VUB Information Security and Privacy

How To – Sign digitally with your eID

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I. Overview

A "How To …" document provides information and/or hints and tips about a specific Information Security and Privacy (ISP) topic. It does not contain a mandatory standard/guideline. Rather, it provides information about how a standard/guideline can be applied.

It is a 'living' document whose quality depends partly on the feedback from its readers/users. The cover page gives the contact email address to which feedback can be sent.

A "How To" document does not follow a formal consultation and approval process.

This How To document describes how to sign documents digitally using the free version of Adobe Acrobat Reader.

It does not describe how the signed document should be securely archived.

II. Security

The digital signature provides security on two fronts:

- The digital signature will first of all confirm the identity of the person who has signed the document;

- If the signature is properly added, it also guarantees that the document and all digital copies of the document have not been altered since it was signed.

These guarantees are only offered as long as the document remains in its digital form. Once the document is printed, this guarantee lapses. Consequently, it is very important to keep a digital copy of the document in a reliable, long-term archive. It can then be retrieved from this archive at any time.

The digital signature is legally binding in almost all industrialised countries.

III. Requirements

The following are required to be able to add a digital signature correctly to a document:

- The document to be signed in PDF format. This PDF may be produced by scanning or be created using a software program such as Microsoft Word;
- A computer;
- An eID card reader, if not built into the computer;
- The software required for this eID card reader: this can be found here https://eid.belgium.be;
- Acrobat reader software: The free version of this software suffices. The Dutch version of this can be found here https://get.adobe.com/nl/reader/ and the English version here https://get.adobe.com/uk/reader/ .
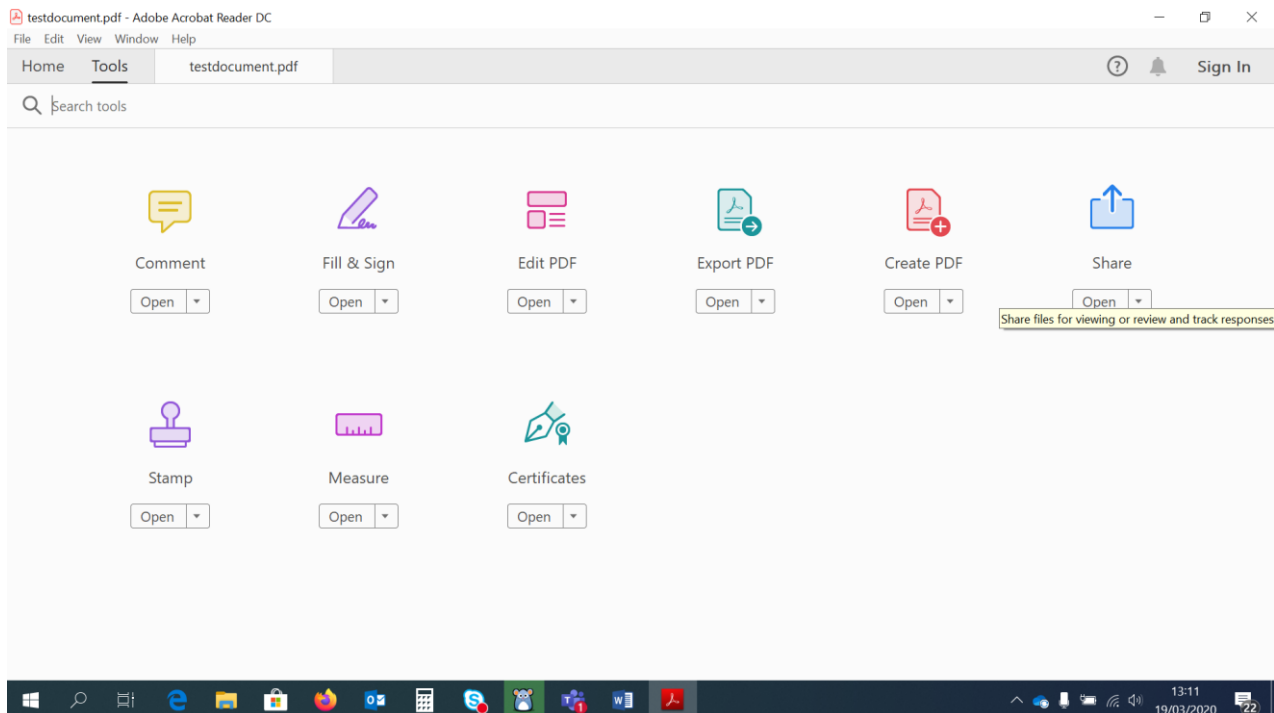
IV. Procedure

This procedure is based on version 2020.006.20034 in English. However, it is similar for other versions.

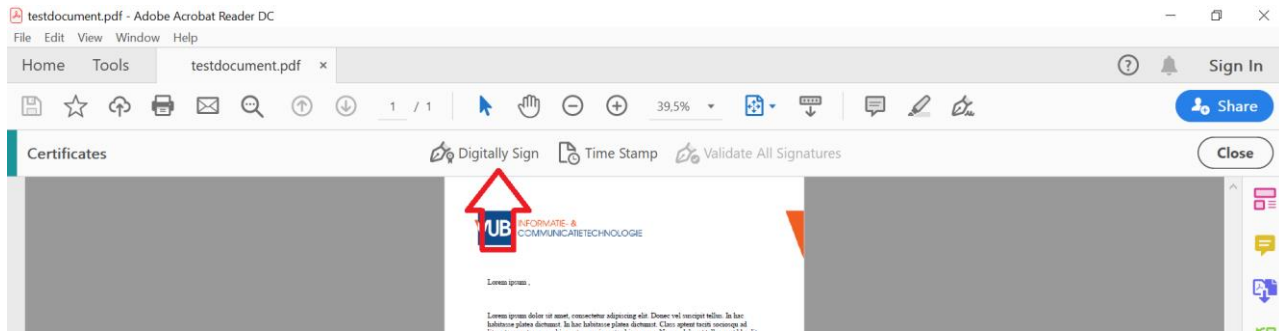Open the document to be signed with Acrobat Reader.
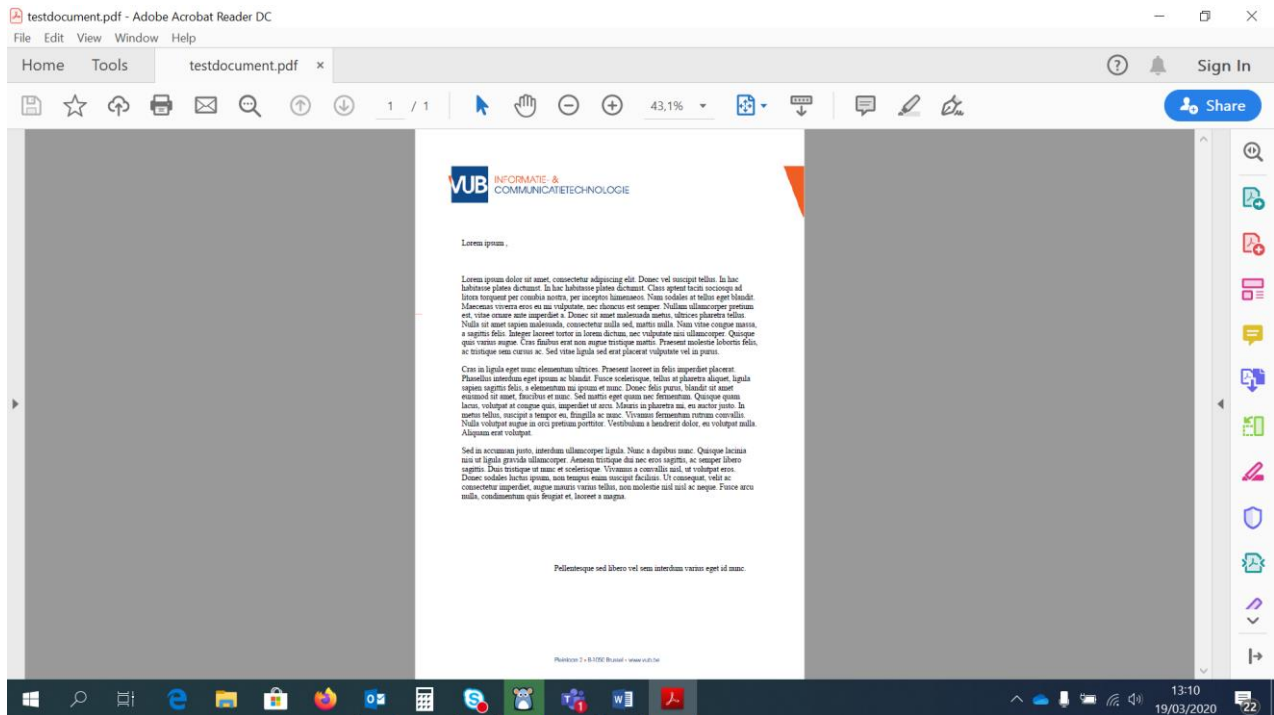
Click on tools in the top left.
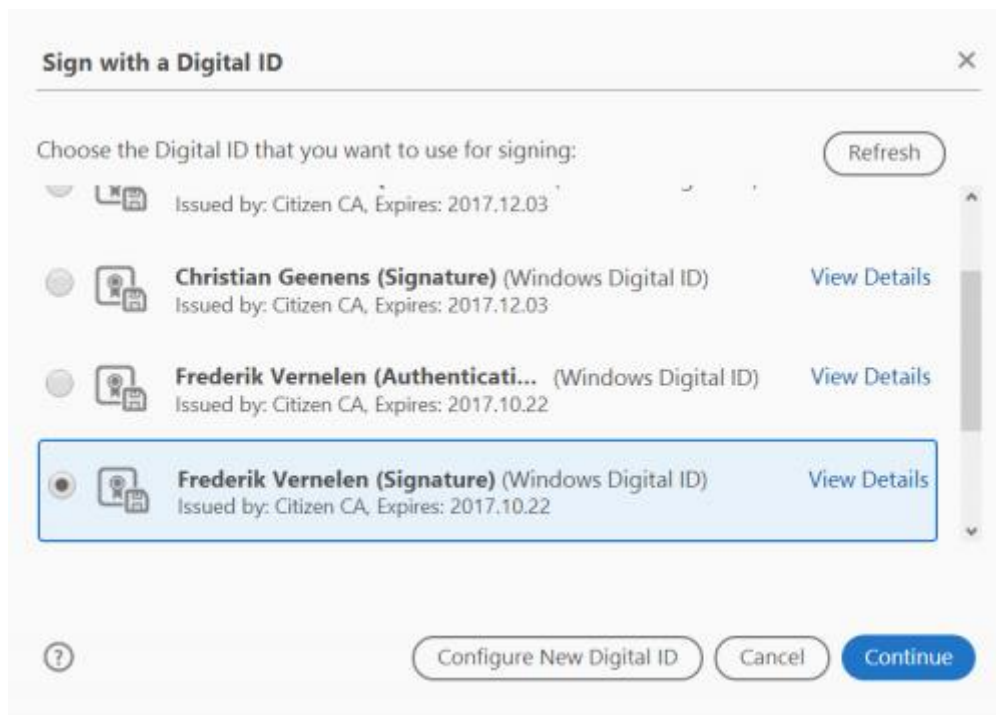
Click on certificates.

Click 'Digitally sign' above the document.

Select the zone where the visible part of this signature should appear.
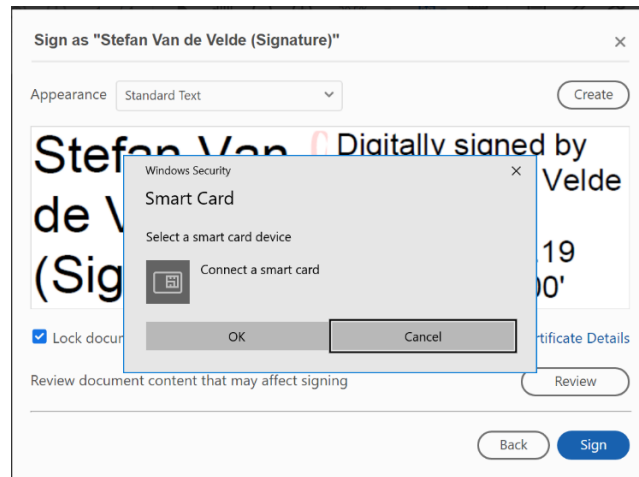
The software will then display one or more existing identities. Select the appropriate identity.

An example of the text that will appear in the document is displayed. If you are the last person who is to sign the document, it is best to tick the "Lock document after signing" option.
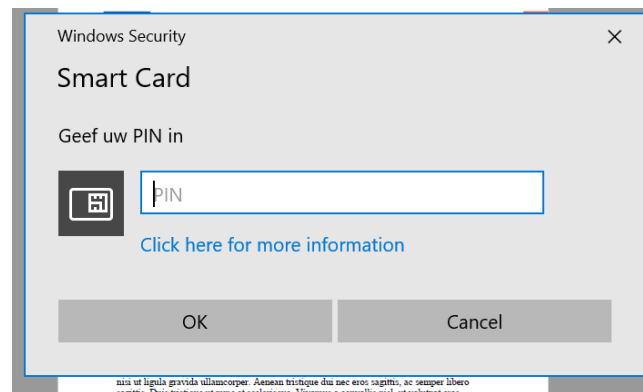

The program then requests the eID card if this has not yet been provided.

Insert the card.

The program now asks you to save the document. Select the place where you want to save the document and the name it is to be given.

Enter the PIN code of your eID card.

The document has now been signed and saved in the location indicated. If appropriate, the document can now be forwarded to the next person who has to sign it. He/she goes through this procedure again.