



# **Windows File History**

## **An automatic backup**

### **SeniorNet Pakuranga Inc.**

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## **How to backup folders with File History.**

These notes cover setting up File History in Windows 10 and selecting what to back-up. Restoring lost folders and files is covered in a separate set of notes. In both cases just reading the notes takes about 20 times longer than doing it.

**File History in Windows 10** is one of many ways of backing up. It has the advantage of being part of Windows 10 and you do not have to download a new Application. All you need is an alternative storage drive, usually an external USB drive like a large memory stick or a dedicated external SSD. Its purpose is to have a reliable record of your valuable data so that it can be recovered in the event of a major component failure in your computer, as a way of transferring to another computer, or dealing with a virus infection, or letting you look back at older versions of a file for information that you have subsequently deleted.

File History is not used to back up the Windows 10 Operating system or any Application programs you have installed. That form of backup is called an Image or Clone and Macrium Reflect is recommended and covered in separate notes.

File History backups will only happen with your computer running and the backup drive connected. File History scans your computer internal drive at regular intervals and looks for changes to be backed up. If a file is changed File History keeps a copy of each version identified by precise time of the change so that you can refer back to previous versions if required.

Note that a file can only be backed up if you have already saved it to your PC hard drive. Any file that is actively being worked on is not backed up. (i.e. in an Application like Word or Excel either as a new file or one you are editing). The Windows limit of 210 characters in a file name applies and must allow for an additional 26 characters extension added by File History to distinguish between versions. If 210 characters is exceeded the file will have been omitted from the backup.

***How much back up capacity do you need?** It is useful to know how large the folders you intend to backup are as this will guide you to the size of external drive to use. To get a report on a folder size go to File Explorer, select “this PC” or “C” drive and right click it. In the dropdown menu click on Properties and the size is revealed. Photos and videos can consume a lot of capacity. I suggest a portable external SSD drive of at least 250 GB capacity @ about \$140 or a portable 1000GB HDD @ about \$80. You can experiment with a spare small drive memory stick if you want, but see the later note on how to change to another back up drive,*

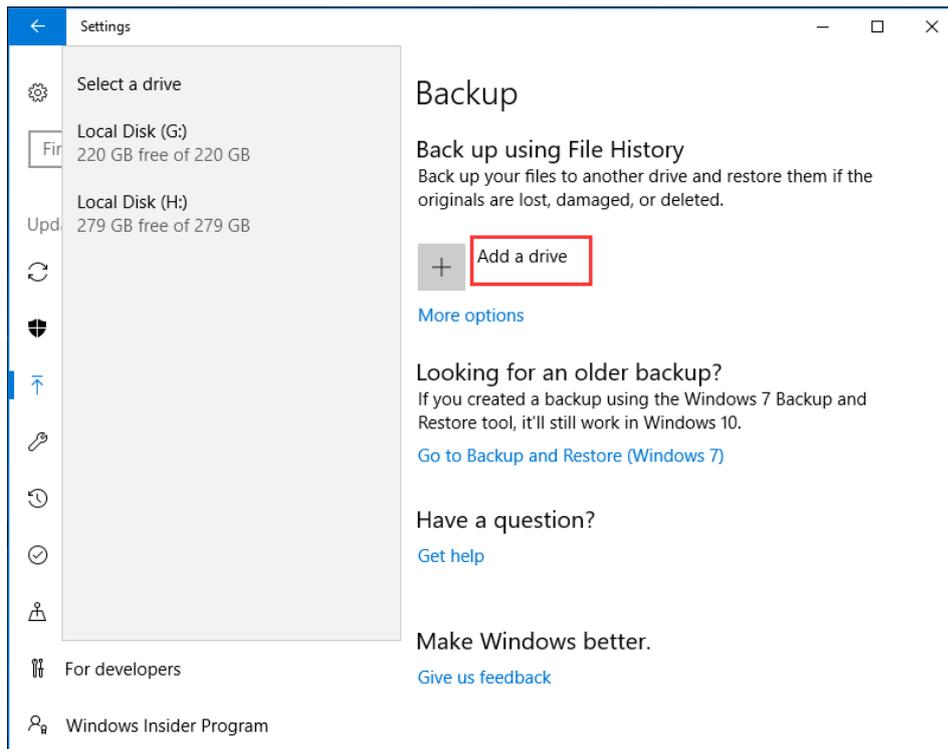
**To make a backup:**

**Step 1: Firstly, connect an external drive** to your computer using a USB socket (You may find a flash drive or other external drive annoying to have connected all the time. Once the set-up which follows is done you can remove the drive for convenience, but **please use the correct eject drive procedure** from the taskbar to avoid interrupting a backup in progress. Once the drive is removed Windows will remind you it is not connected when the next scheduled backup is due and you have the choice of ignoring the reminder or reconnecting to enable a backup)

**Step 2:** Open **Settings** from the **Start** menu.

**Step 3:** Go to **Update & security > Backup**.

**Step 4:** Under the **Back up using File History** section, click the **Add a drive** option to select your external drive to store the backup files.



Step 5: The **Automatically back up my files** option appears and is turned on.

Click **More options** to go to step 6.

## Backup

### Back up using File History

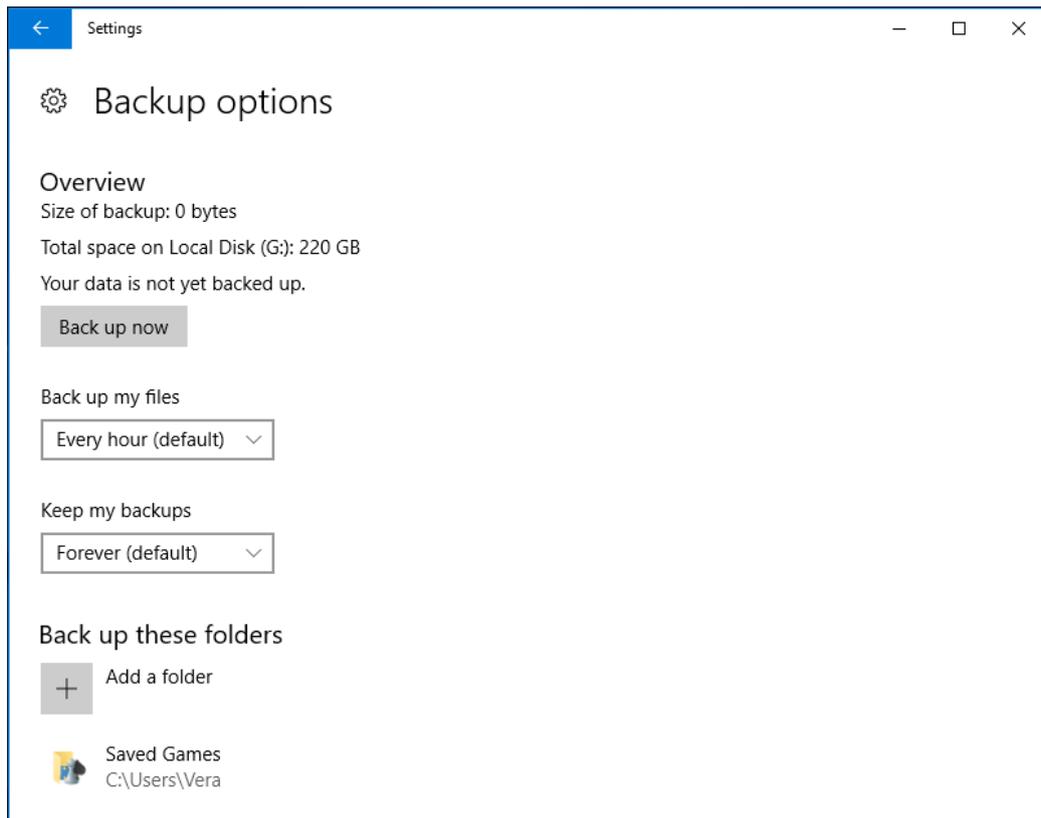
Back up your files to another drive and restore them if the originals are lost, damaged, or deleted.

Automatically back up my files

On

[More options](#)

**Step 6:** Temporarily overlook **Back up now** and set the configuration you want using the dropdown arrow heads.



You can configure how often File History scans for a back up and how long it keeps backup copies. File History doesn't replace an earlier copy of a file it has made. If a change has occurred an up to date version of your file is recorded. All versions are identified within File History by a date extension in brackets after the file name. (The date extension is Year -month -day -hour -minute-second in Universal Time Coordinated. (yyyy\_mm\_dd\_hh\_mm\_ss UCT). Ie the old GMT.) This means you can recover an older file by searching its name and backup date.

The default scan setting is a hourly but you can choose another time, for example, every 10, 15, 20 or 30 minutes, 1, 3, 6 or 12 hours, or once a day. The default time is good for the first ever back up as it may well take over 30 minutes. Later you could choose 10 minutes if you typically have the PC on for short spells. Just choose a frequency of backup and retention time based on your use of the computer.

Under the tab **Back Up these Folders** there is a list of top level folders that will currently be backed up. If there are folders you don't currently use it's OK to leave

them in the list as you may have a future use and they won't have any impact of storage capacity meanwhile.

If internet base storage folders such as One Drive or Google Drive are listed they could be removed as they have their own very reliable back up in their data centres.

To remove a particular folder from the list just click on it and choose **remove**.

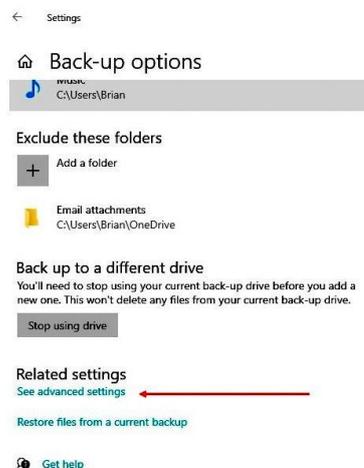
Removing a top level folder also removes all of its subfolders. You cannot restore subfolder unless the top level folder is also restored using restore action described below.

To **restore a removed folder** to the list or to add another folder click on the **Back Up these Folders tab** and the File Explorer opens from which you select the folder to add or restore. back to the scan list.

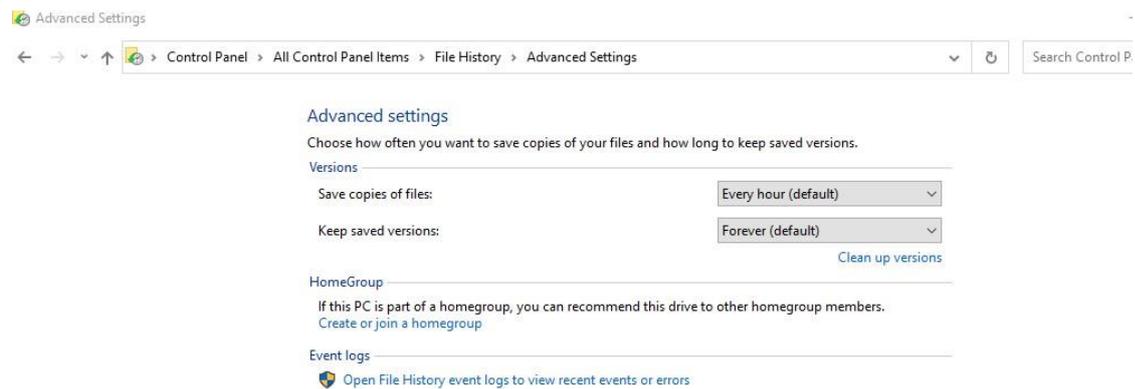
The **Exclude these Folders** works in a like manner but uses File Explorer to exclude subfolders.

## Clean up Backup Versions of a file

At the lower part of Back-up options see **Related settings** and choose **Advanced Settings**.



This takes you to Control Panel and choose **Advanced settings** again where you see the backup frequency and save duration settings repeated but select the additional item “**clean up versions**”. Older versions are deleted after a maximum of 2 years. (I haven’t found an explanation for this limited backup time compared with the “never” settings but it would seem the rationale is that it is a backup and not an archive)



## To Restore

### Step 7 Restore one file.

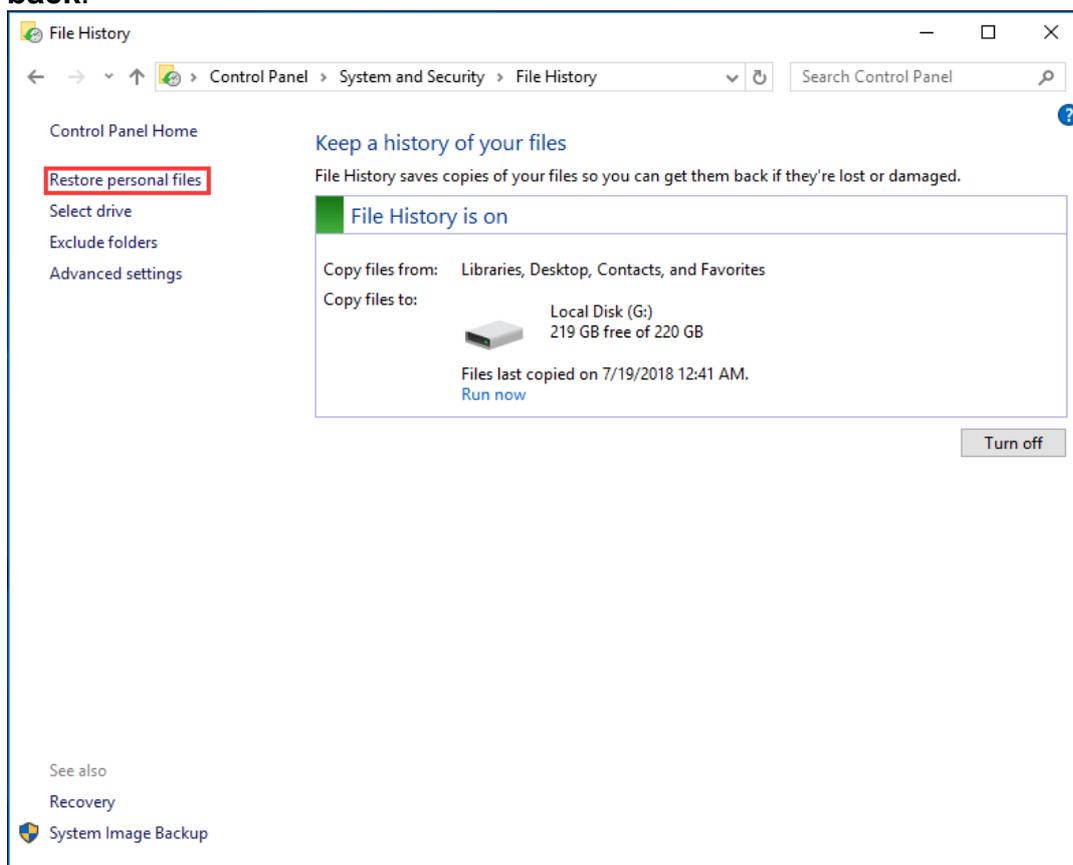
Right-click on a current file in File Explorer, and then select *Restore previous versions*. An alternative route to the same restore is right-clicking the file and going to the *Properties > Previous Versions* window.

See restore from current backup step 6

### Step 8 Restore multiple files using Control Panel (see Related Settings

Advanced settings in Step 6

When multiple original files are deleted, damaged, or lost, go to **Control Panel > System & security > File History > Restore personal files** to **get those files back**.



<https://www.dummies.com/computers/operating-systems/windows-10/how-to-restore-files-from-file-history-in-windows-10/>

<https://superuser.com/questions/659953/how-do-you-restore-from-a-file-history-backup-to-a-new-computer/1169239>

<https://www.tenforums.com/tutorials/55480-restore-files-folders-file-history-windows-10-a.html>

Once File History is enabled, there's a handy trick to access older versions of a file: Right-click on a file in File Explorer, and then select *Restore previous versions*. This is the same as right-clicking the file and going to the *Properties > Previous Versions* window.