How to Compress a PDF

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If you've been in the legal industry for some time, you're probably familiar with the struggles of submitting court documents in person. The ordeal typically involves carving out time in your busy day to print paperwork, hand-delivering it to the courthouse (or arranging a courier), and then obtaining a file stamp. As technology progressed in recent decades, many courts started to let legal professionals e-file their documents.

E-filing, short for electronic filing, has since revolutionized the court filing process—allowing legal professionals to submit documents online from anywhere.

For all its advantages, though, many grapple with one aspect: file size limits. In the legal field, it's not uncommon to have documents that are dozens, or even hundreds of pages long. And yet, most court management systems only accept files that are approximately 35MB.

In this guide, we'll show you five simple ways to reduce the size of a PDF using different software.

5 ways to compress a PDF file for court systems

When it comes to compressing a PDF, legal professionals have several choices. Here, we'll show you some of the top ways to quickly shrink your files—so you can get back to the work that matters.

Compressing PDFs for court systems

You can compress PDFs to ensure they're accepted by court case management software without a hitch. And you have plenty of choices when it comes to doing just that.

Compressing a PDF in Adobe Acrobat Optimizer

Adobe PDF Optimizer is known to be slightly more complex than one-click compressors. But for what it lacks in simplicity, it makes up for in quality. With the application, users have more control over specific compression settings, including the images, font, and other content. Discover the different elements you can change in Optimizer.

Before you compress a file with Optimizer, determine its size. To do that, simply open the PDF and select File and then Properties—it'll then show you how large it is. If your file is over the size limit accepted by your state, here's how to reduce it in Adobe PDF Optimizer:

1. Open the PDF in Adobe Acrobat
2. Click on File at the top-left corner > Save as Other > Optimized PDF
3. Click Audit space usage in the top-right corner of the pop-up
4. Review the largest sections of the document, and compress what you can
5. Select the checkbox next to the element(s) you want to shrink

Compressing a PDF in Optimizer is a manual process—but it's a good option when you need to retain the quality of important elements in your files that one-click compressors may shrink.

Compressing a PDF on a Mac

If you're an avid Apple user—don't fret. There's always an alternative way to perform tasks on a Mac, including compressing a PDF. On your Mac, your PDFs will automatically open in Preview. You can follow the steps below to compress an existing PDF:

1. Open the document you want to compress in the Preview app
2. Choose File > Export (don't choose export as PDF)
3. Click the Quartz filter menu, and select Reduce File Size

Compressing a file from Word

Most Word documents aren't too heavy, and you'll often be able to save them as a regular PDF. In the event that your file is too big, you can save a compressed version right from Word. Simply follow these steps:

1. Open the document
2. Click File > Save As
3. Under Save as type, select PDF
4. Go to Optimize for and select Minimum size (publishing online)
5. Your PDF file will automatically be compressed

Note: Some versions of Word don't offer this feature. If you don't have the option to compress your document from Word, you can use one of the two options below.

Compressing a file online with Adobe

Even if you're not an Adobe user, Adobe offers a free online compression tool to minimize the size of your documents. This is arguably the easiest and fastest way to compress an existing PDF.

1. Click Select a file button at the top of the landing page
2. Select the PDF you want to shrink
3. It will be uploaded and compressed
4. Download the compressed version of your file from the Adobe site

Compressing a file using other online tools

There are also several other free online tools for shrinking PDFs that are similar to the Adobe compressor, like SmallPDF. Here's how it works:

1. Click Choose Files at the top of the landing page
2. Select the file(s) you want to compress
3. Choose your desired compression level
4. Edit your PDF if needed
5. Download your compressed file

When selecting a free tool, you'll want to make sure that none of your information is being stored online. SmallPDF, for example, deletes your information one hour after you compress the file.

Other legal platforms, like Infotrack, offer automated court filing. With Clio's integration, users can e-file documents to state courts directly from their Clio matter. Each document automatically converts to a PDF, while a built-in compression tool makes sure that documents meet court file size requirements.

Tip: Avoid scanning from paper to PDF

Scanning a paper file into a PDF creates a larger file than converting digital files into PDFs. So, be sure to only scan hard copies when there are no digital copies of the documents. If you frequently scan documents, here's our advice on how to choose a scanner for your law firm.

What happens when you compress a PDF?

You may be wondering what exactly happens to your document when you compress it. It's a technical process, as you might expect. In short: the compression tool uses an algorithm that spots redundancies in the code and pinpoints areas that can be reduced to make the file size smaller. That might, for instance, be unnecessary pixels or embedded fonts. Perhaps most importantly, compressors maintain the quality of your document as much as possible.

Remember: You usually can't reverse the process once you've compressed a file. So, you'll want to be sure to back up your files in advance.

The benefits of e-filing

E-filing allows you to submit court documents quickly, and makes them easily accessible to all parties. Let's walk through some of these benefits in closer detail.

- **It's convenient**. It's a breeze to submit court documents with e-filing. In a few clicks, you can securely upload documents, from anywhere and at any time. Because of this, e-filing is playing a powerful role in the legal profession's shift to remote work. That's becoming increasingly important, especially as Clio's *2022 Legal Trends Report* found that fewer than 30% of lawyers work only from the office.
- **It eliminates paper waste**. Another advantage of e-filing is that it reduces the need to print physical copies of documents—which helps to reduce your environmental impact. This also has significant cost savings.
- **It's faster than traditional methods**. Lawyers struggle to find time each day to practice the law—in fact, most spend less than three hours of an eight-hour workday on billable work. With e-filing, court documents can be quickly processed, without the need for frequent trips to the courthouse.
- **It delivers peace of mind**. E-filing reduces the risk of human error that comes with manually entering case information. Plus: You don't have to worry about files getting lost or damaged in transit. You'll get an automatic email verification that it's been received right after filing, as well as electronic file stamped copies back from the court.
- **It improves accessibility.** With e-filing, all case information is immediately available to the public and it's easy to convert filings to searchable court records. This improves access to a wealth of important legal documents.

With these many benefits, it's not surprising that the number of lawyers who e-file is rising. The *2022 ABA Legal Technology Survey Report* found that, of the 84% of respondents who reported filing documents with their state or local courts, they do so electronically an

average of 180 times per year. That's up from 155 in 2020.

With the right tools, this process runs even faster: Clio File enables legal professionals to file, serve, and deliver court documents directly from our industry-leading legal practice management system. That means firms will be able to:

- File and serve court forms without having to switch tools
- Stay on top of state court deadlines and requirements
- Get instant status updates on filings
- Pass through 100% of filing fees to clients

Clio File is launching state-by-state. Learn if Clio File is available in your state—if it's not there yet, you can sign up to be notified when it comes to you!

Final notes on compressing a PDF

Today, many legal professionals are harnessing technology to streamline the court filing process. While e-filing is great for promoting efficiency and accessibility, many case documents are large in size. The good news is that compressing a PDF is an easy way to make your documents fit your local e-filing requirements.

That's only one of the many powerful possibilities that technology has brought to the legal field. From accelerating client intake to automating tedious tasks and easily accepting payments, Clio helps lawyers spend more time practicing the law. Learn more about our solutions here.

Frequently asked questions

How do I compress a PDF without Adobe?

Adobe has a free online compressor that anyone can use without an Adobe account. To compress a PDF without Adobe, open the free PDF compressor tool in any web browser. Then, click Add file (or drag and drop it into the browser), choose your compression level, and click Compress.

About Clio

Clio is the global leader in legal AI, powering legal work across the profession, from law firms of every size to corporate legal teams, government agencies, and courts. Its Intelligent Legal Work Platform unites the business and practice of law, connecting the people, information, and processes behind legal work. Clio's AI brings the context together with legal sources drawn from Clio Library, a growing collection of more than one billion legal documents. Over 400,000 legal professionals in more than 130 countries rely on Clio to run their legal world. Learn more at www.clio.com.