

Saving Word Documents Safely

Make the Most of Useful Word Features that Help to Keep Your Work Safe

This article shows you how to:

- Set Word to protect what you're working on
- Recover lost work if Word is closed accidentally
- Keep automatic backups to guard against mishaps

You've put the finishing touches to your document, tweaking the text, restyling the headings, improving the layout, and then... there's a sudden power cut and it's gone! Does that mean you've lost all your work and you'll have to start again?

Thankfully not! There are various features you can use in Word to ensure you should never lose more than a few minutes' work. Read on to learn how to use these features to prevent accidental loss.

Document Recovery

Word has recovered the following files. Save the ones you wish to keep.



Chapter 6 [AutoRecovered]

Version created from the last AutoRecovery
08/05/2019 10:07



Chapter 6 [Original]

Version created last time the user saved the file
08/05/2019 09:57

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Although this article focuses on Microsoft Word, you'll find the same options and features in two of the other Microsoft Office programs – Excel and PowerPoint. If you spend time using either of those, it's well worth ensuring the same options are enabled to protect (and perhaps backup) your work. You can then follow similar steps to those in this article if you need to recover an Excel workbook or a PowerPoint presentation.

The Golden Rule: Save Early, Save Often!

Always save your work frequently!

Whenever you're using a computer to create something, such as a Word document, this is the number one rule to remember. The more often you save your work, the safer you are if something unexpected causes the program to crash or the PC to switch off. The most you stand to lose is the work you've done since the last save, so it would be better if that last save were two minutes ago rather than 20 minutes ago!

It just takes a quick key-press

It's absurdly easy, of course – you just press **Ctrl+S** – so get into the habit of tapping this key combination after every full-stop (or at least after every new paragraph), every pause for thought, and after every little correction you make when reading through a finished document. The great advantage is that you can keep your fingers on the keyboard: you don't continually break your flow by reaching for the mouse.

If you press **Ctrl+S** and your document hasn't yet been saved, you'll see the usual Save As dialog prompting you to choose a name and location for it, so this one key combination is really all you need to remember. So, save early – ideally before you even start typing anything into a new document – and thereafter, save often!

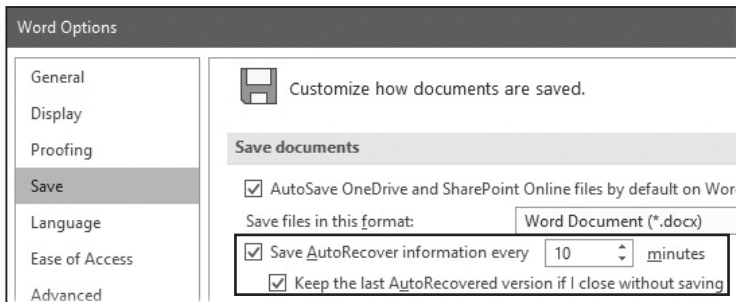
Set Up Word for Best Protection as You Work

With the best will in the world, there may be times when your work is going so well that you forget to save regularly as you go. To help ensure you don't lose what you've been working on, Microsoft Word includes a couple of useful features that automatically create safety copies of the document you're writing.

Switch on Word's document protection features

These features should both be switched on by default, but it pays to make sure! Follow these steps to check this pair of options and, if you choose, make adjustments:

1. Click the blue **File** tab on the Ribbon and choose **Options**.
2. In the Word Options dialog that opens, click **Save**.
3. Make sure there are ticks in the boxes beside the two options indicated in the screenshot below:



- The first option tells Word to save a safety copy of your document regularly as you work on it. By default, it will do this every 10 minutes, meaning you should never be able to lose more than 10 minutes' work if Word or your PC crashes. Feel free to reduce the figure if you tend to work quickly and you'd like Word to save more often, but it's wise to
- An automatic safety copy every 10 minutes*

A temporary copy of documents you don't save

regard 5 minutes as a minimum interval. I'll explain how to recover your work after a crash on page 8.

- The option below tells Word that if you close a document without saving it, a copy of it should be kept anyway, just in case you change your mind. These copies are kept for about four days. I'll explain how you can recover one of these documents below.

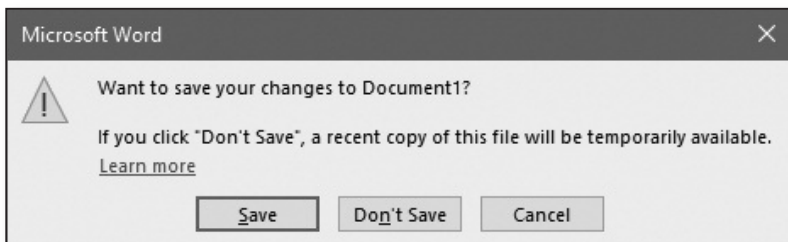
4. With these two options ticked, click OK at the bottom of the Word Options dialog to close it.

Important: remember that these options are only a safety net. It's comforting to know they're there in case something goes wrong or you make a mistake, but don't treat them as an alternative to saving regularly yourself!

Reopen a Document You Didn't Save

Word always prompts you to save

Forgetting to save changes to a document isn't easy: if you've altered a document since opening or saving it, and then you try to close it (or close Word), you'll always be asked whether you want to save those changes. However, in recent versions of Word, you'll see a dialog like this to prompt you:



An extra note in the dialog tells you that even if you decide to close the document without saving it, Word

will keep a copy of it 'temporarily'. In fact, it will only be available for about four days, to avoid filling up your PC with documents you really didn't want, but that should be plenty of time to recover it if you change your mind.

Of course, if you think there's a chance you'll want this document in future, it makes sense to save it, not least because the copy Word has made might be a few minutes old, and you might have done more work on it since.



So, if you click **Don't save** in this dialog, your document isn't gone for good: you have up to four days to access it again. How you do that depends on whether the document was one you'd previously saved (see 'Solution 1' below) or a document that had never been saved ('Solution 2').

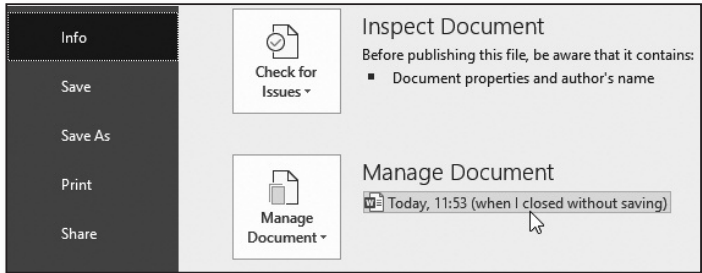
You have several days to recover the document

Solution 1: restore unsaved changes to a document you'd previously saved

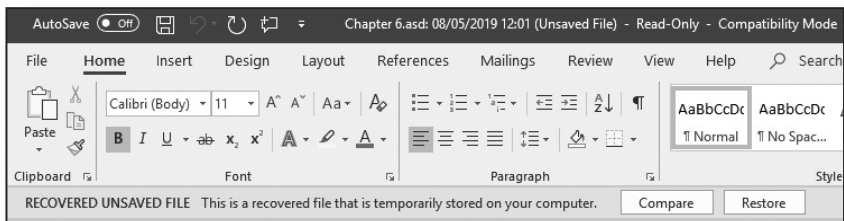
If you opened a document you'd saved at some time in the past, made some changes to it, and then closed it without saving those changes, it should be possible to recover those unsaved changes. Here's what to do:

Didn't save your changes to a document?

1. Start Word and open the document for which you want to recover the newer, unsaved version.
2. Click the blue File tab on the Ribbon and click Info in the left-hand panel.



- Open the auto-saved copy
- Below the heading **Manage Document** (in the newest versions of Word) or **Versions**, you'll see an entry giving the date and time when a copy of the document was made along with the note (**when I closed without saving**). Click this entry and Word will load this copy of the document.
 - Immediately above the document you'll see a bar explaining that this is a recovered copy of an unsaved file, and giving you a choice of two buttons, **Compare** and **Restore**:



Compare the two side-by-side...

- If you click **Compare**, Word will open a new window showing a comparison between the last version of the document you saved yourself and this unsaved version. It looks rather complicated, but the intention is that you can look through the changes marked in the document, accept or reject any of them as required, and then choose **File > Save As** to save the result as a new document.
- If you click **Restore**, you'll see a warning that you're about to overwrite the last-saved version with this autosaved version. If you're sure you want to keep this newer version and discard your original, click **OK**; otherwise click **Cancel**. (Before clicking the **Restore** button, it's wise to have a look through the document and make sure everything seems the way it should be.)

.. or replace your original with the auto-saved copy

Rather than clicking **Restore**, you can choose **File > Save As** and save this automatically-created copy

of the document with a slightly different name, allowing you to keep this along with your original and compare/combine the two at your leisure..

Solution 2: restore a document you never saved

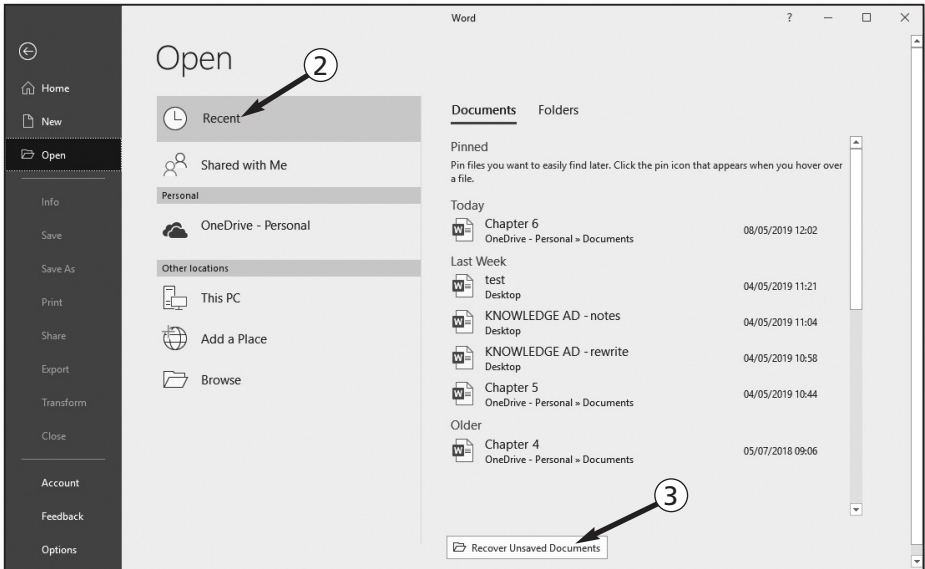
If you spent some time working on a document, but then closed it without ever having saved it, you can still access it up to four days afterwards. Just follow these steps:

Closed without ever saving?

1. Start Microsoft Word and, if you arrive at the Start screen, click on **Blank document**.
2. Click the blue **File** tab on the Ribbon.
3. In Word 2010, click on **Recent** at the left of the window. In newer versions, click on **Open** ① then click on **Recent** (or **Recent Documents**) ②.
4. At the bottom of the window, below your list of recently-used documents, click the **Recover Unsaved Documents** button ③.



See a list of unsaved documents



- Open and save whatever you want to keep*
5. An Open dialog will appear containing a list of the Word documents you worked on recently but didn't save. These have rather odd-looking names, but the names begin with the first few words of the document's text, so it shouldn't be difficult to identify the one you want.
 6. Double-click the file you want to open.
 7. Word will open the file allowing you to have a look through it. If you'd like to keep the document, choose **File > Save As** and choose a name and location to save it. If you don't want to keep it, just close it by pressing **Ctrl+W**: Word will still keep it for the remainder of that four-day period, so you can follow these steps again if you decide you do want to keep it after all.

Recover Lost Work After a PC Problem

A crash or a power cut?

You're in the middle of working when Microsoft Word or your PC suddenly crashes. Perhaps the crash happened sometime after you'd last saved your document, or perhaps you hadn't saved at all.

Check for an AutoRecovered copy

However, as long as Word had time to create an AutoRecover copy of your work (in other words, the time interval set on pages 3–4 had passed since you started Word or last saved the document), you can use that copy to restore your work.

After restarting your PC (if necessary), follow these steps:

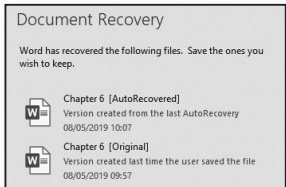
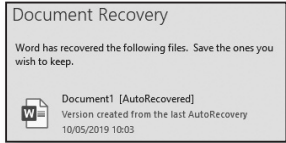


1. Start Microsoft Word and, if you arrive at its Start page, click on **Blank document**.
2. At the left of the window you'll see a task pane titled 'Document Recovery'. This pane lists the documents that can be recovered, giving their names, brief

descriptions of what they are, and the dates and times they were created:

See if recently-used files are shown

- If you'd never saved the document you were working on, you'll just see one entry in the task pane with the name **Document1 [AutoRecovered]** or something very similar, indicating it's a version saved by the AutoRecover feature.
- If you had previously saved the document, you'll see two entries in the task pane, both showing the name of your document. One will be marked **[AutoRecovered]** to indicate that it was created by the AutoRecover feature, and the other will be marked **[Original]** to indicate that it's the last copy of the document you saved yourself.



If the task pane is too narrow and you can't read its details, you can widen it. Move the mouse to the vertical line dividing it from your blank document, at which the mouse pointer turns into a horizontal double-arrow, then click-and-drag to the right.



3. Let's get one possibility out of the way quickly: perhaps you don't want to recover what you were working on at all. Maybe you were just experimenting with something when the crash occurred and you don't need to get it back again. In that case, just click the **Close** button at the bottom of the task pane. The task pane closes and you can continue using Word in the normal way, ignoring the remaining steps below.

Nothing you want to keep?

4. More likely, though, you do want to recover the work you were doing, so let's continue on that assumption. The next step is to open one of these documents to see what it contains and determine which you want to keep:

If you'd never saved the document

- If you'd never saved the document, the task pane only contains one entry – the AutoRecovered copy of the document – so this is an easy decision: click that single entry to display the document in Word. Now you can save it: press **F12** to open the Save As dialog and choose a name and location for the new file, then click the **Close** button at the bottom of the task pane and you can carry on working on this document.



Bear in mind that this AutoRecovered copy may not be quite complete: since Word only saves an AutoRecover copy every 10 minutes (or whatever interval you chose on pages 3–4), you might have done up to 10 minutes' more work on it between that auto-save and the crash, which will have been lost.

The AutoRecovered copy will be newer

- If you had saved the document, you should still find that the **AutoRecovered** copy is newer than the Original copy, and probably contains more of your work. Therefore, it's best to click the **AutoRecovered** copy to display it in Word and have a look at it.

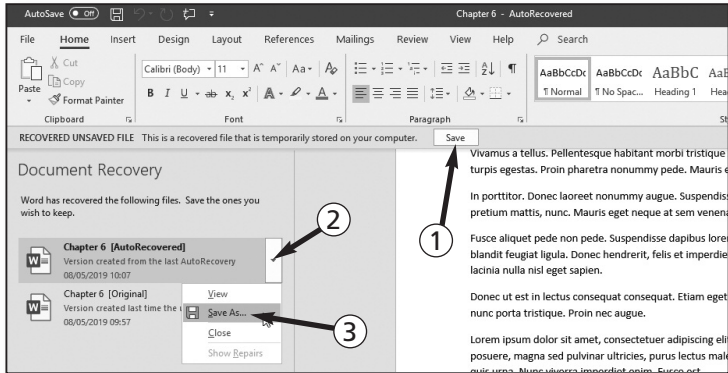
Save it to replace your original...

If you can tell that this copy is more recent and complete than your original, you can save this copy in place of your original: just click the **Save** button ① on the bar above the document.

... or give it a new name to compare the two

If you're not sure whether this AutoRecovered copy is more complete or not, the best bet is to save it with a different name, allowing you to compare the two at your leisure. Move the mouse over the **AutoRecovered** item in the task pane, click the arrow that appears to its right ②

and choose Save As ③ to save it. You can then close the task pane and open the two documents to compare them.



Extra Safety: Keep the Previous Version Each Time You Save

Along with the AutoRecover feature, Word has another useful option that can help you avoid losing your work: the ability to create backup copies of your documents automatically.

Whenever you save the Word document you're working on, Word checks to see if the document already exists (i.e. whether or not this is the first time you're saving it). If the document does exist, Word renames it to **Backup of [Filename].wbk** before saving the current version using your chosen **Filename.docx** name. The result is that you always have both the latest version of the document and the previously-saved version.

Word can keep the previous version you saved

When you use this option, it means that each Word document uses roughly twice the amount of hard drive space it otherwise would (because two versions of each document are kept), which is why it's switched



off by default. However, the huge capacities of modern hard drives mean that the extra space used is fairly insignificant.

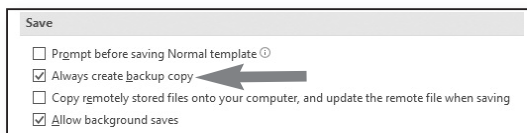
A useful safety net

This backup copy can be a useful fallback if you do something to your document and wish you hadn't (or, more likely, Word does something to it and you can't work out how to put it right!). You can simply close it, refusing the offer to save it, and open the backup copy to get back to where you were.

Here's how to switch on this automatic-backups feature:



1. Click the blue **File** tab on the Ribbon and choose **Options** to open the Word Options dialog.
2. At the left of the dialog, click **Advanced**.
3. Scroll down to the **Save** heading and tick the box beside **Always create backup copy**.



4. Click **OK** to close the Word Options dialog. From now on, Word will keep a backup copy of each document you save.

How to open one of these backup files

The backup copy has the file extension **.wbk**. If you need to open one in Word, press **Ctrl+F12** to display the Open dialog, then open the 'All Word Documents' drop-down list and choose **All Files**. You'll now see all the files in the current folder, including your **Backup of [Filename]** document: double-click it to open it.

If you want to keep this backup copy in place of your original, press **F12** to open the Save As dialog, double-click your original file and then confirm that you do want to replace that document with this one.