

# When to use PDFs

## When *not* to use PDFs

- If the information is intended to be read online
- If another content type could be used instead, i.e. a normal HTML web-page

## When to use PDFs

- When a document needs to be downloaded, read offline or printed
- If a document is more than 5 pages long. But consider whether it could be broken down into smaller sections and presented as HTML
- When attaching a document to an email
- As an additional alternative to online content - e.g. this set of tutorials could also be provided as a single PDF document
- When formatting needs to be preserved - e.g. a PowerPoint presentation
- Instead of Microsoft Office documents. But HTML is better most of the time
- See [the definitive list of when to use PDFs](#) by Joe Clark

## What else to include with your PDF document

- An online HTML version or summary of the document
- A link to download Adobe Acrobat Reader
- A PDF icon to indicate that it is a PDF document
- (see an example on the BBC website)

## See also

- [Forms in CMS](#)
- [Uploading a PDF document and linking to it](#)
- [Microsoft Office and PDF Document Guidelines](#)
- [Avoid PDF for on-screen reading \(Jakob Nielsen\)](#)
- [Facts and opinions about PDF accessibility \(Joe Clark\)](#)

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