



Digital Workflow

How to make & use digital signatures

Digital Signatures make sense

Digital signatures save time, which obviously translates into monetary savings as well. And, by not having to print out documents just to sign them you'll also reap rewards of being environmentally conscious.

You'll want to have a digital signature that you can use in a couple of places: (1) your word processing programs, where you'll insert it in your 'form letter template', and (2) in Adobe Acrobat, where you'll create a custom stamp that you can use to place your signature into PDF documents that you receive and want to sign (if you receive a non-PDF document you can just convert it to a PDF). With these two forms of 'digital signatures' you can pretty much sign any electronic document without having to print it out.

Creating Digital Signatures

Creating a digital signature can be intimidating for those who aren't very comfortable with using Adobe Acrobat and Adobe Photoshop Elements. The method I'm about to describe assumes you have both of these programs, as well as a decent color scanner. I'll offer some alternatives later on, but this is the cheapest way to create signatures. And, doing it yourself allows you more control over what kind of signature you wind up with.

First step is to take a sheet of plain white paper and write your signature several times. If you want your signature to be in color (why not?) then use a blue pen. I suggest making at least two signatures: one with a thick marker, and another with a thin stroke pen. This will give you at least two options for signatures. Some people like to scan in a signature with just their first name, and this makes sense. The point is: now is the time to figure out how many different types of signatures you want. Put them all on one white page and then scan that using a fairly high resolution, with the color option on.

So to review, here are the steps in order:

1. Write as many different signatures on one white paper.
2. Scan that paper at high resolution, in color. Scan to PDF if possible, but if you can't don't worry, just make it a .JPG or .TIFF or any kind of image file.
3. Open that image file in Adobe Photoshop, or Photoshop Elements. The process will be the same in either program.
4. Save the original file on your desktop.

5. Choose 'Crop Tool' and crop the first signature that you are going to work on (from among all those on the single page).
6. SAVE AS a new file. (so you can go back to the page with all of the signatures later)
7. Select the **MAGIC WAND** tool, and click in the white area around the signature.
8. Select **INVERSE** from the **SELECT** menu (this sequence can be described as **SELECT > INVERSE**). Doing this step will change the selection area from step 7 so that only the signature itself is selected.
9. Choose COPY
10. Choose **FILE > NEW > IMAGE FROM CLIPBOARD**.
11. Paste your selection here. You should see your signature against a checkerboard background. If you see all white then something is wrong. Go back and find a way to paste your selection into a 'transparent background.' You want to create a signature that has only your stroke and no white background.
12. Save this file as a .PNG file on your desktop. This is the signature you can now paste into your word processing program, and use as a stamp in Acrobat. If you want to save it again as a .GIF that's another option. The important point is to make sure to treat this file as a valuable resource. You just went through a lot of steps to create it and you don't want to do that again.
13. Go back to step 4 and open the first file and repeat the process for each signature that you want to have in digital form.

Adding Signature to Microsoft Word

If you want to add your signature to a Word document all you have to do is copy it and paste into the document. You can move it around by using the indent markers, or you can paste into a table. But, the best thing to do is create a form document that is preloaded with your firm's letterhead, and all of the information you usually put into the letter. Once you do that, your signature will already be loaded and placed in the right location.

Once you've worked on your document and it's ready to go, you can avoid printing it by simply saving it as a PDF document and then emailing it to the recipient. If you absolutely have to print it to send it, that's okay too. At least your secretary won't have to wait for you to sign it. You can send it to her and she can print it out and mail it. So, either way, you're saving time and making things easier.

Once you've finished the letter, don't forget to save the PDF copy into your electronic file. That way, if you ever need to find a copy of the letter again (to review, or print out), it's only a few mouse clicks away.

Creating a Signature Stamp in Adobe Acrobat

In addition to having a signature pre-loaded into your form letter, you'll want to be able to place your signature into documents you receive by fax or email. For example, let's say you get your faxes by email (if not, then we need to talk). One of the faxes is from someone that needs your signature before they can approve payment to you. Obviously, you want to turn this around as quickly as possible. The fax arrives as a PDF, so you open it up in Acrobat. Wouldn't it be nice if you had a special stamp in Acrobat that you could apply in the space where your signature goes? Then you could save the document with the new change and then email it to the recipient. This would take you about 2 minutes, where waiting for the printer and then the fax machine might take 10 minutes or more.

Here are the steps to creating a stamp in Acrobat using the signature file that you've already made based on the steps outlined above.

1. Open Adobe Acrobat (this won't work in the free Reader program; you need the full blown version of Acrobat).
2. Go to **TOOLS > COMMENT & MARKUP > STAMPS > CREATE CUSTOM STAMP...** (that's a lot of menu choices, but you're wily and you can do it!)
3. From the dialog box, **BROWSE** for the image file you want to use.
4. Next when the new dialog box appears, create a new category called 'My Signatures' or something like that.
5. In the next entry field type in the name of the stamp. For example, "Ernest Svenson BLUE" if the signature is to be distinguished from the black ink version.
6. Click OK and you're all done.

From now on, you'll be able to navigate to the signature by going to **TOOLS > COMMENT & MARKUP > STAMPS > [NAME OF YOUR CATEGORY] > [NAME OF STAMP]**.

Once you've selected your stamp you simply click in the place where you want it to go. If you hover around with your mouse you'll find that in the corners you can drag the signature to make it smaller or bigger. Also, if you hover around you'll see a 4 point symbol that means you can drag the whole signature around to place it more precisely, after you've initially pasted it in.

And if you need to type in some information next to your signature, such as the date, just use the typewriter tool: **TOOLS > TYPEWRITER > TYPEWRITER**. You can make the text from this tool bigger or smaller, as well as dragging it around to suit your taste.

Other options for creating digital signatures

If you don't want to bother with the hassle of scanning your signature you can hire someone to do it for about \$30. A company called [vLetter](#) will do it. Basically they will take a scan of your signature and turn it into a font for you. The turn-around time is about 2 weeks. It's simple to turn your VLetter Signature into an Acrobat stamp. Just choose the font in Word and create a PDF. Then follow the other steps for making it into a stamp.

We can't vouch for the reliability and so forth of this method as we haven't tried ourselves, but it seems like it would be pretty easy to do. But you do still have to scan in your signature to begin with.

Flatten your signature

If you think about it, when you paste your signature into a PDF document it's really just an object on a top layer of the document. Someone with the full copy of Acrobat could copy that object and do mischievous things with it. So, if you're sending the document as a PDF file you might want to 'flatten' it first. Basically, this is the process by which you smooch all the layers into one. And at that point there is no separate layer for anyone to grab onto.

Chances are your copy of Acrobat doesn't have the **FLATTEN** command. It would be at the bottom of the **DOCUMENTS** menu. If you don't then all you have to do is copy the script below and save it as a text file. But you'll have to rename the extension of the file from .TXT to .js.

```
function Flatten(boolCurrentPageOnly) // Takes a boolean argument
{
var i
// Give them a chance to back out
i = app.alert("Are you sure you want to do this?", 1, 2)
if (i != 3) { // If they didn't click "No"...
if (boolCurrentPageOnly) // Flatten either this page...
this.flattenPages(this.pageNum)
else
this.flattenPages() // ...or all pages
}
}
app.addItem({
cName: "Flatten current page",
cParent: "Document",
```

```
cExec: "Flatten(true)");  
  
app.addItem({  
  
  cName: "Flatten all pages",  
  
  cParent: "Document",  
  
  cExec: "Flatten(false)");
```

After you've made this file, which you should call "flatten.js" you'll put it in the folder for Acrobat that is called "JavaScripts." The location of this file depends on whether you have a Mac or a PC and which version of Acrobat you have. But, once you've placed it in the JavaScript folder (which you should do when you don't have Acrobat running), it will create a FLATTEN command under the DOCUMENT menu.

Run the command whenever you've signed a document that you'll be sending as a PDF. You can download a copy of the script at [this link](http://tinyurl.com/6fauuw): <http://tinyurl.com/6fauuw>