

Play all your old media on your Mac and Apple devices

If you find your old movies won't play, don't despair – QuickTime X tricks and third-party components will get them running again.

PLAYING MEDIA OUTSIDE iTunes

QuickTime is the heart of media playback on the Mac and is your first port of call for playing files that you haven't added (and perhaps don't want to add) to your iTunes library. Snow Leopard comes with QuickTime X, a brand-new version that's been given a lick of paint and is also designed to use your Mac hardware more efficiently for playback. It can read Mpeg-4 and H.264 video, which hardware such as the Flip camera range and many mobile phones use to record, and export them straight to YouTube and to your iTunes library. And unlike previous versions of QuickTime, you don't have to upgrade to a Pro version to do that, because there isn't one.

However, QuickTime X can't play some older media, so you might find that a video you downloaded or copied off an enhanced CD single you bought years ago won't play. All is not lost, though. The first thing to try is QuickTime 7. Apple has designed Snow Leopard so that QuickTime 7 and X can coexist. In fact, they work in tandem. When



▲ QuickTime X's minimalist interface provides only the controls required for playback. The button next to the full-screen mode switch appears when a movie has chapter points.

QuickTime X can't play a file, it falls back on version 7's capabilities, and that's key to being able to play not just old QuickTime movies on the Mac, but other types of media, too. That's achieved by installing components, essentially plug-ins, that extend the range of formats QuickTime 7 can play.

QuickTime 7 Pro also offers speedy editing, letting you copy and paste a portion of a video into a new file. That's helpful for sharing when you no longer have the high-quality source material to recreate it, but you can use Mpeg StreamClip (free from squared5.com) to create a trimmed copy of a video.

INSTALLING QUICKTIME 7 IN SNOW LEOPARD

The special version of QuickTime 7 for Snow Leopard can be found on the operating system's install disc; if that's not to hand, you can download it. Opening incompatible files in QuickTime X should prompt you with an offer to download it from the internet, but other applications that rely on the older version's functionality will require you to acquire it manually. You can get it from support.apple.com/kb/DL923. Once installed, QuickTime 7 can be found in the Utilities folder, but mostly it can be ignored because its output is fed back into QuickTime X, which acts as the front end. That saves you the bother of worrying which version is needed.



◀ This file is encoded using the Sorenson Video 3 codec, once popular for trailers and enhanced CDs. QuickTime X is using QuickTime 7 to play it, indicated by the QTKitServer process in Activity Monitor.

Playing panoramas

QuickTime X can't play QuickTime VR files. They're panoramic photographs that place you in the middle of a scene and enable you to adjust the viewpoint through a large sweeping angle, often a full 360° in the horizontal plane and sometimes vertically, too. Try to open a VR file in QuickTime X and it'll prompt you to install QuickTime 7 or, if it's already present, ask if you want to open the file in that version.



◀ Try to open a file in QuickTime X that requires QuickTime 7 and you'll be prompted to download it. Files such as VR panoramas can only be opened in the older version.





PLAYING NON-QUICKTIME FORMATS

We mentioned QuickTime components earlier. QuickTime 7 uses them to extend the range of formats that can be played (and sometimes exported, but from version 7 rather than X). Apple lists some popular components at support.apple.com/kb/HT3526 and the key ones for playback are Windows Media and DivX, especially if you've transferred a lot of media from your old PC.

Flip4Mac is expressly designed to handle Microsoft's Windows Media formats on the Mac. It's invaluable if you made movies on your old PC, but it can't be used to play copy-protected movies purchased on your PC because it doesn't support Microsoft's digital rights management (DRM) system.

Also worthy of consideration, though Apple doesn't mention it, is Perian, which enables QuickTime to play Flash video you've downloaded for offline playback. It's free and available at perian.org.

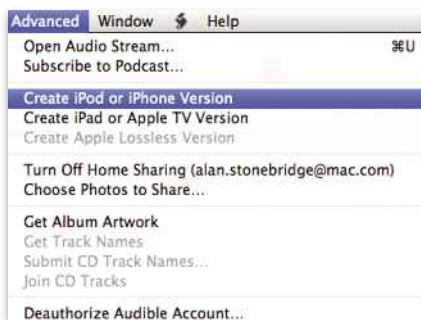


► **Perian, DivX and Flip4Mac add panes to System Preferences for configuring advanced playback options.**

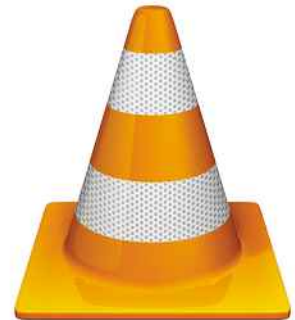
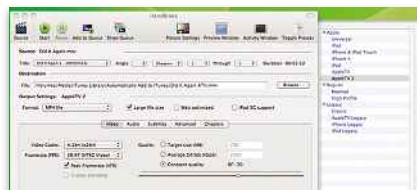


◀ **QuickTime Components are installed in /Library/QuickTime. They add playback support for Windows Media, DivX and many other formats to QuickTime.**

CONVERTING VIDEOS TO PLAY ON YOUR IPOD OR IOS DEVICE



Being able to watch video on your Mac is one thing, but iOS devices and video-capable iPods are picky when it comes to what they'll play. Videos can be converted easily enough, but bear in mind that converting video that's already compressed will sacrifice some quality. How much – and whether you'll notice it on a tiny screen – varies according to the source file. Either way, it's worthwhile keeping the original to hand. Make sure you're happy the result looks and sounds good, and is in sync, and consider archiving the original file in your backups.



VLC

Try VLC (free from videolan.org) when you can't find a QuickTime component to play old media, as it can open many formats that have fallen by the wayside. And while its interface isn't as streamlined as QuickTime's, it could still be the quickest route to playing a file that you can't get Apple's player to recognise. If you created Video CDs in the distant past, it can open those (Mac OS X's DVD Player can't). A list of formats and video and audio codecs that VLC can read is published at videolan.org/vlc/features.php.

Converting with iTunes

Older QuickTime movies can be added to your iTunes library, but you'll only be warned that they can't be copied to your iPod when you try to sync them to it. For a handful of files, you can use iTunes' built-in tool under **Advanced > Create iPod or iPhone Version**. Add something to the original's name so you can tell it apart from the converted copy in the library.

Converting with QuickTime X

Files that you don't want to add to iTunes can be opened in QuickTime X and only the iPod-compatible version sent to your library. Open a movie and choose **Share > iTunes**. The versions that can be created depend on the original's dimensions. Make sure you choose one that plays on your device (shown at the bottom). You can open and queue several exports. Choose **Window > Show Export Progress** to keep an eye on activity.

Converting with Handbrake

Handbrake (free from handbrake.fr) also queues conversions and is well regarded for its output quality. You can skip the advanced options and head straight for the device presets by clicking **Toggle Presets** in the toolbar. Click the **Source** button and choose the file you want to convert. Choose a preset, then pick the name and location of the output file. Press the **Add to Queue** button and repeat until all of your files are lined up, then press the **Start** button.