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Hidden File Extensions: Safe Demo & Protection Guide

Windows + macOS | Simple, practical, and fact-checked

First understand this: Hiding an extension only changes what the filename looks like in Finder/File Explorer. It does **not** convert the file into another format. For example, renaming or hiding part of a filename does not turn an executable into an image.

1. Safe demo: see how extension hiding works

Use only your own harmless test files. You do not need malware or a real executable for this demo.

Windows 11

To hide extensions for the demo	To show them again (recommended)
Open File Explorer.	Open File Explorer.
Open the three-dot menu > Options.	Select View > Show.
Open the View tab.	Turn ON File name extensions.
Check "Hide extensions for known file types", then OK.	You should now see extensions such as .jpg, .pdf, .exe, etc.

Note: On Windows 10, the wording/layout can differ. The key setting is **Hide extensions for known file types**; Microsoft also documents turning extensions on from File Explorer.

macOS

Hide extension for one test file	Show extensions for protection
Select your harmless file in Finder.	Open Finder > Settings > Advanced.
Press Command-I (Get Info).	Turn ON "Show all filename extensions".
Expand Name & Extension.	This overrides the per-file "Hide extension" setting and shows extensions.
Check "Hide extension".	For one file, Command-I > Name & Extension > uncheck "Hide extension".

2. What is the double-extension trick?

A filename can contain more than one dot. What matters is the file's real type and the extension being used by the operating system/application - not the part of the name that merely looks familiar.

Filename	What it suggests at a glance	What to notice
photo.jpg	Image	Ends in .jpg

photo.jpg.exe	May look image-related because “.jpg” appears in the name	Ends in .exe; on Windows this is an executable file type
invoice.pdf.exe	May look PDF-related	Ends in .exe, not .pdf

Important: An **.exe**
red flag is an unexpected executable, especially when it is presented as a photo/document or comes from an untrusted source.

3. How to identify a suspicious file

1. Show filename extensions. This removes one easy source of confusion.

2. Read the ending carefully. A name such as photo.jpg.exe ends in .exe.

3. Do not trust the icon alone. File icons can vary; use the extension and file information as clues.

4. Check where it came from. Be cautious with unexpected email, DM, cloud-share, or download files.

5. Pay attention to OS warnings. Do not bypass security prompts just to open an unknown file.

6. When unsure, do not run it. Verify with the sender or scan/check the file using your normal security tools.

4. Quick protection settings

Windows	macOS
File Explorer > View > Show > **File name extensions** = ON	Finder > Settings > Advanced > **Show all filename extensions** = ON
Keep Windows security warnings/protections enabled.	Keep macOS security warnings/protections enabled.
Treat unexpected executable/script files cautiously.	Do not assume a familiar-looking filename or icon proves the file is safe.

5. If you already opened something suspicious

Do not keep reopening it. Run your operating system's security scan, remove/quarantine anything it flags, and update the OS/security software. If you entered a password after opening the suspicious file or believe an account may be affected, change that password from a trusted device and review active sessions/sign-ins.

One-line takeaway

Do not decide whether a file is safe from its name or icon alone. Show extensions, check the real file type, and be cautious with unexpected files.

Fact-check sources: Microsoft Support - File Explorer / common filename extensions; Apple Support - Show or hide filename extensions on Mac.

Microsoft Support | Apple Support

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