

THE COMPUTER CORNER

File Extensions

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Did you ever wonder how Windows knows what program to use to open a file? If you click on an MS-Word document, MS-Word opens it. If you click on a text file, Notepad opens it. If you click on a sound-containing file, some player or other opens it and begins to play it. On the other hand, sometimes it does not work properly. You might have a good graphics editing and viewing program like Paint Shop Pro, yet when you click on a graphics file you want to see or edit, Windows calls on the old "lightweight" program, MS-Paint, to do the job. Why doesn't it work? On the other hand, when it does, how does Windows know what application to call on to do the job? The answer is that Windows simply does what most of us did when DOS was king. It looks at the file extension.

A DOS filename was restricted to 8 characters followed by a 3-character extension, for example, MYFILE.TXT. While Windows has extended the 8-character limit to 256, it still retained the three-character extension. Windows simply looks at the extension and opens the application that was associated with that extension when Windows was installed, or when that particular application software was installed. Here is a small sample of some extensions and what they are.

.\$\$	Temporary file
.1st	Usually README.1ST text file
.ani	Animation (many)
.asc	ASCII text file
.avi	Audio Video Interleaved animation file
.bak	Backup file
.bat	Batch file
.bmp	Bitmap graphics
.cfg	Configuration file
.dat	Data file in special format or ASCII
.dic	Dictionary
.diz	Description inside ZIP file - text
.dll	Dynamic Link Library
.doc	Document text file (MS-Word)
.dot	Template (MS-Word)
.err	Error log
.exe	Executable program
.faq	Frequently Asked Questions text file
.fax	Fax (raster graphics)
.fnt	Font file; also .fon
.gif	Graphics Interchange Format bitmap
.hlp	Help information
.htm	HyperText Markup Language document
.ico	File which contains an icon
.inf	Information text file (ASCII)
.ini	Initialization file
.jpg	Bitmap graphics (Joint Photography Experts Group)
.log	Log file
.mdb	Database (MS Access)
.me	Usually ASCII text file READ.ME

.mid	Standard MIDI file (music synthesizers)
.mng	Map (DeLorme Map'n'Go)
.mp2	MPEG audio file MPEG = Motion Pic-
.mpg	MPEG animation tures Expert Group
.pal	Color palette
.pdf	Package Definition File (Adobe Acrobat)
.pwl	Password list file
.rtf	Rich Text Format text file (MS-Word)
.sys	System hardware configuration info
.tga	Truevision Targa bitmap graphics
.tif	Tagged Image File bitmap graphics
.ttf	Truetype Font file
.txt	Text file (ASCII)
.uue	Compressed ASCII file (UUENCODE)
.voc	Digitized audio
.vxd	Virtual device driver (Windows)
.wav	Waveform audio file
.wmf	Windows MetaFile vector graphics
.wri	Text file (Windows Write)
.xlb	Data file (MS Excel)
.xls	Worksheet (MS Excel)
.zip	Compressed file created by PKZIP

You say you can't see any extensions when you examine lists of files in a folder? In its infinite wisdom, Microsoft has decided that users should not see them, so the default setup of Windows hides all file extensions as well as quite a few files. You can change that. These directions are for Windows 98, but they should be very close for other versions as well. Click **My Computer**, and then on the **View** menu, click **Folder Options**. Click the **View** tab, and then click **Show all Files**. That will stop Windows from hiding some files from you. Then click to clear the **Hide file extensions for known file types** box. Now all file extensions will be visible. If you also click the **Like Current Folder** button, all your folders will look like the **My Computer** folder. Go ahead and do it. You cannot hurt anything since there is also a **Restore Defaults** button if you later want things back the way they were.

If you then click the **File Types** tab, you can see the programs that are associated with each extension. Scroll down through the list to get a feel for how many different file extensions are used on your particular machine. Quite a few! This is where you can change associations if you need to. For example, if you have Paint Shop Pro but MS-Paint opens when you try to edit a file, you can correct that by changing the association. If you are up to it, go to Windows **Help** and read the instructions under **file extensions, associating with programs**.

Want a printout of what you see on the screen in **Help**? Press the **Print Screen** key, which copies the screen to the Clipboard. Then exit Help and open **Programs, Accessories, Paint**. Then select **Edit, Paste** and the help screen will appear in the workspace. Select **Print**, and your printer will present you with a hard copy. This tip will work in most cases when you want to capture and print screen information. Happy computing!