



Cut, Copy & Paste

by
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Cut, copy and paste is a very useful Windows technique that is available in most application programs. This makes it well worth the small amount of time that it takes to master it.

There are several concepts that are integral to the Cut, Copy, and Paste technique.

- The Windows clipboard is an area of memory that has been set aside for the temporary storage of data. While the clipboard memory can stretch to hold a large picture or many pages of text it has the limitation that it can only hold one item at a time¹. Whenever you place something into the clipboard it replaces what was there previously. Either a “Cut” or a “Copy” will place a copy of the selected data into the clipboard where it will remain until something else is put into the clipboard. You can make several copies of the data that is in the clipboard, but you must do so before you cut or copy another item into the clipboard.
- The difference between Cut and Copy is what happens to the original. Cut removes the original once the paste operation has been completed while Copy simply makes a copy of the original. Use Cut and then Paste to move the data or use Copy and Paste to make a copy of the data. That is why there are two ways to put data into the clipboard.
- Selection is how we tell Windows what we want to place into the clipboard. It is actually the most difficult part of the cut, paste and copy technique. Below you will find a review of how to select data. Much of what is confusing to users is that there are several ways to select data and their relative utility varies with the type of data to be selected.

The first step in a cut, copy and paste operation is the **selection** of the data to be acted upon. The choice of a selection method depends upon the type of data.

Text Selection - In the text sample on the right the text pointer is positioned in front of the word selection. You can position the text pointer any where in the text by clicking the left mouse button where you want the text pointer to be, or you can move the text pointer with the keyboard's arrow keys. Remember your mouse pointer can go anywhere on the screen but the text pointer can only be positioned within or adjacent to text.

This is a text sample which we will use to illustrate the selection of text. The methods we will use apply to simple text editors like Notepad, word processors, and email applications. ¶

There are several ways you can complete the selection:

- drag the mouse cursor over the text with the left button down, releasing at the end of the selection.
- click the left mouse button to mark the beginning, press and hold the shift key while moving the mouse to the other end of the selection and clicking it again.
- position the text cursor at the beginning, press and hold the shift key, and move to the other end of the selection using the arrow keys.

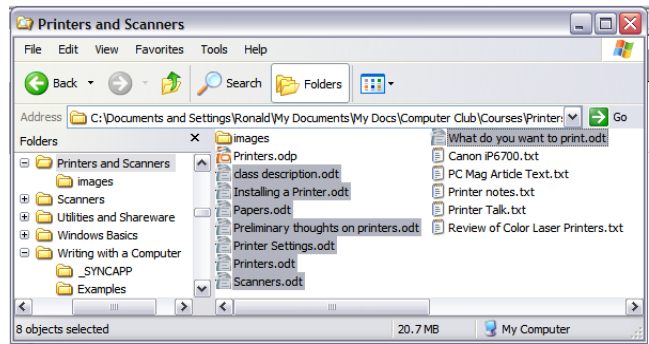
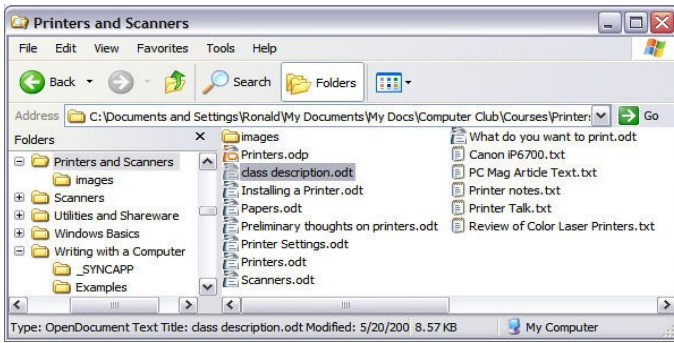
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I sometimes have a bit of trouble using the mouse to drag the selection as in the first method. It seems like Windows has a different idea of where I want to stop. If you need to correct the ending position of a selection try pressing the shift key and moving the end of the selection with the arrow keys. Practice text selection on this article until you are confident that you can do it.

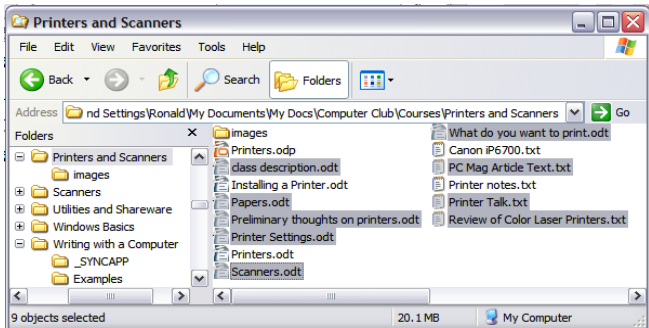
File Selection - Another type of selection can be applied to lists of files such as those shown in Windows Explorer. You may have to adjust the view (list view is shown below) to conveniently see many files in explorer. The **first selection method** is an easy way to select any number of consecutive files. Left click the mouse on the first of the files you wish to select, press and hold the shift key, and click on the last file in the list that you wish to select. This will select all the files from the first to the last. The results are shown below.

¹ Microsoft Word has support for multiple clipboards and will retain one item as another is added. This is a part of that application but is not supported by Windows outside of Word.

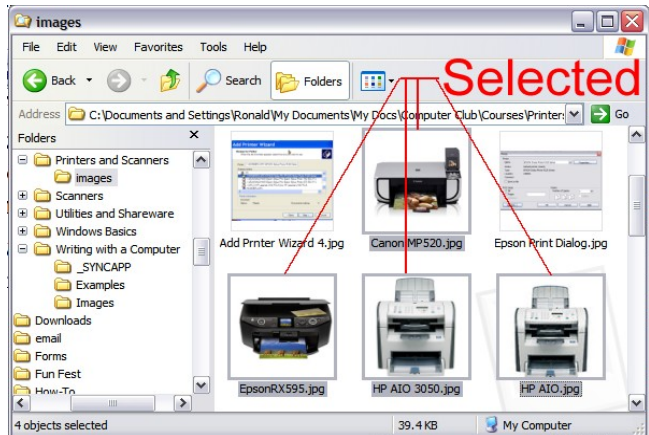


It is rare to have all the files I want to cut, copy or delete fall in consecutive order so I have learned a **second selection method**. You can select any number of files in a list by simply holding down the Ctrl key while clicking the left mouse button when the mouse cursor is over the desired file name. You can select the files in any order. When you have completed the selection you can release the Ctrl key.

Graphic or Picture File Selection – is very easy using the second selection method above combined with the Thumbnail view.



These file selection methods are not limited to Windows Explorer, any well behaved Windows application should support them if it requests a list of files from the user. Be aware, however, that some programs make no effort to handle multiple selections and expect only a single file name.



Cut or Copy - Once you have selected the data you have several options for how you invoke cut or copy to get the data into the clipboard. At the risk of confusing you I will list them all.

- With the selection in place use Edit|Cut or Edit|Copy to place the selected data into the clipboard. Note that you can also delete all of the selected data using the Delete (Del) key.
- With the mouse cursor over the selected data **right** click the mouse. Cut and Copy are near the bottom of the right-click menu which appears.
- With the selection in place use Ctrl X to cut or Ctrl C to copy it to the clipboard.

Paste - Once the data is safely in the clipboard move the cursor to the location where you want to move or copy the data. This can be a few characters away or it can be in a different file or directory. Position the mouse pointer where you want the data to go and do one of the following:

- Use Edit|Paste in the Edit menu.
- Right click the destination and use Paste from the right-click menu.
- For text, position the text cursor where you want the text to go, or click the mouse where you want the text to go and then press Ctrl V.

Drag and Drop - It is also possible press and hold the left mouse button with the cursor within the selection and while holding the button down drag the mouse to the destination location. I have to warn you that if you let up on the mouse button at all along the way your data will be dumped into whatever it is over at the time. I'm not a big fan of the drag and drop (drag and fumble) technique and I don't recommend it.