

# WHAT THOSE WORDS MEAN

Clearing Up Some Backup Confusion



**LEO A. NOTENBOOM**

An Ask Leo! Special Report

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Clearing Up Some  
Backup Confusion

Version 1.0

by

Leo A. Notenboom

An *Ask Leo!*<sup>®</sup> report

<https://askleo.com>

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I believe personal technology is key to humanity's future.

It has amazing potential to empower individuals,  
but it can also frustrate and intimidate.

I want to make technology work for you.

I want to replace that *frustration* and *intimidation*  
with the *amazement* and *wonder* I feel every day.

I want it to be a *resource* rather than a *roadblock*;  
a *valuable tool*, instead of a source of *irritation*.

I want personal technology to empower you,  
so you can be part of that amazing future.

I just want it to work, for you.

That's why *Ask Leo!* exists.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Leo', with a stylized flourish underneath.

Leo A. Notenboom  
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## Introduction

Hopefully, you know my mantra by now:

*If there's only one copy, it's not backed up.*

And you're probably familiar with my constant emphasis on backing up as the prevention for everything from computer disaster to burnt toast (you have a backup loaf of bread, yes?). But judging from the number of questions I get about how to recover from a scenario for which a backup *would* have been the easy solution, it's still not obvious to most people.

So I set out to find out why.

In February 2015, new subscribers to [The Ask Leo! Newsletter](#) received a survey with a simple question: "Do you back up?" They were given the following options:

- Yes, I have automated image backups
- Yes, I have automated data-only backups
- Yes, I back up manually
- Usually, when I remember
- Rarely
- No, I don't believe I need to
- No, I know I should but I don't know how
- What's a backup?

The results of the survey were. . . depressing.

To summarize, roughly 25% of respondents did not back up at all. Just under another quarter of the responses fell into the "Usually" or "Rarely" category. Over a third reported backing up something, albeit not necessarily everything, or in an automated fashion. And 13% ("Leo's Heroes", I call 'em) have automated, system-image backup plans in place. (You can read more about the results in the article [Do You Back Up?](#))

Since my goal would be for that last 13% to be much closer to 100%, I could see I had some work to do.

I went back to my community and asked more questions. I wrote, “Please tell me: what’s the biggest issue you have when it comes to backing up? If you’re not backing up, why not? What’s getting in the way? What’s preventing you? Are you are backing up in a half-hearted way, and not sure you're covered? What’s preventing you from feeling secure about the backups you are taking?”

The responses to that post - [A Different Approach to a Book about Backing Up](#) - were very revealing. It turned out that a lot of people’s failure to backup stems from problems with vocabulary. If you don’t understand the words surrounding a topic, you are more likely to throw up your hands and walk away.

What you are reading now is one attempt to address that problem. Distilled from a series of video presentations, you’ll find definitions of some of the major terms used in talking about backing up:

- Backup (and Back Up)
- Image versus Clone
- Drives (HDD, SSD, disk vs drive, USB, external, NAS, partition)
- Types of backups: full, incremental, differential
- The Five Rs: rescue, restore, recovery, repair, and reinstall
- What it means to restore data after a problem
- Using backups to move data to a new machine
- What it means to mount something

In my ideal world, the answers to “Do you back up?” would fall into two buckets:

- 80% of all computer users would have complete, automated, full-system image backups on a schedule appropriate to their level of computer use.

- The remaining 20% would have at least all their data backed up automatically somehow, or make conscious and well-informed decisions not to back up some portion of their digital life.

My hope is that this primer will help you find your place in one of those back-up buckets.