Lesson 1-7: Understand common file formats

1   Open a new blank workbook.
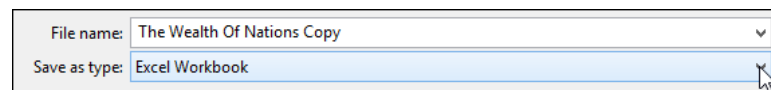
You learned how to do this in: *Lesson 1-1: Start Excel and open a new blank workbook.*

2   View the file formats supported by Excel.

note

You can also use the **<F12>** key to instantly display the *Save As* dialog.

1.   Click the *File* button at the top-left of the screen.

2.   Click: *Save As* in the left-hand list.

3.   Click *Computer* in the *Save As* menu.

4.   Click *Browse* in the *Computer* menu.

The *Save As* dialog appears.

5.   Click the drop-down arrow to the right of the *Save as type* list.

File name:	The Wealth Of Nations Copy	⌄
Save as type:	Excel Workbook	⌄

A list appears showing all of the different file formats supported by Excel (see sidebar).

3   Understand the most important file formats.

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Excel Workbook
Excel Workbook
Excel Macro-Enabled Workbook
Excel Binary Workbook
Excel 97-2003 Workbook
XML Data
Single File Web Page
Web Page
Excel Template
Excel Macro-Enabled Template
Excel 97-2003 Template
Text (Tab delimited)
Unicode Text
XML Spreadsheet 2003
Microsoft Excel 5.0/95 Workbook
CSV (Comma delimited)
Formatted Text (Space delimited)
Text (Macintosh)
Text (MS-DOS)
CSV (Macintosh)
CSV (MS-DOS)
DIF (Data Interchange Format)
SYLK (Symbolic Link)
Excel Add-In
Excel 97-2003 Add-In
PDF
XPS Document
Strict Open XML Spreadsheet
OpenDocument Spreadsheet

Excel Workbook (the Open XML format)

Before Office 2007 was released, every program stored its information on the hard disk in a completely different way. These incompatible formats are called *binary formats*. This made it very difficult to write applications that could be used together.

All of this has changed with the new file format that was first introduced in Office 2007: *Office Open XML*

Microsoft have published exactly how this format works and given it away free to the world's developer community. This allows other programs to easily work with Excel workbook files. For example, Apple's iPhone already supports Office Open XML Email attachments.
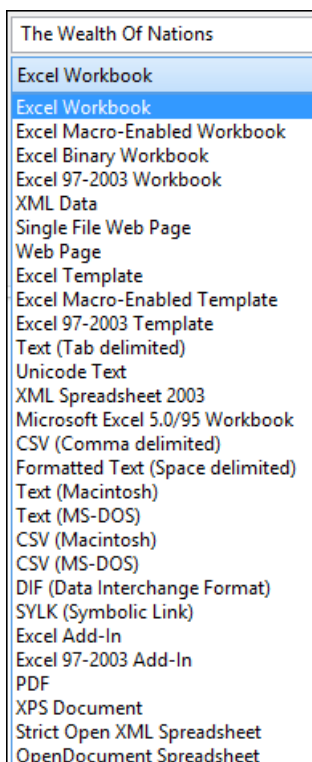
Unfortunately, the future has to co-exist with the past and there are still some people in the world (though a declining number) using pre-2007 versions of Office (97, 2000, 2002 and 2003). If you save your files in the Open XML format, only people running Office 2007/2010/2013 will be able to read them (but see the sidebar on the facing page for two potential solutions to this problem).

Excel Macro Enabled Workbook

An Excel Macro Enabled Workbook is simply a workbook that has program code (called VBA code) embedded within it. Macros are beyond the scope of this book but are covered in the *Excel Expert Skills* book in this series.

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While Macro code is very powerful it can also be destructive as it is extremely simple to write damaging viruses within Excel macro code.

Macro programming (also called VBA programming) is a vast subject of its own and is not useful to the vast majority of Excel users. The Smart Method® run comprehensive classroom Excel VBA courses but they are usually only taken by scientists and engineers who need to add very advanced functionality to Excel.

Versions of Excel before Excel 2007 could potentially allow a workbook to infect your machine with a macro virus because all Excel files were capable of carrying macros. Because the formats are now separate, it is easier to avoid opening potentially infected files.

Excel 97-2003 Workbook

This is the old binary format that allows users with earlier versions of Excel to open your workbooks. Some features won't work in earlier versions and if you've used those in your workbook, Excel will display a warning when you save telling you which features will be lost.

Excel Binary Workbook

An oddity in Excel 2007/2010/2013 is a binary format called: *Excel Binary Workbook*. This is a binary alternative to Open XML but it can't be read by earlier versions of Excel. The only advantage of this format is that it loads and saves more quickly than Open XML.

PDF

If you need to send a worksheet to a user who does not own a copy of Excel, you can save it in PDF (Portable Document Format). This format was invented by Adobe and is also sometimes called *Adobe Acrobat* or simply *Acrobat*.

Adobe provides a free reader program for PDF files and most users will already have this installed upon their computers. If you send a user a PDF file they will be able to read and print (but not change) the worksheet.

XPS

This format is a Microsoft-developed alternative to the Adobe PDF format. It is not as widely used as PDF.

Other formats

As you can see, there are several other less commonly used formats supported by Excel 2013 but the above formats are the only ones you'll normally encounter. The most important thing to remember is that, unless there's a good reason to use a different format, you should always save documents in the default *Excel Workbook* format.