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Protecting and Transferring Your Digital Work

The school year is almost over and summer feels like it is already here. Before you pack up and leave your classroom, consider how to protect and perhaps take home all the lesson plans, assessments and presentations you have developed. As we do more and more of our professional work digitally, we rely on the fact that it will always be there. Just like paper copies, digital versions are subject to a variety of calamities.

You should keep multiple copies of work that would be difficult to recreate digitally. A paper copy is fine for reading, but is difficult to convert back to digital form if you need to update it. It is possible that any medium that you save your files to could get damaged. Keeping copies both at home and at school, protects you from major calamities such as fires which might destroy everything at a particular location.

You should keep multiple copies of work that would be difficult to recreate digitally.

Before you can make copies of your files, you must first know where you have saved the original copies of your digital work. By default, most work (but not all) is saved in your "My Documents" folder. Depending on your computer configuration, this could be located on your computer's hard drive (commonly labeled C:) or one of the district managed shared network drives (commonly labeled I:)

If you have a laptop, any files saved to your C: drive will be available where ever you take your laptop. Files saved to the C: drive of a desktop computer are only available when you are actually sitting at that particular computer.

Files saved to the district network drives (I:) are available where ever you can login to the district

network: computers at any school in the district. Each school has its own "domain name", On some computers in each school, you can change the "domain name" to the name of the school where you saved your files. For example: Oxford_Domain or CHHS_Domain - note that not all schools have their domain names fully spelled. At the elementary level most teachers use a standard login for their school. At the middle and high school levels, every teacher has his/her own personal login. This determines whether you can only save to a shared area *that anyone could view or delete*; or you can save in a private area on the network drive.

Storage Media

Copies of your files can also be saved on a variety of storage media that you can physically (or virtually) take with you.

Floppy Disks

These are still used to transfer files between home and school, but they store very limited amounts of data and are undependable. *You should never keep the only copy of an important file on a floppy disk.*

E-mail

A convenient way to transfer smaller files (or store backups) is to send them to yourself via e-mail. Your district e-mail account will hold a maximum of 50 megabytes which represents quite a few word files but only a few multimedia rich powerpoint presentations.

If you will not be working for the CH-UH schools next fall, you will no longer have a school e-mail account. Be sure to copy/save your important files and e-mails to another location.

You can even create a separate folder for these files so

Last fall, the teachers at Coventry School learned the hard way, that the district does not backup the files they save to the district network. The Coventry server hard drives failed over the summer and *every file saved on that server was lost. Although most organizations have a backup strategy in place for such network failures—our district does not—you must do backups yourself.* (Most files on the high school instructional servers are backed up regularly by a system purchased with a grant.)

they don't get confused with regular e-mail.

Internet-Based Storage

In addition to e-mail, you could also save important files to a web-based storage area that can be accessed anywhere that you can connect to the Internet. The web-based interface makes uploading and downloading easy but—depending on your connection speed—could be fairly slow. If you have your own website, you can save documents there, up to the site's storage limits. This is best for fairly public documents, that you would not care if someone else saw.

USB Keychain/ Flash/Pen Drives

These are very small and can even be carried on a keychain, but can store many times the amount on a floppy. They use the same type storage media as digital cameras and are powered by the USB port on your computer. Costs range from \$10 to over a \$1000, depending on storage capacity. Most computers made since about 1996 have the built in USB port that is needed. If you are not using Windows XP, you may need to install software in order to use it.



Newer computers offer some additional means of transferring/backing up files. These are especially useful when you have large files to backup or transfer.

CD-RWs

This is becoming the preferred means of transferring/backing up large files. CD Drives that allow you to write as well as read CDs have become very inexpensive and are often found on newer computers. Blank writable CDs can be purchased for less than \$1 each and occasionally you can get them almost free with the rebates that are offered. They will store more files than 400 floppy disks could. If you have saved your school files on your school's network drive, you can then go to any computer in your building with a CD burner attached and burn a cd with all your networked files. If you cannot get help with this at your building, contact me and I can burn a CD for you and send it to you.

If you are working on large video editing projects, you may find that even CDs are too small. DVD writable drives are available. These can store as much information

as about 6 CDs. There are a number of different types of DVD writable blanks. Be sure to purchase the type that your DVD burner uses.

External Hard Drives

These are hard drives in a case that you can take from computer to computer. There are two common methods of connecting them to a computer: Firewire and USB. Most computers made in the last few years have USB but not all have firewire. In 2003, a faster version of USB called USB 2 became common. If you are buying an external hard drive for yourself, be sure your computer has either USB 2 or firewire connections. USB is too slow for transferring very much data on a regular basis.

Backup Strategies

With any backup medium, consider whether you may need to find an older version of a file. This could happen if you changed a document and wanted to go back to the older version. A file can also become damaged and unreadable and you will have to use an older version of the file. You may want to save older CD copies or create separate folders on a hard drive for file copies from different dates.

If you do a lot of work at home on you computer, you may want to consider software that will help you manage the backup process. Windows computers include backup management software, as do many of the CD burners or external hard drives you might buy. While details of how to use particular software is beyond scope of this article, these are some general tips.

The file backup programs allow you to select which file types to backup regularly rather than copying everything on your hard drive. To save space, program and operating system files that you can reinstall from a CD may not need to be backed up -- but be sure to keep the serial/registration numbers handy. Sometimes files are saved into folders other than "My Documents." Consider how often you need to backup your files. Financial, record keeping and planning documents that you change daily need regular backups but files that you use but don't change can be backed up once in a while. Incremental backups will copy only files that have changed since the last backup, saving storage space and time. Just make sure you can still find the previous backup files if they are stored separately.

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