

A computer hard drive - what is it and why should you care?

I will keep this short and simple, I promise... I hope. :-)

A computer's hard drive is where your essence resides. Virtually all of what's inside a computer forgets you the moment you turn it off. The processor, the on-board memory, the video card, the network card, the CD/DVD drive, the power supply... none of these remembers anything about you when you press that power button at the end of the day.

You do press that power button at the end of the day, right? It saves energy and helps protect against data loss and damage in the event of a power surge, such as we can get during a lightning storm.

But I digress. The only component in that desktop or laptop computer that remembers anything about you is the hard drive (a desktop computer hard drive is about the size of a 200-page paperback book and a laptop hard drive is not a whole lot bigger than a credit card and about 3/8" thick). Which means the hard drive is the single most important thing in there, as far as you're concerned. I could replace the motherboard, the processor, the memory or the power supply and when you turned the computer on you would see virtually no difference. But if I replaced your hard drive without copying your files from the old one, your computer would have a case of amnesia. It wouldn't know who you were and it would have no record of *anything* you had ever done.

Hard drives are very reliable but they do fail. If you bump your computer when it's operating, the hard drive can be damaged. This is one reason I frown on people placing their computers on the floor under their desks. Aside from all the dust the cooling fans suck into the case, it's too easy to hit it with a chair or foot.

While you can't always predict when, if ever, a hard drive may fail, you can be prepared by backing up any critical data on a regular basis. Some of you may have heard about the College's file synchronization process that is being rolled out. This process copies your Bates work to a server which is regularly backed up. That means that if your hard drive fails, your work remains safe and accessible.

There are a few files you may still want to backup on your own, such as your Thunderbird address book, your Firefox bookmarks and your Internet Explorer favorites. The Helpdesk can assist you in this task. You also want to make sure that all your e-mail is kept on the server, folders listed under "Bates" in Thunderbird, and you have no files under "Local Folders". That really is a disaster waiting to happen.

While you shouldn't save personal image, video or music files on Bates computers, we all know it happens... too often. It would be extremely foolish, however, if you did not have a copy of all these files burned on a CD or DVD or copied to an external drive of some sort. Even if your hard drive doesn't fail, ILS is not responsible for these files and when we work on your computer we can't guarantee that they will survive.

Many of you have experienced having your hard drive re-imaged. I'll talk about that in the next tech tip.

A computer hard drive is an impressive bit of technology. Without it computers wouldn't be of much value to us. If you want to know more, check out this link:
<http://computer.howstuffworks.com/hard-disk.htm>