

Discover the Easy Way To Scan Documents and Photos to Your Computer

This article shows you how to:

- ✓ What you need to start scanning
- ✓ The straightforward scanning steps for Windows 10, 8.1 and 7
- ✓ How to choose the best scan settings for your needs

Scanning should be a simple job. It's the rough equivalent of photocopying for your PC, but rather than making a paper copy of a document or photo, it sends the result into your computer to be saved as a picture.



The trouble is, the software that came with your scanner can make this straightforward task horrendously complicated! In this article, I'll show you the easy way to go about it, using the scanning software that comes built into Windows.

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From Paper to PC: What You Need for Scanning

We're certainly not 'paperless' yet...

For all the promises of the 'paperless office' that began several decades ago, we don't seem to be much nearer to achieving it. Yes, we use email rather than writing letters, and we might receive some of our bank statements and bills online rather than by post, but there's still plenty of paper flying around!

...but some documents could be kept on your PC instead

Some of it really does have to be kept on paper, of course: you need to have hard copies of insurance certificates or your car's MOT, for instance. But even in those cases, having a copy stored on your PC too could be useful for quick and easy reference.

But an awful lot of the paper we receive doesn't really need to be kept at all. When you've paid an invoice or a utility bill, you can scan it, file it neatly on your PC and then recycle the original. The same goes for letters. And rather than stuffing a cardboard folder full of clippings from newspapers and magazines, you can scan those into your PC and organise them in a more practical (and searchable!) way.

Rescue old photos before they disintegrate!

And then there are photos, of course. Catch them now, before they've faded and torn beyond recognition, scan them into your PC and they're safe forever (as well as being much easier to share with friends and relatives). You can also tidy up those grainy old family photos using a photo-editing program.

You just need a scanner

All you need to do this is a scanner, and you might well have one already. A scanner is the computer equivalent of a photocopier, and it works in much the same way, by photographing a document. The difference is that the scanner doesn't print the result on paper; instead, it sends a picture of the document into your PC, where it can be saved as a picture file, edited, printed and – of course – opened for viewing whenever you like.

Scanners come in several different types, and I'll run through them quickly:

- **Flatbed scanner:** this is the most common type of scanner, pictured on the first page of this article, and it really does look like a small photocopier. To use it, you raise the lid and place the document face down on the glass plate. This type of scanner can be bought for around £50 upwards.
- **Photo scanner:** this looks very much like a flatbed scanner, but it scans at the very-high quality needed if you want to scan and edit photographs and then print them again. Most also come with adapters for scanning negatives (which can then be converted easily into 'positive' photos). A photo scanner will cost something upwards of £150.
- **Document scanner:** this is a much smaller device which consists of little more than a slot and rollers. You feed a paper document into the slot where it's rolled through the device and out of the back, being scanned as it passes through. This is fine for scanning single sheets of paper, but not great for photos due to its lower scanning quality, and (obviously) you wouldn't be able to scan a page from a book or magazine without tearing out that page first.
- **Combined printer/scanner:** many modern printers are 'multifunction devices' which have a built-in flatbed scanner. That saves you space on your desk, of course, and it gives you an extra benefit: they can act as ordinary photocopiers. With a button-push on the printer's panel, you can tell it to scan the document and print a copy without having to involve your PC in the process at all.

The cheapest and most common type

Higher quality, for photos and negatives

A small scanner for sheets of text

A 'multifunction' printer with a built-in scanner

If you expect to scan, edit and then print a lot of photos, and you need top-notch quality, a photo scanner might be a worthwhile investment. However, for most



uses, a flatbed scanner (or a combined printer/scanner) will do as good a job as you'll ever need.

If you'd like to be able to scan negatives and turn them into photos, don't assume you'll necessarily have to pay the premium for a photo scanner. Some ordinary flatbed scanners come with an adapter for scanning negatives, and many others offer that adapter as an optional extra.

The scanner's software can be complicated

Any scanner you buy will come with a CD of software, and – along with the all-important 'driver' program that enables your PC to communicate with the scanner – that software will usually include a variety of programs for scanning, editing, organising and converting what your scanner produces. It tends to be a bit of a hotch-potch of programs, and they won't necessarily be easy to understand or use.

Windows' own software keeps it simple!

But scanning has become such a standard routine on PCs that there's no need to get bogged down in any complications. Just use the software supplied with Windows instead, which makes things easy.

Easy Scanning in Windows 10 and 8.1

The two most recent versions of Windows both come with a built-in app named Scan which makes the process very easy indeed. Here's what to do:




Open the Scan app


1. Make sure your scanner is connected to your PC and switched on, and – assuming it's a flatbed-style scanner – place your document face-down on its glass plate. To ensure you don't end up with a wonky scan, it's wise to place the sheet in one corner of the scanner's plate. Close the scanner's lid, taking care not to move the document as you do this.
2. Now find and start the Scan app:

- **Windows 10:** open the Start menu, scroll down the alphabetical list of programs at the left to reach the 'S' section and click on **Scan**. Alternatively, just open the Start menu and type the word **scan** and you should see it at the top of the list of results.

Can't find it? For reasons known only to itself, Microsoft has stopped including Scan with the very latest copies of Windows 10, so if you have a new PC it might not be there. Instead you have to install it from the Store: open the **Microsoft Store** app and use the search box to find the app named **Windows Scan**, then click the large **Get** button to have it downloaded and installed.



- **Windows 8.1:** click the Start button or press the  key to go to the Start screen. Type the word **scan** and you should see the Scan app at the top of the list.

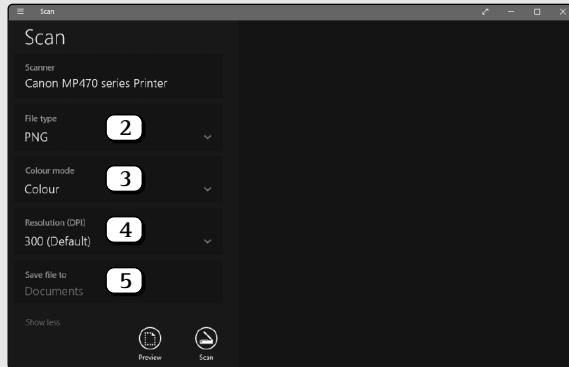
The two things you'll notice about this app are that it looks very simple and very black! We're about to make it look slightly less simple by displaying some extra settings you may want to check or change. Click the words **Show more**  and those extra settings will appear.

Display the extra settings



Adjust settings
as needed

- Now the window will change to look like the following screenshot, and we'll run through these settings to get them ready for the scan we're about to produce:



A 'PNG' file is
usually ideal

File type (2): your scan will be saved as a picture file, and here you choose which of the various picture formats you'd like to create. The selected option is PNG, which is ideal in most cases: it produces a reasonably-small but good-quality file. If you click on 'PNG' (or the arrowhead to its right) you'll see the list of alternatives. JPEG is popular for photos and also works for paper documents (although PNG is better for both); in Windows 10 you also have the option of saving as a PDF, and in either version you can choose XPS, which is Microsoft's own equivalent to PDF.



My suggestion is to use PNG unless you have a good reason not to. However, for your own filing system, you may feel it's more intuitive as you look through your files to have scans of pictures as either PNG or JPEG and scans of paper documents as PDF or XPS.

Colour mode (3): here you choose whether you want to produce a scan in colour, black and white or greyscale. That should be a simple decision, based largely on the colour of what you're scanning, but I'll give one quick tip: for a plain-text document, such as a letter or newspaper article, a black-and-white scan will produce a smaller file, but a greyscale scan might be somewhat easier on the eye when you read it. A certain amount depends on your scanner, so feel free to try a black-and-white scan, and if you're not happy with it, delete it and scan in greyscale instead.

Resolution (4): here, just stick with the default setting of 300 for now. I'll explain what this is and why you might want to change it on page 13.

Save file to (5): this specifies the folder to which this scan will be saved, and the Scan app proposes to save it to your 'Documents' folder. My suggestion is to change this to your 'Desktop' folder instead, so that all new scans land on your desktop. To do that, click the word **Documents** and, in the dialog that opens, click **Desktop** at the left and then click the **Select Folder** button.

Colour, greyscale or black-and-white

Choose where to save your scan

Why save scans to your desktop? Well, every scan is saved with an anonymous name like 'Scan_20201108'. You'll want to rename your scans so that you know what they are, and you'll probably want to move them into particular folders to organise them. If every scan lands on your desktop, that makes it easy to find and ensures you won't forget it if you have several items to scan. From there, you can quickly rename it and then move it to wherever it's going to be kept.



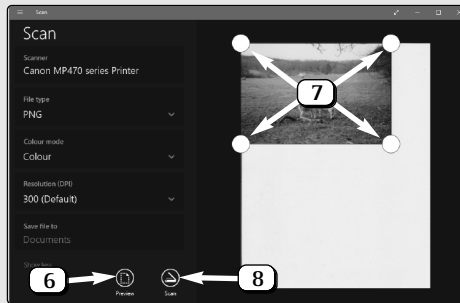
See a preview of the scan

Check the correct area is marked out...

...and scan

Done

- With those settings sorted out, click the Preview button (6) in the screenshot below). Your scanner comes to life and produces an initial scan of the document which you'll see pictured in the main section at the right of the Scan app.
- As soon as the preview appears, the app tries to determine whereabouts on the scanner's plate your document is placed and how large it is, and it draws a rectangle around it with a circular white blob in each corner (7). This rectangle specifies the area of your document or picture that will be saved when you complete the scan, so make sure it's what you want. If it isn't, you can click-and-drag the blobs to change the area outlined by that rectangle.
- When you're happy with the area that's been marked out, click the Scan button (8).



- After another pause while the scan completes, you'll see a message at the top of the window confirming that your scan was created and saved, and noting its name and folder. You can click the View button if you'd like to open the scan and look at it, or Close to close this message.

Scan_20200414.png was saved to Desktop.

View

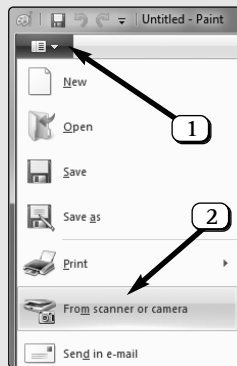
Close

Alternatively, you can simply ignore this note: if you've finished using the Scan app you can close its window, or if you'd like to scan something else, you can place it on your scanner's tray, adjust the Scan app's settings (if necessary) and go back to step 5 above. The last thing to do, of course, is to give your scan a better name than the rather-anonymous, date-related name it's been assigned and then move it to a suitable folder.

Easy Scanning in Windows 7

If you use Windows 7, the simplest way to scan a document or photo is by using Windows' built-in Paint program. Here's what to do:

1. Make sure your scanner is connected to your PC and switched on, and – assuming it's a flatbed-style scanner – place your document face-down on its glass plate. To ensure you don't end up with a wonky scan, it's wise to place the sheet in one corner of the scanner's plate. Close the scanner's lid, taking care not to move the document as you do this.
2. Open the Start menu, go to **All Programs > Accessories** and click on **Paint**.
3. At the far left of the Ribbon in the Paint window, click the blue tab **1** and then choose **From scanner or camera** **2**.
4. Now you'll see the window pictured in the screenshot on the next page. This is Windows 7's scanning window.

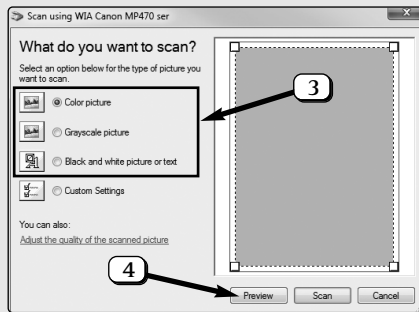


Open the
Paint program...

...and then the
scanning window

Colour, greyscale or black-and-white

- The first step is to choose whether you want to produce a scan in colour, greyscale or black-and-white and choose the appropriate option (3). That should be a simple decision, based largely on the colour of what you're scanning, but I'll give one quick tip: for a plain-text document, such as a letter or newspaper article, a black-and-white scan will produce a smaller file, but a greyscale scan might be somewhat easier on the eye when you read it. A certain amount depends on your scanner, so feel free to try a black-and-white scan, and if you're not happy with it, delete it and scan in greyscale instead. (Ignore the 'Custom settings' option for now, and I'll explain that on page 13.)



See a preview of the scan

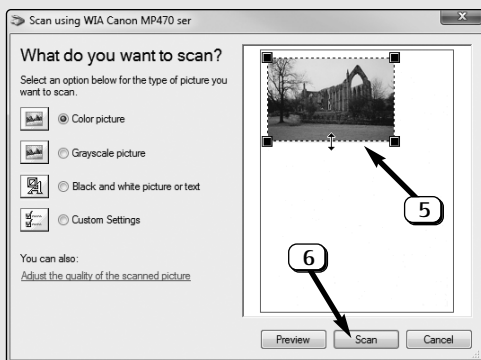
Check the correct area is marked out...

- Now click the Preview button (4). Your scanner comes to life and produces an initial scan of the document which you'll see pictured in the main section at the right of the window.
- As soon as the preview appears, the program tries to determine whereabouts on the scanner's plate your document is placed and how large it is, and it draws a dotted rectangle around it with a square blob in each corner. This rectangle specifies the area of your document or picture that will be copied when you

complete the scan, so make sure it's what you want. If it isn't, you can click-and-drag the dotted outlines to adjust the size of the area (5). If you only want to scan a portion of the document, move the mouse pointer into the centre of the dotted rectangle and drag it to place its top-left corner at the top-left of the area you want to scan and then drag the square blob in the bottom-right corner diagonally to expand or contract the rectangle.

8. When you're happy with the area you've marked out, you're ready to produce the scan: click the Scan button (6).

...and scan



9. At this point, the window we've just been using will disappear and you'll be returned to the Paint window. Your scanner is now busily scanning the document, and at the bottom of the Paint window you'll see a progress bar showing you how much of the picture the scanner has sent into Paint so far.
10. When the process is complete, you'll see your scan appear in the Paint window. It may be quite a lot larger than the window, requiring you to scroll around to see different parts of the picture, but don't

You return to the Paint window...

...and your scan appears

worry about that: it's all down to the 'scanning resolution', which I'll explain a little later in this article.



Now that you're seeing your finished scan, you might feel that you didn't choose the right colour option in step 5, or mark out quite the right area in step 7. If so, go back to step 3 and repeat the process. After the new scan completes, but just before it appears in Paint, you'll be asked if you want to save the changes to 'Untitled' (meaning the old, unwanted scan), so click on **Don't save**.

Save the
scanned image

10. Now you're ready to save the scan. Click the blue tab at the far-left of the Ribbon, move the mouse down to **Save As** and then click the picture format you'd like to use to save the scan. The best option is PNG, which produces a reasonably-small but good-quality file. JPEG is popular for photos and also works for paper documents, producing a slightly smaller file than PNG, but at the expense of losing a little quality. The GIF format can produce a very small file if you scanned a plain-text document in black-and-white, but it won't produce good results for most colour or greyscale scans.

11. After clicking the picture format you want to use, you'll see a Save As dialog. Choose the folder in which you want to save the scan, type a descriptive name for it and click **Save**.

Done

12. That's it – you've scanned and saved your document or photo. If there's something else you want to scan, pop that into your scanner and then go back to step 3 above. Otherwise, just close the Paint window by clicking the x in its top-right corner.

Whichever version of Windows you're using, you may be able to speed up the process by skipping the use of the Preview button. You use Preview chiefly to ensure that the scanning program has correctly identified where the document is on the scanner's plate and outlined it. But if you're scanning a 12-page document, for instance, and the preview of the first page was okay, you can be fairly certain the next 11 pages will also be okay: just insert each page and go straight to the Scan button.



Scan Settings: Choose the Ideal Resolution

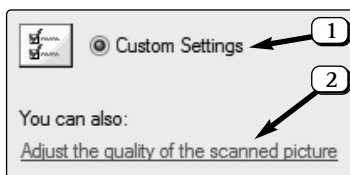
Unless you choose to change this figure, each version of Windows will produce your scan at a resolution of 300 DPI (which stands for Dots Per Inch). I'll start by explaining how you change this and then tell you when and why you might want to.

You can scan at higher or lower resolutions

Windows 10 and Windows 8.1: click on the resolution currently shown (4) in the screenshot on page 6) or the arrowhead to its right, and you can choose any resolution from 50 to 600 DPI, increasing in jumps of 50 DPI.

How to adjust the resolution

Windows 7: rather than choosing one of the three colour options as we did in step 5 on page 10, click on **Custom Settings** (1). Next, click the words **Adjust the quality of the scanned picture** (2).



In the little dialog that appears, you can optionally use the two sliders to adjust the brightness and/or contrast of the scan, but it's easier to use an image-editing program to do that in a more-controlled way when the scan is complete.

In the **Resolution (DPI)** box, highlight the figure shown and type the resolution you want to use. Below **Picture type**, open the drop-down list and make the familiar choice between a colour, greyscale or black-and-white scan. Finally, click **OK** and you're ready to click the **Preview** (or **Scan**) button.

Choosing the best resolution

The 'resolution' specifies the quality of the scan – how much detail is captured – and, as a result, how large the file will be. Higher resolutions produce a more detailed scan which looks larger when you view it on your screen and produces a bigger file.

In general, 300 DPI gives a good balance between quality and file size. But will you want to print a scan or simply view it on your screen?

Low resolutions for viewing on-screen only

- If you're scanning something which you'll only view on your screen, a low resolution of 50–100 DPI should be sufficient for a text document, or 150–200 DPI for a photo.

Higher resolutions are needed for printing

- If you're planning to print the scan (perhaps after editing it), you'll need a higher resolution to produce a good-quality print. Aim for around half of your printer's resolution if you can find out what that is; if you can't, scan at around 300–400 DPI for a text document or 600 DPI for a photo.



Bear in mind that the higher the resolution you choose, the larger the scan will appear when viewed on your screen – and it may be a good deal larger than your screen. That's a necessary evil to produce the quality needed for printing afterwards, but obviously just an annoyance if you'll only ever view it on the screen. That (along with the smaller file size) is why it's wise to choose the lowest resolution you can get away with!