

Practical Help Instruction: Simple Backup Plans

(v1.0)



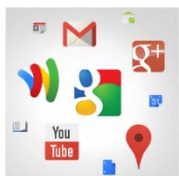
You do back up your personal files, don't you? Probably not. The fact is that 97% of computer users never back up their files. The sad part about this is that, of those people, 100% regret not doing so when their computer crashes. These days we all have tons of digital photographs, music files, documents and what-not stored on our hard drives. And since hard drives last a long time, it's easy to put off the chore of backing up the files. So here are two different but simple methods you can use to make the chore easier.

Super Automatic: If you feel comfortable trusting an online service, you can copy your stuff into the 'cloud' and keep those online copies synced with the stuff on your hard drive. This can be pretty much automatic. Generic online storage providers include Dropbox, Google Drive, Microsoft Skydrive and SugarSync, and they're only a quick internet search away. You can compare pricing and benefits, but I've found the first two to be the easiest to use. The differences?



- Dropbox is generic storage of files. If you want to open the files, you need the right program. Dead simple, but more limited.
- Google Drive includes their own online editors, so you can create documents, spreadsheets, presentations, etc. on any computer, tablet or even smartphone. Google Drive also syncs up with Google's Picasa Web Albums to make managing your photos easier. If you use Google Play, your music & media management is integrated.

Create a new Google Account



The similarities: they both give a small amount of online storage for free, more space costs money. They each have a program to install on your computer, tablet or smartphone that helps make it easier to access your stuff. If you use iTunes for music & media, they can both back that up, but you'll want to use iTunes to actually use those files (and if you're an iTunes and iPhone/iPad user, you've got iCloud for that).

So here's the quick method of automatic backup using Google Drive:

1. If you don't already have one, sign up for a Google account (free). If you have a lot of stuff on your computer, pay for the storage space you need (so for example, 200 gigabytes of online space is \$50/year).
2. Install Google Drive on your computer(s), tablet(s), and smartphone(s). Sign into your Google account on all of them. On your computer, Google Drive will add a folder.
3. On your computer, move all your personal files into the Google Drive folder. You can create sub-folders to mimic whatever organization you want (like My Documents, My Pictures, My Music, etc. on the PC, or Documents, Pictures, Music, etc. on the Mac).
 - a. If you use iTunes, open iTunes and go to your Library settings. Change the location of your library to a sub-folder inside of the Google Drive folder. Make sure iTunes is set to copy all files into the library folder, and choose the menu option/setting to 'organize' your library, so any files not already in that folder are copied in.
 - b. For any other programs on your computer that have files, be sure to open the program and navigate to the Google Drive to access your files. So for example, in MS Office programs, change the location of your files from, say My Documents to Google Drive>My Documents.

Now all the files in your computer's Google Drive folder will be copied to your online location. Anytime you change a file (using either your computer, tablet or smartphone), it'll be changed on all devices. Keep all your stuff inside the Google Drive folder and it'll all be automatically backed up.

Practical Help Instruction: Simple Backup Plans

(v1.0)

The Manual Way: If you don't trust online 'cloud-based' storage services, then here's a quick and easy way to manually back up your files. Please note that this does nothing for anything other than your computer, if you use a tablet or smartphone you'll not have access to your files on those devices.



Buy yourself an external storage drive, such as one of the Western Digital My Passport drives. I like these because they plug into a USB port on your computer and don't need a separate power source. Don't skimp on space, get the biggest you can afford (the largest as of Feb. 2013 is two terabytes).

Now follow the procedure I've outlined below as often as you want to manually backup your files. You can do this monthly, weekly, daily – whatever. Just remember that any changes to files you make in-between backups won't be saved. So if you suffer a hard drive crash, you'll only have files as of the date of your last backup.

1. Plug the external storage drive into your computer. If you have a Mac, you can turn on Time Machine and let it use that drive for a fairly automatic backup (as long as the drive is plugged in). If you have a PC or want to backup your Mac manually, continue on
2. Open a window to the external drive. Also open a separate window to your files. Separate these windows so you can see both on your screen (not overlapping).
3. On the window to your external storage drive, create a new folder – call it Backup1. You can be as creative as you like on naming the backup folders. Some folks put the backup date in the folder name. That's fine, or just use something that will help you know which is the most recent folder.
4. Now with both windows open, click on the window that has select (highlight) and drag all the folders in your list of files into the external drive window, inside the folder Backup1. Go away and come back later, it might take a while.
5. When it's done, you can disconnect the external storage drive, or leave it plugged in. Just close the windows.

Now repeat these five steps as often as you like. Each time, create a new folder (Backup2, Backup3, etc.). That way if you need to, you can find files you might have deleted or changed awhile ago, and retrieve the older versions.

At some point, the external hard drive is going to get full. At that point, just start deleting the oldest backups to make more space.

Automatic VS Manual

There are programs for the PC that mimic what the Mac's Time Machine does so well. And with Windows 7 you have Microsoft's built-in backup program. With Windows 8 you have the File History feature. While all of these are viable alternatives, I don't find anything for the PC that comes close to matching Apple's Time Machine capabilities. Because it isn't just about backing up simply, it's also about how easy it is to recover from a hard drive crash. With the manual method, you can take that drive to any computer and access your files.

Same for automatic online backup services (Mozy, Carbonite, etc.) – restoring your files is a process, unique to each method, and you likely won't remember how to do that if/when the time comes. So even though the manual method is more work, it'll end up serving you much better when you have to recover from a disaster!