

Preflight PDF files

Learn to preflight your Adobe® Acrobat® PDF files by using the built-in tools in Acrobat 6 Professional. PDF expert Ted Padova shows how to prepare PDF files for takeoff.

Preflighting is a term used by creative professionals and service technicians to analyze a file for suitability in printing. A preflight assessment might examine a file for the proper color mode of images, whether images are compressed, whether fonts are accessible either embedded or accessible to the operating system, or any number of other conditions that might interfere with successfully printing a job.

The tools used to preflight files might be stand-alone applications or features built into programs used for printing to commercial printing equipment. Prior to Acrobat 6 you needed to preflight a file before converting to PDF with a standalone product that analyzed the original authoring application file prior to conversion to PDF or a third-party plug-in for Acrobat that performed preflighting on PDF files. Now in Acrobat 6 Professional, preflighting is built into the program.

To preflight a PDF document, choose Document > Preflight. Notice the preflight option is contained in the Document menu and not in the Advanced menu. Preflighting is only available in Acrobat Professional. When you select the menu command, Acrobat pauses momentarily to load profiles already created as presets from your initial Acrobat installation. After the profiles are loaded the Preflight: Profiles dialog box shown in Figure 1 opens.

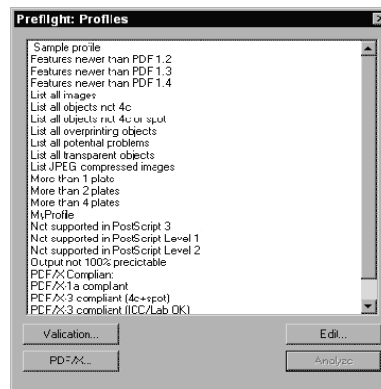


Figure 1: After you select the Preflight menu command in Acrobat Professional, preflight profiles load and the Preflight: Profiles dialog box opens.

Preflight profiles

A preflight profile contains one or more conditions that are contained within rules. A condition might be something like is not a spot color. A rule may contain a single condition or multiple conditions. For example, a rule like ProcessColor might contain conditions like is not spot color, is not grayscale, is not RGB color. The profile is created from a single or several rules. For example a profile might contain ProcessColor, Not Compressed, Fonts not Embedded. A profile containing rules and conditions is listed in the opening dialog box when you select the Preflight menu command.

When you install Acrobat Professional, a list of preset profiles appears in the Preflight: Profile dialog box. You can use one of these profiles to preflight a job, you can create your own custom profile and add it to the list, or you can acquire a profile developed by a service center or print shop and add it to the list. After a profile appears in the list, you use all the rules and conditions contained in the profile to analyze the current open document in Acrobat Professional. If problems are found, Acrobat reports all conditions not met as measured against the conditions in the profile.

Creating a new profile

Before moving on to actually preflighting a document, start by looking at how profiles are created. Click the Edit button in the Preflight: Profiles dialog box. After you click Edit, the Preflight: Edit Profiles dialog box shown in Figure 2 opens.

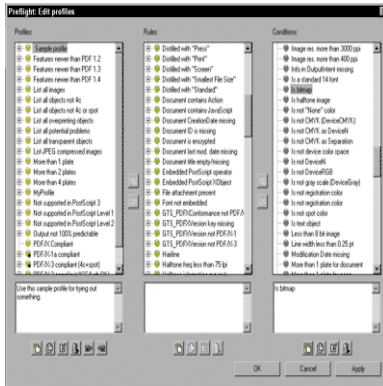
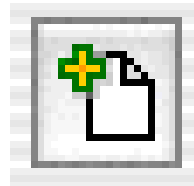


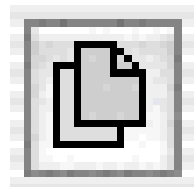
Figure 2: Click on Edit in the Preflight: Profiles dialog box and the Preflight: Edit Profiles dialog box opens where you create new profiles or edit existing profiles.

At the top of the dialog box you see three column headings for Profiles, Rules, and Conditions. In this dialog box, you work from right to left. In the column at the right you create a new Condition, or select an existing Condition from the list. In the Rules column you create a new rule or select a rule from the list. In the Profiles column you create a new profile or select a profile from the list. When an item in a list is selected it is moved to the selected item in the column to the left. For example, if I select a rule, then select a condition, I click on the left-pointing chevron and my condition is added to the selected rule. I then select a profile, and select a rule to add to the profile. You can add multiple conditions to a single rule and add multiple rules to a single profile. However, you add conditions and rules one at a time. Repeat the steps to add one to the other with successive selections and clicks on the left chevrons.

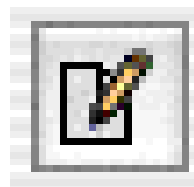
You can modify any one of the existing profiles or rules. You can choose from presets in the columns and move items from one column to selected items in the other columns. If none of the existing presets work for you, you can create new rules, conditions, and profiles. The icons at the bottom of the dialog box enable you to manage the conditions, rules, and profiles. They include:



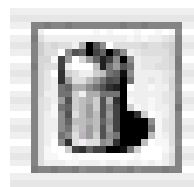
- New (condition, rule, profile): Click on the icon in the respective column to create a new condition, rule, or profile.



- Duplicate (condition, rule, profile): Select an item in the respective list and the condition, rule, or profile is duplicated.



- Edit: Select an item in the respective list and the condition, rule, or profile edit dialog box opens.



- Delete (condition, rule, profile): Select an item in the respective list and the condition, rule, or profile is deleted.

For profiles only, two other buttons appear at the bottom of the column. The tools are:



- Import: Select a profile and click on the Import button. A profile created by a print shop or service center can be e-mailed to you and you can load profiles from vendors who send you their recommended conditions for preflighting jobs.



- Export: If you are responsible for creating profiles at a service center or in a company where you want to implement a set of standards, click on the Export button. The profile selected when you click on the button is exported to a file that you can send to other users who in turn import the profile.

Creating conditions

Click on the New Condition button at the bottom of the Conditions column in the Preflight: Edit profiles dialog box. The Preflight: Edit this condition dialog box opens as shown in Figure 3. You make decisions in this dialog box for adding descriptive information in field boxes and selecting a group and property as they apply to conditions.

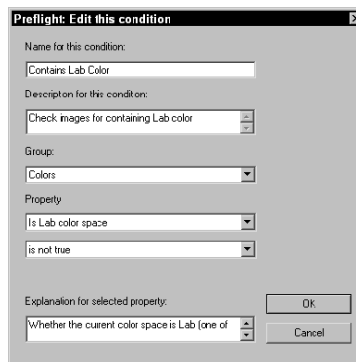


Figure 3: Click on the Edit button in the Conditions column and the Preflight: Edit this condition dialog box opens.

The options include:

- Name this condition: Type a name for the new condition. Use any name you want. Try to add a name that describes the condition so it is clear to you what condition you're selecting when you return to the Conditions list.
- Description for this condition: The text you type in this field box is only visible when you return to the edit dialog box. Add a description for what the condition does or why you're using it.
- Group: Conditions are made up of selections from Groups and Properties. The Group pull-down menu contains categorical items that are further defined in the Properties pull-down menu choices. Select a group by opening the pull-down menu and make a menu selection. In Figure 4 (below), I chose Colors from the pull-down menu.
- Property: After selecting the Group item, open the Property pull-down menu and select an item. In the example, I selected Is Lab Color Space. The second pull-down menu is the conditional item. For my Lab color analysis, I want the preflight to pass if there are no Lab color images in the file. Therefore I select is not true from the pull-down menu. When the condition is checked, a problem is reported if the condition is true. If all images are not Lab color, the preflight reports no problems.

- Explanation for selected property: The message at the bottom of the dialog box is informational. A help message is reported for any condition you select. Before creating a new condition, you can check the definition to be certain what you select preflights the condition you want.

After choosing the options, click OK to add the new condition to the Conditions list.

Creating rules

You create rules by either duplicating an existing rule or creating a new rule. The composition of a rule is the addition of one or more conditions. When you click on the New rule button at the bottom of the Rules column in the Preflight: Edit profiles dialog box, the Preflight: Edit rule dialog box shown in Figure 4 opens.



Figure 4: Click on New rule and the Preflight: Edit rule dialog box opens.

Notice that no preflight conditions are added in the edit dialog box. You add a name for the rule in the dialog box and supply a description. After you click on OK, the rule is empty. To add conditions to the rule, you select it in the Rules column and select one or more conditions to move to the rule by clicking on the left chevron. The rule must be selected to receive the conditions you move from the Conditions column.

Also in the Preflight: Edit rule dialog box is a check box titled For information only (no error). If you want the report to show if a condition was not met but still pass the preflight without reporting problems, check the box.

Creating profiles

After adding all the conditions to one or more rules, the last step is to create a profile to use for preflighting a job. Click on the New profile button at the bottom of the Profiles column in the Preflight: Edit profiles dialog box, and a dialog box similar to the dialog box used when creating rules opens. Add the name for the profile and a description as shown in Figure 5.

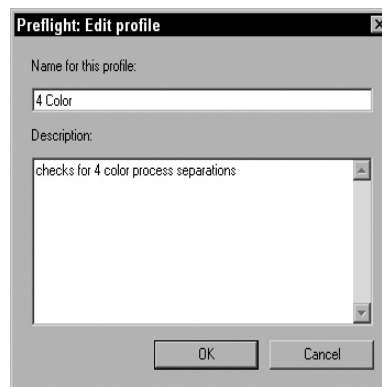


Figure 5: Click on the New profile button to open the Preflight: Edit profile dialog box.

After naming the profile and adding a description, click OK and the profile is added to the Profiles column in the Preflight: Edit profiles dialog box. Select the profile and select a rule to add to the profile. Click on the left chevron between the columns and the rule is added to the profile. Note that only a single profile is moved at one time. To add additional rules to the same profile, click on the next rule to add and click the left chevron.

Preflighting PDF documents is intended primarily for assessing a document's reliability in printing properly. The number of rules and conditions, however, go beyond print conditions and may be used for checking files suitable for other output modes such as distributing files on Web servers or CD-ROMs. Be certain to check the conditions available to you for preflight options other than printing.

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