

# Are Your Critical Files Safe?

**Every Mac OS X user account has CRITICAL, but easy-to-locate files you should consider backing-up consistently and frequently!**

Cutting to the chase, the easiest, quickest way to back-up your documents and other important support files is simply to back-up your entire **HOME FOLDER**.

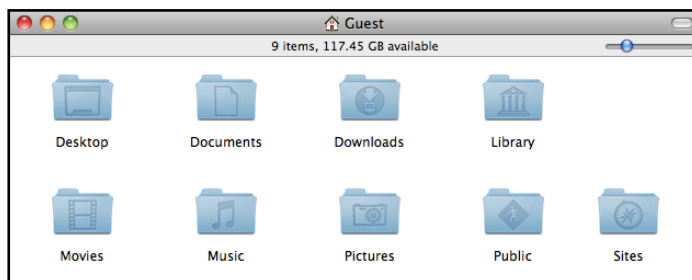
Of course, this assumes that you consistently save your documents within your Home Folder. You can either drag-copy it to an external hard disk drive or run the backup program of your choice. If you are not using Leopard's *Time Machine* for automatic backups (and *why aren't you?*), I recommend **SuperDuper!** \$27.95 from Shirt Pocket Software, [www.shirt-pocket.com](http://www.shirt-pocket.com). You can use *SuperDuper!* to backup specific files and folders to any device, or better still, turn an external drive into a "bootable clone" of your Mac's main hard disk drive, in case disaster strikes and you lose your main drive.

To get directly to your Home Folder, first make sure you are in *Finder*. A quick way to do this is to click on the desktop. You should see "Finder" in the menu bar next to the Apple menu. You can then go to the **GO** menu, and select **HOME**. But, you might be wondering *where* exactly your home folder is located on your Mac's hard disk drive. It is located on your hard disk inside the **USERS Folder**. The Users Folder contains the Home Folder for all the user accounts established on your Mac. On your Mac, you may have just one account – yours! All user accounts are identified by the user names associated with the accounts. *Your* Home Folder is the one with your user name and displaying an icon of a house.



## A Word or Two About the Home Folder

Every Mac comes with several pre-established data folders for every user/account that you, as administrator, establish on it. When looking at your own set of folders – all located within *your* Home Folder – keep in mind that these are *your* personal data folders. No other user can get to them, unless, of course, you allow them to.



Here's the list of these special data folders and what they do for you:

**Desktop Folder:** The files and folders that tend to accumulate on your desktop are actually stored in this folder. The Desktop is really nothing more than a graphic view of the contents of the Desktop Folder.

**Documents Folder:** This is perhaps *your most critical folder*. It is where many applications will save your working documents by default. It is where *you* should get into the habit of saving all your work to. You can create more folders and organize all you want, but stay inside the Documents Folder!

**Downloads Folder:** *Safari* will automatically save any files you download to this convenient folder. Other browsers, like *Firefox*, can be configured to save to this folder as well.

**Library Folder:** This is another very critical folder because it contains a lot of resource data files that your applications require in order to work with *your data!* There are all kinds of items in here: preferences files (*your preferences*; no one else's), application support files, *your* bookmarks, *your* security *Keychain*, *your* database files that some applications use to contain *your data*, *your* emails maintained by *Apple Mail*, *your iCal* calendars, *your Address Book* contacts, and much, much more! Generally, you do not need to access this folder as it's more for the system or applications to access – so, ***leave it alone!***

**Movies Folder:** By default, *iMovie* will store your movie project files in here. Other video applications and utilities may store files in here, too.

**Music Folder:** By default, *iTunes* will store your complete *iTunes Library* in here, which includes all your individual music files. Other audio applications and utilities may store files in here, too.

**Pictures Folder:** By default, *iPhoto* will store your entire *iPhoto Library* in here, which includes all of your photos and photo projects. *Aperture* also uses this folder. Other image editing applications, and utilities may store files in here, too.

**Public Folder:** This is a special folders that other accounts/users of your Mac *or* users on your network can go to to share files with you. By default, this is the only place within your Home Folder that others can have access to.

**Sites Folder:** This is another special folder that is used to house any web site you might have, should you choose to build one and run on your own Mac. In fact, every Mac has the capability of running an *Apache* web server. This is not used much, as the preferred method is to have web sites hosted on Internet service provider sites, such as Apple's *MobileMe*.

As you can see, if you are good about saving your “stuff” in your Home Folder, it becomes the obvious target for backing up.

### **What if you can't or don't want to backup your entire Home folder?**

You can choose the individual folders within your Home Folder to back-up if for some reason you can't, or don't want to, backup your entire Home folder.

## Backup Redundancy!

Yes, it isn't always enough to just have one backup! Consider a more comprehensive plan depending on the critical nature of your data. For example, if using *Time Machine*, consider doing a *SuperDuper!* backup as well so that you can boot up with your cloned drive and get back to work without too much lost time in the event of a data-disaster (eg; a crashed drive).

## In Conclusion ...

Remember what all Information Technology professionals already know: it's not a matter of ***if*** you will have a data disaster, but ***when!*** You can sleep better at night if you have taken the time to set up and maintain your backups.

### Off-site Data Storage

- **For Ultimate Security** consider storing a set of backups (a hard disk drive or CD/DVD discs) at a remote location should a disaster or theft happen at home.
- **Great Candidates** for off-site storage are the homes of family and friends, or your office (as long as you can secure the storage media). Also, a safety deposit box at your bank is a great place for offsite storage.
- **Your Apple MobileMe Account** is a great place to store those extra-critical files, but remember that storage space is limited and upload speeds can be slow.
- **Third-Party Online Storage** is a big deal these days. There are several good ones. I use and recommend ***Mozy.com***, and ***BackBlaze.com***. Most services will offer free backup for a limited amount of storage. 2GB is a typical amount. Unlimited storage plans are available and at very reasonable costs.
- **File Synchronizing** is another popular method for backing up off-site. ***Dropbox (Dropbox.com)*** will store your files for you, but the difference here is that using their desktop application, you can designate a "Dropbox Folder" on your Mac (inside your Home Folder, of course). This Dropbox Folder becomes your "synch folder." This means that if you have other Macs on which you have a Dropbox Folder established, whenever you add, remove or edit a file within the folder, it gets immediately synchronized (copied) to the remote Macs as well as to your *Dropbox.com* account on the Internet for safekeeping. This even works if you collaborate with other people over the Internet and need to share files! There is also a *Dropbox* app for the iPhone and iPod Touch so that you can access your files remotely.

***DON'T USE OFFSITE BACKUP SERVICES AS YOUR SOLE METHOD OF DATA BACKUP! ALTHOUGH UNLIKELY, THERE IS A CHANCE OF DATA DISASTERS HAPPENING THERE, TOO!***