How to Bates number a PDF on an iPhone

Stamp a prefix and sequential number on every page from your phone: the court settings that matter, why printing to PDF breaks them, and four iOS apps compared.

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Yes, you can Bates number a PDF on an iPhone. Scan to PDF, a free offline app for iOS 15.5 and later, stamps a prefix plus a sequential number on every page of a document and writes it into the exported file. You set the prefix, the start number and the digit count, and nothing is uploaded.

Disclosure: AppStoryo is operated by the studio that develops Scan to PDF. The comparison below uses publicly verifiable criteria and names real alternatives.

Without Bates numbering, nobody can point at page 412 of a 900-page exhibit set and be sure you are both looking at the same sheet. Here is what the stamp has to look like, how to apply it from a phone, and when a phone is the wrong place to do it. Get Scan to PDF on the App Store if you want to follow along.

What is Bates numbering, and why does a PDF need it?

Bates numbering is a unique sequential identifier stamped on every page of a document set, usually a short prefix plus a fixed-width number: ABC000001, ABC000002, and so on. It is not page numbering: page numbers restart with each document, while a Bates number never repeats across the whole production, so one label identifies one sheet for the life of the case.

The reason it exists is in the rules. Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 34(b)(2)(E)(i) requires a party to produce documents as they are kept in the usual course of business, or to organise and label them to correspond to the categories in the request. Labelling is the operative word, and the logic reaches beyond litigation: insurance claims, audits and medical records requests all fall apart when two people cite the same bundle differently.

How do you actually Bates number a PDF on an iPhone?

Scan to PDF added Bates numbering in version 2.0, released on 7 July 2026. Open or scan the document, choose Bates numbering in the stamping tools, then set four things: the prefix, the start number, the digit count and whether the cover page is included. The app previews the first and last label before it writes anything, which is the cheap chance to catch a wrong prefix.

Export writes the numbers into the page content rather than on top of it. On iOS, PDF pages are written through Apple's PDFKit framework, available since iOS 11.0, whose PDFDocument class handles writing PDF data, so a stamp committed this way travels with the file. On Android the same app is listed as Document Scanner PDF. Scan to PDF is free, has no watermark and asks for no account.

What settings does a court actually expect on a Bates stamp?

Courts publish this. The Fourth Circuit's electronic appendix instructions for Local Rule 25(a)(1)(D) require Bates stamp pagination in a font of at least size 14, with a minimum bottom margin of .3 inches so the stamp does not collide with existing pagination. Brief citations must match the stamp exactly: JA123, JA 123, J.A.123 or J.A. 123, with no dash or colon inserted between the prefix and the number.

Numbering also runs continuously across volumes: the same instructions say that if Volume I ended at page 500, Volume II starts at 501. On a phone that is one field. The Citelinks requirements behind this apply to cases under formal briefing orders issued on or after 15 July 2022.

Why does printing to PDF destroy the Bates numbers you just added?

Because printing flattens. The Fourth Circuit instructions state it plainly: printing to PDF flattens the file and makes the Bates numbers unrecognisable to the court's Citelinks utility. The stamp stays visible to a human eye, but the utility that builds hyperlinks from brief citations to appendix pages can no longer read it.

So use the app's own export and share it as a file, never a print pipeline or a screenshot. For long-term storage, Scan to PDF exports PDF/A-2b, and password-protected exports use AES-256, the cipher standardised as FIPS 197.

Which Bates numbering app should you actually use?

Choose PDF Bates Desk if the stamping is the whole job

- Gobling Company, $4.99, version 1.0.2 of 17 July 2026, 2.9 MB, iOS 17.0 or later.
- Its listing describes a CSV manifest of page numbers and Bates labels; Scan to PDF does not claim a manifest export.
- English only, and it stamps PDFs you already have; there is no camera scanning underneath it.

Choose PDF Expert if you need a full editor across Apple devices

- Readdle Technologies Limited, free download, version 7.26.0 of 14 September 2026, 306.8 MB, iOS 16.0 or later, 215,897 ratings averaging 4.67.
- Its listing covers iPhone, iPad, Mac and Vision Pro, form filling, a stamp set including Approved and Confidential, and AI summarising, with Premium features behind a subscription.
- It is 3.3 times the download size of Scan to PDF and it is built around a paid tier, so it is the wrong shape for one stamped bundle.

Choose pdf Paginate Pro if you want pagination options above all

- Francis Wildman, free, version 6.3.1 of 10 June 2026, 0.5 MB, but it requires iOS 26.0, ruling out every iPhone that cannot run this year's system.
- It offers roman numerals, numbers spelled as words, Nth forms and alternating outside placement, matched by no competitor here.
- Its own store listing is candid about the scope of its Bates support:

> Even 'Bates numbering' pending your definition of that term. 001, 002, 003 and so on.

That sentence, from the pdf Paginate Pro App Store description, is the dividing line: sequential digits are pagination, while a prefix, a fixed digit width and continuation across volumes are Bates numbering.

Choose Scan to PDF if the paper is not yet a PDF

- Free, no watermark, no account, iOS 15.5 or later, 44 store languages, and the whole pipeline is offline.
- Version 2.0 pairs Bates numbering with exhibit labels and an auto-generated cover sheet, so scanning, stamping and labelling stay in one app.
- Grab it on the App Store; it is the only option here that starts at the camera.

When is Scan to PDF the wrong tool for Bates numbering?

It is the wrong tool for large-scale e-discovery. A production of tens of thousands of pages belongs in a review platform with load files, deduplication and privilege logging. It is also wrong when your firm enforces a numbering scheme on a server, or opposing counsel requires a specific load-file format; the app produces a stamped PDF and nothing else.

Two smaller limits matter. There is no CSV manifest of the labels, which PDF Bates Desk provides. And the app carries no user ratings yet on either store, so you are trusting the published feature list and your own test run. Stamp one throwaway document and check both end labels before the real bundle.

What else do people ask about Bates numbering on a phone?

Is Bates numbering the same as page numbering?

No. Page numbers restart in every document and describe position inside that one file. A Bates number is unique across an entire production, never repeats, and usually carries a party prefix and a fixed digit width so that ABC000042 sorts and cites correctly no matter which document it came from.

How many digits should the number have?

Enough that the sequence never has to grow mid-production. Six digits covers 999,999 pages and is the common default; four is fine for a few hundred. Changing the width halfway breaks sorting, so pick it before the first page is stamped, not after.

Can I stamp a PDF that somebody emailed me?

Yes. Save the attachment to Files, open it in Scan to PDF and stamp it as you would a fresh scan; the camera is optional. What the app cannot do is edit a PDF password-protected against changes, so remove that protection at the source first.

Does the stamp survive when the other side re-saves the file?

Generally yes, because it is written into the page content rather than added as a removable annotation layer. It does not survive being printed and re-scanned at low quality, and the Fourth Circuit warns that printing to PDF flattens the file beyond what Citelinks can read.

Can I number only part of the document?

Scan to PDF lets you decide how the first page is handled, which covers the usual case of an unnumbered cover sheet. For arbitrary page ranges, pdf Paginate Pro is explicitly built around selecting a range and setting the first number in it, and that is a fair reason to use it instead.

Is a phone-made Bates stamp acceptable in court?

Courts specify the result, not the tool. The Fourth Circuit asks for Bates pagination at font size 14 or larger, a .3 inch minimum bottom margin, matching brief citations and a file that has not been flattened. If your export meets the local rule, the device behind it is not the question.

What is an exhibit label and how is it different?

An exhibit label identifies a whole document as Exhibit A or Exhibit 7; a Bates number identifies a single page. Version 2.0 of Scan to PDF does both, adding exhibit labels with an

auto-generated cover sheet, so a single bundle can carry the document-level tag and the page-level sequence together.

Does any of this need an internet connection?

No. Scanning, optical character recognition, stamping and export all run on the device, and the App Store privacy label for the app reports Data Not Collected. That is the argument for doing this on a phone at all: a client's bank statements never leave the handset.

What should I check before sending the stamped bundle?

Four things: the first and last Bates label, the total stamped page count, that the stamp has not landed on existing text, and that the start number continues from the previous volume. Open the exported file in a different reader before you send it, not the app that made it.

Bates numbering on a phone is a real workflow, not a compromise, as long as you respect the export rules. Download Scan to PDF and stamp a test document before the deadline, not during it.

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