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Backing up or restoring only some tables of a database

Export, Import & Backup

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Backing up or restoring only some tables of a database

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



It is not always worth copying the whole database. Before updating a plugin, deleting old orders or fiddling with a table, a copy of **just the tables you are about to touch** is enough. There are two ways: in phpMyAdmin, picking the tables, or on the command line, with their names after the database.

In phpMyAdmin

1. In cPanel open **phpMyAdmin** and pick the database.
2. On the **Structure** tab, tick the boxes of the tables you want. Under the list, in “with selected”, choose **Export**.
3. Alternatively open the **Export** tab, pick the **Custom** method and, in the tables box, select only the ones you need.
4. Leave the format on **SQL**. If you will restore into a database that already has these tables, tick the option that adds *DROP TABLE*; otherwise the import trips over the existing tables.
5. Save the file on your computer. The article **exporting with phpMyAdmin** explains the rest of the screen.

On the command line (SSH or the cPanel Terminal)

With access to a terminal, the table names go after the database name. The names `abc_user` and `abc_database` are examples: use your own, with the account prefix.

What you want	The command
Just two tables	`mysqldump -u abc_user -p abc_database wp_posts wp_postmeta > posts.sql`

What you want	The command
Everything except one table	`mysqldump -u abc_user -p --ignore-table=abc_database.wp_options abc_database > rest.sql`
Structure only, no data	`mysqldump -u abc_user -p --no-data abc_database > structure.sql`
Restoring the file	`mysql -u abc_user -p abc_database < posts.sql`

The `-p` asks for the password at the terminal, without leaving it written in the history. The full backup, with `--single-transaction` and compression, is in **backing up with mysqldump and restoring the copy**.

Restoring a file like this replaces the tables it carries.
By default the copy starts by dropping each table (`DROP TABLE`) and creating it again. Everything that changed in those tables since the copy is lost. If in doubt, restore first into a test database you created in cPanel and compare.

A good habit: put the date in the file name (for example `posts-2026-10-10.sql`) and keep it outside the site's public folder. A file like this holds all the table's data, encrypted user passwords included, and must not sit where anyone who guesses the address can reach it.

Related tables travel as a group.
In a shop, orders live in several tables at once. Restoring one without the others leaves inconsistent data: orders with no lines, products with no price. Copy and restore the whole group, main table and helpers together.

Need a table as it was yesterday, not today?
The account's daily copies hold the whole database, and you can restore from there. See **how to restore your data with JetBackup**. For a copy of your own, outside the panel: **making and keeping your own backup**.

NEED A HAND?

Want help choosing what to copy before a big change? Tell us the application and the table.

Open a support ticket →

SEE ALSO

- **Exporting a database with phpMyAdmin**
- **Backing up with mysqldump and pg_dump, and restoring the copy**
- **Importing with phpMyAdmin, and the size limit that stops you**
- **Making and keeping your own backup, and testing that it works**

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