

# Destroy your data, don't just delete it!

Your handy guide to permanently deleting personal data from computers and smart devices.



With guidance from  
**We Fight Fraud** and the Government's  
**National Cyber Security Centre.**

## How do I delete my data?



## How do I permanently delete my data on my devices?

**Destroy your data, don't just delete it.**

This follows guidance from We Fight Fraud and the Government's National Cyber Security Centre.

**Deleting data the conventional way doesn't destroy it.**

The code that technology uses to store your information remains on your devices, and can be accessed by criminals with the right know-how. This information may in turn be used to commit fraud. Before passing on your smart device for reuse or recycling you need to **permanently** delete all personal and private data so that it can't be retrieved.

Think about **all your devices where you store personal data** - photos, forms, financial records and documents with information like your address, date of birth, and even passwords. Your information could still be recoverable from your old device if you just delete it – so you need to ensure your data is properly destroyed. This guide will tell you how.

It's important to follow the instructions shown here or on the device manufacturer's website to permanently delete your data. This will ensure it can't be retrieved by anyone else. Find your device type below - and read our step-by-step instructions to be sure your data is destroyed, not just deleted.

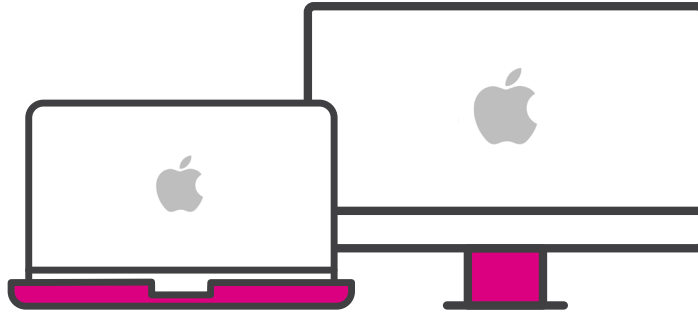
Some people choose to download specialist data deletion software, or employ a reputable professional to do the job. However, you can permanently delete your data on devices yourself by following these 4 simple steps:

- 1. Back up** important files, such as documents and photos, and transfer them to your new computer, an external hard drive or a cloud drive like iCloud, Dropbox or Google Drive. Remember to record the licence numbers of software you may need to reinstall on your new devices.
- 2. Sign out** of all accounts on your device.
- 3. Destroy** your data.
- 4. Remove** any SIM or Memory cards.

## For information about your specific device:

- [> Apple computers and laptops](#)
- [> iPhones and iPads](#)
- [> Windows computers and laptops](#)
- [> Android devices](#)
- [> Games consoles, printers & cameras](#)
- [> External or removable storage  
such as hard drives, SD cards and flash drives](#)

## How do I permanently delete my data on Apple computers and laptops?



**1. Back up** important files, such as documents and photos, by transferring them to your new computer either by using Apple's Migration Assistant (look in the Utilities folder) or saving to an external hard drive. If you are using an external hard drive, simply copy the contents of your home folder to its new location using the 'cmd/ctrl + c' and 'cmd/ctrl + v' copy and paste function. Be patient - it may take some time.

### 2. Sign out of iCloud

If you're using macOS Catalina (v10.15) or later:

- > Apple menu (the Apple icon top left)
- > System preferences
- > Apple ID
- > Overview
- > Sign out
- > Remove any SIM or memory cards

If you're using macOS Mojave or earlier:

- > Apple menu (the Apple icon top left)
- > System preferences
- > iCloud
- > Sign out

### 3. Sign out of Music (iTunes)

Open Music (iTunes):

- > Find the Account menu
- > Authorizations
- > Deauthorize this computer
- > Enter your Apple ID
- > Deauthorize

### 4. Sign out of iMessage

Open Messages:

- > Messages
- > Preferences
- > iMessage
- > Sign out

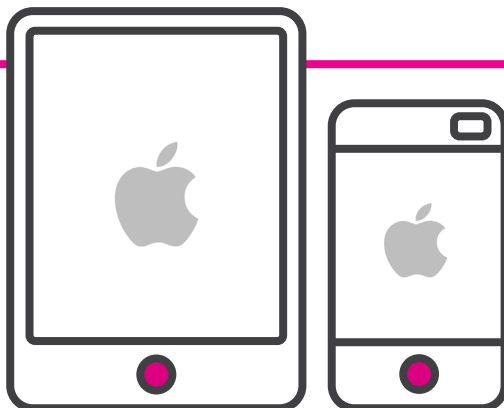
**5.** On macOS Monterey or later, on a Mac with Apple silicon, or a Mac with the Apple T2 Security Chip, you can use the 'Erase all Content and Settings' feature. Otherwise follow the instructions below. Apple has more detailed information, and support [here](#).

Destroy your data by erasing your hard drive to remove any files and programmes you've added. Make sure all your information is backed up in Step 1, because you won't be able to get your information back once this process has been completed.

- > Restart your Mac
- > Open Recovery Mode by holding Command + Q while your Mac restarts until you see the Apple logo
- > Erase your data
- > Follow the prompts provided

Before passing on any device, remove any SIM or memory cards.

## How do I permanently delete my data on iPhones and iPads?



### 1. Back up your device through iCloud

Plug in your device and connect it to WiFi:

- > Go to Settings
- > Apple ID banner
- > iCloud
- > iCloud Backup
- > Back up now.

(The steps may vary slightly depending on model.)

### 2. Sign out of iCloud, iTunes, and the App Store

Turn off Find My iPhone:

- > Go to Settings
- > Apple ID banner
- > iCloud

- > Find My iPhone
- > Turn it off

### 3. Destroy your data by returning your device to factory settings

- > Go to Settings
- > General
- > Reset
- > Erase All Content and Settings.

### 4. Complete the process by entering your passcode and remove the SIM card, leaving a blank set-up screen for the next user

Apple has more detailed information and support [here](#).

## How do I permanently delete my data on Windows computers and laptops?



If you're using a Windows computer older than Windows 8.1, factory reset isn't a guarantee that all the data on your computer will be wiped. For Windows computers older than 8.1, you'll need to use external software.

The one we recommend is called [Eraser](#), and it's free and simple to use.

For all Windows deletions, back up important files such as documents and photos you want to keep, and transfer them to your new computer through an external hard drive or the Cloud (eg Dropbox).

## For computers running Windows 8.1 and above

- > Click Start
- > Settings
- > Updates & Security
- > Recovery
- > Get Started
- > Reset this PC
- > Select the 'Remove Everything' option.  
It may take some time to work, and you must be sure that you've backed up your data first; once you've chosen this option it can't be undone

Before passing on any device, remove any SIM or memory cards.

## For computers running Windows versions before 8.1

You must use an external tool before performing a factory reset. Our recommendation is to use Eraser, found [here](#). It's free and has a user friendly system. Download it [here](#) (choose the latest version), and if you're having trouble using it, read their help section [here](#). Below is a guide on how to install and use Eraser once it's been downloaded:

Installing Eraser:

- > Navigate to the folder you downloaded Eraser into, and double click it to run the installer.
- > When Windows asks if you'd like the program to make changes to your device, select 'Yes'.
- > Once the installer appears, click 'Next'
- > Accept the licence terms if you're happy with them, and click 'Next'
- > Select 'Typical' as your installation setup type
- > Click 'Install', and wait for the installation to finish.
- > You have the option to run Eraser once it's installed. If you'd like to use the program immediately, tick the box labelled 'Run Eraser', then click 'Finish'.

If not, you'll be able to find Eraser in your Start menu.

Using Eraser:

- > In your Start menu, you should either see Eraser as an installed program, or be able to search for it using the search function. Find Eraser in the menu and run it.

- > When Windows asks whether you'd like the program to make changes to your device, select 'Yes'.
- > The Eraser software will appear. Click the arrow next to 'Erase Schedule' then select 'New Task' from the dropdown menu. Alternatively, you can use the keyboard shortcut CTRL+N.
- > A pop-up will appear. For task type, select 'Run immediately', or for more advanced control you can choose a scheduled time.
- > Select 'Add data' in the bottom left of the pop-up.
- > A new pop-up will appear. For 'Target Type' select 'Files in Folder'. Leave the 'Erasure Method' section at default.
- > Under the 'Settings' section, press the 'Browse' button.
- > Select your User folder by going to 'This PC' > C:/ > Users > [folder labelled with your username]
- > Double check the information you provided as being correct, and select 'OK' then 'OK' again. If you've selected 'Run immediately', Eraser will now begin to erase the contents of your home folder, including your documents, settings, and personal data. Make sure everything is backed up beforehand, because this process can not be undone.

Performing a factory reset:

Once Eraser has finished with your home folder, you must factory reset your PC. Here is what to do:

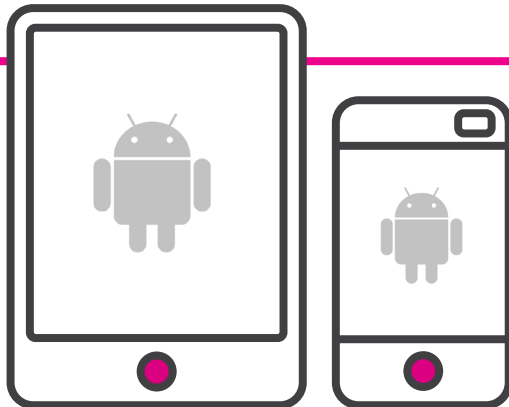
- > Open Settings
- > Find 'Updates and Recovery'
- > Select 'Get Started'
- > Select 'Remove Everything and Reinstall Windows'.
- > Follow the prompts provided.

It's important to be extremely careful when downloading software which claims to delete your files securely. Because the information you may want deleted is, by its nature, sensitive, criminals will be interested in getting their hands on it. As a result, many advertised data deletion tools tend to be malware or viruses. Eraser has been carefully reviewed for many years and is safe to use.

Before passing on any device, remove any SIM or memory cards.



## How do I permanently delete my data from my Android device?



### 1. Back up your device

Plug in your device and connect it to WiFi:

- > Navigate through Settings
- > Backup & Reset
- > Back up my Data
- > Accounts
- > Google.

(The steps may vary slightly depending on manufacturer/Android version.)

### 2. Sign out of your Google account

### 3. Destroy your data by returning your device to factory settings:

Go to Settings:

- > Security
- > Encrypt Phone.

Once this has been completed:

- Go to Settings
- > Backup & Reset
  - > Factory Data Reset
  - > Erase Phone Data.

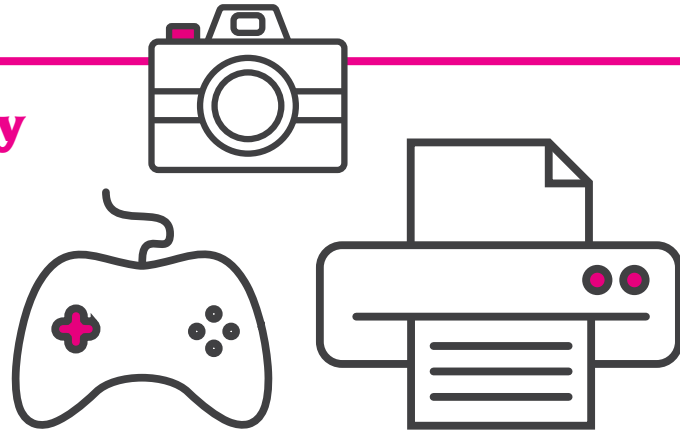
### 4. Remove SIM card

If your Android device has a microSD card, remove it by flipping open the little hatch covering it, using your fingernail to press and release the card and then sliding it out.

Google has more detailed information, and support [here](#).

We also recommend checking the [manufacturer's support site](#).

## How do I permanently delete my data on games consoles, cameras, printers, and external hard drives?



**1. Back up important files** such as documents and photos you want to keep, and transfer them to your computer, to another hard drive or to the Cloud (e.g. Dropbox).

**2. Destroy your data** by returning your device to factory settings.

Unfortunately, the factory reset functions on many smart devices vary wildly in how well they destroy your data. It's a good idea to perform a factory reset anyway, and you can find specific advice on how to do so online. Our advice is to only recycle such devices through trusted third party exchanges, as they have specialised tools and software to help ensure your data is securely destroyed. Never trust a factory reset alone to securely delete your information.

**3. Remove any SD or memory cards** from the device.

Generally, it's a good idea not to sell used storage media such as a memory card with the device itself, so remove it.

**4. Format external media** such as hard drives or memory cards.

If you're donating, selling or recycling storage media, you can connect it to your laptop and use a program such as Eraser for Windows or Disk Utility for Mac. If you're using Disk Utility, set the security level to most secure when erasing the media, in order to securely destroy the information on there first. 'Formatting' SD cards or other storage media is not a sufficient option to destroy your data. Every smart device has its own quirks on how it uses external storage, and no two are alike. As such, there's no perfect catch-all.

Search **recycle your electricals** to find your nearest recycling point

