



HOW TO ADD A BACKGROUND IMAGE TO A WORD DOCUMENT

THE PROBLEM

If you've ever tried to add a custom background image to a Word document, you will know the struggle. You just CAN'T get your perfectly A4 image to fit - on your A4 page!

It sounds simple - all the official helps will tell you 'just' to go to Design > Page Background > Page Color > Fill Effects > Picture and pick your A4 image.

But in reality, you end up trying a thousand different size and dpi / resolution combinations, aiming to guess the perfect - elusive - pairing that gives you an image on your page. And you think you've nailed it ... until you zoom to a different View and all your hard work goes to waste, as your image suddenly tiles on the page.

If this is a frustration you've ever experienced, read on There is a way to solve it.

HOW GOOD IS THE SOLUTION?

Of course, it's not a perfect solution. If you need branded / image backgrounds on a regular basis, or professional results, you must use specialised Publishing software. There's a learning curve, but then you'll find it much simpler and get results you can be proud of.

But if you need to create a letterhead, certificate background or similar, this should be enough to get you going.

THE SOLUTION

The solution is, to put your background image in your HEADER.

Why do you do this to us, Word?

It takes a bit of fiddling around, but this workaround also means you can set a different First Page or Odd / Even Page header - with different backgrounds, perfect for when you want a distinctive title page, or facing pages.

STEP 1 – CREATE A SUITABLE BACKGROUND IMAGE

1. In a graphics program, create an A4 image at 300dpi using CMYK colourway to allow for printing

2. DO include - your brand colours, images, shapes and logo to create a background that showcases your brand, without interfering with the content of your document. This can include repetitive elements that you might use in every document, such as your ABN, Address, License No etc.
3. DO NOT include - document-specific text, such as the title, quotes, etc. This is better added and formatted in Word.
4. Export your image to a .jpeg or .png file format. Depending on whether you have photos or simpler graphics, you may be able to reduce the Quality to create a smaller file size, and still get great results.

STEP 2 – INSERT A HEADER, WITH TEXT IF DESIRED

5. Open a Word document and go to Insert > Header > Edit Header
6. Enter any text you want - we suggest adding Document Parts, such as TITLE, AUTHOR and/or FILE NAME

STEP 3 – INSERT YOUR PICTURE AND SET IT TO FORMAT PROPERLY

7. If you've added Header Text (2), go to the first part of your text and put the cursor just before it, so you're in the background of the Header
8. Select Insert > Picture and select your picture
9. Select the Wrap Text icon and choose Fix Position on Page, then select See More
10. In the Position tab, set both Horizontal and Vertical to Absolute, at 0 relative to Page
11. In the Size tab, resize the image to A4 size - or a fraction more if in doubt. It should be at least 211mm wide and 297mm high
12. Check your image exactly fills your page - you don't want fine white lines around the outside

STEP 4 – REARRANGE YOUR HEADER ELEMENTS

You will probably find you need to move your text back to the front, resize or re-colour it

13. With the picture selected, choose the Picture Format menu, then Arrange > Send Backward > Send Behind Text
14. To format your text, select the Header Text from the left margin and check the font, size and position of Header relative to page are correct so it looks right on your background

STEP 5 – EDIT YOUR DOCUMENT

15. Your Header Text or Picture is selected at this point, dimming the main section of your document. To exit, go to the Header and Footer menu, then Close Header and Footer
16. Check if your margins give the correct appearance, now you have a background graphic. For example, on this document we have set our margins so Top = 5cm, Bottom = 7.5cm and Left / Right = 1.5cm. Use Custom Margins for these settings.

STEP 6 – HOW TO USE YOUR DOCUMENT

Keep playing with your Header and Footer text, margins and adding elements such as Text Boxes, until you reach a result you are happy with.

You can export your document as a PDF file, for a really nice on-screen result.

However, bear in mind that most personal printers still struggle to create truly borderless prints, so you may get a blank edge of 5mm if you try to print yourself.

Also, because you have not included a Bleed, your document isn't well-suited to reliable commercial printing, as you may experience small white borders. If you are primarily aiming for print, this isn't the way to go.

SUGGESTED USES FOR YOUR BRANDED WORD DOCUMENT

If your Word documents have been a bit blah, here are some of the many things you could create a background for:

Forms

Certificates

Proposals

eBooks

Letterheads

Checklists

Chapters/Sections of Operations Manuals

Templates for invoices, etc