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Importing a database with phpMyAdmin, and the size limit that stops you

Export, Import & Backup

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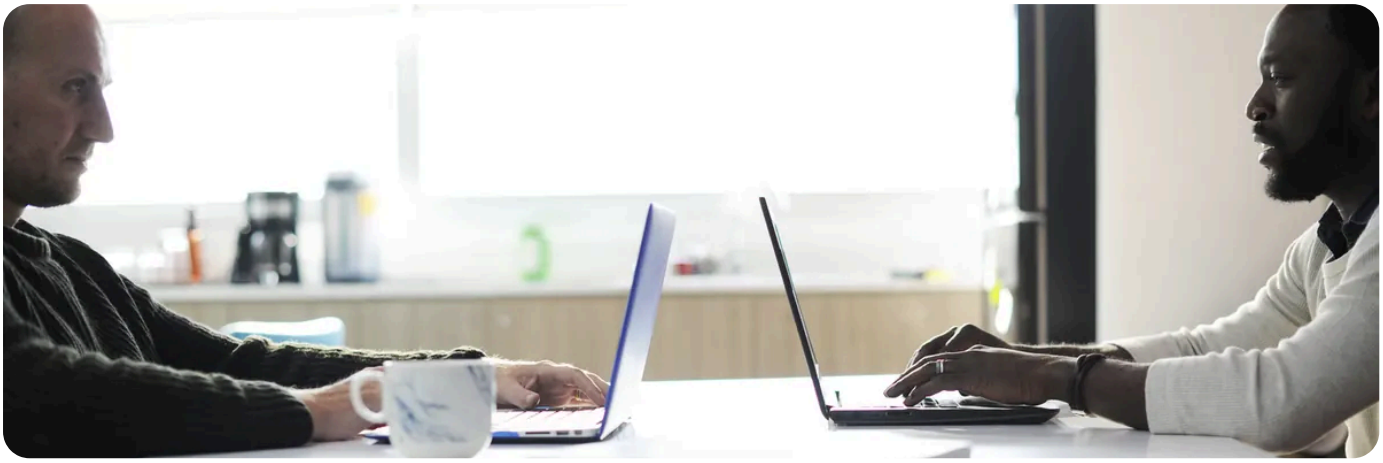
Importing a database with phpMyAdmin, and the size limit that stops you

Export, Import & Backup Created on **October 10, 2026** 3 min read



Create an empty database, open it in **phpMyAdmin**, go to the **Import** tab, choose the file (`.sql` , `.zip` or `.gz`) and click **Import** (or **Go**). If the file is bigger than the **maximum size** shown above the file field, the import will not start. That limit stops almost everybody at least once.

Step by step

1. If you do not have the database yet, create it with its user. See **creating a user and giving it the right privileges**.
2. In cPanel open **phpMyAdmin** and click the name of the **empty** database in the left column.
3. Click **Import**. Note the **maximum size** written near the file field.
4. Choose the file. phpMyAdmin reads compressed files (`.gz` and `.zip`) without you unpacking them first. Leave the character set on **utf-8**.
5. Click **Import** and wait for the green success message. Then check that the tables appear in the left column.

When it fails, and what to do

Symptom	Cause	Fix
The file is refused because of its size	It is bigger than the phpMyAdmin limit.	Compress it to `.gz` or `.zip` (SQL compresses very well) or split it. As a last resort, import over SSH.

Symptom	Cause	Fix
The page stops or times out halfway	The import took longer than the server lets a page run.	Split the file into parts or use SSH. Do not just reload blindly: first look at how many tables made it in.
#1273 Unknown collation	The copy comes from MySQL 8.	Replace `utf8mb4_0900_ai_ci` with `utf8mb4_unicode_ci` in the file.
#1227 Access denied, mentioning DEFINER	The file creates views or routines as the old user.	Delete the `DEFINER=...` clauses from the file.
#1062 Duplicate entry	The database was not empty.	Empty it first. See **emptying without deleting**.

The limit belongs to the panel's phpMyAdmin,
and as a rule it does not move when you change the PHP version or the limits of *your* site. Do not waste time editing `.user.ini` to raise it. If the file is large, change the method instead of trying to change the limit.

Before you press Import

Three checks save a lot of trouble. **First,** confirm you are inside the right database: the import goes into the database that is open, and from the start page phpMyAdmin tries to create whatever databases the file mentions. **Second,** open the file and look for `CREATE DATABASE` and `USE` lines: the database name in your cPanel carries the account prefix, so delete those lines. **Third,** if you are importing into a database that already holds data, export what is there first, so you can go back.

The safe route for big files is SSH:
`Mysql -u user -p database_name < copy.sql`. See **importing a large database over SSH**.

NEED A HAND?

Import never finishes, or the error is not one of these? Tell us the exact error and the file size and we will look.

Open a support ticket →

SEE ALSO

- **Importing a large database over SSH** →
- **Exporting a database with phpMyAdmin** →

Character sets: utf8mb4, collation, and the question marks in your text

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TAX ID (NIF)	500 260 5724
COMMERCIAL REGISTRATION NO.	26464-25/250724
REGISTERED OFFICE	Rua Direita do Patriota, Bairro Dangereux Belas, Luanda, Angola
CONTACT	info@interweb.ao · +244 942 011 191 · www.interweb.ao
OPENING HOURS	Monday to Friday - 08 AM to 04 PM Saturday & Sunday - Closed

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