

Straightforward Steps to Copy Files and Folders to a DVD/CD Using File Explorer

This article shows you how to:

- ✓ Back up your files or send them to others on a disc
- ✓ Burn CDs and DVDs without installing special software
- ✓ Quickly erase a rewritable disc to use it again

Not so long ago, if you wanted to copy files to a CD or a DVD, you'd have needed specialised software to do it – you might even have had to pay for it.

Nowadays, all the features you need are included in Windows, built right into the File Explorer program (known as Windows Explorer in Windows 7 and earlier). Whichever version of Windows you use, just follow the steps in this article when you need to burn files to a disc.



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DVDs and CDs: Cheap Storage for Your Files

Why use CDs and DVDs?

Even in these days of USB flash drives, memory cards and external hard drives, there are still good reasons to use CDs and DVDs:

Send files to someone

- **To send files to others:** you'd rather not send a comparatively-expensive flash drive or memory card to someone else, so a cheap CD or DVD is perfect for sending files.

To store backups

- **Backing-up files:** it's wise to back up your personal files to at least one device. An external hard drive is the best choice for storing backups, but a CD or DVD is a good second-best. For truly important files, you might like to put copies on a CD/DVD and store them away from your home – perhaps with a relative, a bank or a solicitor – for extra safety.

To clear space on your hard drive

- **Archiving files:** if you're getting short of storage space on your PC, but you can't bring yourself to delete files, you can use a CD or DVD to 'archive' files you rarely use. Copy the files to at least two discs (for safety) before deleting them from your PC.

You just need some blank discs

Your PC almost-certainly has a built in CD/DVD recorder (a drive that can copy – or 'burn' – files to recordable discs as well as read and play the discs), and Windows includes all the necessary features to burn discs, so the only extra cost is that of the blank CDs or DVDs.

There are two different types of recordable disc available:

Recordable – use once

- **CD-R and DVD-R:** the 'R' stands for recordable. You can burn files on to one of these discs only once: when you no longer need the files on the disc, all you can do is throw it away.

Rewritable – erase and reuse

- **CD-RW and DVD-RW:** the 'RW' stands for rewritable. With this type of disc, when you no longer need the files

it contains, you can erase the disc and use it again. Rewritable discs won't last forever, but they should be good for upwards of 1,000 reuses.

Either type of disc is fine to use in a computer, but some other types of device (such as audio CD players and home DVD players) can't cope with the 'RW' discs. As a general rule, if you're planning to copy files to a CD and keep them – as a backup, or to send to someone – it's best to use an ordinary 'R' disc. There's also a cost benefit to using the 'R' discs: a pack of 50 'R' discs costs about 15p per disc for CD-R and 20p per disc for DVD-R. Using rewritable discs instead, the price is over £1 for either CD-RW or DVD-RW.



The recordable discs are cheaper and more reliable

There are two little catches to be aware of with DVDs. First, Windows XP can only burn CDs, not DVDs: this ancient version of Windows dates from a time before DVDs were in common use.

Second, there are two formats of blank DVD available: the DVD-R/DVD-RW (note the minus sign in their names) and the DVD+R/DVD+RW (note the plus sign). Your DVD drive may support both types, but it may support only one or the other. (Labels and logos on the front of the drive tray will usually tell you.) If your DVD drive is fussy about using only 'minus' or 'plus' discs, be sure to buy the right type of discs!



You can burn between 700 and 800 MB of data on to a CD. A DVD can hold either 4.7 or 8.5 GB of data depending on whether you use single-layer or dual-layer discs. However, since most DVD drives can't use the dual-layer DVDs, you'll probably be limited to the (still very capacious) 4.7 GB single-layer discs.

A DVD can hold much more data than a CD

Overview of the disc-burning steps

There are three basic steps to burning discs using Windows:

- **Preparation:** open two File Explorer windows and arrange them side by side, and get a blank CD or DVD disc ready for use.
- **Select and copy:** in the first Explorer window, copy the required files and folders to the clipboard.
- **Paste and burn:** in the second Explorer window, paste the files from the clipboard, then have Windows burn them to the blank disc.

Step 1: Prepare Your Disc Burning Session



Start Windows Explorer

Move it to the left of your screen

A second Explorer window

1. Insert a blank recordable CD or DVD into your CD/DVD drive. (Remember, though, that Windows XP can only burn to CDs!) If a prompt asks what you want to do with the disc, just close it or ignore it.
2. Open File Explorer by pressing the key combination **(Windows)** + **(E)**. Move and resize this window so that it sits at the left side of your screen occupying about half your screen's width:
 - **Windows 10/8.1/7:** press the key combination **(Windows)** + **(Left Arrow)** and Windows will move and resize the window automatically.
 - **Windows Vista/XP:** drag the window to the top-left corner of your screen, then drag the bottom-right corner of the window downwards and to the right to enlarge the window until it fills roughly half the screen.
3. In this Explorer window, press the key combination **(Ctrl)** + **(N)** and another Explorer window will open.

4. Move this second window to the right of your screen, occupying the other half of the screen's width. In Windows 10, 8.1 and 7 you can do this by pressing **Windows + Right Arrow**; in Windows Vista/XP, move and resize the window manually.
5. **Windows XP only:** on the toolbar of both Explorer windows, click the **Folders** button to make Explorer display a list of drives and folders in the left panel of both windows. This will make it easier to navigate between folders and, later, to open the Burn folder for your CD drive.

Move this to the right of your screen

XP users: display the folders panel

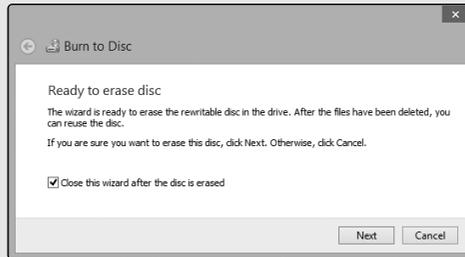


6. Have you inserted a previously-used rewritable (RW) disc that you need to erase? If so, in the right-hand Explorer window, right-click the icon of your CD/DVD drive and choose **Erase this disc** (in Windows Vista and later) or **Erase this CD-RW** (in Windows XP) from the context menu that opens. Follow the prompts in the simple dialog that appears, and Windows will erase the disc. (The dialog looks a little different in the various versions of Windows – the dialog from Windows 10 and 8.1 is pictured below – but it just asks for confirmation that you really do want to erase the disc.)

Erase a rewritable disc?

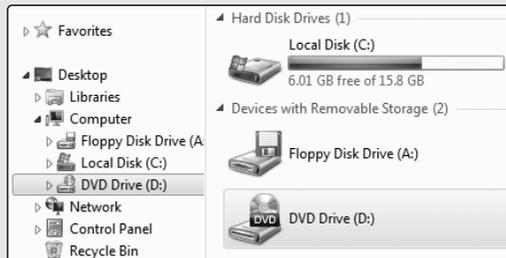


If Windows ejects the disc after erasing it, close the drive tray again to reinsert it, and then close the ‘What do you want to do...?’ prompt again if it reappears.



Right-hand window: select your CD/DVD drive

- In the right-hand window of the two Explorer windows, look at the left panel to find the icon for your CD/DVD drive. It will be named something like DVD RW Drive (D:). If you can't see it, click the arrow or plus sign to the left of **This PC**, **Computer** or **My Computer** to expand it, and then scroll downwards if necessary until the icon comes into view.

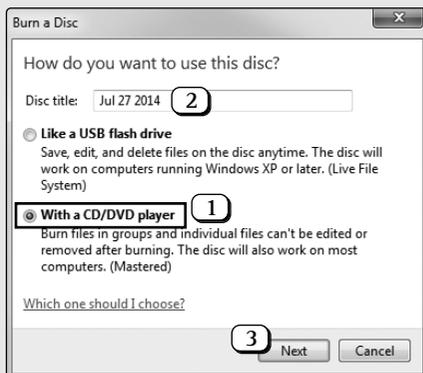


Prepare the blank disc for use

- When you find the icon for your CD/DVD drive, click it once.
- In Windows XP, the right side of the window will show a blank area where, a little later, you'll paste

the files and folders to be copied to the disc and you can jump forward to the heading on the next page. In Windows Vista and later, something different happens first: you'll see a 'Burn a Disc' dialog like the one pictured below asking how you want to use the blank disc you've inserted:

- **Windows 10, 8.1 and 7:** click on **With a CD/DVD player** (1), then optionally type a short, descriptive name for your disc in the **Disc title box** (2) (or leave the title as it is, showing today's date), and click **Next** (3).



- **Windows Vista:** click on **Show formatting options** and then click the **Mastered** option. Optionally type a short, descriptive name for your disc in the **Disc title box** (or leave the title as it is, showing today's date) and click **Next**.
10. In Windows Vista and later, Windows will prepare the blank disc for use and the 'Burn a Disc' dialog will close. That right-hand Explorer window will now show a mostly-empty area in which, later on, you'll paste the files and folders to be copied to the disc.

Choose **With a CD/DVD player**

Choose **Mastered**



At this point in Windows Vista and later, you may see that 'What do you want to do...?' prompt yet again. If so, just close it or ignore it.

Step 2: Choose the Files and Folders You Want to Copy

Copy files from the left window to the right

That's the preparation taken care of: you now have two Explorer windows open, side by side on your screen, and the right-hand window is showing the 'disc burning area' which is ready to receive the files and folders you want to burn to the disc.

The next step is to select the items you want to burn to the disc and copy them to this disc burning area:



1. Using the left-hand Explorer window, navigate to a folder you want to copy to the disc (or a folder containing files you want to copy to the disc).



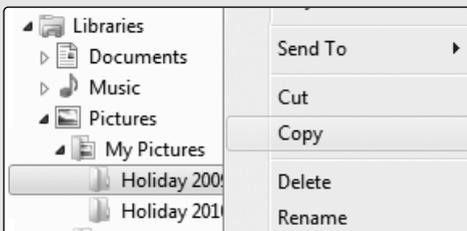
It's usually easiest to navigate in Explorer by using the folders panel at the left of the window. There you'll find your personal folders such as 'Documents' (or 'My Documents'), which you can click to see their contents displayed on the right. Click the arrowheads or plus signs to the left of items to expand them and see the folders they contain.

Select folders and/or files

2. Now select the folder(s) and/or file(s) you want to copy to the disc. To select a folder, click it in either the left or right pane of the Explorer window; to select a single file, click it in the right pane of the

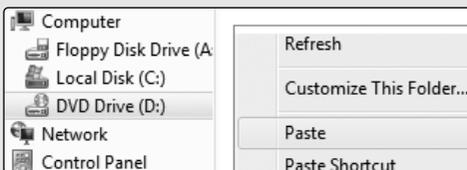
window; if you want to select multiple files in the right pane, hold down the **(Ctrl)** key while clicking each required file in turn. (If you click the wrong file by accident, keep the **(Ctrl)** key down and click the same file again to deselect it.)

3. Next, copy the selected item(s) to the clipboard: right-click an item you've selected and choose Copy from the context menu.



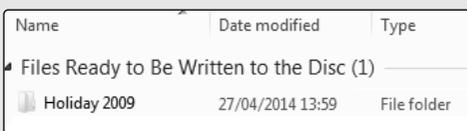
Copy them to the clipboard

4. You can now paste these items into the 'disc burning area' in the right-hand window. Right-click a blank white space in the right-hand window and choose Paste from the context menu.



Paste them into the right-hand window

5. After a second or two, you'll see the files and folders appear in this window under the heading 'Files Ready to Be Written to the Disc'.



The items appear in a list

At the same time, you may see a balloon message at the bottom of the screen telling you that files are waiting to be burned to disc. This message may reappear from time to time, but just ignore it and it will disappear of its own accord after a few seconds.



Add more files or folders?

6. Are there other files or folders you want to include on the disc? If so, go back to step 1 on page 8 to select, copy and paste those in the same way.

If you've copied the wrong files into the right-hand window by mistake, or you've changed your mind about including some of them on the disc, just delete them from this right-hand window: select the unwanted items and press the **(Del)** key on your keyboard. This simply removes the items from the 'disc burning area', ensuring they won't be burned to the disc – it doesn't delete your original copies of the files.

Step 3: Burn Your Chosen Files to Disc

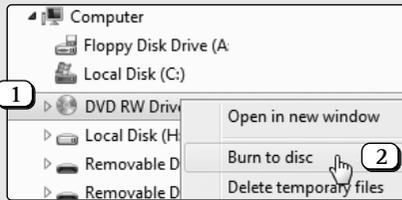
With the right-hand Explorer window now listing all the folders and files you want to copy to the CD or DVD, you're now ready to start the disc-burning process:



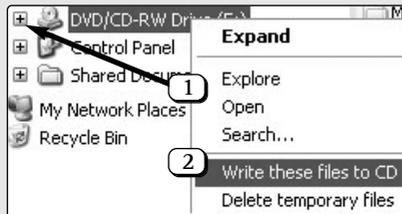
1. In the right-hand Explorer window, find the icon for your CD/DVD drive in the left panel **(1)** and right-click it.

2. On the context menu that appears, do the following according to your version of Windows:

Windows Vista and later: click on Burn to disc (2).

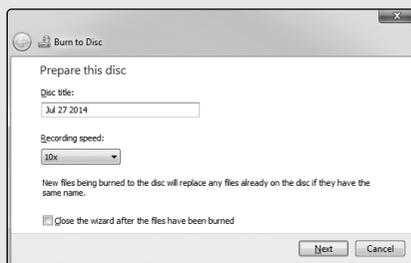


Windows XP: choose Write these files to CD (2).



3. Now you'll see the 'Burn to disc' window (in Windows Vista or later) or the 'CD Writing Wizard' window (in Windows XP). Here you can change the disc title if you choose to, but it's rarely worth bothering: this disc title is shown in Explorer alongside the icon for your DVD drive whenever this disc is inserted, but it has no other function.

You can change the disc title



Windows
burns the files
to the disc



4. Leave the **recording speed** option set as it is and click the **Next** button.
5. Now Windows starts burning the files to the CD or DVD, and you'll see a progress bar to keep you posted on how much longer the job will take.



Done!

6. When the process is complete, you'll see a message telling you so: click **Finish** and Windows will eject the disc. You can use this disc in another computer (or in another type of device that reads data CDs or DVDs). If you're planning to send the disc to someone, you could close the drive tray again to reinsert the disc into this PC and check the files on it to make sure everything went as intended.

Finally, of course, you can close the two Explorer windows you were using for the job.