COMPUTER CENTER ONLINE · FREE GUIDE · LEVEL 2

Updates and Backups

Keep your devices up to date and your files safe.

1 Your computer

The original files live here.

→

2 External drive

Plug it in, copy your files, then unplug it.

→

3 Another place

A second drive at a trusted person's home, or a cloud backup.

Why update

Updates fix security holes and bugs. Install them when your computer or phone asks, instead of choosing Remind me later. Turn on automatic updates if your device offers them.

How to update

On Windows, open Settings and look for Windows Update. On a Mac, open System Settings, then General, then Software Update. On a phone, open Settings and look for Software Update or System Update. Plug in first, because an update can take a while.

What a backup is

A backup is a copy of your important files kept somewhere else. If your computer breaks, is lost, or a virus locks your files, the copy saves them.

The 3-2-1 rule

Keep three copies: the original, one on an external drive, and one in a second place away from home, such as another drive at a trusted person's home or a cloud backup.

Use the drive carefully

Plug in the external drive, copy your files, then unplug it. A drive that stays plugged in can be damaged along with the computer if a virus gets in.

What to save

Photos, documents, school or work files, and anything you made. Programs can be installed again, so they do not need a copy.

Test it and protect it

Once in a while, open a file from the backup to make sure it works. An encrypted drive keeps your files private if it is lost or stolen. Ask us how to encrypt one.

Sources: CISA Secure Our World (cisa.gov/secureourworld); California Privacy Protection Agency (privacy.ca.gov). Last checked November 2026. Is something unclear or out of date? Use the contact form on our website and choose Guide feedback.