

Backing up files to an External Drive

There's nothing more frustrating than having your hard drive fail, and all of your data is lost. If only you had remembered to back up your files, whether they are pictures, documents, spreadsheets or music, someplace else for a good preventative measure. Hard drives are mechanical devices and sooner or later they're going to fail, and it always seems to happen at the worst possible time.

There are several methods to backing up files. In this example we're going to deal with a very simple method that's built right into your operating system. The only additional tool you'll need before doing this procedure is some kind of external drive. These drives vary in size (storage capability) and usually plug into one of your computer's USB ports.



Pictured above are examples of Flash Drives (also known as pen drives, thumb drives, key drives or jump drives). Below are examples of external hard drives. These drives will vary in price depending on the amount of storage they provide for you.



When you plug in your external drive for the first time, your operating system will "recognize" that new device and load the necessary software to properly communicate with that new drive. The computer will then treat that drive as an additional storage device and assign it a drive letter. Figure 1 shows the My Computer window in MS Windows after an external drive has been added.

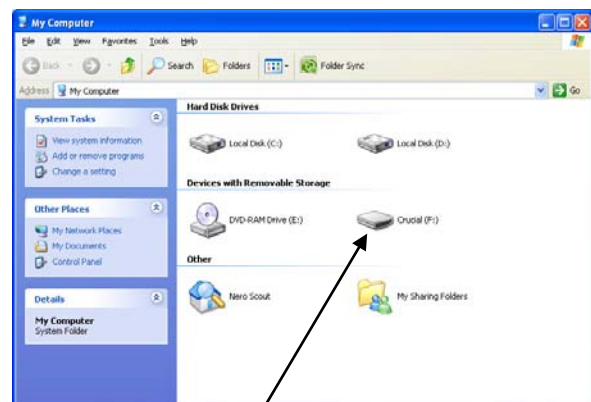


Figure 1: External Drive (F)

To back up any files, navigate to the folder that contains the files you wish to back up to the external drive. When you double click on your My Documents folder for example, a listing of your files will be shown in the window.

In the My Computer icon, double click on the external drive. In the case of Figure 1, double click on drive F. This opens a window showing any files that are currently on that drive (if any). Position your windows to where the origin (My Documents folder) is on the left side of your screen, and the destination (Drive F) is on the right side (Figure 2).

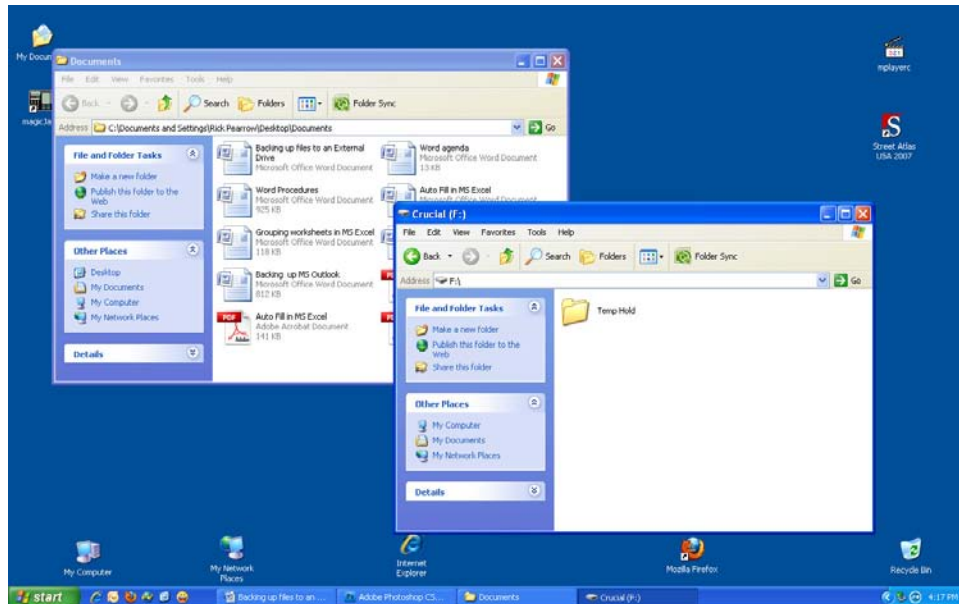


Figure 2: Window layout for backup

You can simply click and drag a file(s) from the origin to the destination. This COPIES the files from one place to the other (the original stays in My Documents and a duplicate is copied to the external drive).

If you want to copy more than one file at a time, here are some shortcuts:

- To copy ALL files from one drive to the other: Click on one file and then press the CTRL + A combination on your keyboard. This selects all files and folders within that parent folder. Click drag one of those files or folders to the external drive window to copy all of those files selected.
- To copy selected files from the original folder, click one file, and then while holding down the CTRL key, click on other files or folders you wish to copy. When you have them all selected, click-drag one of them to the external drive and all selected files will be copied.

Verify the backup of the files by double clicking on a few to be sure they open in the default program used to view them. You can then unplug your external drive for storage elsewhere.