

Set Up File Sharing

One of the best reasons to create a home or small-office [network](#) is to make it possible for computers on the network to all access, read, or change a pre-determined group of files, folders, and drives. This multi-user capability is implemented in two steps:

1. The owner of a computer makes files, folders, or drives available to others on the network (a process called "sharing").
2. Others on the network then access the files, folders, or drives.

You may have completed the first step, set up file sharing on your computers, when you set up your base station or adapters. If you didn't, you can enable it on each computer by using the Microsoft® Windows® operating system.

This article explains how to use Windows to make files and folders available to the other computers on your network. It also explains how you can control the way people access and change shared files.

Setting up a workgroup

Most home and small office file sharing occurs within a workgroup, which is a grouping of computers that are connected to each other over a network. Computers in a workgroup communicate directly with each other and do not require a server to manage resources.

Sharing files and folders, and accessing those shared resources, is much easier if your computer is part of a workgroup. So before setting up file sharing, we recommend joining an existing workgroup or establishing a new one. For more information, see [Set Up a Workgroup](#).

Sharing files, folders, or drives

File sharing is configured from the computer that contains the files and folders you wish to share. You can share an entire [drive](#) with the network so that all the files and folders on that drive become available to the other computers on your network, or you can share just specific folders. For example, if you store photographs of your children in a folder named "Kids" on your computer, and you want to make the photographs available to your network, you can choose to share only the Kids folder.

The process for sharing files, folders, and drives varies, depending on which version of Windows your computer is running.

To share a file, folder, or drive in Windows XP operating system

1. Enable file sharing on your computer if you haven't already done so. You need to do this only once. For information about how to enable file sharing, see Windows Help. **Note** You must have administrative privileges on your computer to share files and folders in Windows XP.
2. Open **My Computer**.
3. Browse to the file or drive that you want to make available to other computers on your network, and then select it.
4. On the **File** menu, click **Sharing and Security**.
5. Click **Share this Folder** on the **Network** tab. By default, the folder is made available to all of the other computers on your network, and everyone has read-only access. To give everyone read-write access, select the **Allow Network Users to Change My Files** check box.

For more information, see "Sharing Your Computer" in Windows Help.

Note In Windows XP, you can also share individual files and folders from your computer by dragging them or copying them to your Shared Documents folder. This is an easy way to share some files and folders over the network without setting up sharing and permissions for your computer's other folders. You can access the Shared Documents folder from Other Places in My Computer, or under My Computer in Windows Explorer.

To share a file, folder, or drive in Windows 2000 operating system

1. Enable file sharing on your computer if you haven't already done so. You need to do this only once. For information about how to enable file sharing, see Windows Help. **Note** You must have administrative privileges on your computer to share files and folders in Windows 2000.
2. Open **My Computer**.
3. Browse to the file or drive that you want to make available to other computers on your network, and then select it.
4. On the **File** menu, click **Sharing**.
5. Click **Share this folder**. By default, the folder is made available to all of the other computers on your network, and everyone has read-only access. To give everyone read-write access, click **Permissions**.

For more information, see Windows Help.

To share a file, folder, or drive in Windows Me, Windows 98 SE, or Windows 98 operating system

1. Enable file sharing on your computer if you haven't already done so. You need to do this only once. For information about how to enable file sharing, see Windows Help.
2. Open **My Computer**.
3. Browse to the file or drive that you want to make available to other computers on your network, and then select it.
4. On the **File** menu, click **Sharing**.
5. Click **Shared as**. Change the level of access if you want.

For more information, see "Sharing Your Computer" in Windows Help.

Limitations to file sharing

While you can share most files on your computer, there are a couple of limitations:

- You cannot share your copy of most software programs, such as Microsoft Word or Microsoft Excel. You can share files created by the program, but the program itself needs to be installed on each computer in your workgroup.
- You cannot share certain protected folders on your computer. These include the **Documents and Settings** folder, the **Windows System** or **System 32** folder, and the **Program Files** folder. You also can't share files from other users' [profiles](#).

Setting security, permissions, and access levels

If you are sharing files over a wireless network or with computers that are connected to the Internet, security is an important consideration. If you don't take steps to help protect your network, it is possible for Internet intruders or wireless eavesdroppers to access your shared files.

You can help protect your computers from unauthorized access from the Internet by installing a [firewall](#) between the Internet and your network. Software-based firewalls, such as Windows Internet Connection Firewall (ICF), might interfere with file sharing over the local network. The Microsoft wired and wireless [base stations](#) have a built-in hardware firewall that helps provide security while allowing unrestricted file sharing over the local network.

On wireless networks, you should enable Wi-Fi® Protected Access (WPA) or 128-bit wired equivalent privacy ([WEP](#)) to help prevent eavesdroppers from accessing your shared files.

If you want to help protect some of your folders from unauthorized access, you can assign them passwords by using Windows share-level access control, also called permissions.

For more information about network security, see [Security Guidelines for Your Broadband Network](#) and [Wireless Network Security](#). For more information and instructions for setting permissions and access levels in Windows, see [Set Permissions on Shared Network Resources](#).

Accessing and managing shared resources

Once you've set up your workgroup and set up file sharing, the other computers on your network can access the shared files and folders. To learn more, see [Work with Shared Files and Folders](#). You can also share printers; for more information, see [Set Up Printer Sharing](#).