Your guide to 'Previous Versions' backup system – By Microsoft

Here are answers to some common questions about previous versions of files and folders.

What are previous versions?

Previous versions are either backup copies—copies of files and folders that you back up by using the Back Up Files wizard, or shadow copies—copies of files and folders that Windows automatically saves as part of a restore point. (Shadow copies can be copies of files on your computer or shared files on a computer on a network.) You can use previous versions of files to restore files that you accidentally modified or deleted, or that were damaged. Depending on the type of file or folder, you can open, save to a different location, or restore a previous version.

How are shadow copies created?

Shadow copies are automatically saved as part of a restore point in System Properties. If System Protection is turned on, Windows automatically creates shadow copies of files that have been modified since the last restore point was made. Typically restore points are made once a day. If your hard disk is partitioned or if you have more than one hard disk on your computer, you need to turn on System Protection on the other partitions or hard disks.

Please Note

Only one version of a file is saved as a shadow copy. For example, if you modify a file several times in one day, only the version that was current when the restore point was made is saved.
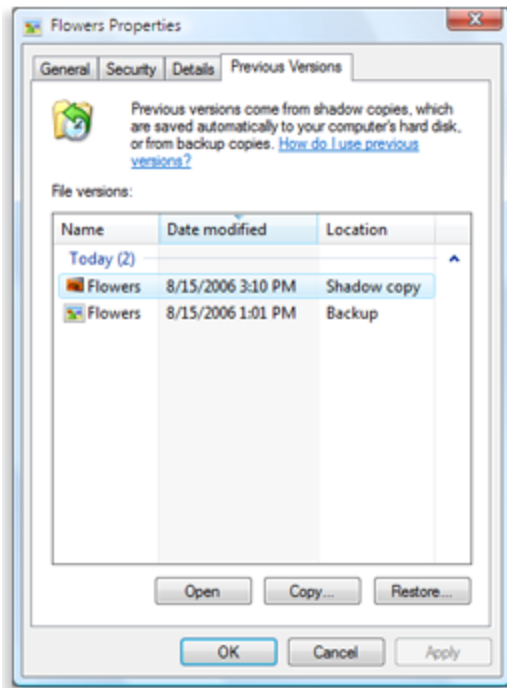
To turn on System Protection

1. Open System by clicking the Start button , clicking Control Panel, clicking System and Maintenance, and then clicking System.

2. In the left pane, click System Protection. If you are prompted for an administrator password or confirmation, type the password or provide confirmation.

3. Under Automatic restore points, select the check box next to the disk where you want to turn on System Protection, and then click OK.

How do I access previous versions of a file and folder?

- Right-click the file or folder, and then click Restore previous versions.

You'll see a list of available previous versions of the file or folder. The list will include files saved on a backup as well as shadow copies, if both types are available.

The Previous Versions tab, showing some previous versions of files

How do I restore a previous version of a file or folder?

Before restoring a previous version of a file or folder, open it to make sure it's the version you want. Then, follow these steps:

1. Right-click the file or folder, and then click Restore previous versions.

2. Click an item in the list, and then click Restore.

Warning

The file or folder will replace the current version on your computer, and the replacement cannot be undone.

Please Note

If the Restore button is unavailable, you can't restore a previous version of the file or folder. You might be able to open it or save it to a different location.

How is restoring shadow copies different from restoring backup copies?

To restore a shadow copy that's stored on your computer, you right-click the file or folder, and then click Restore previous versions. Then you select the previous version of the file or folder that you want to restore, click Restore, and the file or folder is restored. Restoring a shadow copy from a network location is similar, as long as your computer is connected to the network and the network location is available (the computer is turned on and you have permission to access the computer or disk).

To restore a backup copy, you follow the same steps but you click the backup version of the file in the Previous Versions tab. When you click Restore, Windows opens the Restore Files wizard and from there, you follow the steps in the wizard. You need access to the removable storage or media (such as an internal or external hard disk or a CD or DVD) that the backup is stored on to restore items from a backup.

Please Note

If you use Disk Cleanup to delete restore points after a restore, Disk Cleanup will also delete shadow copies. For more information about how to free up disk space on your hard drive, use disk clean-up.

Why can't I find shadow copies of some files?

There are several possible reasons:

- System Protection might not be turned on for that hard disk. If System Protection is not turned on, Windows can't create shadow copies.

To turn on System Protection

1. Open System by clicking the Start button , clicking Control Panel, clicking System and Maintenance, and then clicking System.

2. In the left pane, click System Protection. If you are prompted for an administrator password or confirmation, type the password or provide confirmation.

3. Under Automatic restore points, select the check box next to the volume where you want to turn on System Protection, and then click OK.

- The file might be an offline file. Offline files are copies of files that are stored on shared network folders. Shadow copies are not available for offline files. For more information about offline files, see Understanding offline files.

- If your computer is on a corporate network, your network administrator might have disabled shadow copies.

Are shadow copies unavailable for some files or folders?

Shadow copies are unavailable for files and folders that are required for Windows to work properly. Examples of these include the system folder (the folder that Windows is installed in) and files in the system folder, which is usually C:\Windows. Windows provides a way to restore system files using System Protection.

Can I restore a file or folder that was deleted or renamed?

If you accidentally delete or rename a file or folder, you can restore a shadow copy of that file or folder, but you need to know the location that the file or folder was saved to. To restore a file or folder that was deleted or renamed, follow these steps:

1. Open Documents by clicking the Start button , and then clicking Documents.

2. Click the arrow next to Folders at the bottom of the left pane.

3. In the Folders list, open the folder that contained the file or folder that was deleted or renamed.

4. Right-click somewhere in the folder (without selecting a file or folder), and then click Restore previous versions.

5. Double-click a previous version of the folder that contains the file or folder you want to restore. (For example, if a file was deleted today, choose a version of the folder from yesterday, which should contain the file.)

6. In the folder, drag the file or folder that you want to restore to another location, such as your desktop or another folder.

The version of the file or folder is saved to the location that you selected.

Useful Tip

If you don't remember the exact file or folder name or its location, you can search for it by typing part of the name in the Search box in Documents.