Application Software File Types and Formats

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WHAT'S COVERED

Microsoft popularized the idea of the office-software productivity bundle with its release of Microsoft Office. While Microsoft Office is no longer the only office software bundle, this package continues to dominate the market, and most businesses expect employees to know how to use this software. One of the major characteristics of all productivity software is that these applications produce information such as charts, graphs, slideshows, worksheets, video, music, drawings, pictures, etc. In this tutorial, we will examine the file types generated by productivity application software.

Our discussion will break down as follows:

1. What is a File Type?

A **file type**, commonly referred to as a file format, is the ending of a file that gives the operating system the ability to identify it. The file type specifies the relationship between the file and specific programs or applications, and tells a software application how to display it. In Microsoft Windows, the file type is a three-character suffix preceded by a period and the file's name. For example, a file named ”windows” with a “.ppt” file type is displayed as “windows.ppt.” The file type of “ppt” indicates to the computer’s operating system that it is a presentation file and can be opened and edited in presentation software such as Microsoft PowerPoint. In most cases, the file type will be one to three characters at the end of the file name. However, there are some software applications that allow for more than the traditional three-character file type, such as the “html” file type associated with web pages.

TERM TO KNOW

File Type

The ending of a file that gives the operating system the ability to identify it; provides the structure of a document and tells a software application how to display it.

2. Common File Types

The file type of a document tells a program how to structure and display the contents of the file. As

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productivity application software has evolved, some file types have become associated with particular applications. Furthermore, manufacturers of software have also developed native file types. A **native file type** describes the file type that an application directly uses during the creation and editing of a document. For example, a file with the .doc or .docx file extension specifies to the computer's operating system that the file will be best viewed with Microsoft Word. This is because the .doc file type is native to Microsoft Word.

Listed below is a table with common productivity software applications and their native file formats:

Productivity Software Application	Common Native File Types
Microsoft Word	.doc, .docx, .rtf
Microsoft PowerPoint	.ppt, .pptx
Microsoft Excel	.xls, .xlsx
Microsoft Access	.accdb, .mdb

In some cases, a file with a specific extension may be viewed with a piece of software not native — or*foreign* — to that extension. A **foreign file type** is a file type that is not directly used by an application during the creation or editing of a document. When opening documents with file formats foreign to a software application, the contents may not be displayed accurately or completely. Programs that are not compatible with a file format may be able to give an overview of a file, but they may not be able to display all of the file's features.

TERMS TO KNOW

Native File Type

File type that an application directly uses during the creating and editing of a document.

Foreign File Type

File type that is not directly used by an application during the creating or editing of a document.

3. Data and File Types

Remember that file formats define for software applications how the contents of a particular file are to be displayed. As you work with a computer, there may come a time in which you need to make a determination as to what file format will be best suited to display the type of data you will be working with, or the type of file you wish to create. There may even come an instance in which you need to make an association between a file type and the correct type of application to use to display the contents of the file. Listed below is a table with common data (file) types and the associated file:

Data Type	File Extension
Text	.asc, .doc, .docx, .msg, .txt, .wpd, .wps
Sound	.aac, .au, .mid, .mp3, .ra, .snd, .wma, .wav
Image	.bmp, .eps, .gif, .jpg, .pict, .png, .tif
Database	.xml, .tar, .sql, .db, .dbf, .dat, .csv
Video	.avi, mpg, .mov, .wmv
Computer Program	.bat, .com, .exe

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Presentation	.ppt, .pptx, .pps, .key, .odp
Spreadsheet	.xls, .xlsx, .xlr, .ods

SUMMARY

A file format defines a software application how to display the contents of a file created within the application. In this tutorial, we covered common **file types** and the software applications and **types of data (files)** that tend to be associated with **specified file types**.

Source: Derived from Chapter 3 of "Information Systems for Business and Beyond" by David T. Bourgeois. Some sections removed for brevity.
https://www.saylor.org/site/textbooks/Information%20Systems%20for%20Business%20and%20Beyond/Textbook.html

TERMS TO KNOW

File Type
The ending of a file that gives the operating system the ability to identify it; provides the structure of a document and tells a software application how to display it; commonly referred to as file format.

Foreign File Type
File type that is not directly used by an application during the creation or editing of a document.

Native File Type
File type that an application directly uses during the creation and editing of a document.

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