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Accents turning into strange symbols on your site: UTF-8 from file to database

PHP & Development

CODE

RLX-MZ-KB-1944

VERSION

v2026.10.15

COUNTRY · LANGUAGE

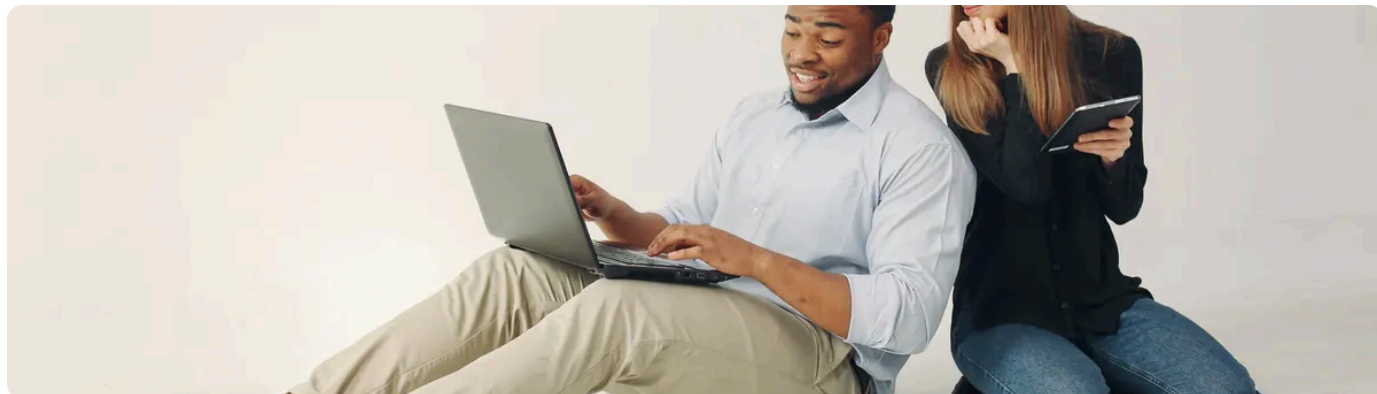
Mozambique · English

Interweb Mozambique

RLX Holdings, S.A. · Group RLX Holdings

Tax ID (NUIIT) 401 191 607 · Legal entity no. (NUEL) 105 045 974 · Economic activity code (CAE) 62022

<https://www.meu.interweb.co.mz/knowledgebase/1944>



The short answer: “ação” shows as “aÃ§Ã£o”, or as “a💎💎o”, or as “a?o”. It is always the same problem: the text was written in one **alphabet (encoding)** and read in another. The fix is to make the file, the page, PHP and the database all speak **UTF-8**. You find where it fails, in order.

What each symptom points to

What you see	Likely cause
“Ã§Ã£” (extra letters, starting with Ã)	UTF-8 text read as if it were another alphabet (Latin-1). The page or the connection is not saying it is UTF-8.
“💎” (a diamond with a question mark)	Text in another alphabet read as UTF-8. The file was saved as ANSI/Latin-1.
“?” in place of the letter	The letter was lost when saved to the database: the table or the connection cannot hold accents.
Only in e-mails or only in a PDF	The message header or the PDF’s font, not the site.
After importing a database	The imported file was read with the wrong alphabet.

Finding where it fails, in order

1

Look at the page: the HTML head should have `<meta charset="utf-8">` right at the start.

2

Look at the file: open it in an editor that shows the encoding and save it as **UTF-8 (without BOM)**. Many errors come from files saved as ANSI.

3

Look at PHP: the `default_charset` setting should be UTF-8: **Viewing and adjusting your PHP configuration**.

4

Look at the database: the tables and columns should use utf8mb4, and the site's connection too. In WordPress, wp-config.php has `define('DB_CHARSET', 'utf8mb4');`.

5

When importing, choose the file's character set in phpMyAdmin: **Importing a database**.

Take a backup before converting anything, and do not convert the database without knowing what the problem is: converting twice writes double the strange symbols and is hard to undo. First find out whether the error is in reading (fixed without touching the data) or in saving.

If the data was already saved with the strange symbols, some can be fixed with a replacement in the database: **Replacing text in the database**. For spreadsheets with accents, see **Product CSV**.

Tried this and the symbols are still there? Open a ticket with the address and an example of the text.

[Open a support ticket](#)

SEE ALSO

[Viewing and adjusting your PHP configuration: version per folder, extensions and phpinfo](#)

[Importing a database with phpMyAdmin, and the size limit that stops you](#)

[Exporting a database with phpMyAdmin](#)

[Replacing old addresses in a WordPress database without breaking it](#)

[Importing and exporting products in WooCommerce with a CSV file](#)



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