Back up your Zotero Library

This guide will walk you through backing up a Zotero library from the local Firefox application (and not Zotero standalone) on a PC system. The third page also provides instructions for restoring your Zotero library from your backup.

These instructions (tested by KU Libraries staff) are condensed from the following web pages: https://www.zotero.org/support/zotero_data and http://libguides.northwestern.edu/c.php?g=114874&p=750370

Please note that in its support pages, Zotero.org strongly emphasizes that having a full hard-drive back-up is preferable to simply backing up a Zotero library. More information is available in this PC World article: http://www.pcworld.com/article/2065126/the-absurdly-simple-guide-to-backing-up-your-pc.html

Before getting started... (for Zotero Sync and Zotero Groups users)

First, be sure that your “automatic sync” process is disabled. In the Firefox Zotero, click the Gear icon, then Preferences then Sync and make sure that “Sync automatically” is not checked.

Also (for Zotero Groups users), if you have synced sources into your “Group Libraries,” add those to your “My Library” before backing up. (Click on the folder in the Group Libraries that you want to add. Next, click once in the middle pane and then click Control+A to select everything in that folder. Now drag those items into the My Library folder or into a folder you have created in the My Library area.)
The Backup Process

1. From your Firefox Zotero library, click the Gear icon, then click Preferences then the Advanced tab then Files and Folders tab then click the Show Data Directory button.

2. A separate window is now open that shows your Zotero path and directory. Click the minimize button on this window, we will use it again here in a bit.

3. Now completely exit Zotero and Firefox.

4. Re-open the minimized window from step 2. From here move up one level of the directory. Here’s mine (below), so one level up will put me in the t2k5fvy9.default folder.

5. From here, look for the folder labeled either Zotero or Zotero_library. You can tell which one by looking again at your path (in this case, mine will be named Zotero). We’re just trying to get one level above this folder so that we can copy the whole thing.

6. Once you’ve found this folder, click once to select it, then right-click and select Copy.

7. Click over to your flash drive or other external storage location then right-click and select Paste. (Do plan to use a device with lots of space available. You may need over one gig of space, even for a relatively small library).

8. Double check to be sure the files are present. You will not be able open them outside a Zotero library, but you can make sure that they appear to be present. If you want to inspect the accuracy of the backup, you will need to create a blank Zotero library on another computer (or using a different Firefox profile)—more information here: https://support.mozilla.org/en-US/kb/profile-manager-create-and-remove-firefox-profiles?redirectlocale=en-US&redirectslug=Managing+profiles) then follow the instructions below.
How to restore from backup, if you need to:

1. **Be sure auto-sync is off (described above).**

2. Again, open your Firefox Zotero application and click on the **Gear** icon, then **Preferences** then **Advanced** then **Files and Folders** then **Show Data Directory**.

3. Minimize the data directory window.


5. Re-open the minimized directory.

6. Hold down the Control button and select the items here named “Zotero.sqlite” and “Storage.” (This will be one file and one file folder, respectively.) Now drag these items out to your desktop and drop them there.

7. Minimize the Zotero directory window again.

8. Now open your backup version and find these same two files, Zotero.sqlite and Storage. Hold down the Control key to select them both, then **right-click** and select **Copy**.

9. Open the minimized Zotero directory from steps 5 through 7.

10. Right click and select **Paste**. This should drop the backed-up versions of your Zotero.sqlite and Storage files into your current Zotero directory.

11. Now return to Firefox and start Zotero. It should load your backup.