

Creating Searchable PDFs

All you need to know about Searchable PDF Files

A. What Is a Searchable PDF?

A searchable PDF file shares two characteristics with a word processor file:

1. You can use the search feature of the application to find words, phrases, or other strings of text and/or characters and
2. You can highlight text in the document, copy it, and paste that text elsewhere.

So, searchable PDF file contains individual letters, numbers, and other characters just like a word processor file.

Now, try to search for or highlight text on a document that you, or someone else scanned. Neither is possible. That is because the scanning process merely takes a picture of the document that you scanned so you see only pictures of words.

To recap, a searchable PDF file consists of actual text and perhaps some images while a non-searchable scanned PDF file consists of a picture of text and possibly some images.

B. How to Create Searchable PDF Files

There are at least four ways to create searchable PDF files for eFiling:

1. **Upload your word processor documents directly to FileTime** – FileTime contains PDF converters. You simply upload your word processor file at the appropriate time during the eFiling process and they are automatically converted to searchable PDF files for you. And, No, you do not need to physically sign those pleadings, motions, etc., so that is why you are able to directly upload your word processor files.
2. **Print PDFs from your word processor** - Recent versions of Corel WordPerfect and Microsoft Word contain features that enable you to output your word processor files directly into PDF files. Those outputted files are searchable PDFs.
3. **Use Adobe Acrobat Standard or Professional versions to create searchable PDF files** - This feature is not available in the free Adobe Acrobat Reader program – you have to spend some money to enjoy this feature. When you install either Acrobat Standard or Professional on your computer you also install PDF Distiller that lurks in the background and displays as another print option. To create a searchable PDF file with Distiller, open your word processor file, select **Print**, choose **Adobe PDF or Microsoft print to PDF** as the printer option, and click Print. The searchable PDF file will be saved to the location you designate.

You can use a search engine to search the Internet for “PDF converter” and find many alternatives to Adobe Acrobat. However, Acrobat Standard and Professional have so many other must-have features that it really is worth the investment. This is particularly true if you will handle appellate cases. For appellate work you’re going to want and/or need to combine PDF files, add bookmarks and hyperlinks to PDF files – all of which are simple in Acrobat.

Finally, you can bates stamp, redact, and more with Acrobat Standard or Professional.

4. **OCR your scanned PDF files** – OCR is the acronym for Optical Character Recognition. Basically, OCR software analyzes the picture of each word on the scanned PDF file and through a series of algorithms decides what written word it represents. This can be a very slow process to OCR a

large document as the OCR software slogs through word by word but the output is a searchable PDF file.

C. Guidelines for Scanned Documents

1. Make sure your scanner is set to create documents that are 8.5" wide by 11" high. The clerk can strike documents that are larger or smaller or turned sideways.
2. Make sure that your scanner is set to create black and white images, not color.
3. Set the dpi (dots per inch) at 300.

CI. Pay Attention to the Maximum File Size

The maximum total file size for all documents in an eFile submission is 35 MBs. You can include hundreds, even thousands of pages within this limit if they are converted directly from word processor files to PDF files.

However, scanned PDF files are many times larger than those that are converted directly from word processor files to PDF files. So, whenever possible, upload your word processor files directly to FileTime or convert them yourself to PDF before uploading them.

If your scanner and OCR'd document exceeds 35 MBs you need to reduce the file size. One way to do so is to reduce the dpi setting on your scanner and hope that the setting is still high enough to ensure a good OCR.

CII. Electronic Signatures

You do not need to physically sign your eFile documents. The rules of procedure specify that /s/ [your name] constitutes your electronic signature on the eFiled document.

CIII. Caveats and Explanations

It is beyond the scope of this article to explain step-by-step the processes of converting documents into searchable PDF files. But, that is the beautiful thing about the Internet – all knowledge is at your finger tip. With a little research you will find numerous articles and probably Youtube videos with step-by-step instructions.

The OCR process is not 100% effective. Most OCR software will be able to correctly identify about 95% of the words on a page with a good quality scan. That drops dramatically as the quality of the scanned document image diminishes. It is recommended that you scan originals only at a setting of 300 dpi. And, you should always review the outputted searchable file and make any critical corrections – something you can do with Adobe Acrobat Standard or Professional.