Vancouver ProMusica

How to Prepare an Anonymized Score PDF

Preparation of an anonymized score PDF file may seem rather obvious. However, many score submissions to Vancouver Pro Musica calls for scores still have personally identifying information present. Sometimes this is due to failing to remove certain personally identifying information, possibly not knowing it even exists in the PDF file. In other cases, it is the result of using flawed methods that seem to remove or obscure information that identifies you personally, but do not actually work with PDF files. This brief document will help to educate you on the steps to prepare an anonymized score PDF, and some of the dos and don'ts when you are doing so.

First, we should identify the three major parts of your score that can have personally identifying information in them:

1. **Composer name on the first page of music, the title page of the score, and the copyright notice**. Almost everybody removes this information, but some use incorrect means to do so.
2. **PDF Metadata**. The PDF file format contains hidden information fields called *metadata*. These fields can contain information such as the original file name of the file created in the music notation program, the name of the composer, and the notation program used. Even handwritten scores scanned to PDF can contain the name of the person that scanned them in the "Author" field, which in most cases will be the composer themselves.
3. **Dedications and Program Note References**. If the dedication is to a family member identified by name, or the program notes present information that personally identifies you, it would be best to edit this in the anonymized score version.

The following procedure should allow you to ensure that you have no personally identifying information in your anonymized PDF file.

Step 1: Use "Save As" in your notation software to create the anonymized version

Many PDF generators automatically include the original filename of the music notation file in the "title" metadata field. Some composers may put their name in the notation file name, and then export to PDF. The name may therefore be visible in this field. Because of this, the first step should be to take your notation file in whatever notation program you use and save it as a different filename. When doing the save as, you should remove your name and perhaps add "ANON" to the name so you can distinguish it from the normal version, for your own benefit.

Step 2: Delete your name – DO NOT try to obscure it with black boxes instead

We have all seen releases of classified government documents where certain sensitive information is sanitized/redacted by "blacking it out". This is a technique that works fine for old fashioned printed paper records, but must be avoided when done in the digital domain. We receive some submissions that have black boxes added over the composer name, but this can fail in a few regards:

1. The PDF file actually preserves your name underneath the black box and it is easy to determine your name by simply copying and pasting the text to another program; and,
2. The PDF file draws in layers. The bottom layer draws first, the top layer draws later. This means that when the file is first opened, your name will draw first, as a lower layer, and then the box overtop would draw later, sometimes up to a few seconds after opening the file. This means your name could appear prominently when the file is opened before the black box obscures it a few seconds later.

It is important that you <u>delete your name</u> in the <u>first page of music</u>, the <u>title page of the score</u>, the <u>copyright notice</u>, and <u>anywhere else it may be present</u>, rather than simply trying to obscure it with black or white boxes or other such things. *An exception is made here for scores scanned from paper where it is already blacked out in the paper copy.*

Step 3: Review your Program Notes and Dedication (if present) and edit if necessary

The program notes and dedication (if present in the anonymized score) could contain the names of relatives who share your last name, or an unusual fact about yourself that could serve to identify you. Use your judgement – if it is something that could identify many composers, there is no need to remove this, but a program note comment such as "as the author of the novel series (name given here)", or something similar that is very personally identifying, the program note should be reworded for the anonymized version.
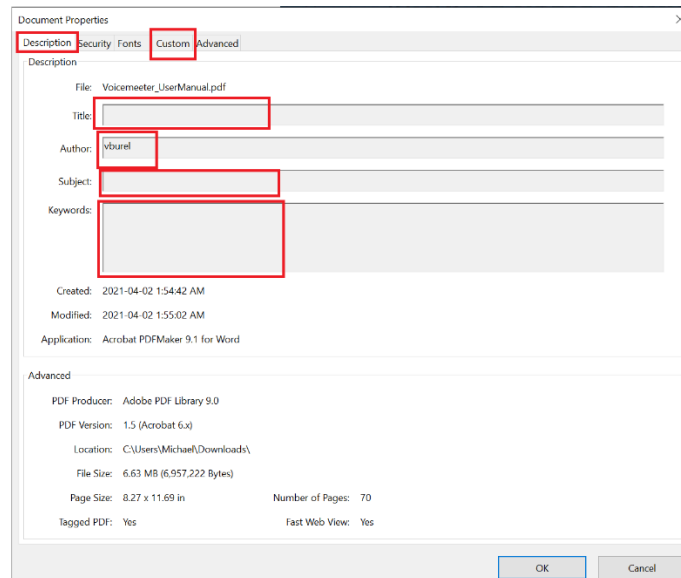
Step 4: Print to PDF (avoid your notation program's Export to PDF function if possible)

The notation program's "Export to PDF" feature frequently fills in the metadata fields with the composer name and file name of the original file, trying to be helpful to ensure attribution to the composer. It can be used if necessary, but you must take an extra step to clear this unwanted metadata later. When using your computer's "Print to PDF" function, less of the metadata is available to the PDF printer and so the chances of your name being leaked into the PDF is lessened.

However, even when using Print to PDF, you must still proceed to step 5, as the print-to-PDF feature in some computers may include the name of the logged in user, which is often the composer's name.

Step 5: Review your submission for identifying metadata

You should now review your submission for identifying metadata. The identifying metadata can be viewed in the official Adobe Acrobat Reader program, which can be installed for free if you do not have it from https://get.adobe.com/reader/. Review the Title, Author, Subject and Keywords fields in the Document Properties pane for any identifying information, and also review the Custom tab for identifying information.

If you do not want to have to install Adobe Acrobat Reader, there are online PDF metadata checkers (one good one is at https://www.metadata2go.com) that will allow you to view the metadata and identify if your name is contained within it.

Step 6: If your PDF has identifying metadata, scrub the metadata

If you found that your file in step 5 has identifying metadata, you can use an online tool to scrub it. You can do web searches for "PDF Metadata Editor" to find some good online scrubbers, and these include https://www.sejda.com/edit-pdf-metadata and https://pdfcandy.com/edit-pdf-meta.html.

After uploading your file and editing the metadata, be sure to verify that it not only has properly removed the metadata, but also that your document still displays correctly, and doesn't have missing items or pages.

Step 7: Name and Submit your Anonymous PDF

For naming your anonymous PDF file, please refer to the call for scores that you are responding to, as it will contain the most up to date naming guidelines. Then, submit your anonymous PDF to the call for scores.