

Technology Tips

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Question:

The CD writer in my new computer will take either CD-R or CD-RW disks. What's the difference between a CD-R and a CD-RW? Does it matter which one I use? Should I use Easy CD Creator or Direct CD to record the files?



Answer:

Deciding when to use a CD-R versus a CD-RW is confusing for people new to CD burning. Yes, they are different. Yes, there are clear reasons for choosing one over the other. If you want to share files with people who have older computers with plain CD drives, you must use a CD-R and record the CD a certain way. Here is a quick summary:

- 1 A **CD-RW** is much like a floppy disk. You use a special program such as Direct CD to format the CD-RW unless you buy pre-formatted disks. Once the disk is formatted, you do not need a special program to save, modify or delete files on the disk. As long as Direct CD or a similar program is installed, you can save, modify and delete files on a CD-RW using Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Windows Explorer or any other Windows program. The limitation of a CD-RW disk is that you can only share it with other people who have a CD writer because most plain old CD drives cannot read a CD-RW disk.

Bottom line: A CD-RW is the best choice when you are transferring files between computers with CD writer drives in them. It is also a good choice for backing up the files on a computer with a CD writer drive. It is not a good choice for sharing files with people who have computers with plain old CD drives.

- 2 A **CD-R** only allows you to record files but it is the best way to share files with others. To make a CD that is readable in older CD drives, you must use a special program such as Easy CD Creator to record the files. In Easy CD Creator, choose the "data cd" option for sharing files with other computers. Whatever you do, do not format a CD-R and do not use Direct CD; this will make the CD-R unreadable in plain old CD drives.

There are two approaches to recording files to a CD-R with Easy CD Creator or a similar program. You can record all of the files in one session and "close" the disk. Or you can record the files in several different sessions as long as you do not close the disk. Old CD drives may only read the kind of CD-R that is recorded in one session and closed. (Some old CD drives refuse to read any kind of CD-R.) Newer CD drives that are designated "multi-read" will read CD-Rs recorded in several different sessions. Multi-read drives will also read CD-RWs.

Bottom line: If you are recording a CD that must be readable on an older computer with a plain old CD drive, the best choice is to use a CD-R, employ a program like Easy CD Creator to record all of the files in one session and close or finalize the CD. Do not use Direct CD and do not format the disk.

Summary Comparison

	CD-RW	CD-R
Format?	Yes, with a program like Direct CD	No
Record, modify, delete files?	Record, modify & delete	Record only
Re-usable many times?	Yes	No
Special program to record files?	No, use any Windows program (if program like Direct CD is installed)	Yes, use a program like Easy CD Creator
Readable in plain old CD drive?	No	Yes, especially if recorded in one session and closed

Note: Easy CD Creator is a popular CD writing program developed by a company called Adaptec. Direct CD is usually bundled with Easy CD Creator. Adaptec recently spun-off its CD software division into a company called Roxio. Version 3 or 4 of Easy CD Creator is commonly bundled with CD writer drives. Version 5 was released in 2001. Versions 4 and 5 will run on Windows 2000 but both require patches. Be sure to visit Roxio's web site (<http://www.roxio.com>) for more information.