

# Burning CDs and DVDs from the Desktop

Burning a CD or DVD is great for backing stuff up, transferring stuff to another computer, mailing to somebody, or archiving older files to free up hard drive space. These days, you can buy blank CDs and DVDs very inexpensively in bulk via the Web or a discount store.

---

**Note:** This chapter describes *data* discs—ones that open in File Explorer as containers for files. You can also burn music CDs and video DVDs (that play in standard DVD players, for example), of course, but to do that, you'd use Windows Media Player or Windows Movie Maker.

---

If your computer has a drive at all, it can burn *both* CDs and DVDs. Many Windows machines, however, are designed to be small and light—tablets and ultralight laptops, for example—and don't have disc drives at all. In that case, you can always buy an external USB burner; they're dirt cheap.

Before you dig in, however, here's a brief chalk talk about CD data formats.

## A Tale of Two Formats

Turns out Windows can burn blank CDs and DVDs using your choice of *two* formats:

- **Mastered (ISO).** This is what most of the world is used to. It's what everybody burned before Windows Vista came along. The primary virtue of discs burned this way is compatibility; they play in just about any computer, including Macs, PCs, and CD or DVD players that play MP3 CDs and digital video.

To make one, insert the blank disc and then drag files and folders into its window. The PC duplicates the items, parking them in an invisible, temporary holding area until you're ready to burn. You burn all the files and folders at once.

Trouble is, you're therefore *doubling* the space requirement of the files you intended to burn. If you're burning a DVD to get older files off your hard drive because you're running low on space, you could wind up in a catch-22: You can't free up drive space without burning a DVD—but you don't have enough drive space to burn a DVD!

---

**Tip:** To be fair, you *can* change the location of the temporary holding folder—if you have another hard drive. In your Computer window, right-click your burner's icon; from the shortcut menu, choose Properties. Click the Recording tab; from the drive menu, choose the hard drive you prefer, authenticating when you're asked.

---

- **Live File System (UDF).** This newer, more modern format—Windows's factory setting—is light-years more convenient. It lets you use a blank CD or DVD exactly as though it's a USB flash drive. You can drag files and folders onto it, move icons around on it, rename them, and so on. There's no momentous Moment of Burn; files are copied to the CD in real time, whenever you put them there. You can leave a disc in your drive, dragging stuff onto it throughout the week as it's convenient—without ever having to click a Burn button.

What's more, you can eject the CD, store it, or share it—and then, later, put it back into your PC and *burn more stuff onto it*. That's right—you can burn a single CD as many times as you like. And we're talking regular, cheapie CD-R discs, not CD-RW (rewritable).

What Windows creates, in other words, is a *multisession* disc.

Of course, the downside is that discs you burn this way play back only on relatively recent Macs and PCs. And you can record *more* stuff onto them only on a PC running Windows XP or later.

---

**Tip:** If it helps you to remember which format is which, here's a mnemonic for you: The last letter of the format name (ISO, UDF) lets you know whether this is the *Older* format or the *Future* one.

---

## Burning, Step by Step

Now that, with luck, you understand the difference between the Mastered (ISO) and Live File System (UDF) formats, you're ready to proceed.

### 1. Insert a blank disc into your PC.

Windows asks how you want to handle blank discs (see Figure 1, top left).

### 2. In the Navigation pane of an Explorer window, click the name of your DVD burner.

The Burn a Disc dialog box appears (Figure 1, top right).

### 3. Type a name for the disc.

But don't click Next yet. This crucial moment is your only chance to change the disc's format.

If you're OK with burning in the delicious, newfangled UDF format described above, leave "Like a USB flash drive" selected; skip to step 4.

If you want this disc to be usable by a CD or DVD player, or somebody using a version of Windows before Windows XP, though, you want to take this moment to click "With a CD/DVD player."

Once that's done, you can go on to step 4.

#### 4. Click Next.

Your PC takes a moment—a long one—to format the blank disc.

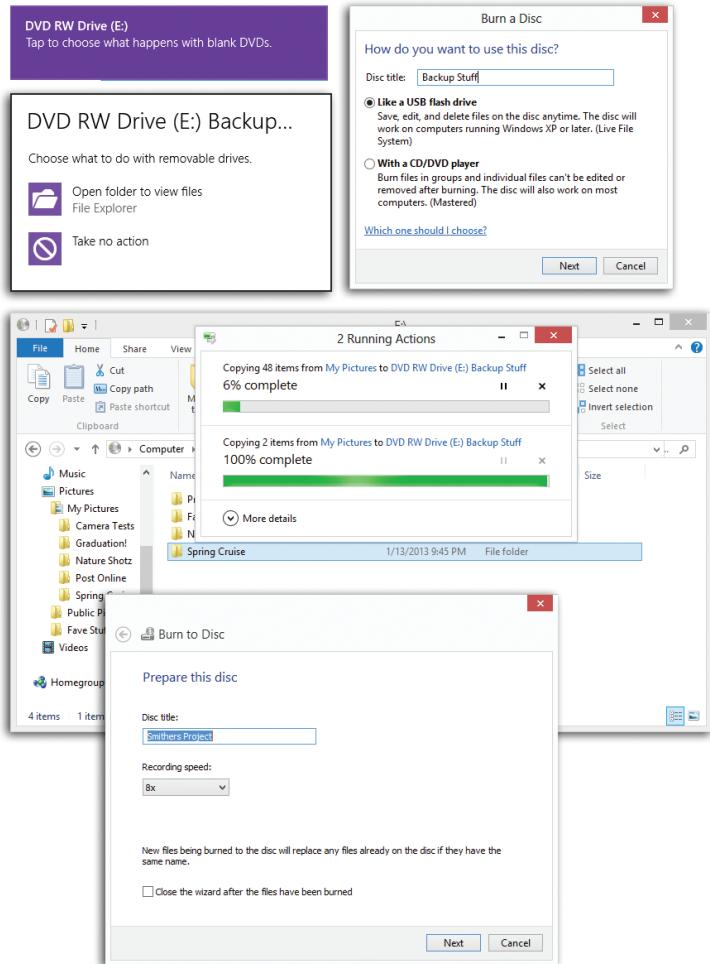
**Figure 7-17:**

*Top left: When you insert a blank disc, this note appears in the corner of the screen. Select that message to open the one shown beneath it—"Choose what to do with removable drives."*

*Top right: Name your disc and specify which type you want.*

*Middle: You can now drag files and folders into the empty Explorer window of the disc.*

*Bottom: When you're ready to burn a Mastered disc, you get one last chance to name the disc and adjust the recording speed.*



When it's finished, you're left facing the disc's empty Explorer window. The words "Drag files to this folder to add them to the disc" hint at what you're supposed to do next.

## 5. Begin putting files and folders into the disc's window.

You can use any combination of these three methods:

First, you can scurry about your hard drive, locating the files and folders you want on the CD. Drag their icons into the open CD/DVD window, or onto the disc burner's icon in the Computer window (Figure 1, middle).

Second, you can highlight the files and folders you want burned onto the CD. From the Home tab on the Ribbon, click Copy. Click in the CD or DVD's window, and then click Paste (in the Ribbon) to copy the material there.

Finally, you can explore your hard drive. Whenever you find a file or folder you'd like backed up, right-click it. From the shortcut menu, choose "Send to"→DVD/CD-RW Drive (or whatever your burner's name is). Those files will wind up at the root of the disk (that is, not in any folder).

To finish the job, see "The final steps," below, for the kind of disc you're burning.

---

**Tip:** The Details pane at the bottom of the CD/DVD window gives you a running tally of the disc space you've filled up so far. (It may say, for example, "223.2 MB of 702.8 used on disc.") At last you have an effortless way to exploit a blank disc's capacity with precision.

---

### ***The final steps: Mastered (ISO) format***

When you put files and folders into the disc's window, Windows actually *copies* them into a temporary, invisible holding-tank folder. (If you must know, this folder is in your Personal folder→Local Settings→AppData→Local→Microsoft→Windows→Burn→Temporary Burn Folder.)

In other words, you need plenty of disk space before you begin burning a CD—at least double the size of the CD files themselves.

---

**Tip:** Remember that a standard CD can hold only about 650 MB of files. To ensure that your files and folders will fit, periodically highlight all the icons in the Computer→CD window (choose Organize→Select All). Then inspect the Details pane to confirm that the size is within the legal limit.

---

What you see in the disc's window, meanwhile, is nothing but shortcuts (denoted by the downward arrows on their icons). The little down arrows mean, "This icon hasn't been burned to the disc yet. I'm just waiting my turn."

At last, when everything looks ready to go, click "Finish burning." (This button appears on the Drive Tools/Manage tab of the Ribbon.) Or right-click the burner's icon, or any blank spot in its window, and, from the shortcut menu, choose "Burn to disc."

The Burn to Disc dialog box appears (Figure 1, bottom). The PC's laser proceeds to record the CD or DVD, which can take some time. Feel free to switch into another program and continue working.

When the burning is over, the disc pops out and you have a freshly minted CD or DVD, whose files and folders you can open on any PC or even Macintosh.

At this point, Windows asks: "Do you want to burn another disc using these same files?" This is your chance to insert another blank disc and make a copy of what you just did—without having to wait for all that copying business a second time. Click the Yes checkbox if so; click Finish if not.

### **The final steps: Live File System (UDF) format**

If you've been dragging files and folders into the window of a Live File System-formatted disc, there are no more steps. You can eject the disc and put it to use.

To eject the disc, click Eject on the Drive Tools/Manage tab of the Ribbon. (You can also right-click your burner's icon; from the shortcut menu, choose Eject.) Windows takes a moment to "close the session" and then ejects the disc.

You can play this disc on Macs or PCs running Windows XP and later.

Better yet, you can put this disc back into any XP-or-later PC and pick up right where you left off, adding and erasing files as though it's a big flash drive.

## **Final Notes**

Here are a few final notes on burning CDs and DVDs at the desktop:

- To erase an RW type disc (rewritable, like CD-RW or DVD-RW), click your drive's icon (in the nav bar or Computer window); on the Drive Tools/Manage tab of the Ribbon, click Format. (Or right-click the burner's icon; from the shortcut menu, choose Format.) Change the file-system format if you like, and then turn on Quick Format. Finally, click Start to erase the disc.

---

**Tip:** Of course, you don't have to erase the disc completely. You can always select and delete individual icons from it using the Delete key.

---

- If you do a lot of disc burning, a full-fledged burning program like Nero adds myriad additional options. Only with a commercial CD-burning program can you burn MP3 music CDs, create *mixed-mode* CDs (containing both music and files), create Video CDs (low-quality video discs that play on DVD players), and so on.

Just double-click the downloaded ISO icon. (You can also right-click it; from the shortcut menu, choose Mount. Or click its icon and use the Mount button on the Ribbon's Disk Tools/Manage tab.)

After a moment, it magically turns into a disk icon in your Nav pane or Computer window, which you can work with just as though it were a real disk. Windows even assigns it a drive letter, like D: or L:; you've got yourself a virtual disc. The software you downloaded is inside.

In theory, you could also create an ISO image from a DVD or Blu-ray disc, so you'll have "the disc" with you when you travel (even if your machine doesn't have a disc drive). Games, for example, run faster from a disk image than from an actual disc. The Web is full of free programs that let you turn folders or groups of files into ISO images.

---

**Tip:** If an ISO image doesn't mount (open) when you double-click it, check your file associations ("Default Programs" on page 406). It's possible that you've associated .iso file types to open with a different program, like WinZip or Nero. That program is therefore intercepting your attempt to open the ISO image.

---

When you're finished working with the disk image, you can eject it exactly as you would a CD or DVD—using the Eject button on the Drive Tools tab of the Ribbon, for example.