Five Best PDF Readers

Adobe's free PDF reader has long been a standard for handling its extremely popular document format, but you aren't limited to using it to view your PDF files. Let's take a look at five of the most popular PDF readers.
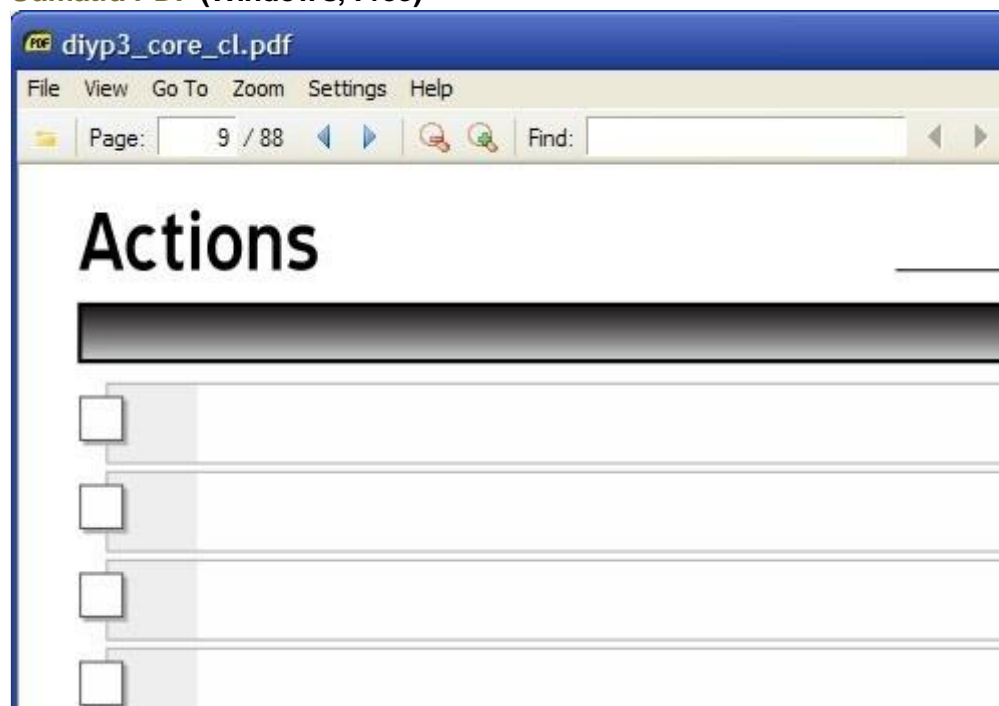
Original image by iowa spirit walker.

Last week we asked you to share your favorite PDF reader, and now we're back to share the results.

A note about pricing: Every basic package offered by the companies included in today's Hive is free. Among those offering paid upgrades, we selected the upgrade directly above the basic package for our price inclusion. Make sure to check out the company sites for additional information and to see which, if any, of the upgrades is necessary for your needs.

The test document we used is the D*I*Y Planner 3.0 Handbook, an excellent resource of organization-related printouts.
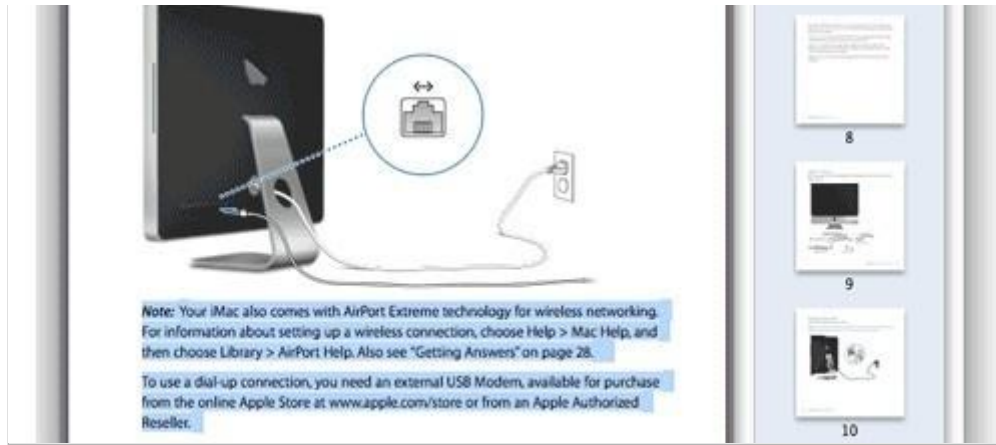
Sumatra PDF (Windows, Free)

Sumatra PDF is an ultra-lightweight and open-source portable application. The emphasis with Sumatra PDF is not on the number of features and the wide-ranging abilities of the application, but instead on speed. It loads almost instantly, renders pages extremely quickly, and thanks to a huge number of keyboard shortcuts, you can zip through nearly any document with ease. Sumatra PDF, thanks to a lack of frills and extraneous features, is a great candidate for a portable drive or for in-browser use for someone who wants quick-loading PDF files without the lag caused by features they won't ever use.
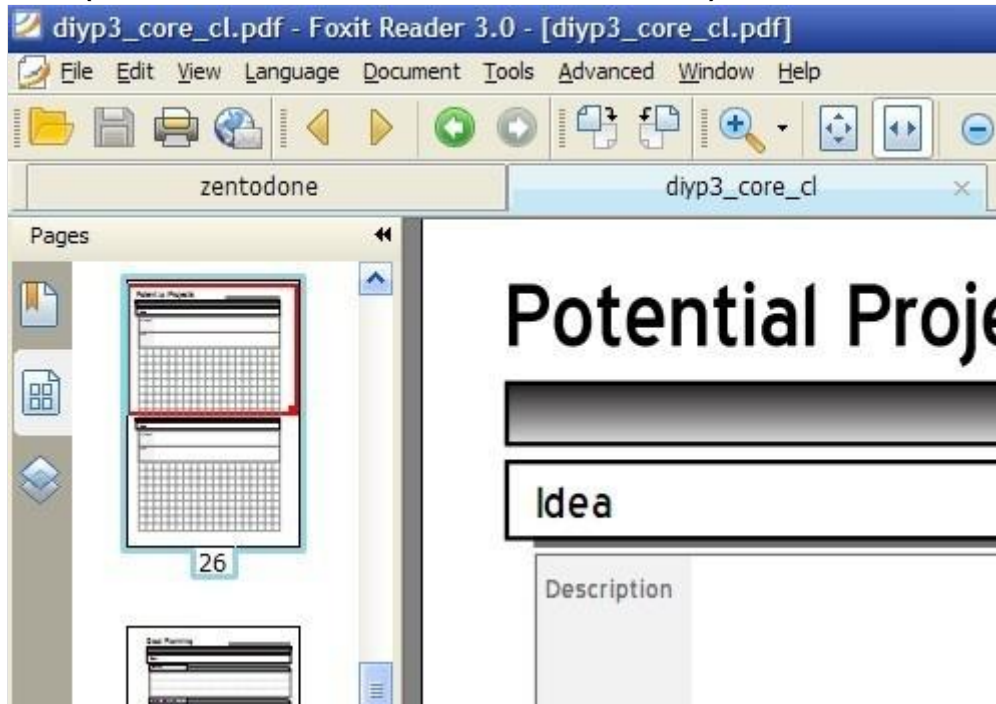
Preview (Mac, Free)

Preview is Apple's free PDF viewer, built into OS X. It's no mystery many Mac users have no need to step beyond the built-in tool. Preview has quite a few features often only found in commercial PDF software.

In commercial PDF software, like the ability to drag and drop pages between documents, page extraction, encryption, and text annotation. In addition to viewing PDF files, Preview can display over two dozen other file formats, making it quite a versatile little viewer.
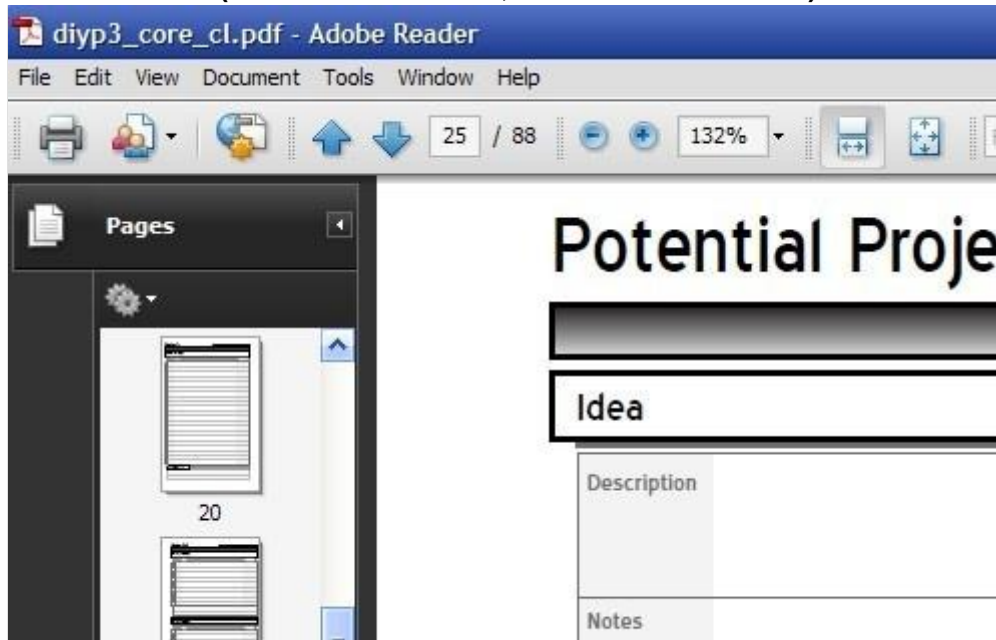
Foxit (Windows/Linux, Basic: Free/Pro Pack: $39.99)

Foxit is a polished Acrobat-alternative that, on top of cleanly displaying PDF files with a minimal interface, also has a host of handy features—all packed into a lightweight 6MB package. Foxit loads immediately, without any splash page or lag from plug-ins loading. Reading PDFs is just as snappy, and in-text pictures and charts render quickly. When filling out PDF forms, you can save your progress in the form and return later to finish filling it out. While both the free and the Pro version allow you to annotate

text, insert graphics and drawings, and insert links, the free version adds a Foxit stamp on each page you annotate; the pro version removes the marking. Foxit is available as a portable application.

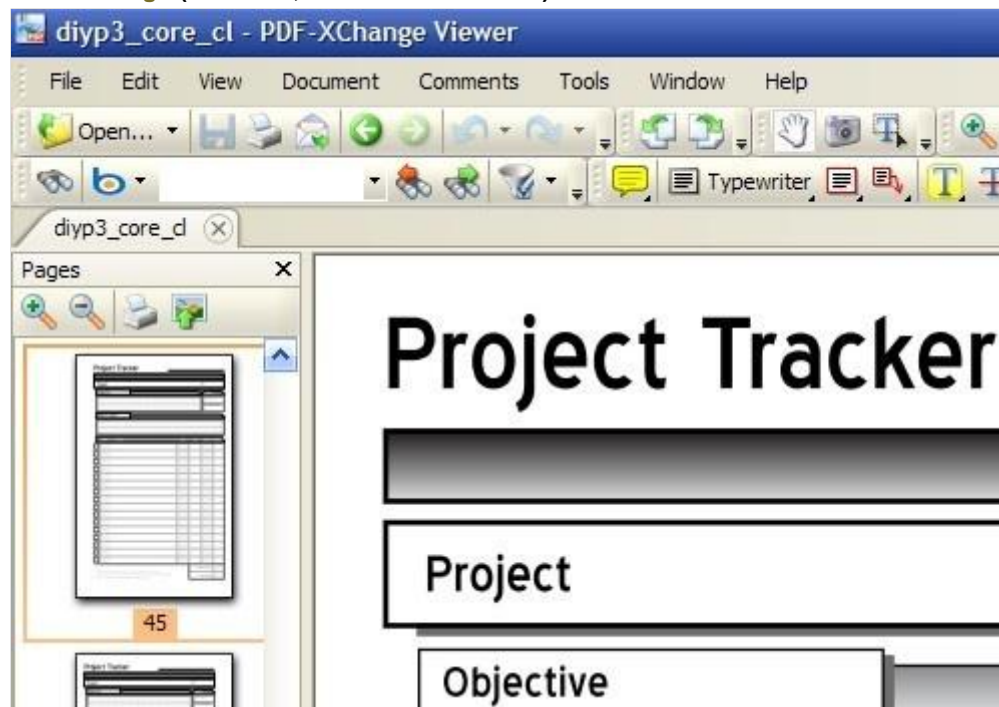### Adobe Acrobat (Windows/Mac/Linux, Basic: Free/Pro: $299)

Adobe Reader is Adobe's default offering for viewing PDFs. Acrobat enjoys widespread popularity as a result of being offered by the company that created the PDF. For light PDF users, it's a more than adequate tool, although frequent users may seek to try a lighter alternative to get rid of the long load times and the lag that can occur when Acrobat loads within a web browser pane. You can attach sticky notes to pages and highlight text for your own review. More

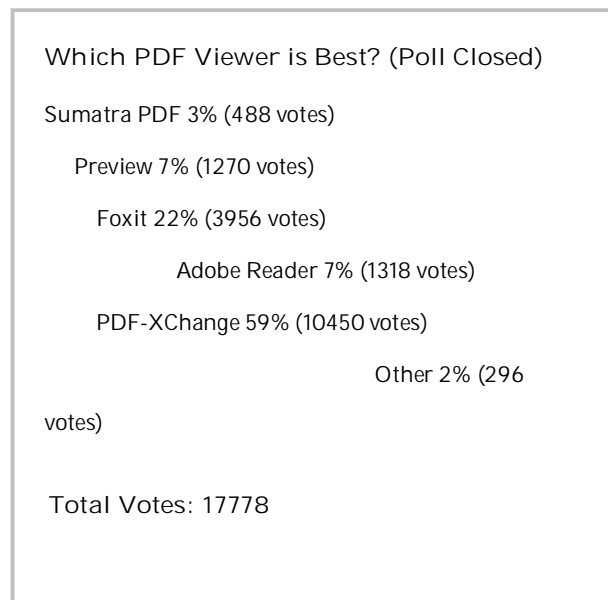merge PDF files, are only available with an upgrade to Acrobat Standard for $299.

PDF-XChange (Windows, Basic: Free/Pro: $34)

PDF-XChange is another Adobe-alternative in today's Hive that boasts snappy load times and basic functionality that outpaces the basic functionality of Adobe Reader. With PDF-XChange you can open and browse PDF documents, perform simple page annotations with drawings and text, and type outside of preset form boxes by using the PDF-XChange typewriter tool to place text wherever you want. Advanced features like reorganizing pages and text extraction are only available with the Pro upgrade. PDF-Xchange is available as a portable application.

Now that you've had a chance to look over the candidates—and hopefully get a chance to test them out, since so many are conveniently portable!—it's time to cast your vote in the poll below:

Which PDF Viewer is Best? (Poll Closed)

Sumatra PDF 3% (488 votes)

Preview 7% (1270 votes)

Foxit 22% (3956 votes)

Adobe Reader 7% (1318 votes)

PDF-XChange 59% (10450 votes)

Other 2% (296 votes)

Total Votes: 17778

Love a PDF application that didn't make the cut? Have a trick for making Adobe Acrobat load faster? Share your PDF tips and tricks in the comments.

Send an email to Jason Fitzpatrick, the author of this post, at jason@lifehacker.com.