How to use Time Machine to back up or restore your Mac

Time Machine backs up all of your files to an external storage device so that you can restore them later or see how they looked in the past.
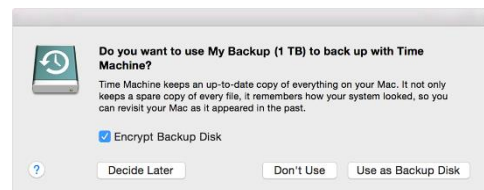
⚙ Set up Time Machine

Time Machine is the built-in backup feature of your Mac. You can use Time Machine with a drive connected to your Mac, a drive built into or connected to a Time Capsule, or a supported network volume.

Time Machine can back up the data on your Mac to:
- An external hard drive connected to a USB, Thunderbolt, or FireWire port on your Mac
- An AirPort Time Capsule's built-in drive (any model)
- An external USB drive connected to an AirPort Time Capsule (any model) or AirPort Extreme (802.11ac model only)

When you connect an external hard drive directly to your Mac, you might be asked if you want to use the drive to back up with Time Machine. Click "Use as Backup Disk." If you select the option to encrypt, your backups will be accessible only to users with the password.

If Time Machine doesn't ask you to choose a backup disk when you connect the drive to your Mac:

1. Open Time Machine preferences from the Time Machine menu 🕐 in the menu bar.

   Or choose Apple ( ) menu > System Preferences, then click Time Machine.
2. Click Select Backup Disk, Select Disk, or Add or Remove Backup Disk.
3. Select a backup disk from the list, then click Use Disk.
4. For additional backup security and convenience, you can repeat these steps to add another backup disk. For example, you might use one backup disk while at home, and another backup disk while at work.
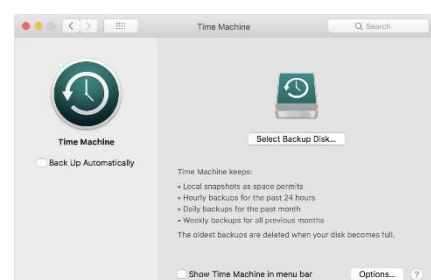
Back up using Time Machine

After you set up Time Machine, it automatically makes hourly backups for the past 24 hours, daily backups for the past month, and weekly backups for all previous months. The oldest backups are deleted when your backup disk is full.

- To back up now instead of waiting for the next automatic backup, choose Back Up Now from the Time Machine menu.
- To stop automatic backups, open Time Machine preferences, then either deselect Back Up Automatically (macOS Sierra or later) or turn off Time Machine (OS X El Capitan or earlier). You can still back up manually by choosing Back Up Now from the Time Machine menu.
- To cancel a backup in progress, choose Skip This Backup (or Stop Backing Up) from the Time Machine menu.
- To check backup status, use the Time Machine menu. The icon shows when Time Machine is backing up, idle until the next automatic backup, or unable to complete the backup.
- To exclude items from your backup, open Time Machine preferences from the Time machine menu, click Options, then click ＋ and select the item to exclude.

Your first backup may take a long time, depending on how many files you have. You can continue using your Mac while a backup is underway. Some Mac computers make backups even when asleep. Time Machine backs up only the files that changed since the previous backup, so future backups will be faster.

Backup Complete
Time Machine has finished the first backup to "Macintosh HD".

Close
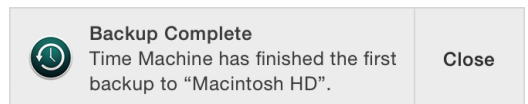
↻   Restore specific items from a Time Machine backup

1. Open a window for the item that you want to restore. For example:

   - To restore a file you accidentally deleted from your Documents folder, open the Documents folder.
   - To restore an email message, open your inbox in Mail.
   - If you're using an app that automatically saves versions of documents as you work on them, you can open a document, then use Time Machine to restore earlier versions of that document.

2. Choose Enter Time Machine from the Time Machine menu ⟲ , or click Time Machine in the Dock. This example shows Time Machine for the Documents folder:
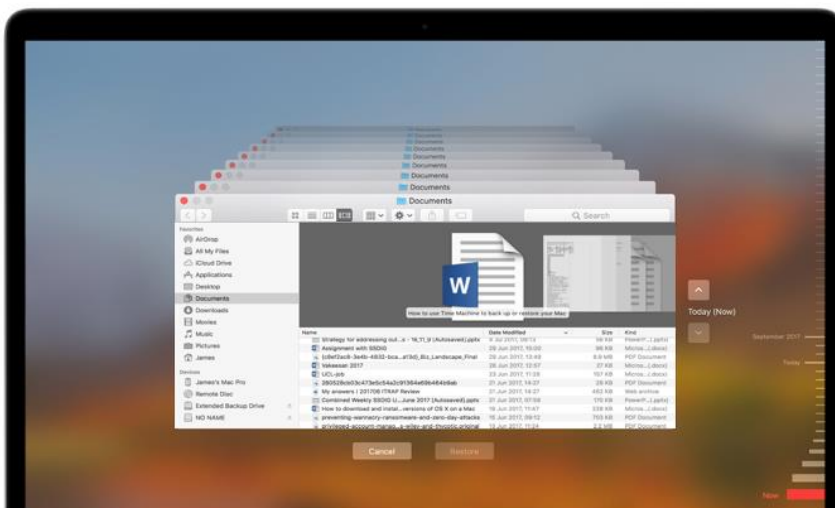
3. Find the items to restore:

   - Use the timeline on the edge of the screen to see the items in your Time Machine backup as they were at that date and time. The timeline may also include local snapshots.
   - Use the onscreen up and down arrows to jump to the last time the contents of the window changed. You can also use the search field in a window to find an item, then move through time while focused on changes to that item.
   - Select an item and press Space Bar to preview it and make sure it's the one you want.

4. Click Restore to restore the selected item, or Control-click the item for other options.

Learn more

- Learn what to do if you can't back up or restore with Time Machine.

- If you back up to multiple disks, you can switch disks before entering Time Machine. Hold down the Option key, then choose Browse Other Backup Disks from the Time Machine menu.

- If you're using Time Machine to back up to a storage device on your network, you can verify those backups to make sure they're in good condition: Hold down the Option key, then choose Verify Backups from the Time Machine menu.

- After you choose your backup disk, its icon in the Finder might or might not be the same icon that you see in Time Machine preferences. You can change the icon if you want.

- In OS X Lion v10.7.3 or later, you can start up from your Time Machine disk, if necessary. Hold down the Option key as your Mac starts up. When you see the Startup Manager screen, choose "EFI Boot" as the startup disk.