Device Backup Guide

So you dropped your phone in the toilet …

Or your PC or Mac just made a horrible, grinding noise (smoke may or may not have been seen). And maybe your favorite tech repair shop couldn't salvage it.
Now what?!? Have you lost EVERYTHING?
Maybe not!

If you have copies of your files (emails, photos, documents) stored "someplace else" - then you have taken the first step to avoiding "losing EVERYTHING": you have backups.
(And if you get hacked and have to wipe your phone or laptop, your backups will help you recover from that too.)

The big picture of backups

This guide focuses on **online services** for copying your files. You also can purchase physical hardware such as SSD drives or thumb drives to store the copies … but honestly the various flavors of online options are a lot better.

Some online services rely on manual setup and sometimes monitoring. Here's some examples:

- The New York Times Wirecutter service reviews many technology solutions. This older Wirecutter article gives a good overview of backup strategies covering both Mac and Windows PCs.
- A quick outline for Windows PCs:
  - Windows Backup (OneDrive) - Sign in with your Microsoft account; then use Windows Backup to back up folders like Desktop, Documents, Pictures, Videos, and Music to OneDrive. These files will be accessible on any computer where you sign in with your Microsoft account.
  - Or use Windows 11 Backup - Open Control Panel, search for "Backup and Restore," and set up a backup.

For backing up an Apple computer:

- Time Machine, the backup software that's included with the Mac operating system. See Apple's support page about how to set up Time Machine.

More Cloud/Online info – perhaps the best overall approach

From Wirecutter, October 2024:

The differences between cloud storage, cloud syncing, and cloud backups

In general, you have three ways to manage files stored in the cloud.

- **Cloud storage** is an online locker for your files. You manually move files into storage and then access them via the web.
- **Cloud syncing** involves automatically syncing a folder or folders on your computer to other devices via the internet.
- **Cloud backups** use special software on your computers to automatically copy files to the internet. Ideally, your cloud backup includes all the most important files on your computer and updates frequently, so the newest versions (and previous versions) are always available.

To add to the confusion, many services cross over between these three categories. For example, Box, Dropbox, iCloud, OneDrive, and others can sync files between devices and store them in the cloud. Several of the online backup services we looked at offer file syncing between computers and even file sharing with people you invite.

It's possible to use any of those types of online storage to back up your files, but doing so involves some trade-offs. For instance, not all cloud storage or syncing services can encrypt your files so that only you can access them, though notably iCloud has that option. Also, if you remove or delete a file from a cloud syncing service, that change will be reflected on all the other machines it syncs with, making it less useful for backups. And with cloud storage you have to ensure that all the most important files are being uploaded—either manually by you or through client software like what's provided by Google Drive.

Wirecutter rated these cloud backup services highly:
> **IDrive**: https://www.idrive.com/
> **Arq**: https://www.arqbackup.com/

Also: for iPhone and Android phones, see this recent Wirecutter story.

Also: specifically for photo backups, see this The Conversation story.

And: World Backup Day

MFM Communications Committee
Ann Schwartz, February 2025

For more information about how to protect yourself from cybercrime, visit
https://milwaukeequakers.org/cybersecurity/