

File Formats & Codecs Cheat Sheet

Know your containers, codecs, and when to use each format for editing and delivery

VIDEO CONTAINERS

Format	Extension	Best For	Pros / Cons
MP4	.mp4	Web, social, delivery	Universal compat, good compression
MOV	.mov	Apple, ProRes workflows	High quality, large files, Apple ecosystem
AVI	.avi	Legacy Windows	Older format, large files, limited support
MKV	.mkv	Archival, multiple audio tracks	Flexible container, not widely supported for editing
WebM	.webm	Web delivery, VP9	Open format, great for web, limited editor support
MXF	.mxf	Broadcast, professional	Industry standard for broadcast delivery
MTS	.mts	AVCHD camcorders	Raw camera format, convert before editing

VIDEO CODECS

Codec	Type	Quality	Use Case
H.264 (AVC)	Lossy	Good	Most common. YouTube, social media, delivery.
H.265 (HEVC)	Lossy	Better	50% smaller than H.264 at same quality. Growing support.
ProRes 422	Visually lossless	Excellent	Apple ecosystem, editing, professional workflows.
ProRes 4444	Lossless	Maximum	Highest quality ProRes. VFX, compositing.
DNxHR	Visually lossless	Excellent	Avid ecosystem, cross-platform editing codec.
VP9	Lossy	Good	Google/YouTube open codec. Web delivery.
AV1	Lossy	Best	Next-gen. 30% better than H.265. Growing support.
CineForm	Visually lossless	Excellent	GoPro codec. Good for intermediate editing.

AUDIO FORMATS

Format	Extension	Quality	Best For
AAC	.aac	Good	Default for MP4, web, streaming
MP3	.mp3	OK	Smaller files, universal compatibility
WAV	.wav	Lossless	Editing, mixing, sound design
FLAC	.lossless	Lossless	Compressed lossless, archival
ALAC	.m4a	Lossless	Apple lossless, iTunes ecosystem
PCM	.wav	Uncompressed	Camera audio, raw recording

- Editing Codec
- YouTube Export
- Social Media
- Archival
- Low Bandwidth

QUICK DECISION GUIDE

Use ProRes 422 or DNxHR for timeline performance. Convert H.264/H.265 on import.

H.264 MP4, 1080p or 4K, 8-12 Mbps (1080p) or 35-45 Mbps (4K).

H.264 MP4, 1080p, 8-10 Mbps. Keep under 60 seconds for Reels/TikTok.

ProRes 422 HQ or DNxHR HQ. Large files but maximum editability.

H.265 for 50% smaller files at same quality. Or AV1 for even better.

