

Three ways to Save Video from the Internet

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Tip 1: [Capture with Web Sites](#)

Tip 2: [Capture with a Firefox extension](#)

Tip 3: [Capture with Commercial Programs](#)

Capture with Web Sites

If you're a regular YouTube viewer, you've probably experienced the frustration of trying to save your favorite videos. The movies are presented in the Flash Video (FLV) format and can't be downloaded with a simple right-click. Flash Video makes highly-compressed streaming video possible, and many Web sites use it because it displays well in most browsers.

One of the easiest ways to capture videos is with KeepVid a download-helper site. It's completely browser-based, so there's no software to download. After you've found a video you want to save, enter that video's URL at KeepVid, then select its originating site from a pop-up list. KeepVid works with a wide variety of video sites. You can reuse its sites list to discover new places to surf for videos.

When you enter your video URLs, KeepVid prompts you to change the suffix of the downloaded file (so that instead of Video.htm, you download Video.flv). The only problem with the site is it leaves FLV files in their original format, so downloading alone isn't enough. To view your file, you'll need to either download a FLV viewer such as FLV Player, or convert your file into a more usable format (for conversion help, see Tip 2).

Another good site for saving online video is YouTube Downloader, a simpler option that only works with YouTube. In this site, you enter the URL of the page with your chosen video and click "Get Download URL." You'll then create a URL for the video itself. Click that new link to download the video file. You shouldn't need to add a FLV suffix, but it's a possible fix if you have problems. Again, you'll either need to convert this file or download a FLV viewer to play it.

Capture with a Firefox Extension

There are many reasons why Mozilla Firefox is our favorite Web browser, and one is because it makes grabbing online videos so easy. This tip for Firefox works with both the Windows and Mac versions. Adding new features and customizing Firefox is simple to do with extensions. Extensions are typically created by other users and are simple to search for and add. To see your browser's list of extensions, select Extensions from the Tools pull-down menu or hit the Ctrl+Shift+E key combination. You can then click "Install" to add extensions you've downloaded locally.

A fantastic extension called Video Downloader makes it easy to download and store video from more than 60 streaming-video sites. After installing Video Downloader, you'll see a new icon in the bottom-right corner of your browser interface; click it when you have a video page open to save that video. The resulting pop-up window directs you to right-click a download link, then change the suffix to FLV. That works, but in our testing so did left-clicking the link. Plus, if we left-clicked, we didn't have to change the suffix.

Once you've saved your file, you'll need a way to view it. Mac users are in luck, because there's a great

donation-ware video-conversion program called iSquint all ready for you. It's not time-limited, so you can use it indefinitely without paying, but if you like it, you should throw the programmer a couple bucks.

To use iSquint, open it and drag your downloaded file into the work area. You can choose the quality of your final video, the format (standard MPEG-4 or the H.264 codec), and optimize it to play on a video iPod. Nice. We love the program's opinionated progress messages. Don't miss the Help menu, which is clever, although not actually helpful.

We haven't found a similar free video-conversion application for Windows (if you know of one, tell us), but CinemaForge is a good, inexpensive tool (free to try; \$24.95 to buy). Windows users also can download a FLV viewer, such as the aforementioned FLV Player, a donation-supported free program.

Capture with Commercial Programs

When it comes to inexpensive video capture, two programs rule the arena: SnagIt for Windows and SnapzPro X 2 for Macs. These programs cost more than the other solutions here, but they're also much more versatile and are good buys if you want to capture more than just Web site videos. SnagIt, put out by TechSmith, costs \$39 and provides a simple way to capture anything that finds its way onto your screen. To grab video, select the Record Screen Video option from the main screen and click the microphone icon in the Options box to grab the audio, as well. When you've got your chosen video in place, click SnagIt's big, red record button. The SnagIt interface then disappears and you're prompted to drag a rectangle across the area you want to save. Press the Start button in the pop-up window and then start your video. When you're done, finish recording by pressing the program's hot key (PrintScreen, by default). You'll then return to the SnagIt interface where the program prompts you to save your creation.

Ambrosia Software offers two versions of SnapzPro X 2, but you'll need the more expensive \$69 version for movie capture. The controls can be a bit confusing at first, but read through the included PDF manual and you'll have it in no time. SnapzPro is set to launch at start-up and run in the background by default. You can activate it by pressing the default hot-key combination, which is Ctrl+Shift+3, unless you change it. Click the video button, place the outlined capture square over your video, and then customize the video settings. Be sure to select Mac Audio Track if you want to include the sound. Double-click within the video-capture area to start recording, then press play on the video. When you're done, press the hot keys again to stop recording.

You'll be prompted to set the audio- and video-compression information before the program creates your video. We like the degree of options, although we wish the program allowed users to name the file at this point. As is, it creates a default name based on the program it captures from.