf.nilsson@emory.edu and I will include them in this document.