

# Handling Mystery Files

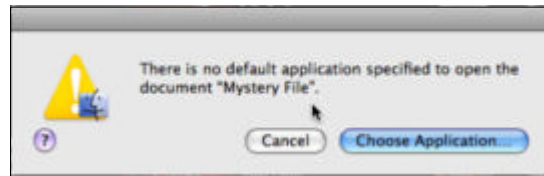
How many times have you seen them?

Document icons that are plain and unadorned. You've probably met them attached to emails, sitting contemptuously on CDs or mocking you from your own Desktop. What are these mysterious file icons and *what do they want?*

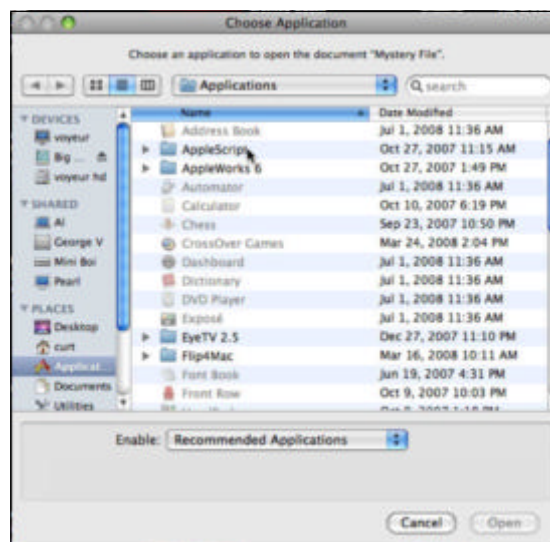


Mystery File.doc

They want to open! But when you double click on them, instead of opening, your Mac complains:



And, if you click on the Choose Application button, you are met with a bewildering set of choices and no clues as to which is the correct choice:



*What to do?!?*

Sit back, relax and think it through. First, you need to know this clue: plain, unadorned icons, like our Mystery File, are *Generic Icons*. Your Mac uses a *Generic Icon* when it has no idea what the right icon should be.

You're not the only one confused; Mac is too. The most common reason that Mac doesn't know which icon to use to represent the file or what application to use to open the file is that you *do not* possess the application that created the file.

All applications (*iPhoto*, *Mail*, *Safari*, *Pages*, etc. are applications) save new document files in proprietary formats. Because they are proprietary, only the creating application can open the document file that it created. So, a letter written using *Pages*, once saved, can only be opened by *Pages* and no other application. If you send this document file to someone else and they do not have *Pages*, they will not be able to open it. Period! They will see a *Generic Icon* representing that *Pages* document.

The second most common reason for seeing a *Generic Icon* is that the file represented by the *Generic Icon* is damaged. If so, that file is most probably unrecoverable and should be thrown away.

Now you know why you see a *Generic Icon* and why Mac doesn't know which application to use to open the file. You have three courses of action:

- 1) *To Heck With It!* Toss the icon in the Trash and forget about it. A simple choice, but not ideal if you want to use the document in question!
- 2) *Pass the Buck.* The document's creator should have checked with you before sending the document. It is their responsibility to know what applications you have and send documents that you can open. So, contact the sender and tell the inconsiderate lout that they need to send you a copy that you can use. Most applications can *Save As* in universal formats, they just hide this ability from us to keep us locked in and buying their expensive upgrades. Bitter? Who? Me?

3) *Get creative.* There is a good chance that you can open that Mystery File, but Mac doesn't know it. So, look for clues.

Check the file's name. Note that the Mystery File's full name is Mystery File.doc. That .doc is a clue.

Many applications append a suffix (usually a dot and three characters) that identifies the creating application. In the case of .doc, the creating application is *Microsoft Word*. Knowing that, you could drag and drop the icon (see CCC News June 2007) onto the *TextEdit* application icon (find it in your *Applications* folder). *TextEdit* knows how to open most *Microsoft Word* documents.

Here are some common file name suffixes and what they mean:

.doc = Microsoft Word  
.xls = Microsoft Excel  
.ppt = Microsoft PowerPoint  
.cwk = AppleWorks or ClarisWorks  
.pps = Adobe Photoshop  
.pdf = Adobe Acrobat  
.pages = Pages  
.rtf = Microsoft Word  
.txt = text  
.jpg = JPEG picture file.  
.exe = Windows application (you can't run these; throw them away).

If the file name does not have a suffix, try to figure out if the file is text from a word processor, a spreadsheet of numbers, a picture, a music file, a video file or whatnot.

Once you have determined this use these rules of thumb:

**Text:** Drag the icon to *TextEdit*, *Pages*, *AppleWorks* or *Microsoft Word*.

**Picture:** Drag the icon to *Preview*, *iPhoto* or *Safari*.

**Spreadsheet:** Drag the icon to *AppleWorks*, *Numbers* or *Microsoft Excel*.

**Music:** Drag the icon to *iTunes*, *Flip4Mac* or *QuickTime Player*.

**Video:** Drag the icon to *QuickTime Player* or *Flip4Mac*.

**PDF:** Drag the icon to *Preview* or *Adobe Reader*.

Occasionally, you may have to try more than one application. Usually you will find a way to open that Mystery File.

But, sometimes you can't. There will be times when nothing you can do will work. If you can't induce the sender to help you, please send the file to me. I have a large library of applications plus some pretty sophisticated transla-

tion software that makes it 95% certain that I can open almost anything. If I can open your Mystery File, I can translate it into a format that you can open. Once done, I'll email the file back to you. This service is free to California Computer Care members.

### July Tip—

Is stuff on your Mac's screen looking a little small? My old, bifocaled eyes often think so. Try changing Mac's screen's resolution.

- 1) Launch *System Preferences* and click on the *Displays* icon.
- 2) In the *Displays* preference, look for the *Resolutions* column.
- 3) Note the list of numbers. Smaller numbers mean that stuff on screen will appear bigger. Larger numbers mean the opposite.
- 4) Experiment. Click on a set of numbers. The screen will change. Do you like that better? If so, great. If not, try another set of numbers.
- 5) Once you find a setting that you like, *Quit System Preferences* and that setting will be your setting from now on.

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