

# Buying and Using a Flash Drive

It has been more than 40 years since personal computers were introduced to the public. At that time, Floppy discs were the permanent storage medium of choice. The computer 'booted' its Operating System from a floppy disc and stored your digitized information on a floppy disc. The three most popular sizes of floppy were 8", 5.25" and 3.5". In 2000 the world was introduced to a 'Flash Drive'. The Flash Drive contained a solid state 'flash' memory, and the 'drive' electronics to allow a computer to write information *TO* the memory and read information *FROM* the memory. The Flash Drive also included a 'USB' connector which, when plugged into a devices USB 'Port', became the communication path between the memory and the device.

Floppy discs were a magnetic device that was both physically fragile and could be corrupted with a common magnet. Optical storage such as CDs and DVDs proved superior to floppies as they were physically more robust and could store much more data. Unfortunately the optical medium required a physical mechanism larger and heavier than the size of the floppy disc itself to both write and read information.

Flash drives, although not waterproof, are even more robust than optical discs. Some versions can survive being run over by a truck. They are also quite small with mini versions to be carried on a key chain. Over the past 20+ years the flash drive has become a replacement for the floppy.

## **Your new Flash Drive**

Before you purchase a Flash Drive, there are a few characteristics you should be aware of. First, your device must have a USB port for you to be able to use a Flash Drive.

USB (*Universal Serial Bus*) is an industry standard that defines connector shape and communication speed. **IF YOU CHOOSE THE WRONG CONNECTOR SHAPE, THE FLASH DRIVE WILL NOT WORK WITH YOUR DEVICE!**

At the time of this writing there are two different shapes for the computer connector: a rectangle with square corners (*USB-A*) and a rectangle with round ends (*USB-C*). Make sure you know the shape of your device's USB

port! Additionally, some non-computing devices like printers, cameras and battery chargers have USB-B (*square-ish*), Mini (*small*) and Micro (*smallest*) shapes.

Communication speed is increasing as technology evolves. The slowest flash drive currently available is USB2 at a maximum theoretical speed of 480 Mbps (*megabits per second*). USB3 at 5Gbps (Gigabits per second), USB3.1 at 10 Gbps and USB3.2 at 20 Gbps. Flash drives with same connector are all backwards compatible, meaning they will all work with slower speeds than they were manufactured for.

Most manufacturers (*HP is an exception*) follow an unspecified standard of the plastic 'tongue' in the USB-A connector. Grey or Black means USB2 and Blue is USB3 and USB3.1. If you are uncertain of your connector's speed, read the user manual for your device!

### **Personalization**

When you choose to plug any USB storage system such as your new flash drive (*or an external hard drive*), into your computer's USB port, the operating system will assign a letter to it. The letters are chosen in order of appearance to the operating system, NOT because that flash drive has that specific letter!!! To be able to identify YOUR flash drive you need to rename it. The name that appears when you plug in a new flash drive is *usually* the name of the manufacturer. For instance: I plugged in a new Lexar S80 USB3.1 flash drive into one of my computers. The file manager's navigation pane (*left pane*) displayed: Lexar (F.).

To **Rename** your Flash Drive, Navigate **to**, and **context menu click** the **name** currently assigned to the flash drive. Then, from the pop-up menu, select **Rename**.

A text box appears with the current folder name already *highlighted*.

**Hands OFF your pointing device!** Just type the name you want the folder to have, AND THEN POKE **ENTER** to tell the computer you are done typing!