FREE OPTIONS FOR BACKING UP YOUR FILES

FOR WINDOWS

1. Obtain a USB external hard drive, you can get them at most electronics stores. Try to get one that has twice as much space as your computer, so you have room for multiple backups and so you have room for all the data you might get in the future. If you want to be extra safe, buy two. Back up to both and keep them in different physical locations (now your data will survive lightning, flood, fire, or theft)

2. When you first plug it in, Windows will ask if you want to use it as a backup. Click "use this drive for backup". If you don't receive this prompt, try unplugging the drive from the usb port and plugging it back in. Or try a different USB port.

3. The window that pops up will say "What do you want to back up" at the top. Leave the default selection "Let windows choose (recommended)" and click "Save Settings and Run backup" at the bottom of the window.

4. You're done! Windows will make its first backup of your drive, during which you don't want to turn off your computer. After that, it'll make regular backups in the background as you work—you don't need to deal with it again.

5. For users that never receive the prompt in step 2, you can also manually load windows backup by clicking the windows start button and typing "backup and restore" in the search box. Click backup and restore and on the window that pops up select "Set up backup". Follow the prompts.

If you ever need to restore a file you lost, you can just go to the Start Menu, type in "backup", and go back to "Backup and Restore". You can hit the "Restore My Files" or "Restore Users Files" buttons to get those files back.

For a more in-depth tutorial, try these resources. Backup and restoring in Windows 7, Windows 8/8.1, & Windows 10.

FOR MAC

1. Get a backup drive. This can be just about any USB external hard drive, and you can get them at most electronics stores. Try to get one that has twice as much space as your computer, so you have room for multiple backups and so you have room for all the data you might get in the future.

2. When you plug in your drive, your Mac will ask you if you want to use that drive as a backup disk. Hit "Use as Backup Disk". If you don't get this prompt, you can always go to System Preferences > Time Machine to set it as a backup disk, too.

3. From Time Machine's preferences, hit "Select Backup Disk" and choose your external drive.

4. That's it! OS X will perform its first backup (during which you'll want to keep your computer on), and from then on it'll back up in the background with no work required on your part.

If you ever need to restore a file, just click on the Time Machine icon in your menu bar and hit "Enter Time Machine". From there, you can search through your old backups for the files you lost and restore them to your hard drive.

For a more in-depth tutorial, try this resource for Time Machine Backup.

PAID OPTIONS FOR BACKING UP YOUR FILES

You can spend up to $100 a year, depending on how much storage space you're looking for, to back up the data from all your PCs and mobile devices to an online storage service. Here are a few options: Carbonite, Dropbox, Google Drive, iDrive, iCloud, Mozy, or SkyDrive/OneDrive.