

What Are All These Files for Anyway?

Don't know the difference between a .jpg, .tif, .gif or .ai file? No problem! Here's a crash course in graphics to help you know what you'll need to produce the materials you want. If you right click on any of the logo links, you will be able to select "Save Link As..." and save the file to your desktop so you can easily find and open the file. If you left click on the link, it will open in your Internet browser, where you might not be able to view or save the image. To resize an image, hold the "shift" key as you drag the corner of the image box to make sure the image doesn't stretch in one direction: this is referred to as "constraining the proportions."

JPEG (or .jpg)

These are standard image files, just like the pictures you'd take on a digital camera. They are fairly universal and easy to upload to any website or open in any image-capable computer program. They are high quality as long as you constrain the proportions when resizing them. Use a JPEG when you want a color image that is a small enough file to quickly upload, e-mail and share.

TIFF (or .tif)

If you're an Apple user, these are the files of choice, but PC users still might find them useful. Larger files than JPEGs, they hold more detailed information, which means you can easily resize them without losing image quality. They also store more information such as layers and clipping masks that would be helpful to a professional printer or designer. But you might find many programs won't recognize, open or upload these files. Use a TIFF if you use a Mac or are seeking assistance from a professional designer.

Bitmap (or .gif)

Unlike a JPEG or TIFF, these files do not have layers or backgrounds, which makes them a smaller file size and easy to animate. Unfortunately, this also means bitmaps have a lower color resolution and lose quality quickly when they are resized—even when you constrain the proportions. Use a bitmap to place the image on a colored background or to upload to the Internet, but do not resize the image to more than five inches in width.

Vector (or .ai)

Most people will not be able to open these files, but they are the most important files at your disposal. Instead of using dots to make a composite of an image, vector files use an infinite number of lines and mathematical curves to build an image. Vector images can be resized to any dimension and still keep full quality. The .ai extension stands for Adobe Illustrator, so unless you have the Adobe Creative Suite 5 at your disposal, you will not be able to manipulate these images. Professional designers and printers will greatly appreciate having access to this file, and their work will be a better quality. Use a vector file whenever printing a high-quality image, including a poster or banner, advertisement or brochure.