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*Feel like you don't know an .mpg2 from a MP4?
 Confused? You're not alone.
 Wrappers and Codec's Revealed*



Photograph by Joe Munroe/Ohio Historical Society Collections
 Within the world of digital media, wrapper formats like .mov and .avi hold all the compressed video, audio & metadata in one container where they function together.

What the heck is a Codec?

Not long ago, terms such as codec meant little outside of an edit suite but with a rapidly changing industry, even those trying to download the latest Hollywood blockbuster might need a basic understanding of relevant video terms.

Basically, 'codec' is geek speak for "Compressor/Decompressor," which relates to technology that makes video and audio files small enough to travel over the internet or fit into specified parameters. MPEG-2, for example, is the standard codec used for authoring DVDs. The latest, greatest codec on the horizon is known as [H.264 \(or MPEG-4, Part 10\)](#). Developed by Apple, this codec has some [amazing advances](#) in compression technology and scalability, making it a fast

riser in the industry. It's a 'behind the scenes' file that's incorporated into many new, high-quality video products for use in Blu-ray, iPod, Playstation3 and X-Box 360 players.

About Compression

For compression, we use a wide variety of software at Video Labs like Apple's Compressor, Adobe Suite, Sorenson, and QuickTime Pro. In the compression process, these tools apply complex algorithmic equations to determine which pixels to keep and which to throw out while still maintaining picture quality. Making the right choices in software settings (frame & bit rate, field settings, etc.) ultimately affects how the video will look once it is decompressed in your player.

What's up with Wrappers and Containers?

Wrappers, also called containers, are the structure that holds everything together in one neat file like, well, a container or wrapper. Commonly, they are referred to by the extension - .avi, .flv, .wmv to name a few. Within the container, you'll find video, audio, color space files & other metadata, all of which function together.

So, it gets a little confusing sometimes . . . that's ok, right?

Here's what makes these terms confusing -- in some instances, containers and codec's have the same or similar names and you can only tell by context what is being referred to. QuickTime, for example, can be referred to as a media file, but it's actually an entire system for digital media - .mov is the container format that holds it all together. To make it more complex, QuickTime can also be used within other container formats including mp4 for iPod.

We hope this has helped to sort things out a little and if not, call on the expertise at Video Labs - we're just an email, tweet or phone call away.

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