Signing a document electronically

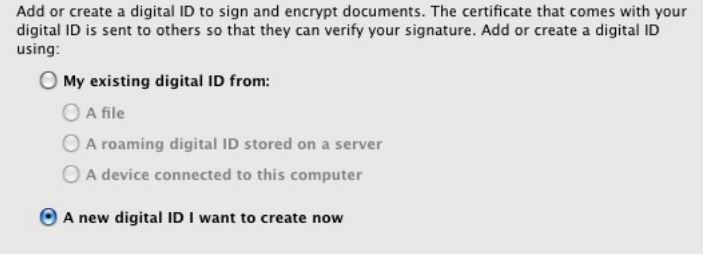
Like a handwritten signature, a digital signature is uniquely yours, and Adobe® Acrobat® includes the features you need to keep it secure. Unlike traditional signatures, digital signatures can contain additional information, such as the date and time of signature and the reason for signing. Just as you developed your own signature style early in life, you can add your own flair to your signature appearance, as well!

You can use the sample file (Security_sample.pdf) included with this tutorial. For help using sample files, see Getting Started Help in the Tutorials folder.

1 Obtain a digital ID.

If you don't already have a digital ID, create a self-signed digital ID in Acrobat. A self-signed digital ID includes an encrypted private key for signing or decrypting documents and a public key in a certificate used to validate signatures and encrypt documents.

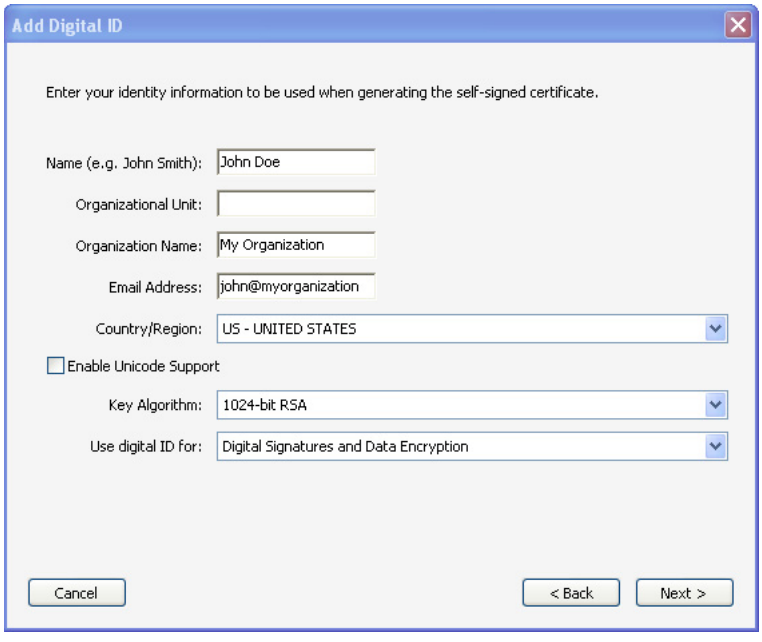
To create a self-signed digital ID, choose Advanced > Security Settings in Acrobat. Select Digital IDs on the left, and then click the Add ID button in the toolbar. Select A New Digital ID I Want To Create Now, and continue through the wizard.



Create a new digital ID.

Note: *In Windows, select where you'd like to store your digital ID, and click Next.*

Type the personal information for your digital ID, including your name. When you certify or sign a document, the name appears in the Signatures panel and in the signature field. Name your digital ID and create a password for it that contains at least six characters, with no punctuation marks or special characters. Click Finish. Before you forget, make a backup copy of your digital ID file, in case the original is lost or damaged.

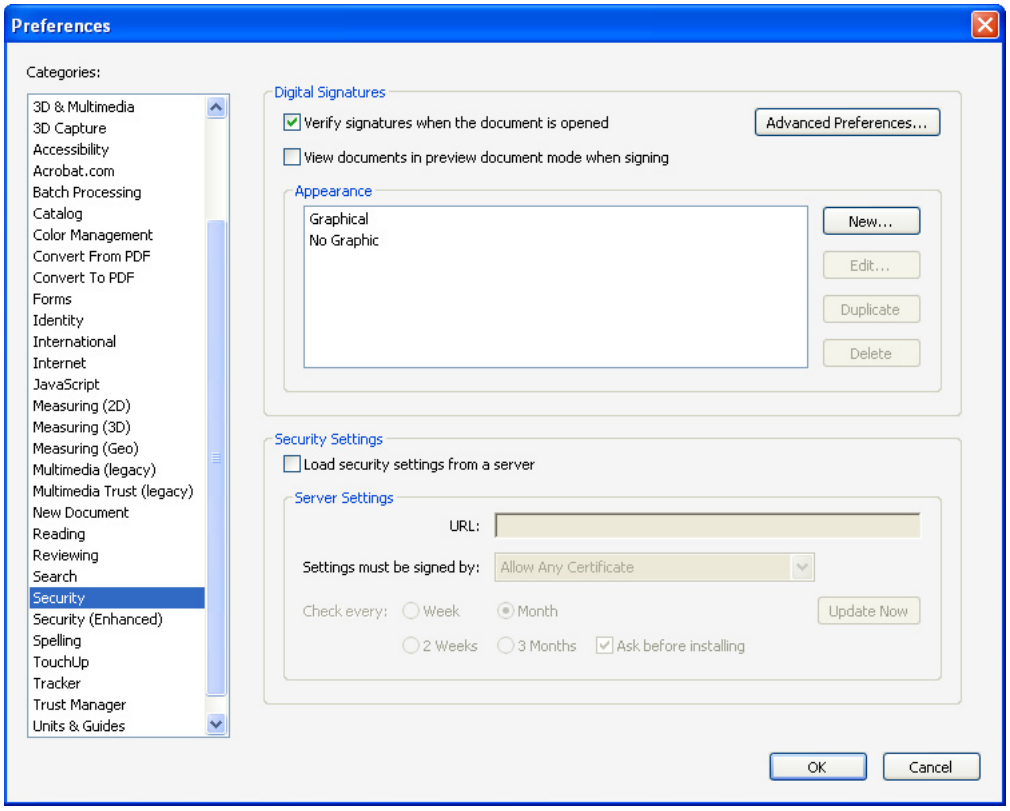


Enter your identify information for the digital ID.

2 Create an appearance for your digital signature.

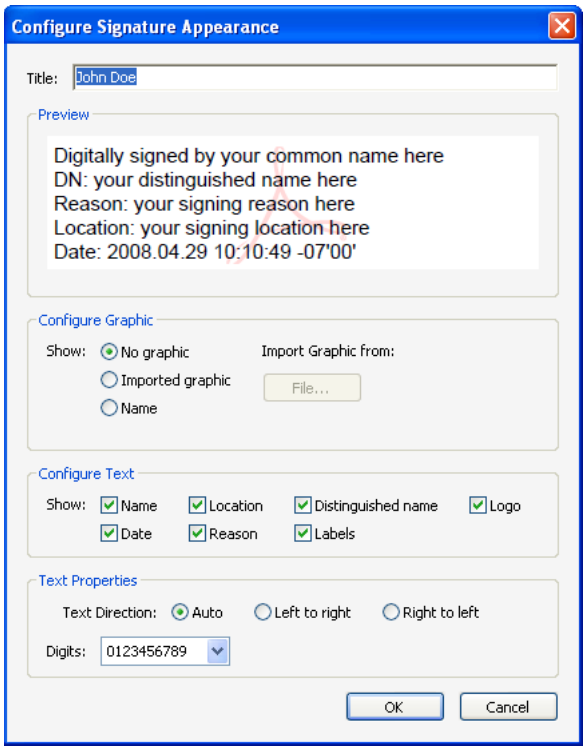
Your digital signature can be simple or complex. It can look like a handwritten signature or a typed name. It can contain a company logo, include the date and time you signed, and state a reason for signing. You can create multiple signature appearances for different uses; select one each time you sign a document. If you want to include an image of your signature, scan your signature and save it as a PDF file.

To create an appearance, choose Edit > Preferences (Windows) or Acrobat > Preferences (Mac OS). Select Security on the left, and then click New in the Digital Signatures section. Give the signature appearance a short, descriptive title that you'll recognize when you're signing a document. Select options, including whether you want to include an imported graphic, such as a scanned signature. As you make changes, the preview window shows you how your signature will look. Click OK when you're satisfied.



Preview Document mode protects you from hidden elements.

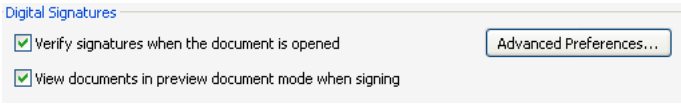
If you selected Reason or Location, click Advanced Preferences, and, in the Creation pane, select Show Reasons When Signing or Show Location And Contact Information When Signing, respectively.



Customize your signature appearance.

3 Review the document carefully.

Before you sign any document, physically or electronically, make sure you know exactly what you are signing and where all the signature fields are. Because dynamic content might alter the appearance of the PDF document and mislead you, it's a good idea to view the document in Preview Document mode before signing. To use Preview Document mode, open the Preferences dialog box and select Security on the left; then, select View Documents In Preview Document Mode When Signing.



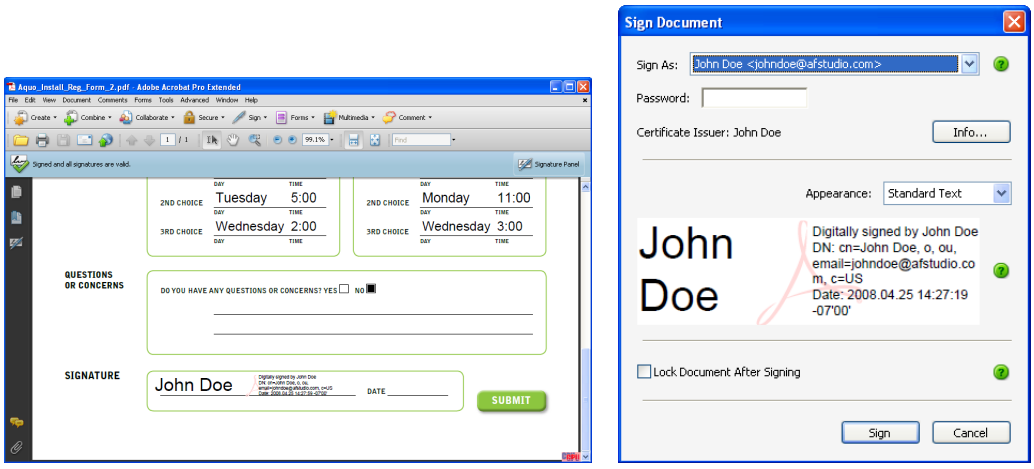
View documents in preview document mode to ensure there are no hidden features in the document before signing.

Check each page of a document for signature fields. You may need to sign a document in more than one place. Each signature field is unique, so your signature won't automatically be copied from one field to the other signature fields in the document.

4 Sign the PDF document.

To actually sign the document, click the signature field, if there is one, or choose Sign > Sign Document from the Tasks toolbar and draw a signature field on the page.

If you've set Acrobat up to display documents in Preview Document mode before signing, a document message bar reports whether there is any dynamic content in the document. When you've reviewed the document, click Sign Document in the document message bar to proceed.



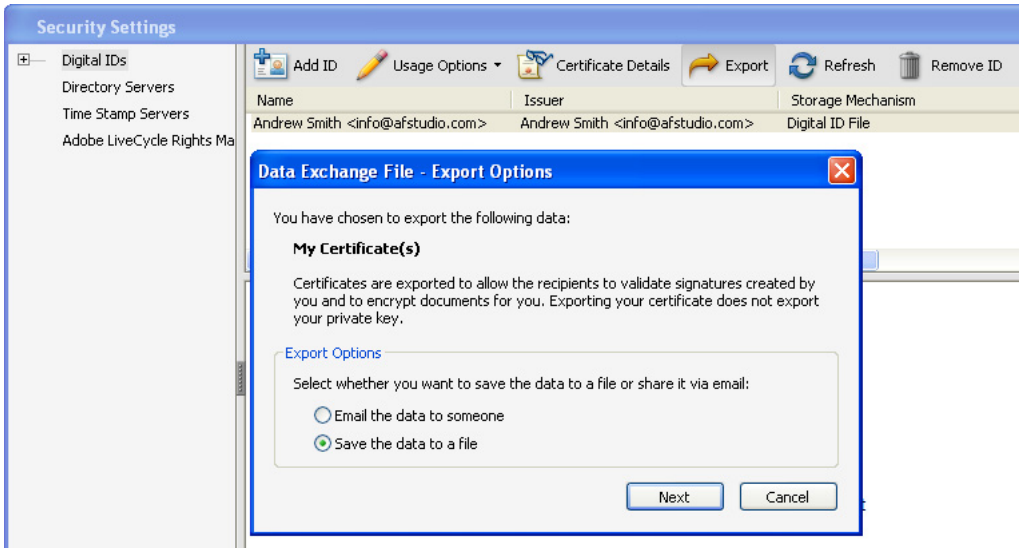
Acrobat adds your signature to the page.

In the Sign Document dialog box, select an appearance, and then add any information it requires, such as the location or the reason for signing. Enter a password if your digital ID requires it. Click Sign. Give the document a new name so that you can change the original PDF file without invalidating the signature, and click Save.

When you apply a digital signature, Acrobat embeds an encrypted message digest in the PDF file, along with the details from your certificate and a version of the document at the time it was signed.

5 Distribute your certificate.

In order to verify your digital ID, others who view your document need to have the public certificate from your digital ID. To send your certificate, choose Advanced > Security Settings, and select Digital IDs on the left. Select the digital ID you want to share, and click Export. Follow the onscreen instructions to email your certificate as an FDF file to someone or to save the certificate as a different file type.



Share your certificate.

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