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Gzip or Brotli: which one your visitors get, and why it can differ

Images, Files & Front-End

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Gzip or Brotli: which one your visitors get, and why it can differ

Images, Files & Front-End Created on **October 10, 2026** 2 min read



Gzip and Brotli are two ways of compressing **text** (HTML, CSS, JavaScript, JSON) before it travels. Brotli usually gives smaller files; gzip is older and understood by everything. **The server chooses, according to what the browser says it can handle**, so two different visitors can receive different versions of the same page. There is nothing to configure in your account: compression is on here. This article explains how to see which one was used. To confirm it is on and measure the gain, see **compression: confirming it is on**.

How the choice is made

1. The browser sends the `Accept-Encoding` header with the list of what it can unpack, for example `gzip, deflate, br`.
2. The server picks one and returns the `Content-Encoding` header saying which: `gzip` or `br`.
3. The browser unpacks it. The visitor never sees any of this.

Why they can differ

Situation	What happens
Site opened over http (no padlock)	Browsers only advertise Brotli over HTTPS. Over http they receive gzip.
Site behind a service such as Cloudflare	The service does the compressing, with its own rules. The answer can be br even if the origin server would give gzip.
Very small files	Compressing may not be worth it, and the server leaves them out.

Situation	What happens
Images, video, ZIP, PDF	They are already compressed formats. Compressing again gains nothing, and it is not done.
Two plugins compressing	They may compress twice or clash. One is enough.

Seeing and comparing, step by step

1. **In the browser:** F12, **Network** tab, click the page row and read `content-encoding` in the response headers.

2. **On the command line,** ask for each version and compare the bytes received: `curl -s -H "Accept-Encoding: gzip" -o /dev/null -w "%{size_download}\n" https://yourdomain.tld/`. Repeat swapping `gzip` for `br` (and for `identity` to get the uncompressed size). If your curl build does not support Brotli, it does not matter: the server answers anyway, and curl only counts the bytes.

3. **Check there is no clash:** if only one of the requests returns `content-encoding`, the other path is not compressing. Tell us which.

cPanel's "Optimize Website" screen is not where this is switched on.
Changing it does not alter what the server does. It is explained in **compression: confirming it is on, and measuring what you gained**.

It is not worth arguing gzip against Brotli.
On ordinary pages the difference between them is small beside the difference between having compression and not having it, and beside the weight of the images. If your page is heavy, the culprit is almost never the text: see **image optimisation and WebP**.

NEED A HAND?

Neither request returns content-encoding and the page is text? Send us the exact address and the curl result.

Open a support ticket →

SEE ALSO

- Compression: confirming it is on, and measuring what you gained
- HTTP/2 and HTTP/3: how to see which one your site uses
- Browser caching with .htaccess
- Hosting plans and what each includes

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