Be prepared - Create a Windows 10 Recovery Drive

By Greg Shultz | January 13, 2016

Windows 10 offers two ways to create a Recovery Drive: on a USB flash drive and on an optical disc. This walk-through demonstrates both methods.

A Recovery Drive lets you boot your system (when it won't otherwise boot) and easily access a number of recovery and troubleshooting tools to revive a failing Windows 10 system. If you haven't done so yet, you need to create a Windows 10 Recovery Drive. That way, you'll be prepared should you encounter a problem with your Windows 10 installation. In Windows 10, you can create a Recovery Drive on a USB flash drive as well as on an optical disc. While both procedures produce the same recovery tool, they are created from different user interfaces. The USB flash drive version is created using a stand-alone tool; the optical disc is created from the Backup And Restore (Windows 7) user interface. Why Microsoft didn't unify the process under one roof, I don't know. In this article, I'll show you both ways to create a Windows 10 Recovery Drive.

Caveat

Regardless of whether you are creating a Recovery Drive on a USB flash drive or on an optical disc, it is important to remember that a Recovery Drive is *bit specific*. In other words, if you create a Recovery Drive in a 64-bit version of Windows 10, you can't use that drive to boot up and repair a 32-bit version of Windows 10. Likewise, you can't use a 32-bit Recovery Drive in a 64-bit Windows 10 system.

Using a USB flash drive

The USB flash drive you use will become a dedicated Recovery Drive—you won't be able to use it for anything else. In its base configuration, the contents of the Recovery Drive will require about 330 MB of space. However, if you choose to include the system files, which will allow you to use the Recovery Drive to reinstall Windows, you'll need more space. Thus, if you are creating a basic Recovery Drive, you can use a 1GB USB flash drive. (If you have a smaller drive, from the old days, you could use it as well.) If you are going to add system files, you'll want at least a 16GB USB flash drive.

To launch the USB flash drive version of the Recovery Drive creation tool, open the Control Panel and type *Recovery* in the search box. When the search is complete (a matter of seconds), click Create A Recovery Drive, as shown in **Figure A**. You'll then encounter a UAC, as shown in **Figure B**, and will need to click Yes to continue. As you can see in the UAC dialog box, the program name is listed as Recovery Media Creator.
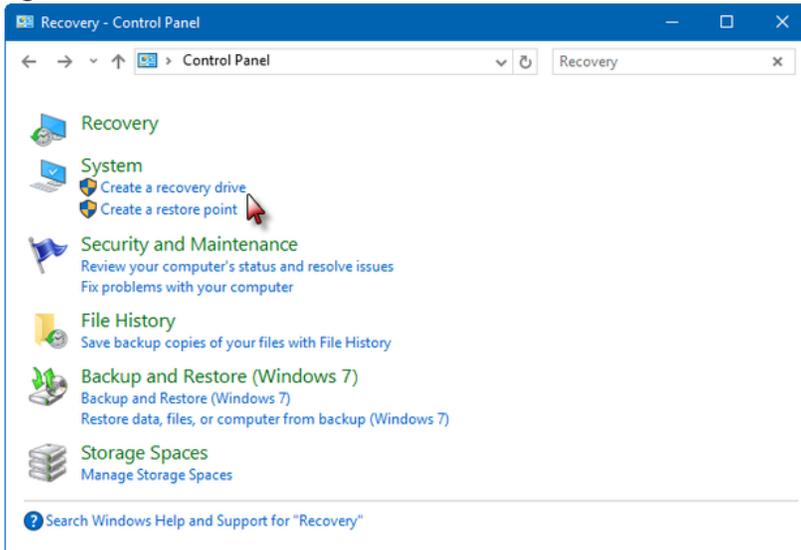
Figure A   **Figure B**
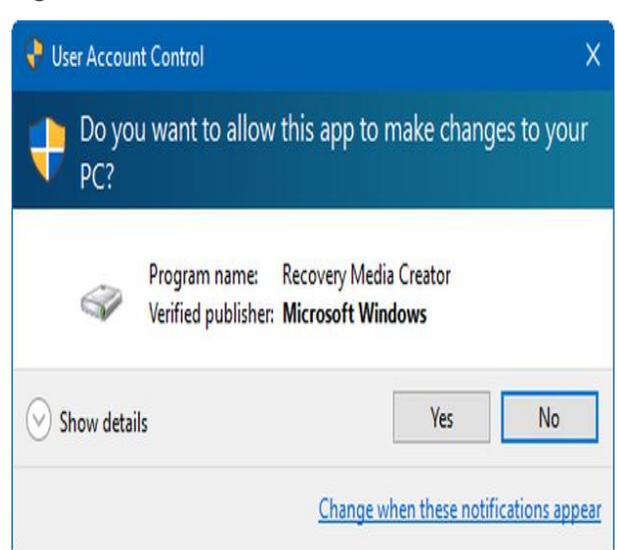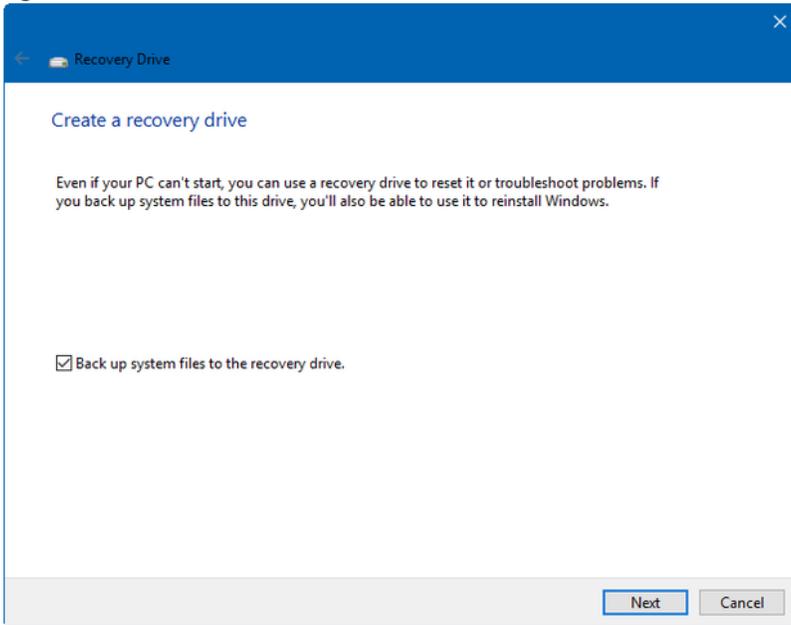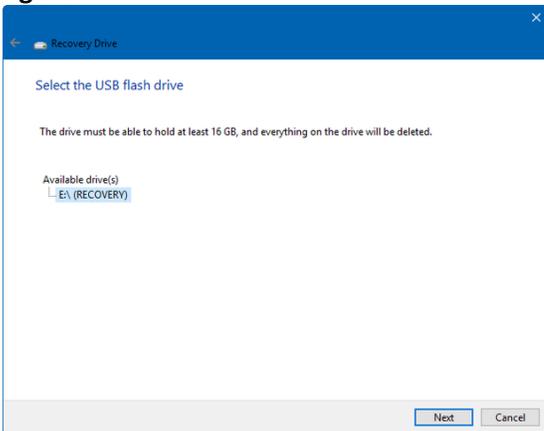
Figure C

In a moment, you'll see the first screen in the Recovery Drive wizard, shown in **Figure C**. As you can see, backing up system files is optional. (If you select this option, you'll need a sufficiently large capacity USB flash drive.)

For this example, I'm going to back up system files. To continue, click Next.

In the next screen of the Recovery Drive wizard, you'll be prompted to select your USB drive. If the drive isn't already connected to your system, insert it now. Windows 10 will then rescan the system and display your drive. Since I am backing up the system files, the wizard informs me that the drive will need to hold at least 16 GB and that everything currently on the drive will be deleted (**Figure D**).

Remember, this will become a dedicated Recovery Drive. After you select your USB flash drive, click Next.

Figure D

In the next screen, shown in **Figure E**, you are once again warned that the contents of the drive will be deleted.
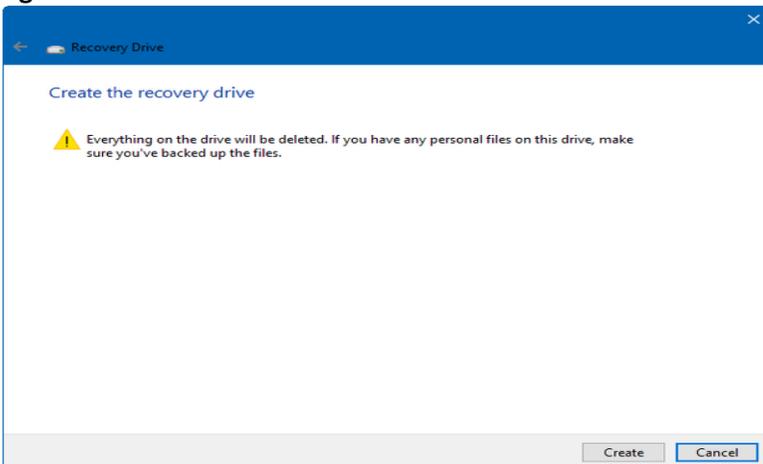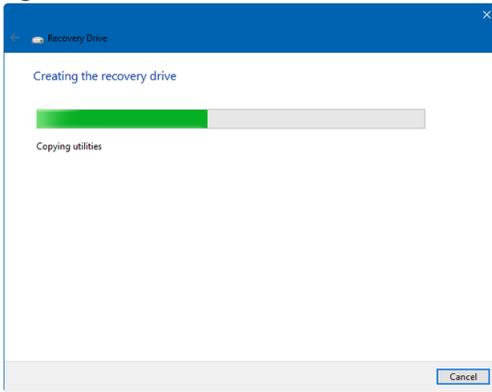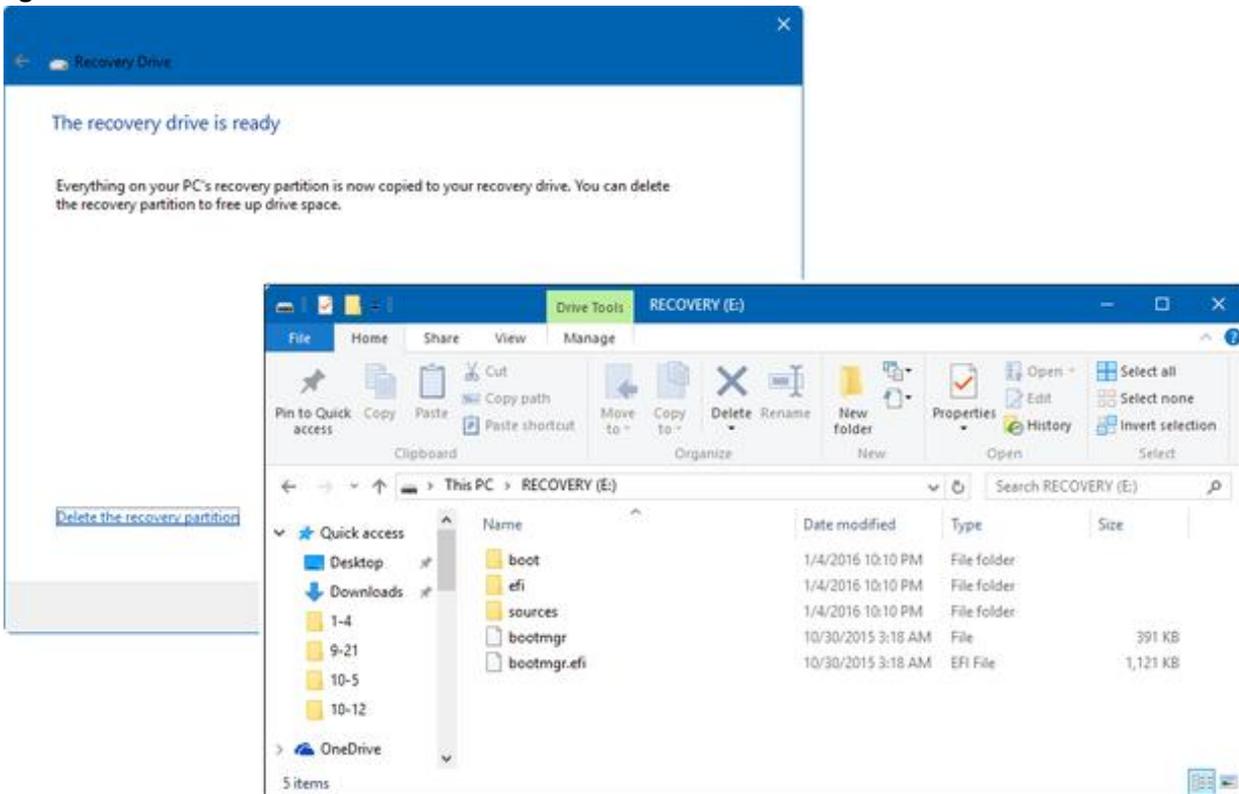
Figure E

Figure F

To continue, click the Create button. When you do, the Recovery Drive tool will format the drive and begin copying files to the drive, as shown in **Figure F**. If you are creating a basic Recovery Disk, the process will just take a <u>few minutes</u>. If you are including a system files, go get yourself a cup of coffee—<u>it could take as long as an hour</u>.

Figure G

When the process is complete, you'll be given the option to delete the recovery partition on your hard disk if you chose to include system files. You can open the drive in File Explorer so that you can see the contents, as shown in **Figure G**. You can then close the Recovery Drive wizard by clicking the Finish button.

Using an optical disc (CD)

If you want to use an optical disc as a Recovery Drive, you'll use the old System Repair Disc tool from Windows 7. Keep in mind that while you will use this legacy interface, you will indeed end up with the same set of Windows 10 Recovery Drive tools as are on a USB flash drive created with the Recovery Drive wizard.

To launch the optical disc version of the Recovery Drive creation tool, open the Control Panel and type *Windows 7* in the search box. When the search is complete (a matter of seconds), click the Backup And Restore (Windows 7) link, shown in **Figure H**.
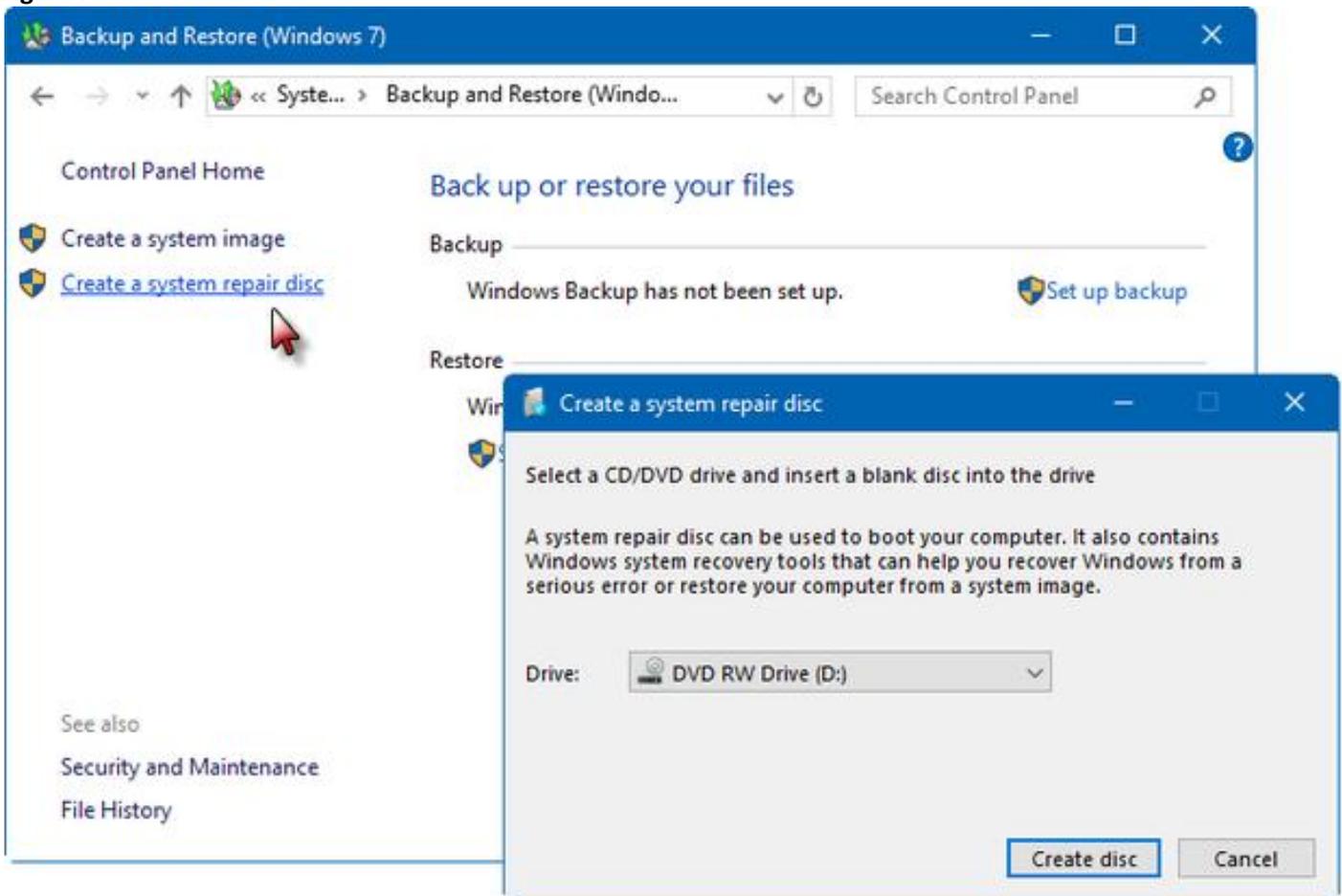
Figure H
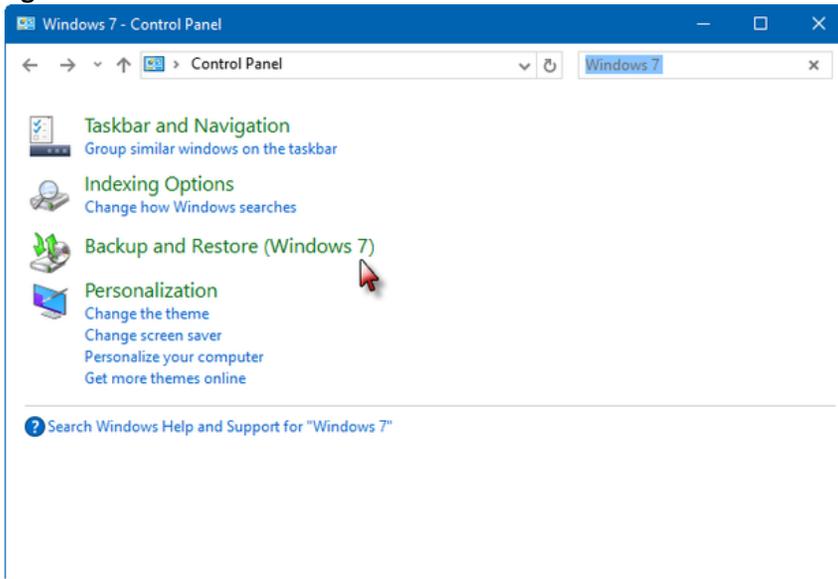
**Accessing the Backup And Recovery (Windows 7) tool from the Control Panel is easy.**

Now, when you see the Backup And Restore (Windows 7) user interface, select the Create A System Repair Disc command on the left side of the screen to launch the creation tool. This process is shown in **Figure I**.

Figure I

To start the procedure, click the Create Disc button. The program will begin the process of creating the disc, as shown in **Figure J**.

Figure J
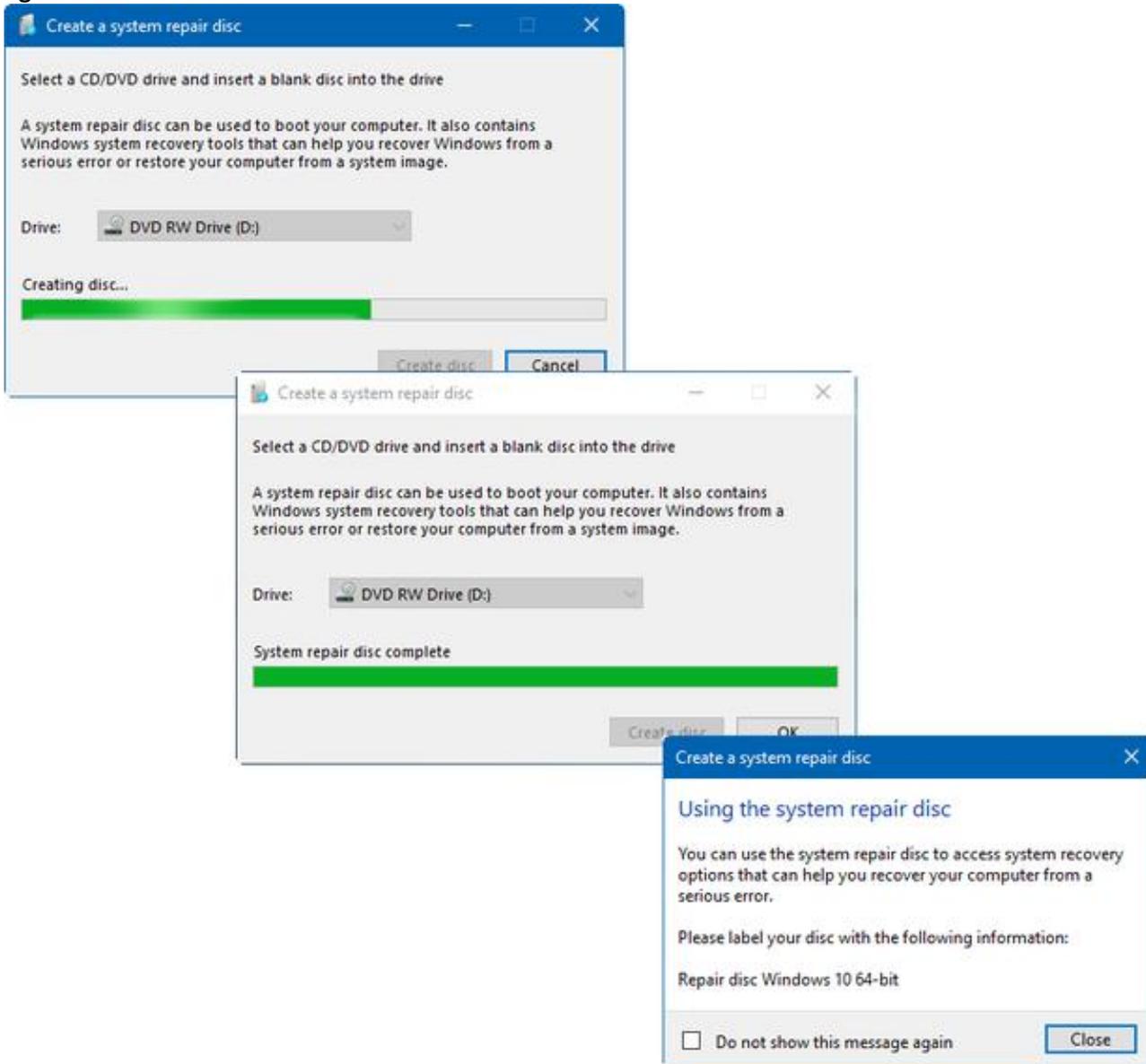
How do you use a recovery drive created on Windows 10

1. Insert the USB recovery drive and turn on your PC.
2. Find out your Boot Menu procedure for booting from the USB Drive (See below)
3. Choose US Keyboard (Click on US).
4. On the **Choose an option** screen, select **Troubleshoot**, **Advanced Options**, **StartUp Repair**, then **Windows 10.** If you don't see the **Choose your option** screen, your PC might not be set up to boot from a drive. See below for info on how to change your PC's boot order.

- Restore from a system restore point by selecting **Advanced Options** > **System Restore**. This will remove recently installed apps, drivers, and updates that might be causing your PC problems, but it won't affect your personal files.
- Select **Reset this PC** and then choose to keep or remove your files. For info on how resetting affects your apps and settings, see the Reset your PC section of this topic.
- If resetting doesn't work, you can also **Recover from a drive**. This will reinstall Windows 10. It'll also remove your personal files, apps and drivers you installed, and changes you made to settings.

Note: If you chose not to back up system files when you created your recovery drive, Reset this PC and Recover from a drive won't be available.

BE VERY CAREFUL TO CHOOSE THE OPTIONS YOU WANT, SO THAT YOU DON'T ACCIDENTLY RESET YOUR PC!

How to find your Boot Menu procedure:

Search Google for "Boot Menu Key XXXX" where XXXX is your computer manufacturer.
Examples:
Dell: Hit F12 immediately after turning on your PC. Then hit F12 again to get boot options. If you had inserted your USB before starting, you should see the USB Drive as an option. Use the **Arrow Keys** to get to the USB option and hit Enter

HP: Hit F12 as soon as the HP screen appears to get Boot Menu. Then follow directions under Dell.

Most manufacturers have a different process to get to the Boot Screen. Some processes are even different within PC types, i.e. different process for laptops than for desktops.