

METHODS TO FILL OUT PDF FORMS IN ADOBE (ACROBAT) READER

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I. SUMMARY.

There are two methods to fill out forms in Adobe (Acrobat) Reader: typing into (interactive) fields (added by a form creator) or typing into a flat space. Either method has advantages and disadvantages.

A form user has no choice, but to use the method available for a specific form:

1. If there are fields, then typing into a flat space is impossible in Adobe (Acrobat) Reader. Accordingly, a form user has to type into fields. While it is impossible to type into a flat space in Adobe (Acrobat) Reader (if there are fields), it is possible to type into a flat space in Adobe (Acrobat) full program and some third-party software (even if there are fields).
2. If there are no fields and typing into a flat space is possible, then a form user has to type into a flat space. Typing into a flat space is possible only in Reader 11 or later. While typing into a flat space is possible only in Reader 11 or later, it is possible to type into a flat space in Adobe Acrobat full program 10 and earlier. Typing into a flat space may be possible or not, depending on the file structure (static XFA, dynamic XFA, or PDF Acrobat). It is possible to type into a flat PDF Acrobat file. It is impossible to type into a flat (static or dynamic) XFA file in Adobe (Acrobat) Reader. While it is impossible to type into a flat static XFA file in Adobe (Acrobat) Reader, it is possible to type into a flat static XFA file in Adobe Acrobat full program and some third-party software. However, it is impossible to type into a flat dynamic XFA file in any program: neither in Adobe (Acrobat) Reader, nor in Adobe Acrobat full program, nor in any third-party software.

Comparison of Methods.

1. Typing into single-cell fields has advantages over typing into a flat space and over typing into a single-row of cells. The advantage is clear only if locations and properties of all fields are set correctly by the form creator and if relevant JavaScript actions are added to single-cell fields by a form creator, as in the FBF (Field-by-Field) method introduced in 2000 by USA-Federal-

Forms.com).^{*} Otherwise, the advantage is questionable.

2. Typing into a flat space has some advantages over typing into a single-row of cells. It also has many disadvantages, especially if relevant JavaScript actions are added to a single-row of cells by a form creator, as in the ITAOP (Insert Text Anywhere on Page) method introduced in 2000 by USA-Federal-Forms.com.^{*} In general, typing into a flat space and typing into a single-row of cells are two methods with about of the same value.

Note: In general, the JavaScript actions (to change locations and properties of fields) are needed only to type in Adobe (Acrobat) Reader. No JavaScript actions are needed to type in Adobe Acrobat full program, because in the Acrobat full program a user can change locations and properties of any field without using any JavaScript actions -- unless there are security restrictions (set by creator). Security restrictions may prevent a user from changing locations and properties of fields without using relevant JavaScript actions.

3. Typing into a multi-row field covering a part of a page (or a whole page) has disadvantages over typing into single-cell fields, or typing into a single row of multiple cells, or typing into a flat space. In general, the larger the multi-row space -- the more difficult to place a text in the best position for each cell. For a relatively small field, it is usually possible to find an acceptable text position with relevant JavaScript actions added by a form creator.^{*} Despite these disadvantages, a form with a multi-row field covering a part of a page (or a whole page) is a preferable option over a non-fillable form.

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II. METHOD-1: FILLING OUT FORMS IN READER BY TYPING INTO (INTERACTIVE) FIELDS (ADDED BY A FORM CREATOR).

If there are fields, then typing into a flat space is impossible in Adobe (Acrobat) Reader. Accordingly, a form user has to type into fields.

Note: While it is impossible to type into a flat space in Adobe (Acrobat) Reader if there are fields, it is possible to type into a flat space in Adobe (Acrobat) full program and some third-party software, even if there are fields.

To fill out a form by typing into a field, a user must click inside a field, and start typing.

Each field added by a form creator can be either:

- for a single cell, or
- for a single row of multiple cells, or
- for a multi-row field covering a part of a page, or

- for a multi-row field covering a whole page.

III. METHOD-2: FILLING OUT FORMS IN READER BY TYPING INTO A FLAT SPACE.

To fill out a form by typing into a field, a user must click Tools > Fill & Sign (or Comment) > Add Text, then click anywhere on page and start typing.

Note 1: Typing into a flat space is possible only in Reader 11 or later.

Note 2: While typing into a flat space is possible only in Reader 11 or later, it is possible to type into a flat space in any version of Adobe Acrobat full program (including versions 10 and earlier).

Note 3: If there are fields, typing into a flat space is impossible.

Note 4: If there are no fields, typing into a flat space may be possible or not, depending on the file structure (static XFA, dynamic XFA, or PDF Acrobat). It is possible to type into a flat PDF Acrobat file. It is impossible to type into a flat (static or dynamic) XFA file in Adobe (Acrobat) Reader.

Note 5: While it is impossible to type into a flat static XFA file in Adobe (Acrobat) Reader, it is possible to type into a flat static XFA file in Adobe Acrobat full program and some third-party software. However, it is impossible to type into a flat dynamic XFA file in any program: neither in Adobe (Acrobat) Reader, nor in Adobe Acrobat full program, nor in any third-party software.

Note 6: At first glance, a (static or dynamic) XFA file seems no different than an Acrobat file: same PDF extension, same appearance, seemingly same functionality. However, XFA files are created by using LiveCycle Designer technology (instead of Acrobat technology). Since XFA files are created by a different technology, they have a different functionality, and cannot be manipulated in the same way as Acrobat files. The XFA files are not even considered PDF type files (despite the PDF extension). To be manipulated in the same way as Acrobat files, an XFA file must be converted into an Acrobat file.

IV. COMPARISON OF METHODS TO FILL OUT FORMS IN READER.

1. Typing into single-cell fields has the following advantages over typing into a flat space:

1.1. To type into fields added by a form creator, a user does not need to determine the location and properties of the information to be entered. In contrast, to type text into a flat space, a user must determine the location and properties of the information to be entered. For a form user, the availability of correctly designed fields added by a form creator may be a big advantage over a Acrobat Fill & Sign (or Comment) tools, because by creating fields, the form creator relieves the form user from the task to determine the location and properties of the information to be entered.

Note: The above advantage takes place only if locations and properties of all fields are set

correctly by the form creator. However, if a needed field is omitted or a location or property of just one of the fields is incompatible with the information to be entered, then a form user is forced to fill out that field by hand or typewriter. For many form users, such a partially fillable form has no advantage over a flat form. By this reason, it is very important to allow users to change (in Reader) field locations and properties (text size, text font, number of lines) to adjust to specific information to be entered (and possible to correct creator's errors). This is possible only with relevant JavaScript actions added by a form creator (as in the FBF method by USA-Federal-Forms.com).* You will not find such features on forms posted on U.S. government Websites (as probably anywhere on the Internet, except USA-Federal-Forms.com).

1.2. To type into identical fields located in different parts of the form (on the same or different pages), a user needs only to type into one of such fields. The information entered is automatically copied into fields of the same name and type. For example, some forms have identical pages: Copy A, Copy B, Copy C, etc. If each field in copy A has the same name and type as the identical field in Copy B, Copy C, etc., then Copy B, Copy C, etc. are filled out automatically, as soon as a form user fills out a Copy A. In contrast, a user would be forced to re-type identical text into a flat space of Copy A, Copy B, Copy C, etc.

Note. The above advantage takes place only if identical fields have the same name and type. Otherwise, a form user must fill out each copy of the field.

2. Typing into a flat space has the following advantages over typing into a single row of cells:

2.1. The representation of information in a row has more limitations. The text is used as the only method to represent information. In contrast, it is possible to type both text and check marks into a flat space by Fill & Sign (or Comment) Tool.

2.2. To place a text in the best position for each cell, a user is forced to use the trial and error method by moving the whole row in the vertical and horizontal directions. This is possible only with relevant JavaScript actions added by a form creator (as in the ITAOP method by USA-Federal-Forms.com).* In contrast, it is possible to type into a flat space by placing text directly in the best vertical and horizontal position.

2.3. To insert a text in the middle of row, a user must press the space bar (to insert spaces to move the text to the middle of the row). This means additional typing. In contrast, it is possible to type into a flat space by placing text directly in the needed position.

3. Typing into a flat space has the following disadvantages over typing into a single row of cells:

3.1. It is impossible to type into a flat space in Reader 10 or earlier.

3.2. It is impossible to type into a flat space in a (static or dynamic) XFA file.

3.3. A user typing into a flat space has no access to any of the following features:

- to set font size to auto (to allow the user to type in text of any length to fit in the fill-in space regardless of the size of the space),

- to copy a row into row,
- to copy a set of rows into a set of rows,
- to copy a page into a page,
- to reset (delete, erase) all the text inserted into a row,
- to reset (delete, erase) all the text inserted into a form.

In contrast, the above features may be available to a user typing into a single row of cells (if relevant JavaScript actions are added by a form creator, as in the ITAOP method by USA-Federal-Forms.com).*

The above features are in addition to the following features available for both users (a user typing into a flat space and a user typing into a single row of cells):

- to insert text anywhere on page,
- to change text size,
- to change text font,
- to change vertical position of the text,
- to change horizontal position of the text,
- to change the space between rows,

Note: Ability to copy a row into row, to copy a set of rows into a set of rows, and to copy a page into a page may allow a user to copy manually text into Copy A, Copy B, Copy C, etc. (as in our 1.2 example). Copying manually is slower than copying automatically (into single-cell fields), but much faster than re-typing (into a flat space).

4. Typing into a single-cell has the following advantages over typing into a single row of multiple cells:

4.1. The representation of information in a row has certain limitations. The text is used as the only method to represent information. There are neither check boxes, nor radio buttons, nor list boxes, nor dropdowns, nor digital signatures.

4.2. To place a text in the best position for each cell, a user is forced to use the trial and error method by moving the whole row in the vertical and horizontal directions. This is possible only with relevant JavaScript actions added by a form creator (as in the ITAOP method by USA-Federal-Forms.com).* It is possible to find a perfect text position by this method.

4.3. To insert a text in the middle of row, a user must press the space bar (to insert spaces to move the text to the middle of the row). This means additional typing.

5. Typing into a single-row of cells has the following advantages over typing into a multi-row field (covering a part of a page or a whole page):

To place a text in the best position for each cell, a user would need to move the multi-row field in the vertical and horizontal directions. In general, the larger the multi-row space -- the more difficult to place a text in the best position for each cell. For a relatively small field, it is possible to find an acceptable text position with relevant JavaScript actions added by a form creator.*

* Note: In general, the JavaScript actions (to change locations and properties of fields) are needed only to type in Adobe (Acrobat) Reader. No JavaScript actions are needed to type in Adobe Acrobat full program (because in the Acrobat full program a user can change locations and properties of any field without using any JavaScript actions). A form with security restrictions (set by creator) is an exception. Security restrictions may prevent a user from changing locations and properties of fields (without using JavaScript actions).

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ALL U.S. AIR FORCE FORMS: <http://www.USA-Federal-Forms.com/Air-Force-Forms.html>

This includes multiple versions of each form. Visit the page to check for updates.

U.S. AIR FORCE FORMS WEBSITE: <http://www.e-publishing.af.mil>

The U.S. Air Force Forms Website has some significant limitations in form browsing functionality.

HELPFUL ARTICLES FOR USERS OF FORMS:

Review of U.S. Air Force forms:

<http://www.USA-Federal-Forms.com/Air-Force-Forms-Review.html>

Comparison of methods to fill out PDF forms:

<http://www.USA-Federal-Forms.com/Methods-to-Fill-PDF-Forms.html>

Comparison of methods to save PDF forms:

<http://www.USA-Federal-Forms.com/Methods-to-Save-PDF-Forms.html>

HELPFUL ONLINE CONVERSIONS OF PDF FORMS & DOCUMENTS:

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