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Day to day in FileZilla: syncing, permissions and hidden files

Files & FTP

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Day to day in FileZilla: syncing, permissions and hidden files

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Connecting and dragging files takes five minutes to learn. What separates people who use FileZilla from people who *run* it is half a dozen options buried in the menus, and they save hours a month to anyone who touches a site regularly. Here they are.

Compare the two folders, and upload only what changed

Under the *View* menu there is **directory comparison**. Switched on, FileZilla colours both lists: what exists on one side only, what exists on both but with different dates or sizes, and what is identical. You stop having to upload the whole site to change three files.

Next to it is **synchronised browsing**. Switched on, opening a folder on one side opens the folder of the same name on the other. With both on at once you can work in a large site and never lose your place.

> **Compare on size and date, and distrust the date.**
> Your computer clock and the server clock may not be in the same timezone, and then everything looks different. If that happens, compare on size alone: the option is in the same menu.

The files you cannot see, and which decide everything

Files whose name starts with a dot are hidden by default. It is an old convention and a modern trap, because some of the most important files are exactly those:

File	What it does
`.htaccess`	Redirects, pretty addresses, forcing HTTPS, blocking addresses. If a site «lost» all its pages after a copy, this is almost certainly what got left behind.
`.env`	The secrets of a bespoke project. It must never be readable from the internet.

File	What it does
`.well-known`	The folder certificates use to validate themselves. Delete it and renewal stops working.
`.user.ini`	PHP tweaks for that folder.

Under the *Server* menu there is **force showing hidden files**. Switch it on and leave it on.

Permissions: the three numbers

Right click a file and choose file permissions. You get tick boxes and a three-digit number, saying the same thing two ways.

Value	What for
644	Ordinary files. The owner writes, everyone else only reads. This is what the overwhelming majority of a site's files should be.
755	Folders, and files that have to be executed. A folder at 644 will not open and gives a 403.
600	Configuration files with secrets in them, where the program allows it.
777	**Never.** Not even «to try». See the warning.

> **!** **777 fixes nothing here, and it opens a door.**
> On these servers PHP runs as your own account, so the site can already write to your files at 644 and 755. Setting 777 gives it no power it did not have, and gives power to people who should not have it. If a tutorial on the internet tells you to use 777, that tutorial was not written for here.

The same window offers to apply the change to all subfolders, and to apply it only to folders or only to files. That is how you tidy a whole site in two passes: 755 on folders, then 644 on files. If what you are looking at is a 403, the list of causes is in **error 403 Forbidden**.

Editing a file without downloading it

Right click a text file and choose *View/Edit*. FileZilla opens it in the editor on your computer and, when you save, asks whether to upload the new version. It is the quickest way to fix one line in an `.htaccess` or a configuration file.

In settings you can choose which editor, and map different extensions to different editors. Pick a real code editor, not a word processor: a word processor damages the file in silence.

The queue, and what to do when something fails

1. **Always look at the failed transfers tab** before you call the job done. It hides next to the other two and it is the one that matters.

2. **To retry**, select the rows, right click, and put them back in the queue. You do not have to start over.

3. **If the same files always fail**, the problem is their names: accents, spaces or unusual symbols. In the site settings, on the character set tab, force UTF-8 and try again.

4. **If everything dies at roughly the same point**, lower the number of simultaneous connections and raise the timeout. It is explained in **common FTP errors**.

Bookmarks save more time than they look like they will.
The bookmarks menu lets you save a pair of folders, one each side, with a name. One click and you are in both right places at once.

Dragging the site down to your computer is not a backup.
It is missing the database, the mail and the accounts. A copy without the database restores no website at all. The right habit is in **making and keeping your own backup**.

NEED A HAND?

Files that refuse to upload, or permissions that will not stick? Send us the FileZilla log.

Open a support ticket →

SEE ALSO

- **Hosting plans and what each one includes** →
- **Support Policy: how far our help goes** →

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