

How to Keep your Backups Current with FreeFileSync (Win)

posted on August 17, 2009 by [Jim Henderson](#)

We've posted a lot of information here in the past about [backups](#) and [file synchronisation](#), but I've been doing some work recently moving a huge quantity of data and ensuring that it has actually arrived, and it's great to find something that just works.



FreeFileSync v2.1

I've been using both [Vista](#) and the [Windows 7 RC](#), and the official recommendation for those platforms for raw copy tools is to use Robocopy, rather than the rather dated XCopy.

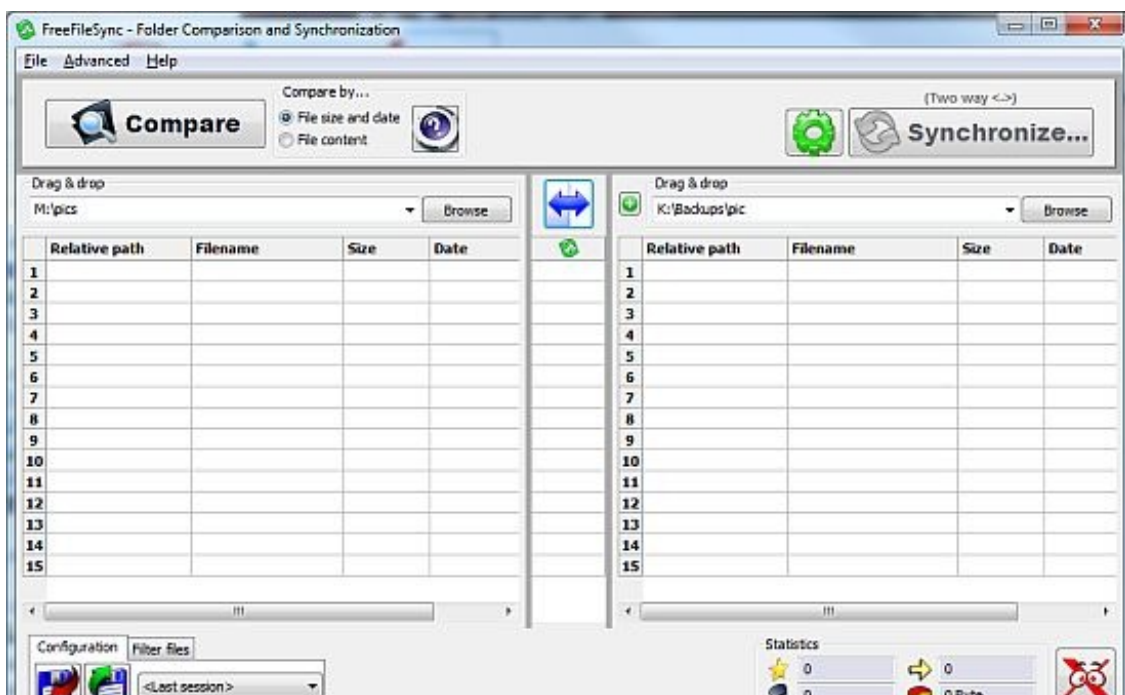
[Robocopy](#) has a GUI that leaves a lot to be desired, and Microsoft have been quietly pushing a free tool called [RichCopy](#), so you would think there were plenty of options, but I've had an awful time with everything except for the barbaric option of running Robocopy from the command line, so I was really on the hunt for something less official.

[FreeFileSync](#) (FFS) takes the sting out of synchronising local backups. I'd still go some other places for Internet backups, and this isn't the tool for scripted synchronisation either, if you're headed down that path. Robocopy is great for that.

There isn't much information available about FFS, so it's just as well that it largely seems not to need it. Download, install, start, and get things done. It's that easy.

I have an ongoing need to ensure that I have my photographs saved in at least two places. I have another copy that leaves the building with me as well, but we're just looking at the locations I can see on the network for this.

When FFS is started, you can see a fairly straightforward interface.

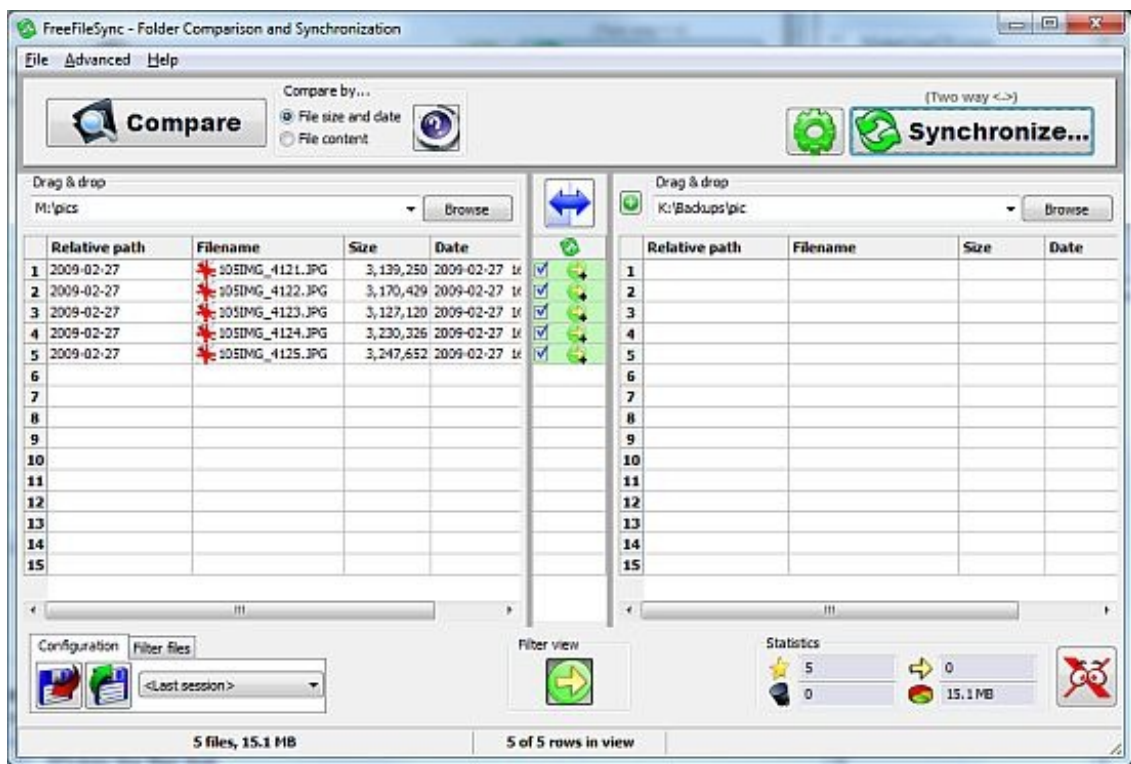




The idea is to put the source location in the left column, and the destination in the right, but the terms are less than distinct, because at least by default, FFS is going to synchronise the files in both locations, and will happily update both ways.

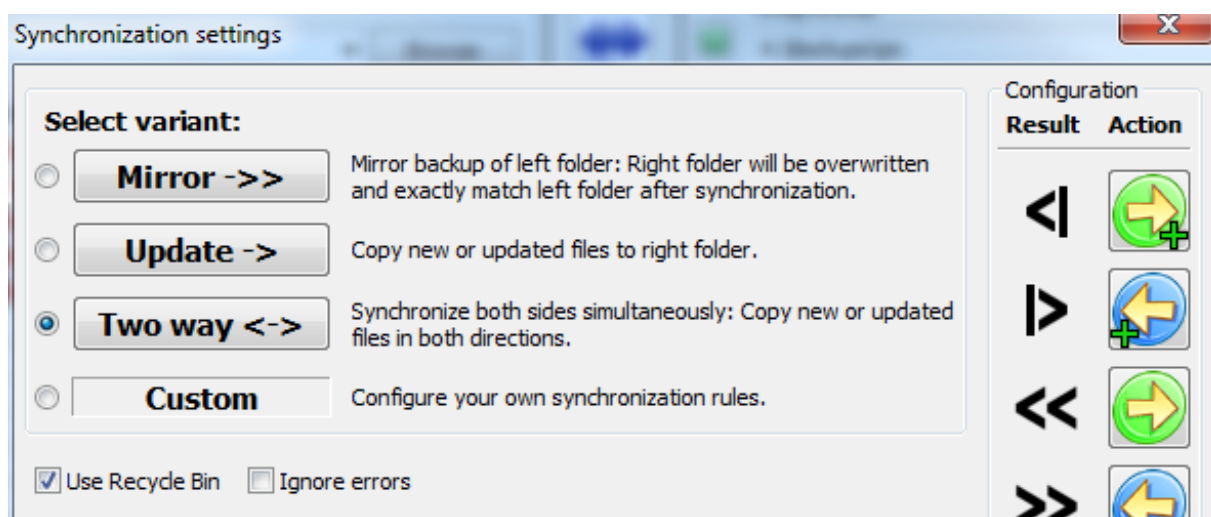
In my case I have files in *M:\pics* that I would like to backup to *K:\backups\pic*. Just browse to both of those locations, as shown above.

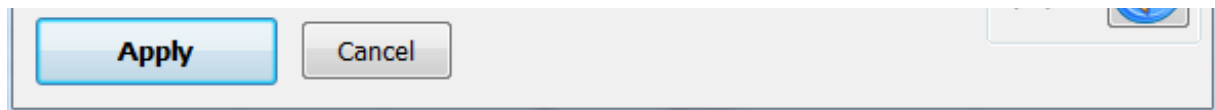
The big compare button does exactly what you might think. It doesn't move anything anywhere, just takes a look and reports back.



FFS lists the folders and files that need to be copied across, and would also list any that needed to go the other way. This set is pretty straightforward though.

Click the *options* button to sort out the way you want the synchronisation to happen. You'll be presented with a list of options which are mostly self-explanatory.





Warning! Take some care in here. If you get these, or the folders you've listed in FFS the wrong way around, you could end up deleting files by mistake. Measure twice, cut once!

You can select a main option from the left, and then make minor (but important) adjustments to it on the right.

For instance, if you choose *Mirror* on the left, you'll get this list on the right.

What this says is that if you have files that exist **only** on the left, they will be copied to the right. If you have files **only** on the right, they will be deleted. If you have **newer** files on the left they will be copied. If you have **newer** files on the right, they will be overwritten.

You can also adjust each of these actions, by clicking the green buttons, if none of the major options is what you want.

Spend some time and get familiar with this. Really.

Mostly, though, the requirement is to mirror folders, as in the larger image above.

Once you've chosen the option you want, click the *Apply* button to return to the main screen.

The settings you've chosen for this session are displayed above the *Synchronize* button. Check things are as you want them to be, and then click the button.

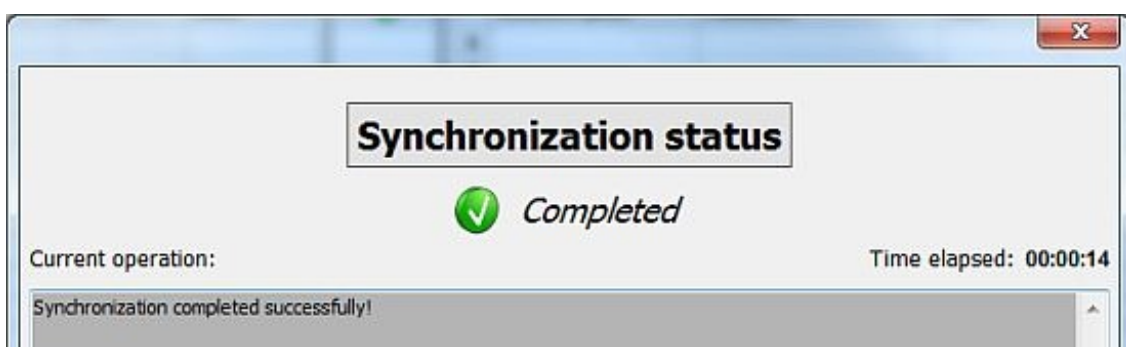
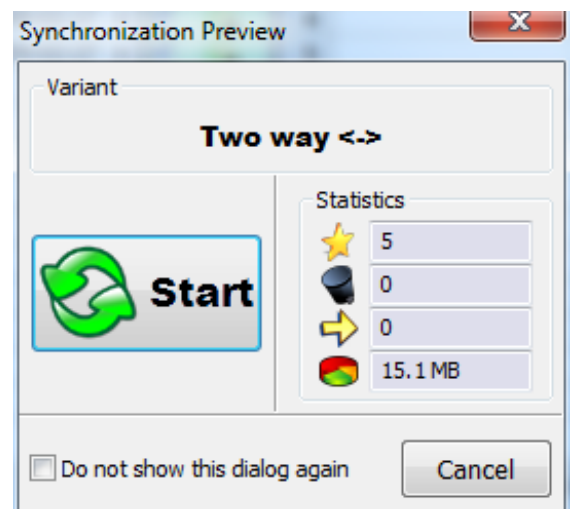
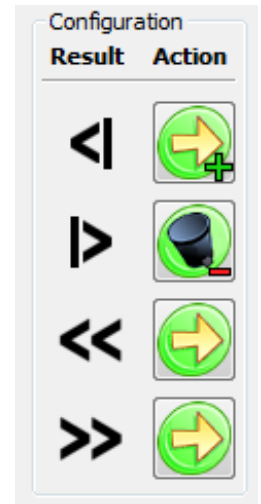
You'll get one last chance! A preview screen is displayed that shows you what is going to happen.

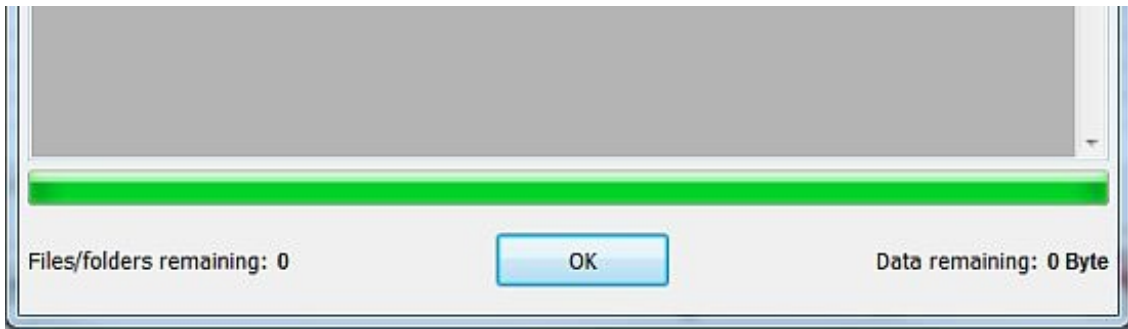
At about this point I'm getting tired of symbols, and wish the application would just put things in English.

The *star* is the number of files that will be created. The *bin* shows the number to be deleted. The *arrow* shows the number to be overwritten, and the *pie chart* shows the total amount of data that is going to be transferred.

Click *Start*.

Depending on the amount of data involved, you may or may not see much happen before you are eventually presented with a completion screen.

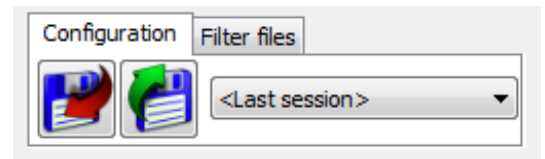




Click *OK* to return to the main screen. You're all finished. Congratulations!

Most folk would like to perform the same sync activity over and over, and FFS has the ability to save and open setups so you can run them again any time.

Click the button with the red arrow to save the config you've just been working with, and you'll be prompted to supply a (would you believe) `.ffs_gui` file name. Take the offered name or change it to something more useful, and then click *Save*.



Opening a session is just the same in reverse. Click the button with the green arrow, etc.

That's it. Now you have one less excuse for not doing backups";

I'd be most interested in any experiences you've had with this or other similar products. Do you use any sort of sync tools? let me know in the comments.

[10 Comments](#)