

Classroom PCs: File Compression in Windows

Windows provides a zip compression utility suitable for compressing files and folders.

The most common compression format for PC files is **Zip** (with corresponding file extension **.zip**) and the process of compressing and decompressing files on a PC is often referred to as zipping and unzipping files, respectively.

A zip file can contain a single compressed file or a collection of files, including directories and sub-directories, if appropriate.

Using Windows compression utility

To compress a file or folder

1. Right-click on the file or folder you wish to compress.
2. From the pop-up menu, select **Send To** and then **Compressed (zipped) Folder**.
3. This creates a compressed folder, identified by a zipper icon, displaying the same name as the file or folder compressed.
4. If you want to rename the folder, right-click on it and select **Rename** from the pop-up menu.

You can also create a compressed folder from scratch:

1. Right-click on the Desktop, or a location of your choice.
2. From the pop-up menu, select **New** and then **Compressed (zipped) Folder**.
3. Name your folder appropriately.
4. You can then add files to this folder using drag and drop or the **Send To** command. Any files you add to the folder are automatically compressed.

To extract files or folders from a compressed folder

1. Find the compressed folder that you want to extract files or folders from.
2. To extract a *single file or folder*:
 - Double-click the compressed folder to open it, then drag the file or folder from the compressed folder to a new location.
3. To extract the *entire contents* of the compressed folder:
4. Right-click the folder and select **Extract All** from the pop-up menu, then follow the instructions.

Deleting a Compressed folder

Once you have extracted your files, a copy of the compressed folder remains.

Delete this folder by right-clicking on it and select **Delete** from the pop-up menu.

Why use file compression?

File formats (usually identified by file extensions e.g. **.docx** for Word files, **.exe** for executable files, **.txt** for plain text files, etc.) are generally designed for the convenience of the application with which they are to be used. As such, they often contain repeated and redundant data, and so can take up more filespace than is necessary.

While this is convenient when you are using files with their parent application, there are times when it would be more efficient to store them in a compressed format.

For example:

- when you are archiving files and want to fit as much as you can onto a pen drive or other medium;
- when you want to free up some of your home filespace for new files and have some old files you are not actively using at the moment;
- when you are sending a file or a collection of files to another person via email.

Note: Compressing (or zipping up) files before sending by email is becoming common practice. Because so many viruses are propagated by email attachment, many email services (including that at the University of Aberdeen) automatically reject email attachments with file extension types that might contain a virus-infected payload.

Since propagation depends on a recipient unwittingly double-clicking an attachment and thereby activating the virus, requiring that the attachment is de-compressed (un-zipped) first, provides an additional (though not infallible) layer of security.

Which types of file compress best?

Some types of files compress better than others. Those that are reduced most by compression are text-oriented, e.g. **.txt**, **.docx**, **.xls**, and the non-compressed graphics file type **.bmp**. Graphic formats such as **.jpg** and **.gif** files and multi-media formats such as **.mp3** and **.mpg** are already highly compressed, so file size is reduced very little by further compression.

Help and Support

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