

What The Heic?

Those of you who take photographs with their mobile phones and then copy them to their PC may find that you are unable to view them or work on them on said PC. This is because some mobile phones are using a new file format for pictures instead of the tried and trusted (and by now somewhat long in the tooth) JPEG format. This new format is known as High Efficiency Image Coding and pictures taken using it will show as abc1234.heic. Confusingly, the format is properly called High Efficiency Image Format (HEIF) but for our purposes this can be ignored. The new format was developed by MPEG, the people who developed the JPEG format, and the main practical benefit is that it produces images which are at least as good as JPEG's but the files are about half the size.

Note: what follows applies to Windows 10.

If you double-click on an heic image then the Windows 'Photos' app will launch, but it may or may not display the picture. If it does then well and good, but if it doesn't there will be a link to "Download Codecs at Microsoft Store":

- Follow the link and click the 'Get' button and install the free codecs on your PC.
- You will now be able to open and view heic pictures in the same way as any other image, and you will also be able to see thumbnails in folders.

If this is all you want to do there is no need to go any further. However, there are a couple of good reasons why you might want to convert them to the JPEG format; one is that if you send copies to somebody else they might not be able to view them unless they go through the same rigmarole, the second is that many editing programmes (including Photoshop) can't deal with them. If this is what you want to do then you will need to install a converter programme:

- Find the folder containing the picture you want to convert and right-click on it.
- Choose 'Open with' and select 'Search the Microsoft store'.
- Once in the store choose "HEIC Image Viewer – Support Converter". This will cost you £2.49.
- Install the converter.

To use the converter:

- First launch the heic viewer (either from the Start menu or by double-clicking on an heic image).
- At the bottom of the window which opens click on 'Batch-Convert Entry'. A new window will open.
- At top left click on 'Open heic files' or 'Open Folder', navigate to where the pictures are located and select the pictures you want to convert. Click 'Open' and they will be listed in the Heic-Conversion window showing their Conversion Statue as 'Waiting'
- By default, the Converter will save the JPEG's in the same folder as the original heic files. If you want to save them somewhere else click on "Select Output Folder" and choose where you want them put.
- At top middle you will see the box 'Select Saving Format' and by default it will show 'PNG'. To save to a different format such as JPEG click on the box and select 'JPEG' from the drop-down list. There is also an option to save as TIFF, but when I tried this the tiff files would not open in Photoshop.
- Click on 'Start Convert' and wait for the process to complete.

- The original heic files will not be deleted, so you will finish up with a set of heic files and a corresponding set of JPEG files. Personally, I would delete the heic files as I don't see any point in duplicating the pictures.

Note1

There are many free programmes which will enable you to view and convert heic files. Personally, I wouldn't use them because usually you have no idea who wrote them and what else might be in the programme, such as spyware and malware. Obviously, this doesn't apply if the source is one that you're confident you can trust.

Note 2

There are also free services where you can upload your pictures to a website and get back the converted images. I would not use these because once you have uploaded your pictures you have no control over what happens to them or where they might appear.

Note 3

Being able to see file extensions is often very useful, but by default Windows does not show them. To make Windows (any version) show them:

- Open the Control Panel (Start menu>Windows System>Control Panel).
- Choose 'File Explorer Options'.
- In the box that opens click on the 'View' tab at the top.
- Scroll down the list of 'Advanced Settings' and find 'Hide extensions for known file types'. The small box beside it will be ticked.
- Untick this box, then click 'Apply' (bottom right) and then 'OK' (bottom centre).

Windows will now display file extensions for all files, not just pictures.