

Windows 8 File History



With Windows 8, Microsoft introduced a new feature called File History for continuously protecting your personal files. This new feature replaces the Windows 7 Backup and Restore features. It is very similar to Mac OS X's Time Machine, although not as robust. It is also similar to the Microsoft tool Synctoy.

The basic function of File History is to automatically and periodically back up your Desktop, Libraries (your documents, music, pictures, videos, and other folders), Contacts, and Favorites to another hard drive. These backed up files are saved as versions, which you can browse through and if needed, restore with a couple of mouse clicks.

File History requires that you use some form of external storage, such as an external hard drive or network share. Anytime you back up, you should use external storage, so File History enforces this good behavior.

By default, File History is turned off (stupid in my opinion), and therefore has to be explicitly turned on by you. To enable File History, either invoke it in the Control Panel or in the Metro screen, type "backup" and click on "Save backup copies of your files with File History". Next, click "Select Drive" on the left hand side and pick an external hard drive or network location with lots of empty space. Then simply click "Turn on" and your documents are now being backed up.

To restore folders or files, you simply open the File History dialog (you can do so by just typing File History at the Start screen) and choose "Restore personal files." This will display all the backed up folders. You can restore whole folders or individual files if you drill down into the folders. The big green circular arrow will restore them to their original location, but you can also choose "Restore to" from a right-click menu or from the Settings gear to specify a target folder for the restored files. Next to the green circular arrow are back and forward buttons, which let you choose the previous and next saved versions. If you click the back button, even deleted files will show up, available for restoration.

The ability to view file versions and restore versions is also integrated into the File Explorer Home ribbon. Simply click on “History” and restore from there.

The default backup period is every hour. However, in Advanced Settings, you can vary this from Every 10 Minutes to Daily. You can also alter how long versions are kept and some other settings.

File History only backs up files that are in folders in your Libraries or Desktop. To add a folder to a Library, just right click the folder and select the Library to add the folder to. Within “Include in library” is also an option to create a new library. So beware: if for instance your Quicken or Outlook files are not in a Library, they will NOT be backed up by this mechanism.

File History provides a simple, but effective means of backing up and restoring your data. However, it does nothing for creating and restoring complete system images. I will cover this topic in a future newsletter.

As always, I hope you have found this information useful. If you do not wish to receive these emails in the future, let me know.

This newsletter, as well as all past newsletters, can be found on my web site (<http://steve.gimnicher.com>).