

Backup Restore Test Guide

A backup nobody has restored is a hope with a schedule attached. The quick test below takes five minutes. The proper quarterly one takes about twenty.

The five minute version

Pick a file from three months ago. Ask for it back. Time how long it takes to arrive.

If nobody can produce it today, you do not have backups. You have a subscription.

Who to ask, and where to click

This is the step that stops people, so here is the routing.

You have an IT provider. Email them: "Please restore [filename] as it was on [date], to a separate folder. I am timing this as a restore test." Start the clock when you hit send.

Microsoft 365 or OneDrive, no provider. Right click the file on the web and choose Version history. If it was deleted, look in the recycle bin.

Google Workspace. Right click in Drive, choose File information, then Manage versions. Deleted files sit in Trash for 30 days.

Dropbox. Open the file menu on the web and choose Version history.

You genuinely do not know who to ask. That is your result. Write it down and stop. Nobody knowing is the finding.

One warning before you start

Do not roll the whole drive back. OneDrive Files Restore, Dropbox Rewind and similar features roll back everything to an earlier point, not one file, and they will discard current work across the business. You want the single file option. If the only option you can find is a whole rollback, stop and ask your provider.

The proper test, quarterly

1. Pick something real. Not a test file created yesterday. A document from a few months ago that somebody would actually miss.

2. Restore it to a separate folder. Never over the original. Put the copy somewhere outside a synced folder, so you are not pushing a duplicate out to everybody.

3. Open it. A restored file that will not open is not a restored file.

4. Time it. Start to finish, including finding the backup and working out how the restore process works. Note that this is the time to recover one file with everything else still running. Treat it as the floor, not the estimate.

5. Try a bigger one. Once a year, restore a whole folder rather than a single file.

6. Delete the test copy. If the file held client or staff information, you have just made a second copy of it. Remove it, and record that you did.

What this test does not prove

This proves a file can come back. That is useful, and more than most businesses have. Be honest with yourself about what it leaves untested.

- That a server, or the applications your business actually runs on, can be rebuilt. That is a different exercise and usually a much longer one.
- That accounting, your client database, or any line of business system restores in a working state. Databases fail differently from documents.
- That a copy exists which ransomware could not reach. If backups can be deleted by whoever holds administrator access, they can be deleted during an attack.
- That you could resume trading.

If restoring one file took longer than you expected, assume rebuilding everything takes very much longer.

What to check while you are in there

Write the answer, not a tick. The answer is the useful part.

Is everything you assume is backed up actually in scope? Check for folders added since setup.

Answer: _____

Is Microsoft 365 or Google Workspace data backed up, or only your local files?

Answer: _____

How far back does retention actually go?

Answer: _____

Could somebody with administrator access delete the backups as well as the data?

Answer: _____

When did somebody last receive a backup failure alert, and who did it go to?

Answer: _____

The log

Date	Restored from	What was restored	Type	Time taken	Result	Issues found

Date	Restored from	What was restored	Type	Time taken	Result	Issues found

Type means file, folder, mailbox or whole system. Result means pass or fail. If it failed, write what you did about it and when, because a log of unfixed failures is worse than no log.

Why the date matters

Insurers ask when you last tested a restore, and a date you can name is worth more than a policy document saying backups run nightly. Keep this log where you can find it at renewal.

One caution. The application usually asks a bigger question than this test answers: whether backups are immutable or held offline, and whether recovery of your systems has been tested. Restoring a single file does not entitle you to answer yes to that.

Log what you actually tested, in the words you actually tested it in. An overstated answer on a proposal form is exactly the kind of thing that surfaces at claim time.