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How to Make a PDF File

PDF stands for "Portable Document Format" which means that just about anything can read it.

The Adobe company makes and sells a program called "Acrobat" to do all kinds of presentation layout and create PDF documents. To create interest in documents in their PDF format, they gave away a free program called "Acrobat Reader".

Almost every computer has "Acrobat Reader" installed on it.

So you can read PDF files. What if you want to make a PDF file of one of your own documents to send to someone? There are several free programs that can do this. This document describes one called "CutePDF Writer". When the program is installed on your computer, it does not appear as a program. It shows up as a printer, which you can see using the control panel. In the diagram, as well as the CutePDF; the Brother is a real printer and the MicrosoftXPS is something Windows added (maybe their attempt at a PDF competitor).
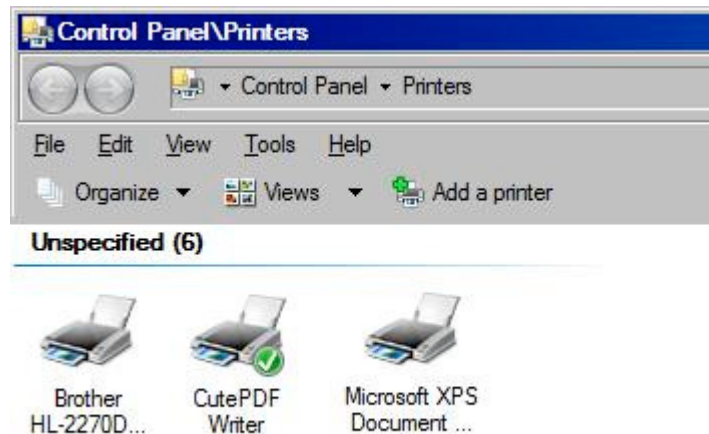

The good thing about looking like a printer is you can use it easily from any program, Word, Excel, Internet Explorer, Pspice, etc. As long as the program you are using can print a page, you can make a PDF file.

Example of Making a PDF File using Excel

If you are in Excel and you want to print, normally you hit the printer icon and the output goes to your default printer. The diagram is Excel 97 with toolbars; your screen may appear different.
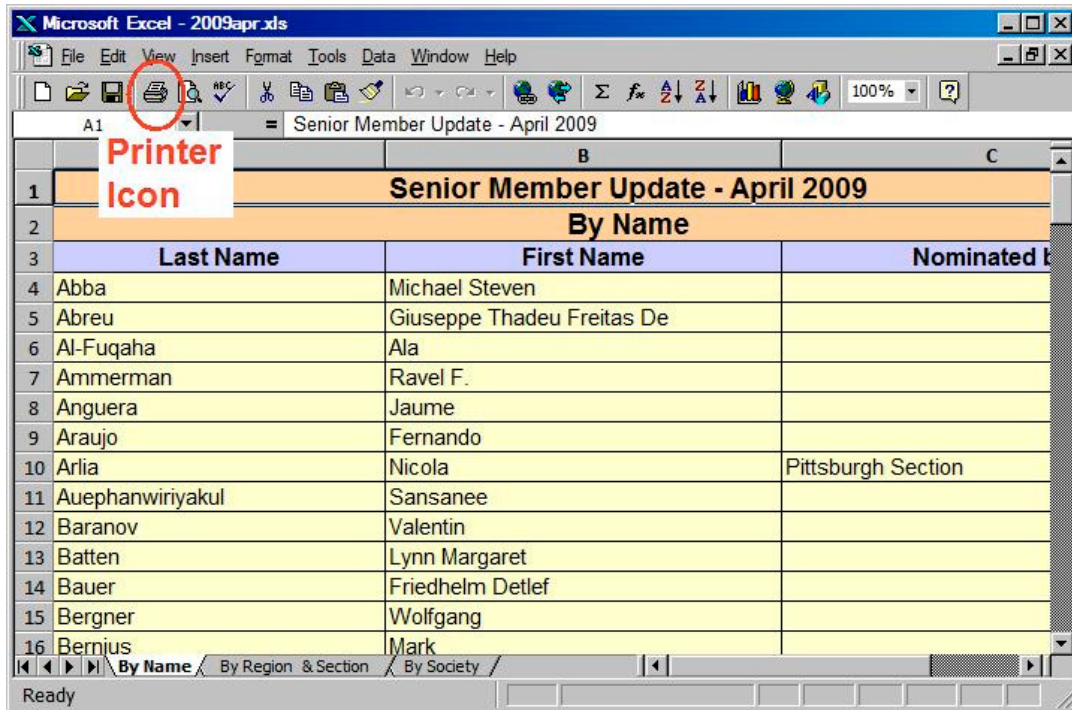

Here is how it looks in a 2006 version
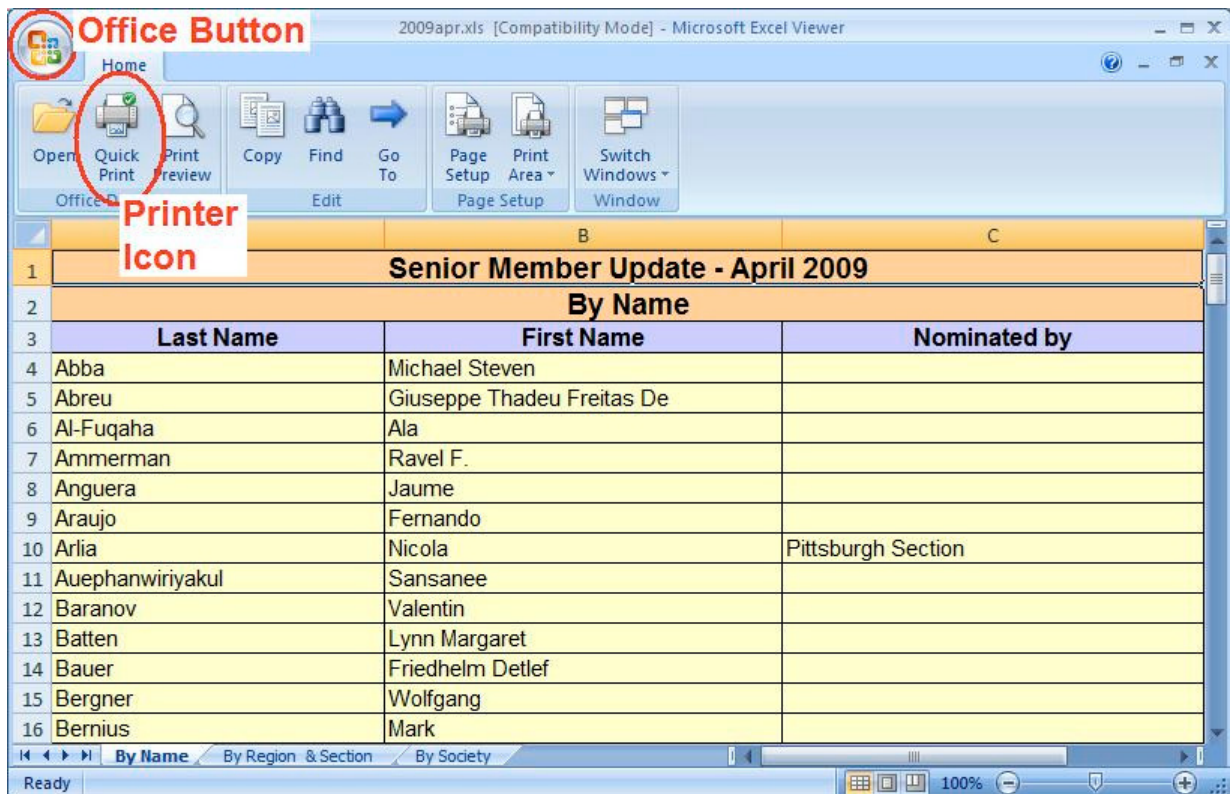
To select some printer other than the one you normally use, i.e. CutePDF Writer, you have to press and hold down the CTRL key and press P. Then you release the CTRL key. Or you can use the menu bar to select File > Print.
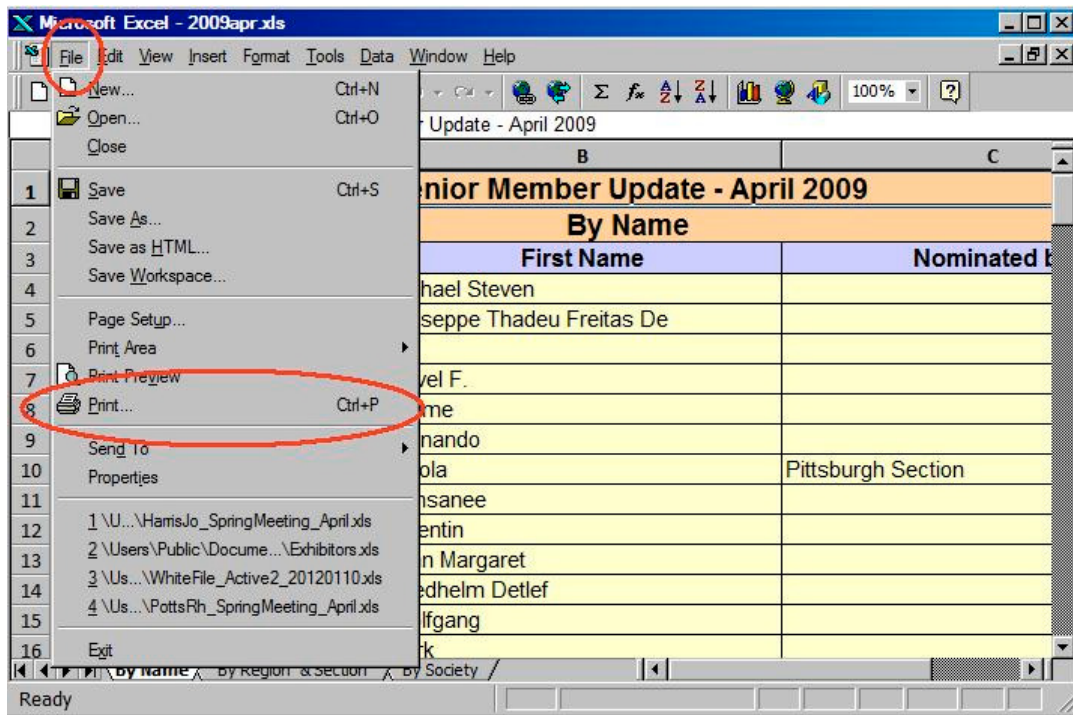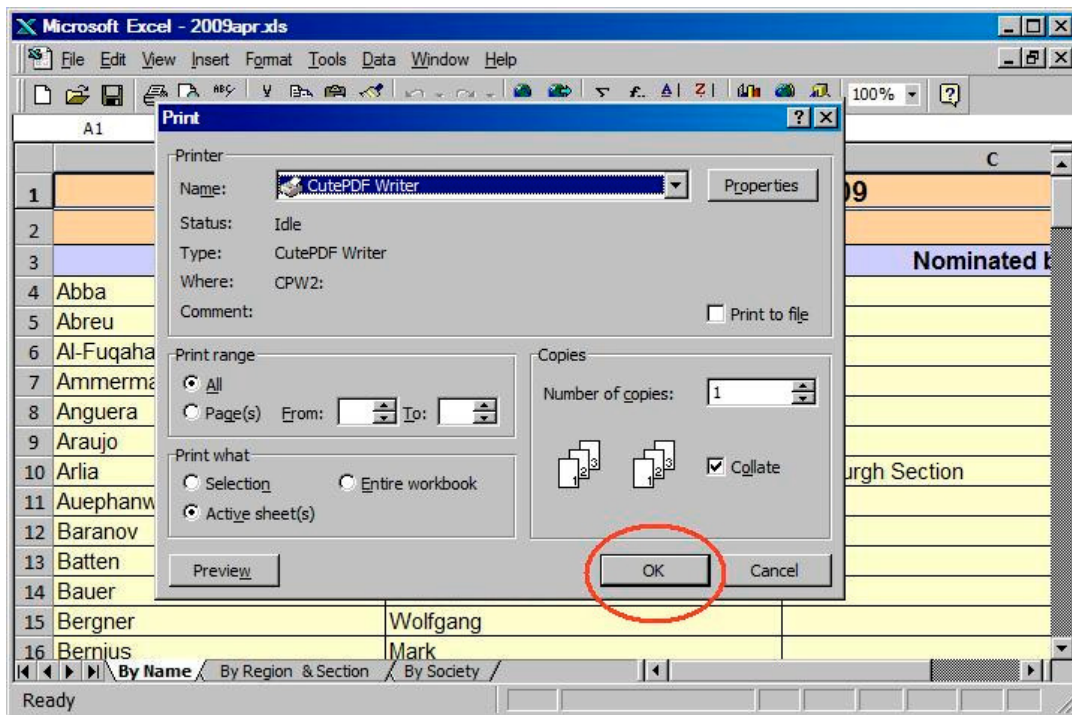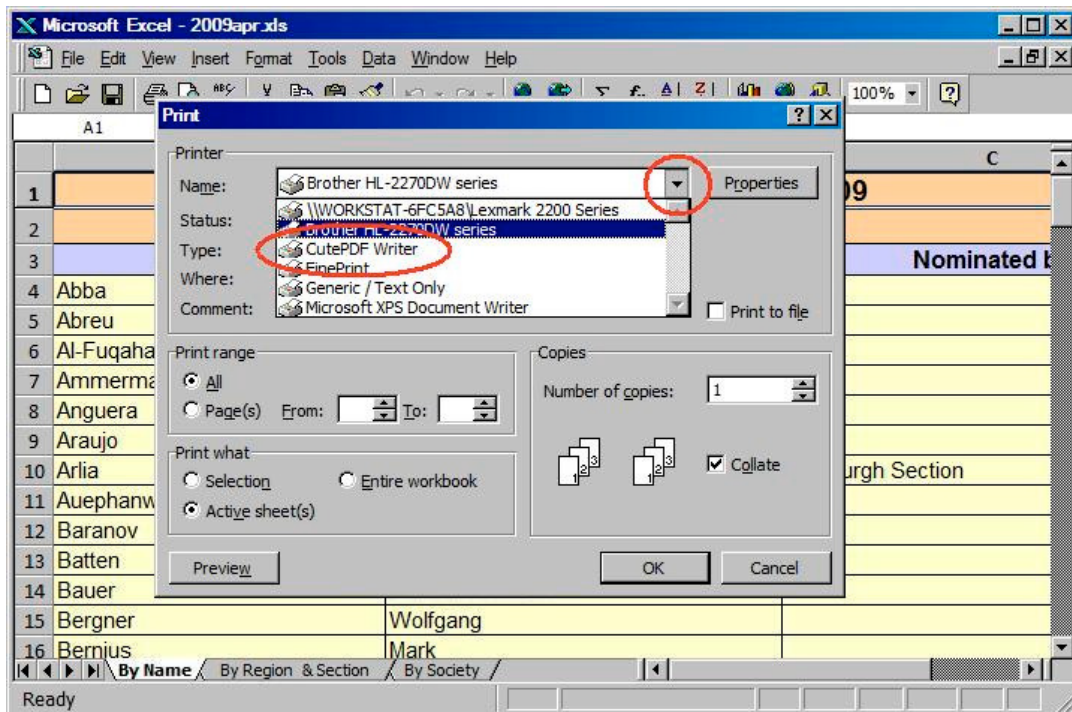

In the 2006 version, Control-P still works. To find print in the menu, you start with the "Office Button" in the top left corner and then select Print and Print.
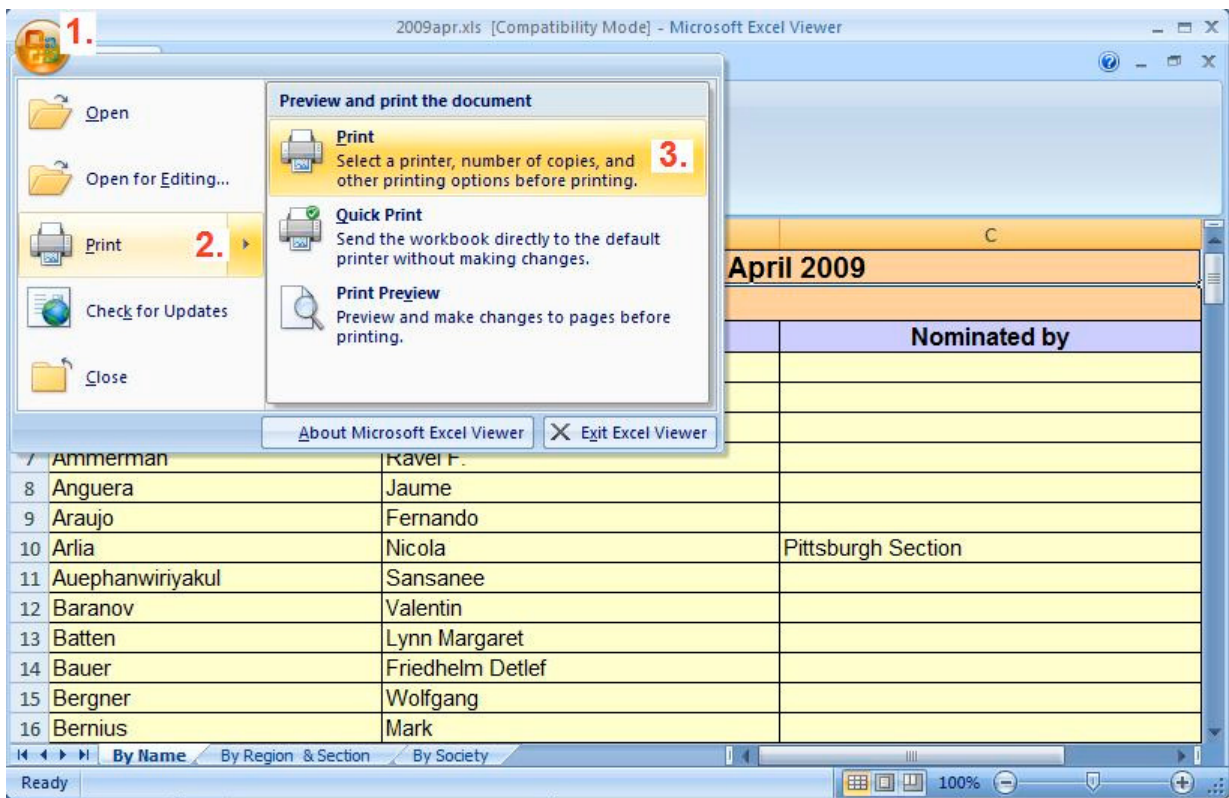
The printer options window appears showing your default printer. If you click the triangle to the right of the printer name, you can choose the Cute PDF Writer.
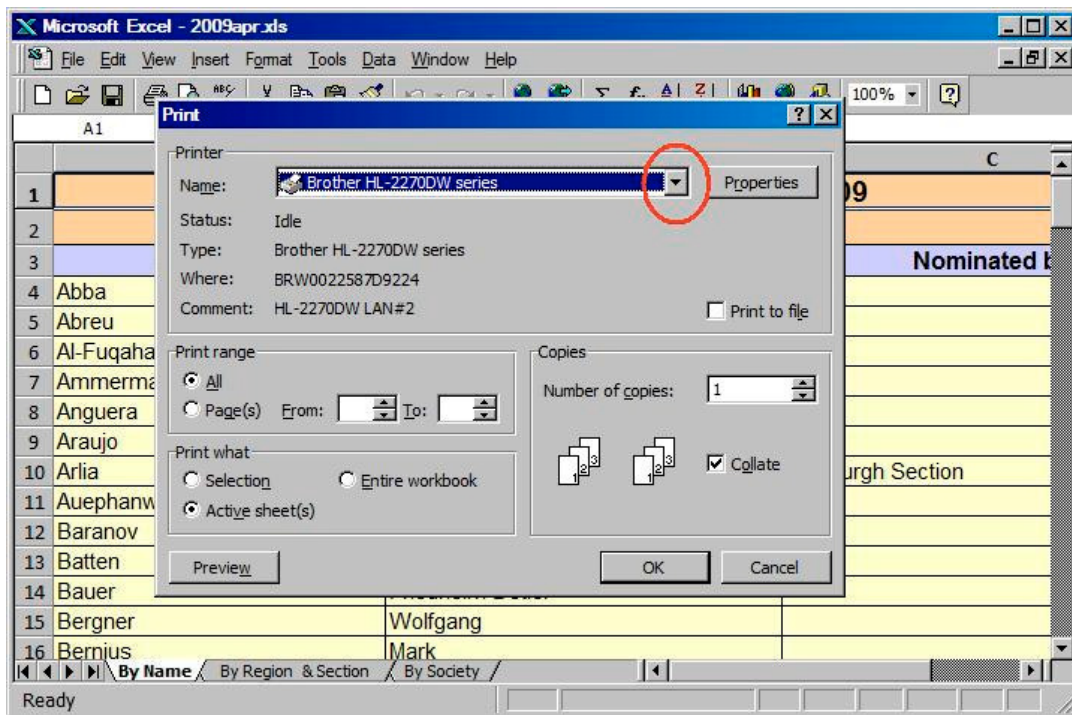
Now the CutePDF window opens asking you where to save the newly created PDF file. You may want to set up a special folder in Documents for your PDF output files, e.g. PDF_Files. CutePDF starts in the last directory it used, so if you want the PDF file in the same folder as the Excel file, you may have to navigate to the directory the Excel worksheet is in.

CutePDF assumes you want the file to have the same name as the Excel spreadsheet but with .pdf at the end instead of .xls; but you can type in any name you want, just keep the pdf ending. (If your Explorer is Windows default, you will not see the .pdf as part of the name. It is invisible. But it will be there because the "Save as type" says it should be.)
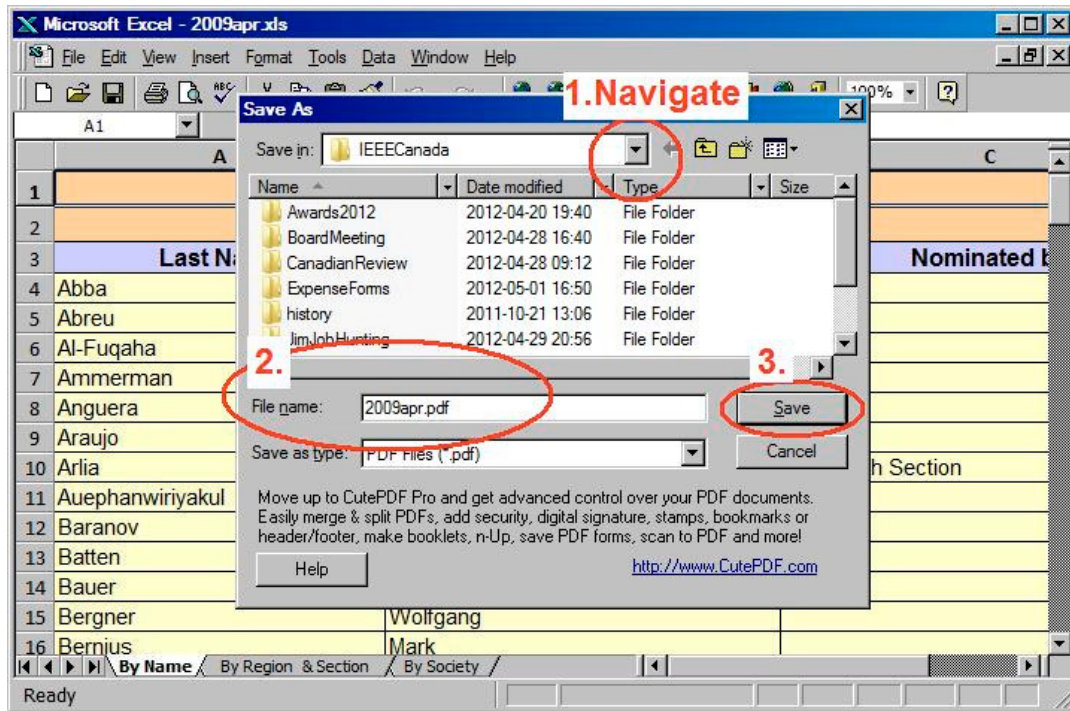
In Explorer, you can now see the PDF file beside the excel spreadsheet.

I show folders and file details in my explorer window
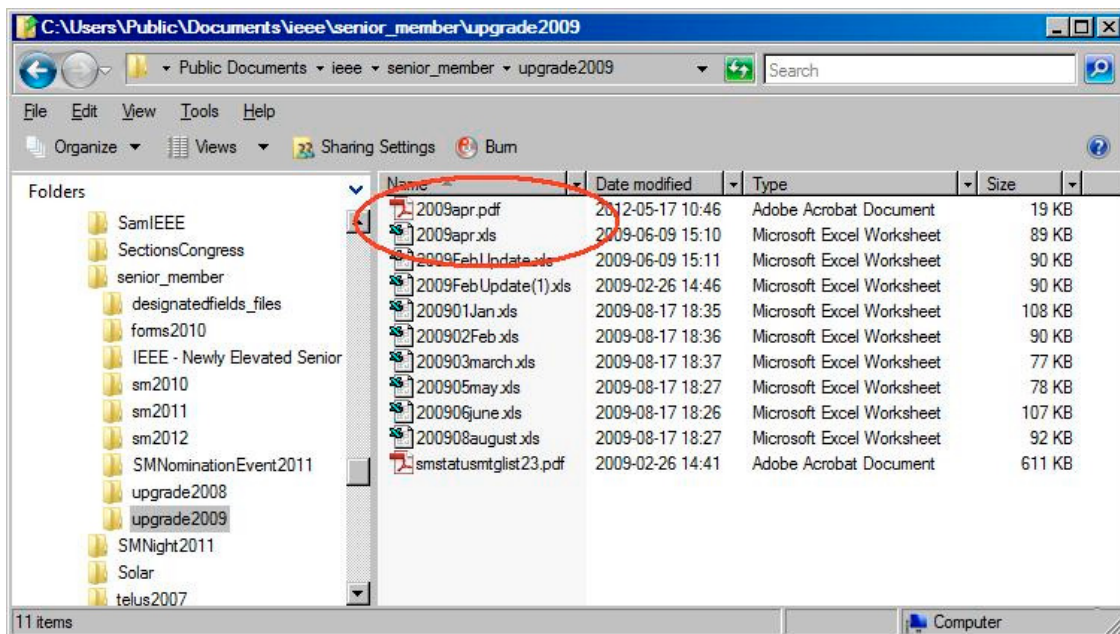
If you use the default Windows settings, your screen will likely be more like this. The file name doesn't show the .pdf file extension, but there is a pretty red icon on the document. Likewise, the worksheet doesn't show the .xls file extension, but there is a pretty blue X identifying it.
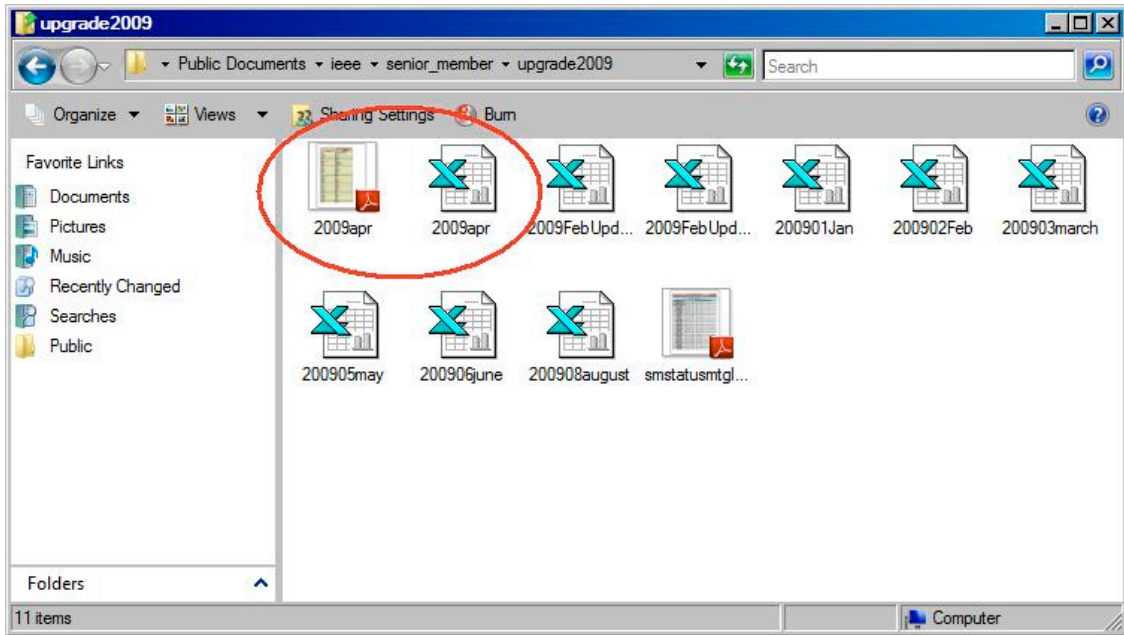
In either case, you now have the PDF file. You can double click to look at it. While looking at it, you can print it to your real printer. You can add it as an attachment to an email. It is your file, you can do whatever you want with it.

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Appendix 1
Installing CutePDF Writer

Just like installing any program, you have to find the installer program first. If you bought a program, the installer starts when you put the CD in the drive. If you are getting a free program off the internet, you have two choices.
A. What I do is download it to my hard drive and run it from there. That leaves me with a copy I can move to other computers that don't have internet access.
B. What will be described is the method many people use. Just installing it from the website while online.

Go to the Cute PDF website http://www.cutepdf.com/ and look for download button associated with the freeware CutePDF Writer
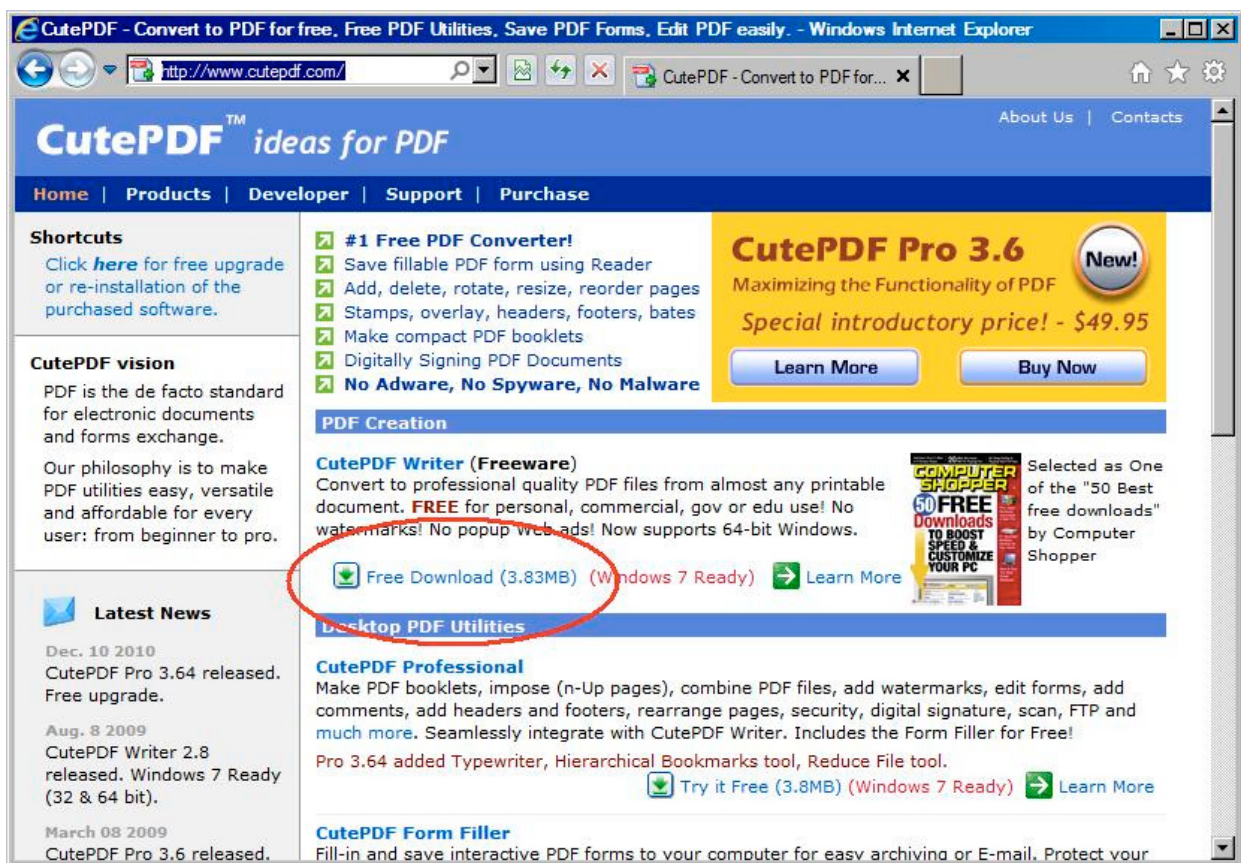
Because the installer program, CuteWriter.exe, is not displayable, Internet Explorer asks if you want to run it or save it. It also warns that it could bad for you since Microsoft didn't write it. Choose Run.
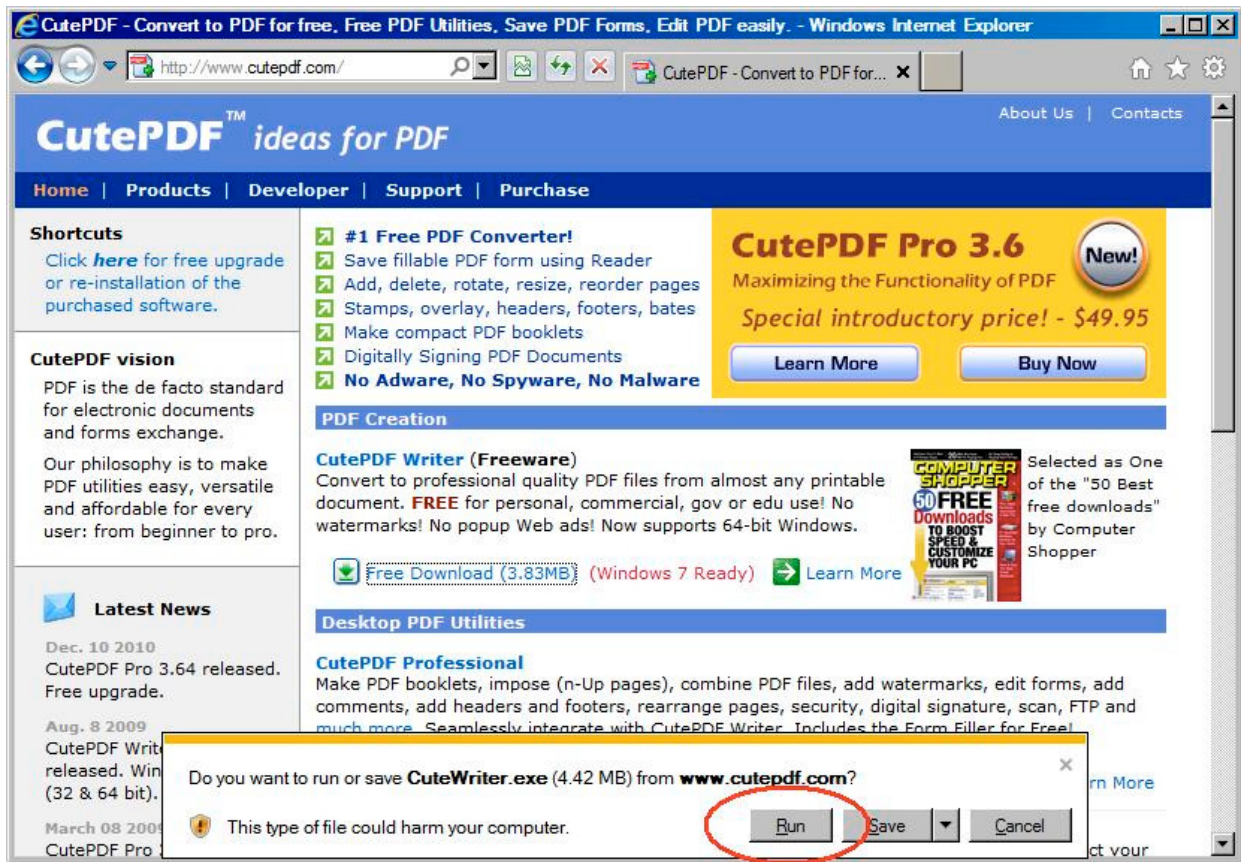
At this point, you may run into the User Account Control screen, which is a security feature in Windows Vista and Windows 7. If you are the only person using the computer, enter your password. If you have two accounts, one called administrator and one called your name, enter the password for the administrator account.
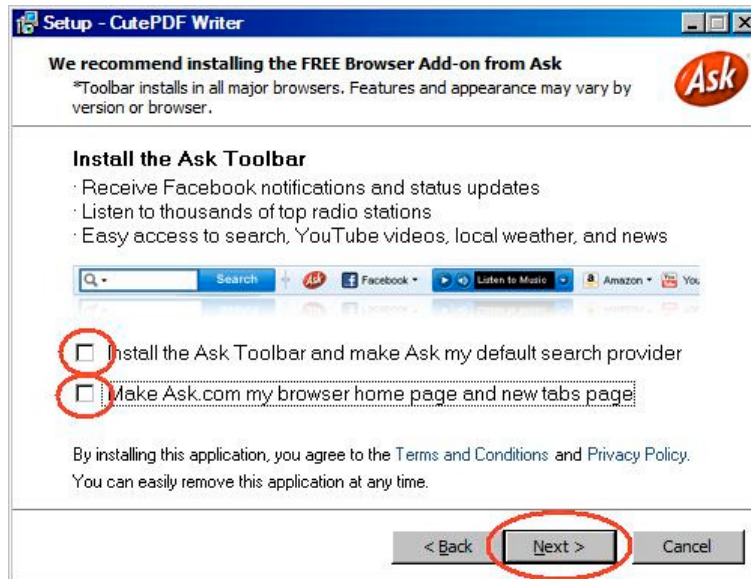
Then the installer program starts. Click next.

Next comes the license agreement, saying since you got it for free you won't try to sell it. You must click the agree spot before you can hit next.
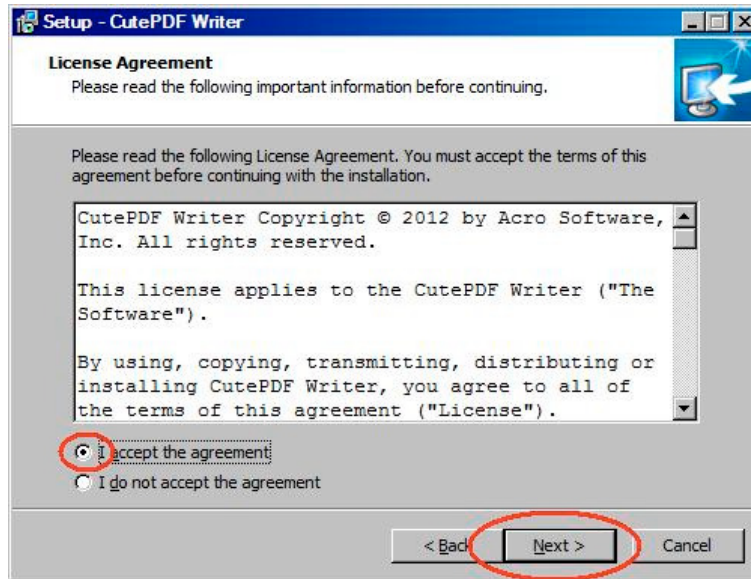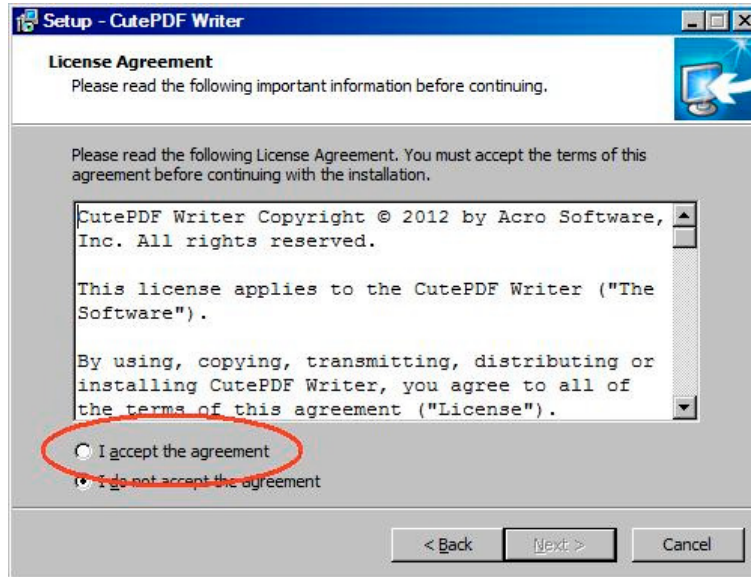
Now a word from their sponsor. Would you like to add stuff to your Internet Explorer? Uncheck the boxes before clicking the Next button.
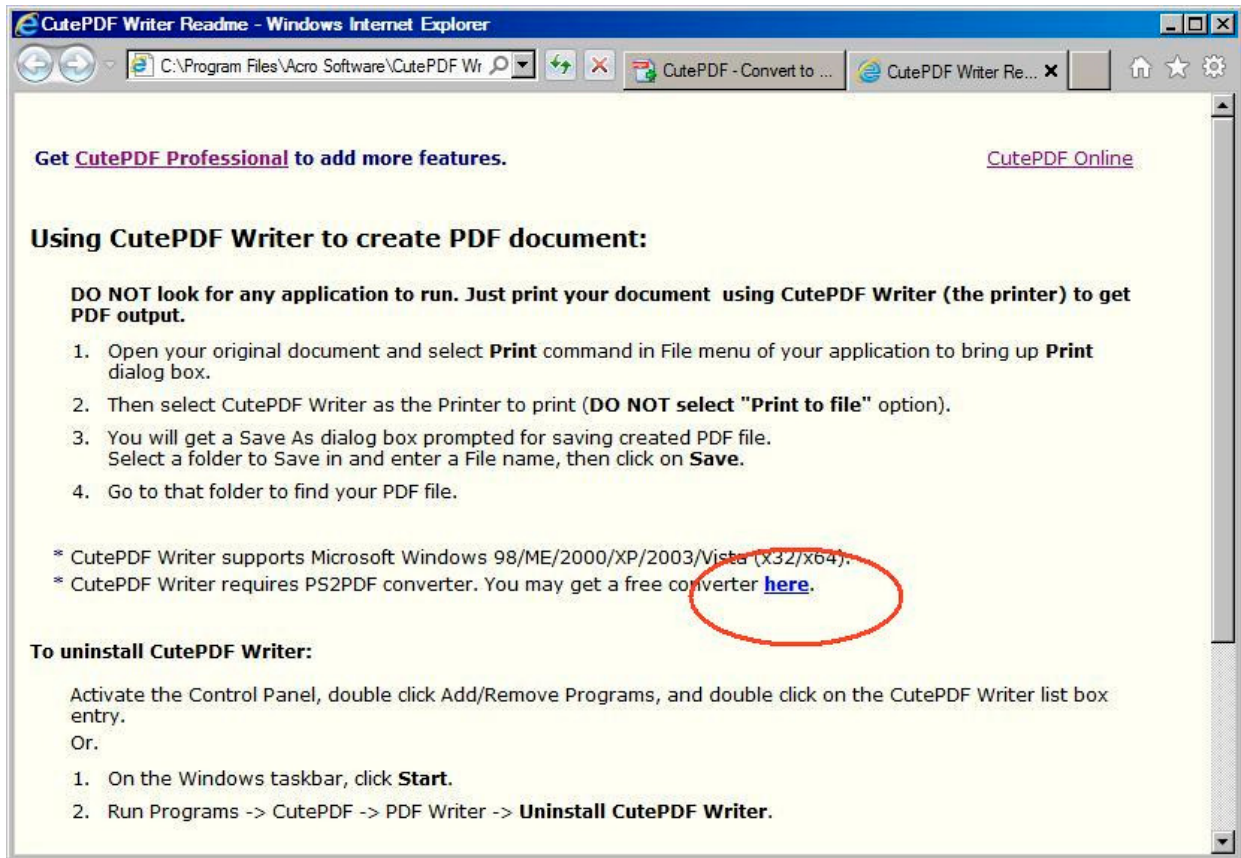
The installer program is now ready to do its thing. Click the Install button.
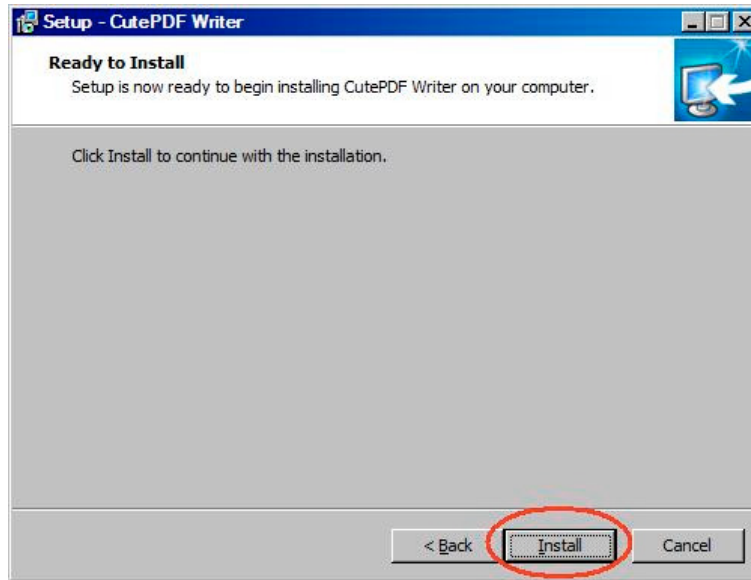
When it is finished, the installer disappears and a web page appears in your Internet Explorer telling you about CutePDF. You are half way there. CutePDF needs another free program to complete it. Click the word here to open another website.

Here we go again... "lather, rinse, repeat" :-)
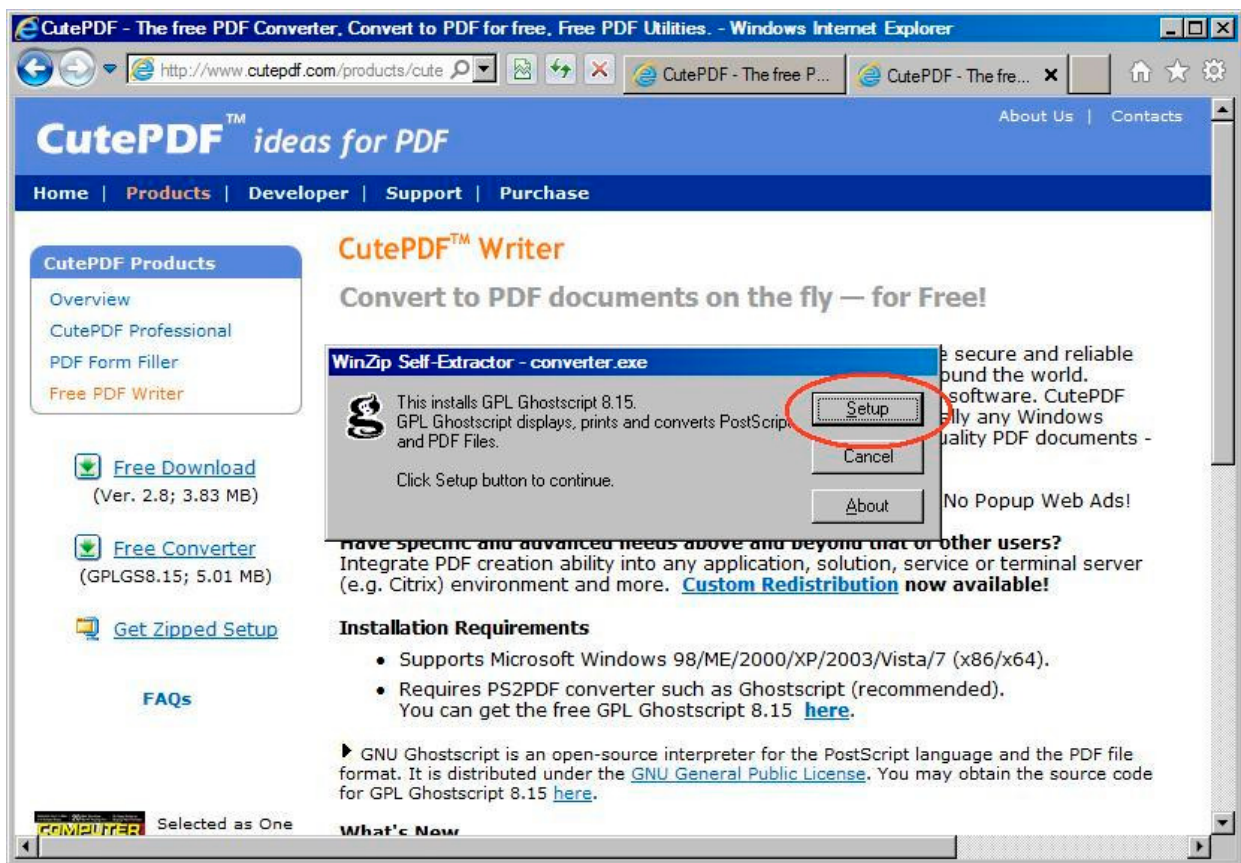Click download Free Converter. And then click Run when prompted.
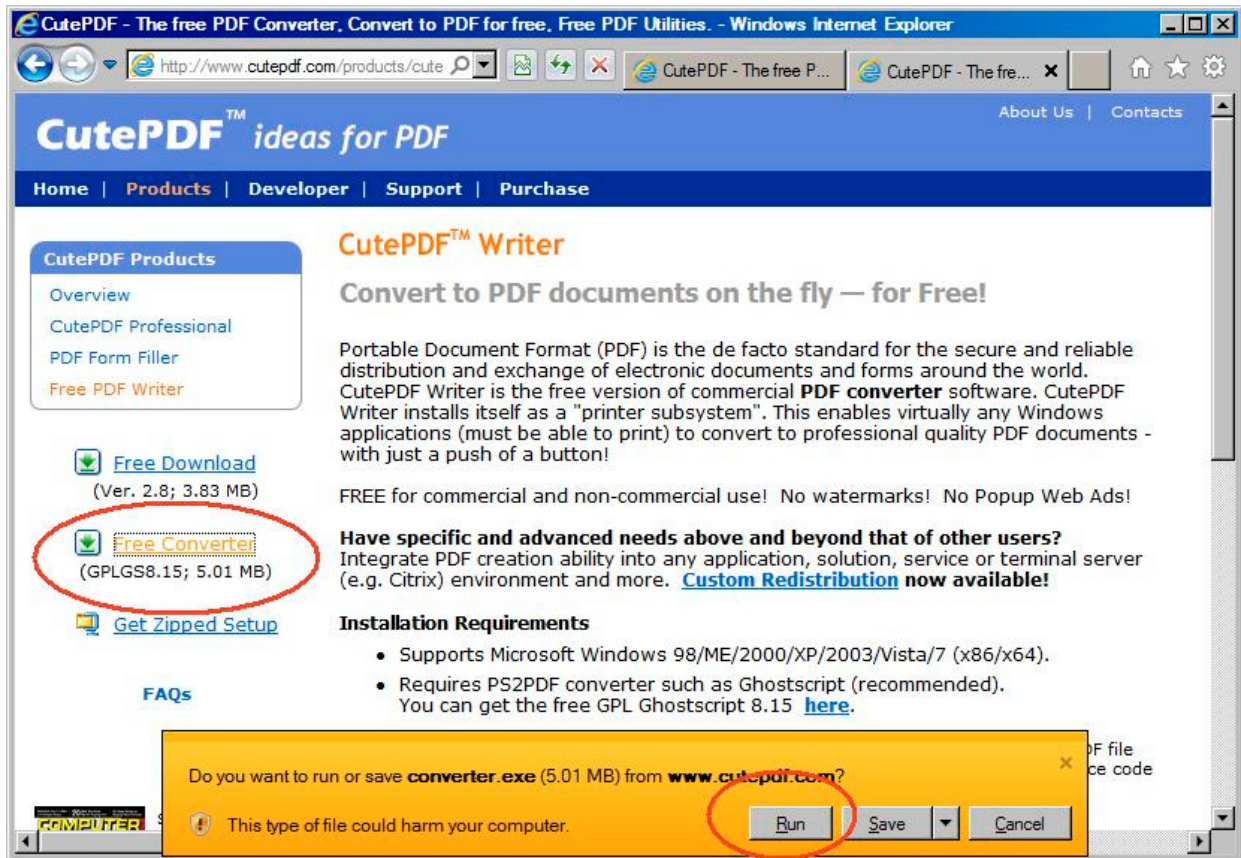
Acknowledge the warning that Microsoft didn't write the program and doesn't know who did by clicking the next Run button.
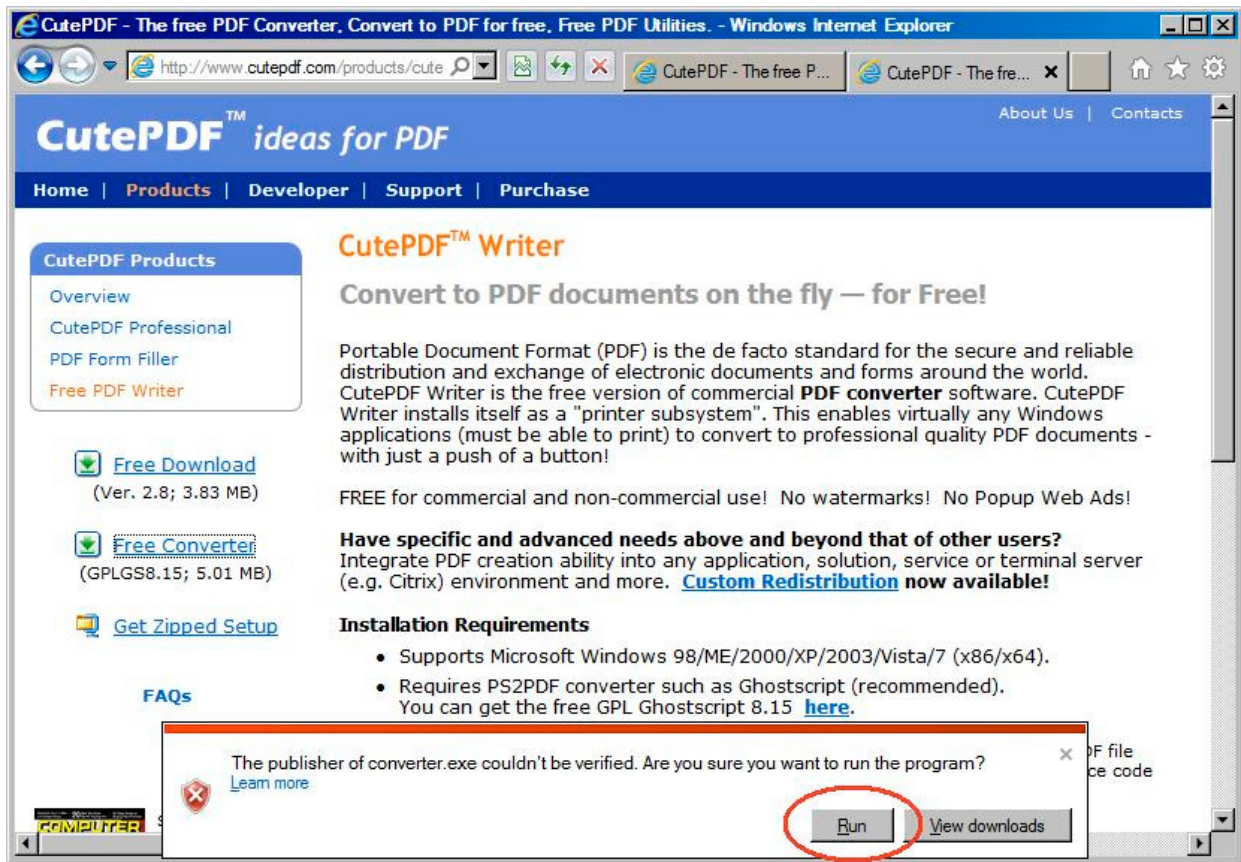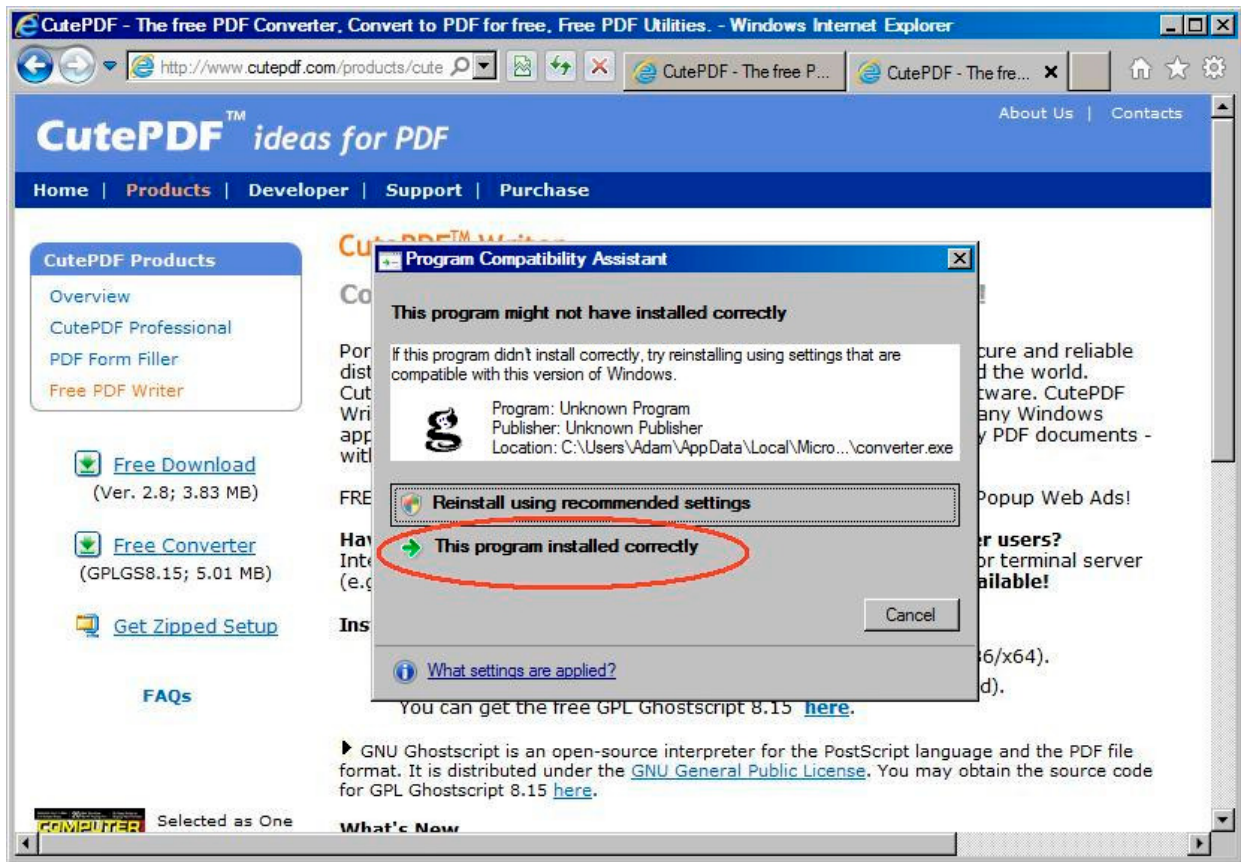
Enter your password if required by User Account Control security screen.
Then click Setup.

While the program is installing various screens flash by, including a DOS command window. (This program has been around for a long while.) After the program installs, there is a screen asking if it installed correctly. Click yes. We will test it using Appendix 2.
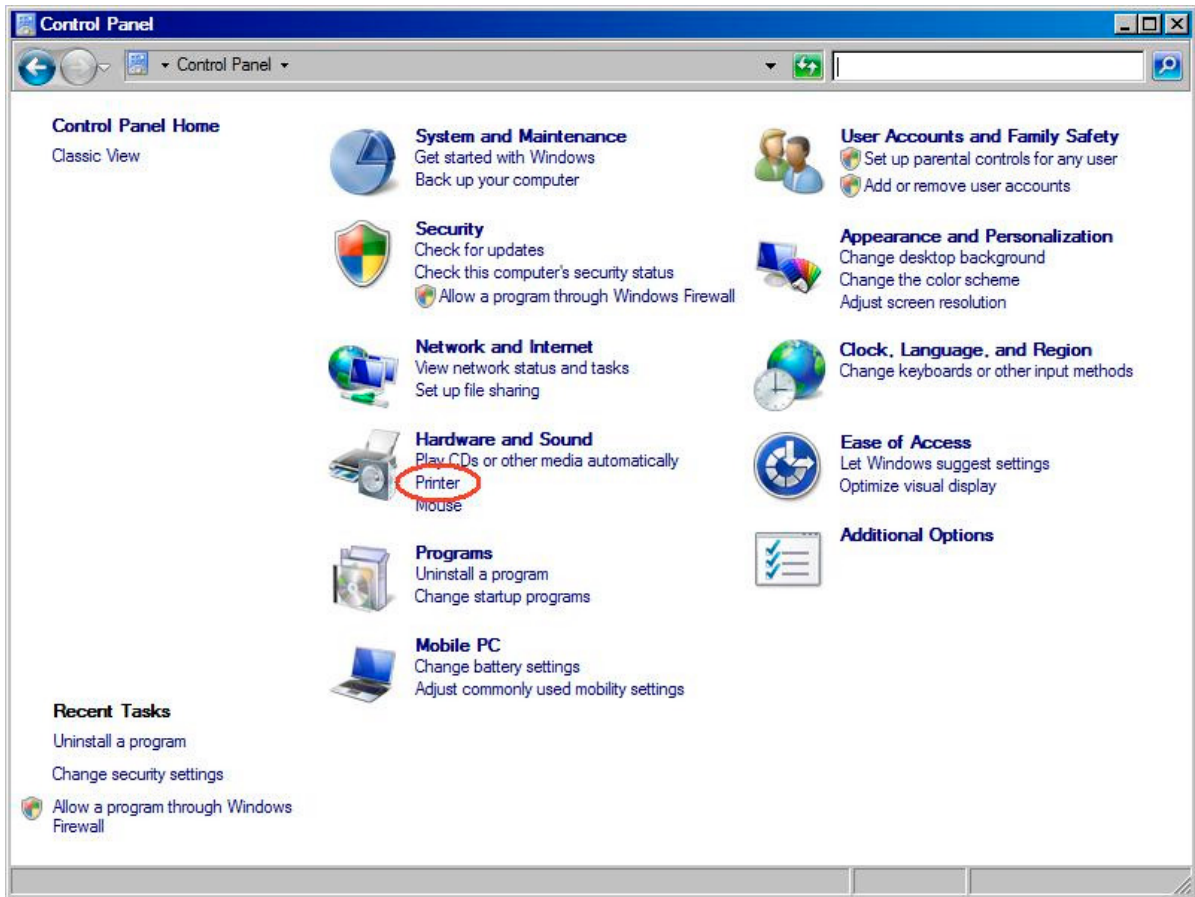
All done!

Appendix 2
Testing PDF Writer

One way of getting to your list of printers is from the start button.
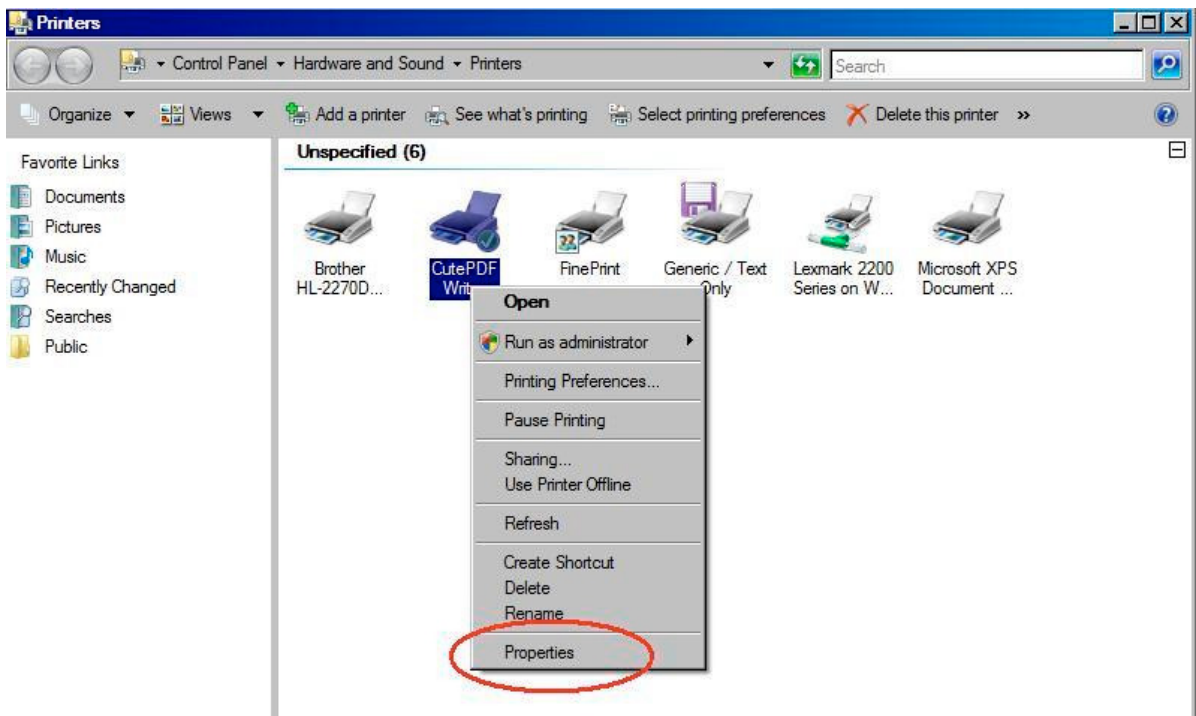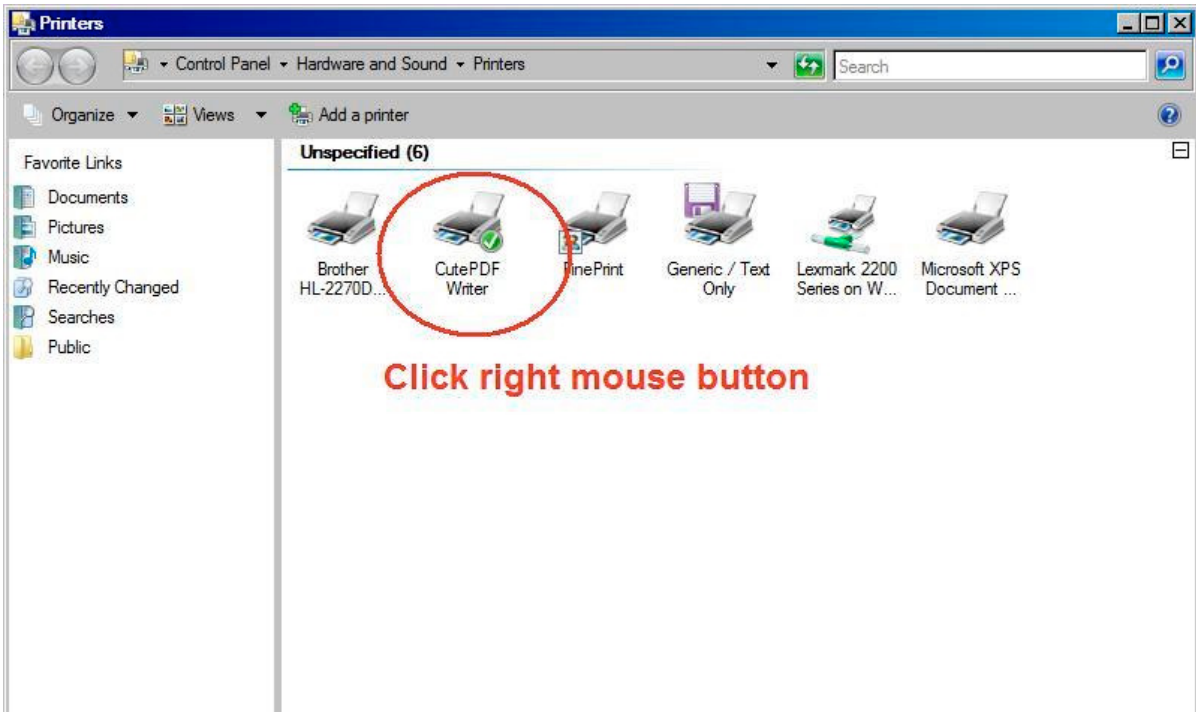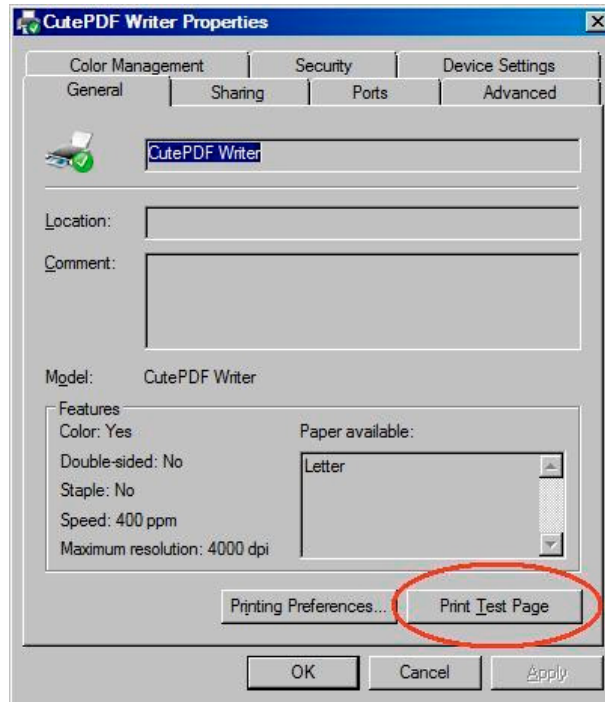
Start > Settings > Control Panel
Then click Printer

When you have the display of your printers, you should see CutePDF. Right click on it to get a list of options.
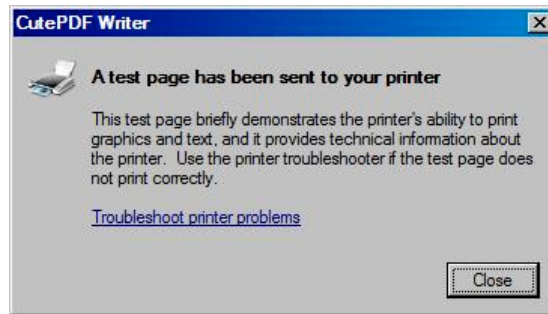
Click properties, and then click the Print Test Page button.

Windows says it printed the test page, but it is faster than CutePDF. Click the Close button


The PDF print driver asks where to save the test page. It assumes the same location as the last time it was used. (Sorry, I can't remember where it goes the first time; maybe C:\Program Files\Acro Software\CutePDF Writer\ or maybe your Documents folder.)
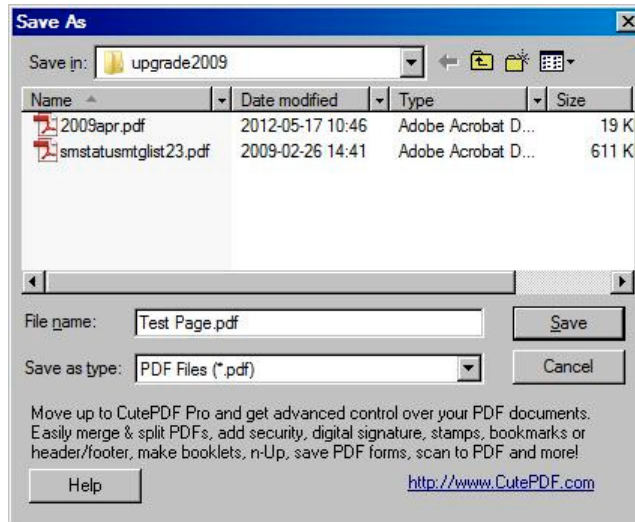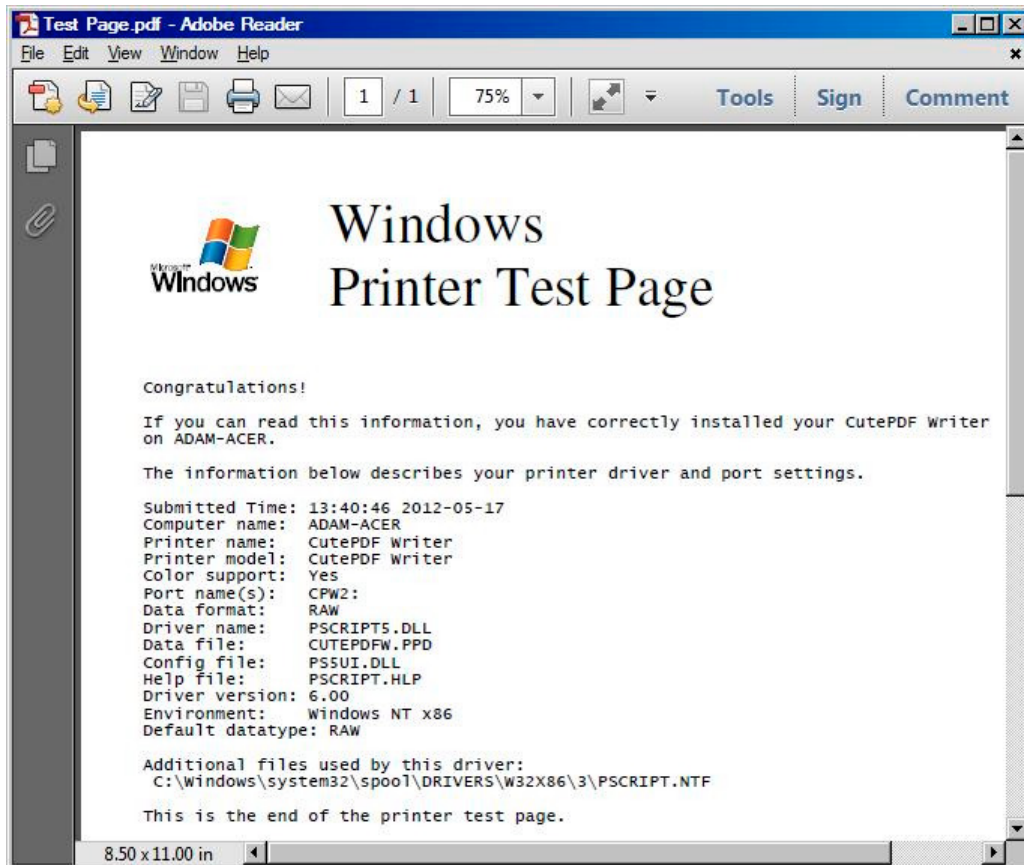
You may as well make a new folder in Documents called PDF_Files. It will be a handy place to store your PDF files and it will become the default location next time you create one. Click save.
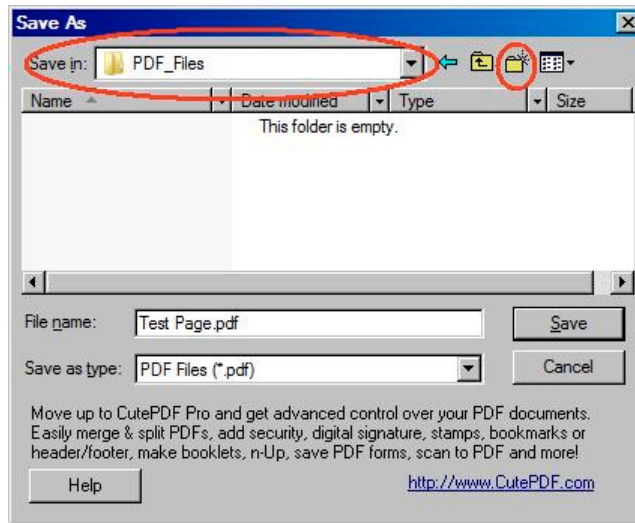
You are done with the printer properties page, click OK or the Cancel button.
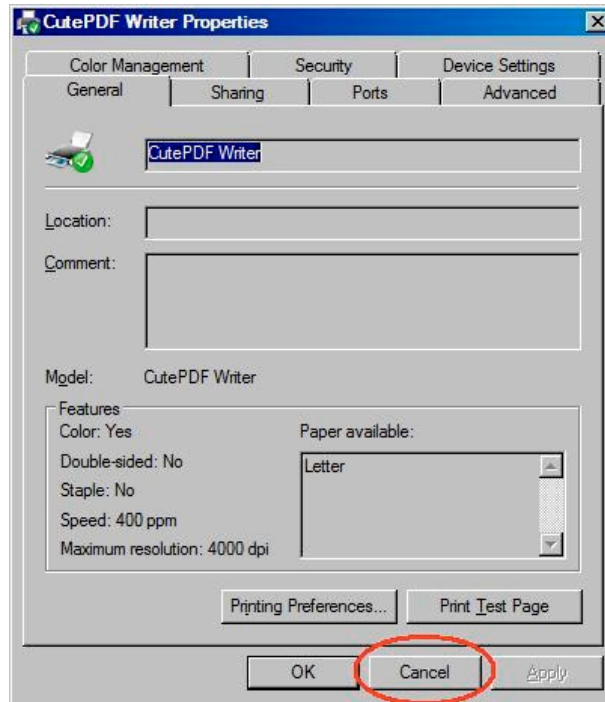
Now go to the folder and look at the test page.

If you can find and read it, all is well with the world... at least for making PDF files.