

Dashboarding Word: Revealing the Right Tools for the Write Job Right Now

Tip: Converting DOC to DOCX

Introduction

Many HHS documents were created last decade. Some were even created last millennium. Although they have been revised repeatedly over the years, many of these documents still have one of their original traits: The file format.

How do I know that my document is in the old file format?

If you see a document with an extension of .DOC, that document is still using the format of Microsoft Word 2003 and earlier. Many of the features of more recent versions of Word, including some that make it easier to make the document accessible, cannot be used in DOC files. When you are given a DOC file to revise, the first thing you should do is convert it to the more modern file format, DOCX.

I have a question. We know how to rename a document and change its file extension in Windows Explorer. Is that all we need to do?

Adding an "X" to the filename isn't enough. Simply changing the extension will not affect the underlining features of a Word document that make it accessible and easier to maintain. But don't sweat it, converting your document can be easily done in Microsoft Word.

Extensions are not shown in my Windows Explorer. How do I know if it's DOC or DOCX?

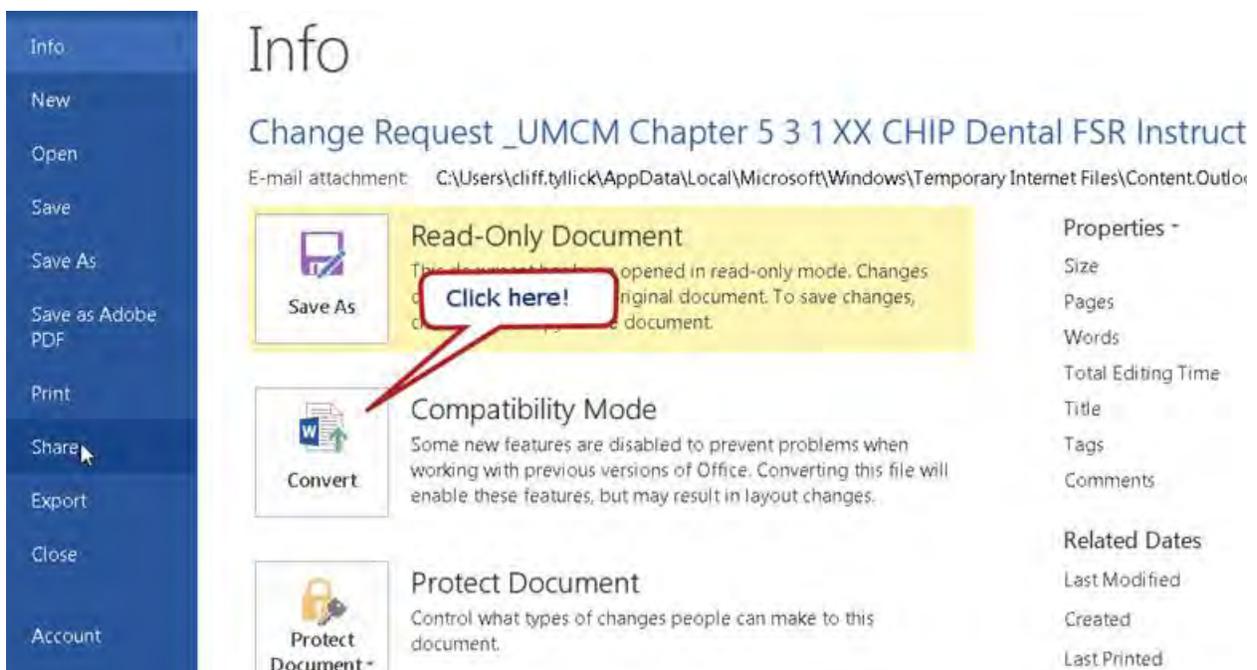
If you don't see the file extension or didn't notice the file extension before you opened the document, select the File tab in the ribbon and look at the top of the document window. You may see the entire filename including the extension. If it's an old DOC file, you will see "Compatibility Mode" in brackets following the filename.



Now that I know I'm dealing with an ancient file type, how do I convert it?

Converting your document to the new format is easy:

1. Just in case, save a backup copy of the file in its original format. I usually create a backup folder in my current folder and copy and paste the file there.
2. Open the document to convert in Microsoft Word.
3. Select the **File** tab from the ribbon.
4. Select the **Convert** button:



5. Microsoft warns us that there might be layout changes. When you click the Convert button, you'll get a warning again in a pop-up message. Just click "OK."
6. Save the file. You now have a document in the new format!

I'm a little freaked out about that warning message. We can't change the layout. What changes should I expect to see?

The only changes we've seen in our extensive testing are in the position of text boxes. If the text boxes are repositioned, you'll need to fix them one text box at a time, but it's easy to find each one and the payback is greater than the cost. In fact, by using styles we can often find a way to avoid using text boxes at all.

Text boxes are very difficult for persons using assistive technology. Screen readers often get "trapped" inside text boxes making it very difficult to read the entire document. It's better for everyone to use **Styles** to format your text rather than text boxes.

My team is using old Word templates. Do I need to convert those as well?

If you are still using any templates in the old format with the DOT extension, they should be converted to DOTX. The process for converting templates is the same. Select the Convert button from the File tab.

Conclusion

Now that we've covered the benefits of using templates, themes, and styles, use them to their full potential by converting all your old documents to new documents. When properly using templates, themes, and styles with the DOCX format, your documents will be easier to read and more accessible for everyone.