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# Document management — Electronic document file format for long-term preservation —

## Part 4: Use of ISO 32000-2 (PDF/A-4)



Reference number  
ISO 19005-4:2020(E)

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## Foreword

ISO (the International Organization for Standardization) is a worldwide federation of national standards bodies (ISO member bodies). The work of preparing International Standards is normally carried out through ISO technical committees. Each member body interested in a subject for which a technical committee has been established has the right to be represented on that committee. International organizations, governmental and non-governmental, in liaison with ISO, also take part in the work. ISO collaborates closely with the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) on all matters of electrotechnical standardization.

The procedures used to develop this document and those intended for its further maintenance are described in the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 1. In particular, the different approval criteria needed for the different types of ISO documents should be noted. This document was drafted in accordance with the editorial rules of the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 2 (see [www.iso.org/directives](http://www.iso.org/directives)).

Attention is drawn to the possibility that some of the elements of this document may be the subject of patent rights. ISO shall not be held responsible for identifying any or all such patent rights. Details of any patent rights identified during the development of the document will be in the Introduction and/or on the ISO list of patent declarations received (see [www.iso.org/patents](http://www.iso.org/patents)).

Any trade name used in this document is information given for the convenience of users and does not constitute an endorsement.

For an explanation of the voluntary nature of standards, the meaning of ISO specific terms and expressions related to conformity assessment, as well as information about ISO's adherence to the World Trade Organization (WTO) principles in the Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT), see [www.iso.org/iso/foreword.html](http://www.iso.org/iso/foreword.html).

This document was prepared by Technical Committee ISO/TC 171, *Document management applications, SC 2, Document file formats, EDMS systems and authenticity of information*.

A list of all parts in the ISO 19005 series can be found on the ISO website.

Any feedback or questions on this document should be directed to the user's national standards body. A complete listing of these bodies can be found at [www.iso.org/members.html](http://www.iso.org/members.html).

## Introduction

PDF is a digital format for representing page-based documents. PDF files can be created natively in PDF form, converted from other electronic formats or digitized from paper, microform, or other hard copy format. Businesses, governments, libraries, archives and other institutions and individuals around the world use PDF to represent considerable bodies of important information. Much of this information needs to be kept for substantial lengths of time; some needs to be kept permanently. These PDF files need to remain useable and accessible across multiple generations of technology. However, the inclusive, feature-rich nature of the format requires that constraints be placed on its use to make it suitable for the long-term preservation of electronic documents. The future use of, and access to, these objects depends upon maintaining their visual appearance as well as their higher-order properties, such as the logical organization of pages, sections, and paragraphs, machine recoverable text stream in natural reading order, and a variety of administrative, preservation and descriptive metadata.

This document is part of a series of documents, of which this is part 4. This allows future parts to be created without rendering this document or applications based on this document obsolete.

The primary purpose of ISO 19005 is to define a file format based on PDF, known as PDF/A, which provides a mechanism for representing electronic documents in a manner that preserves their visual appearance over time, independent of the tools and systems used for creating, storing or rendering the files. Some parts of ISO 19005 also define a framework for representing the logical structure and other semantic information of electronic documents within conforming files. These goals are accomplished by identifying the set of PDF components that can be used, and restrictions on the form of their use, within conforming PDF/A files.

Parts 3 & 4 in this series enable PDF documents to serve as containers for other file formats, so that a single physical file can contain not only the visual representation but also other representations including the original authored version, richer semantic formats, and others. This standard does not address the long-term suitability of formats, that may be embedded, other than those compliant with any part of this document.

This document is based on PDF version 2.0 (as defined in ISO 32000-2:—<sup>1)</sup>) and as such provides recommendations in how to properly archive content that uses some of the newer features present there including page level output intents, associated files and improvements to tagged PDF.

This document also introduces some new directions in archiving non-static content that can be present in PDF documents, such as form fields and ECMAScript. It seeks to preserve more information in the file (by not requiring its removal during the archival process) and puts a greater burden on conforming viewers to ensure that such information does not alter the visual appearance of the file during consumption.

By itself, PDF/A does not necessarily ensure that the visual appearance of the content accurately reflects any original source material used to create the conforming file; e.g. the process used to create a conforming file might substitute fonts, reflow text, downsample images or use lossy compression. Organizations that need to ensure that a conforming file is an accurate representation of original source material might need to impose additional requirements on the processes that generate the conforming file beyond those imposed by this document. In addition, it is important for those organizations to implement policies and practices regarding the inspection of conforming files for correct visual appearance.

This document is one component of an organization's electronic archival environment for long-term retention of documents. Successful implementation of this document for archival purposes depends upon:

- the retention requirements of an organization's archival environment, records management policies and procedures as specified in ISO 15489-1<sup>[2]</sup>;

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- any additional conditions necessary to ensure the persistence of electronic documents and their characteristics over time, including, but not limited to, those defined by ISO 14721<sup>[1]</sup>, and ISO/TR 18492<sup>[3]</sup>;
- quality assurance processes necessary to verify conformance with applicable requirements and conditions; e.g. an inspection regime to verify the quality and integrity of converted source data.

This document is intended to lead to the development of various applications that read, render, write and validate conforming files. Different applications will incorporate various capabilities to prepare, interpret and process conforming files based on needs as perceived by the suppliers of those applications. However, it is important to note that a conforming application needs to be able to read and process appropriately all files complying with a specified conformance level.

This document (in conjunction with its normative references) provides sufficient information to interpret any conforming PDF/A-4 file.

The PDF Association may maintain an ongoing series of application notes for guiding developers and users of this document. These application notes are available at <https://www.pdfa.org/>. The PDF Association will also retain copies of the specific non-ISO normative references of this document which are publicly available electronic documents.