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COMPUTER SAFETY GUIDE – JUNE 2024

A recent accident by a friend of mine highlighted the risk of losing the contents of your computer, tablet or phone in a matter of seconds. In this case a glass of water spilled over her laptop and destroyed it. Fortunately, the internal hard drive could be removed and the data recovered, but my friend hadn't taken any steps to back up her data elsewhere.

FOR A COMPUTER, HERE ARE SOME IDEAS TO AVOID DISASTER:

Back-up. Choose and install a back-up service, such as [Backblaze](#). This will make a copy of all significant files on your computer and store them 'in the cloud', where you can access them and recover them if they get lost. Backblaze is just one example; other services are available.

Photos. Use a photo management tool which catalogues and stores your photos. On a PC, Google Photos will handle 15GB of files for free and, for a small amount of money, much more. On a Mac, use Apple Photos and switch on '[iCloud Photos](#)' which will keep a copy of all your photos elsewhere.

File Storage. You can safely store all your everyday files and folders by putting them all in [Onedrive](#) or [Dropbox](#) (others file storage services are available), and work within their folders.

External Hard Drive Back-up. Buy a cheap external hard drive which plugs in via a USB, keep it plugged in and run back-up software which keeps a copy of your files on that hard drive. In the event you lose the files on your main computer or laptop, you can quickly get them back from this back-up.

The key point for your computer or laptop is to ensure your files and photos are stored in at least two places. You need to consider risks such as fire, theft, faults and spilled liquids which render your computer unusable. Make sure you have your files elsewhere so you can easily recover them.

FOR A TABLET OR PHONE:

iPhone. If you are an iPhone user, switch on iCloud back-up. This will copy everything on your phone elsewhere and, should your phone break, you can simply reconnect to your Apple account. Also switch on iCloud photos, which will copy all your photos elsewhere too.

Android Phone. For non-iPhone users, consider Google Drive Backup or Onedrive Backup, a similar approach.

Losing a phone, breaking it, or having it stolen is probably more likely than the risks to your computer. Ensure your phone is backed up, and also made secure using all the passcodes, passwords, finger prints or face scans that you can.

PASSWORDS

I came across the chart below, which shows how easily bad people can find your password. I know people often find remembering their many passwords to be a challenge, but this is ever more necessary. The chart illustrates that your password becomes much safer as it gets longer and includes mixed characters and symbols.

How Safe Is Your Password?

Time it would take a computer to crack a password with the following parameters

	Lowercase letters only	At least one uppercase letter	At least one uppercase letter +number	At least one uppercase letter +number+symbol
1	Instantly	Instantly	-	-
2	Instantly	Instantly	Instantly	-
3	Instantly	Instantly	Instantly	Instantly
4	Instantly	Instantly	Instantly	Instantly
5	Instantly	Instantly	Instantly	Instantly
6	Instantly	Instantly	Instantly	Instantly
7	Instantly	Instantly	1 min	6 min
8	Instantly	22 min	1 hrs	8 hrs
9	2 min	19 hrs	3 days	3 wks
10	1 hrs	1 mths	7 mths	5 yrs
11	1 day	5 yrs	41 yrs	400 yrs
12	3 wks	300 yrs	2,000 yrs	34,000 yrs

Whilst writing down passwords is a slight risk, forgetting them is worse as it denies you access. My experience from helping villagers with their computers is that they rarely know the right password.

Has my email or password been captured? Each time a company who have your details is hacked, your email address and possibly your password is captured and sold on the black market. You can find out if this is case using this website: <https://haveibeenpwned.com/>

Enter your email address and it will tell you how often and from where your email address has been stolen. I tried it with one of my email addresses; it had been stolen 5 times from different sites.

If your email address shows up via that website, it's not a disaster, but make sure your password is fresh – not five years old.

FINAL THOUGHTS

If you don't know whether your computer (or phone or tablet) is backed up – find out now and consider the steps above and use the checklist below.

If your passwords are years old, then update them and keep a safe record of them, even if it means writing them down.

Consider the impact on your life, should you lose everything on your computer or mobile phone. I have seen computers break unexpectedly. A small investment could save you from disaster.

I don't wish to sound like the voice of doom, but I feel these issues are worth highlighting.

A few simple steps can prevent a lot of trouble.

Bill Hodgson, June 2024

CHECKLIST FOR A COMPUTER (LAPTOP OR DESKTOP)

- Setup a backup to a second device (like a small hard drive or thumb drive) and leave it running in the background
- Join a cloud file service (like Onedrive or Dropbox)
- Setup a Onedrive or Dropbox folder on your computer and move all your important documents and files into there. Work in there all the time.
- Consider also joining a backup service like Backblaze, to keep all your files outside your house
- For Mac owners, consider using iCloud photos

CHECKLIST FOR AN IPHONE OR IPAD

- Switch on iCloud backup
- Consider using iCloud photos on all devices
- For the best security use your finger print or face recognition to lock your phone

CHECKLIST FOR OTHER PHONES

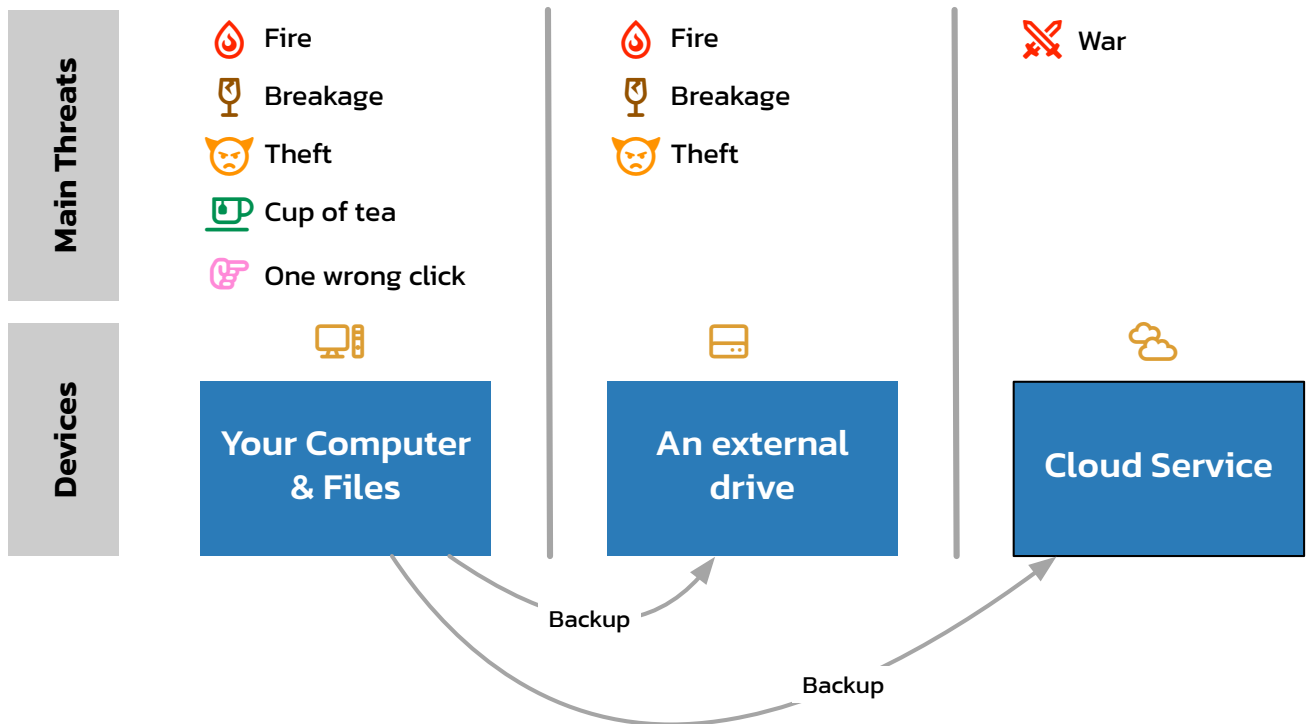
- Consider using Google Drive Backup or Onedrive Backup
- Consider using Google photos
- For the best security use your finger print to unlock your phone

Note: Face unlock on (non iPhone) Android phones is no more than a photo scanner and can be fooled by a photo of your face. iPhones make a 3D scan of the shape of your face and is hard to trick.

WEBSITES

- Backblaze: <https://www.backblaze.com>
- Onedrive: <https://onedrive.live.com>
- iCloud photos: <https://www.icloud.com/photos>
- Google photos: https://www.google.com/intl/en_uk/photos/about/
- Check for stolen email addresses: <https://haveibeenpwned.com/>

RISKS VISUALISED



The risks to your devices reduce as you copy your data elsewhere. Cloud services take a military approach to the security of their premises, using multiple power supplies and tight access control to people. They also distribute your data across multiple redundant devices to allow for failures.

- Making a backup to a local device is better than nothing, but is still at risk
- Copying all your important files and photos to any cloud service is the best you can do. Getting your files back is usually easy.

Older computers have hard drives which can be removed, and the data recovered relatively easily. With modern computers shrinking, this is less likely and would eliminate any chance of recovering your data at all, or at huge cost.