External Hard Drive for Data Backup
With hard drive costs under $1/GB a wise investment is an external hard drive for backing up your data or moving it between devices. Typically the hard drive needs to be formatted before it can be used.

This step by step tutorial shows you how to format your external drive using XP.

Plug in your drive to the power source and attach the USB or Firewire cable to your computer.

Find the External Drive
Right click on My Computer then select Manage.

Ensure the new external hard drive is powered on from its remote power supply with the USB or Firewire cable supplied attached to your computer.

Select Disk Management
Select the Disk Management option from the left pull down menu.

Windows XP should identify all the existing system drives on the right including the new remote external drive. If you cannot see the remote drive, try unplugging and replugging the USB connection.

Select the External HD to format
In the drives found panel on the right side, right click on the external hard drive to be formatted. In the pulldown menu left click on New Partition.
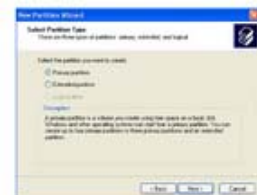
IMPORTANT -
Make absolutely certain that you do not accidentally select one of your existing drives or you will erase everything on it.

Launch New Partition Wizard
After right clicking on the external drive the New Partition Wizard will launch.

Click NEXT after making a selection on each screen that follows.

Specify Primary Partition
In this example we will select the default settings for making one large drive but you can select options to partition the external drive into more than one logical drive if you wish.

Specify the Size
For a single drive select the maximum size available to use all the space. The maximum size will be slightly less than the drive capacity like this example for a 160 GB hard drive in the external enclosure.
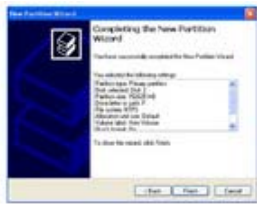
Choose a Drive Letter
Select the default as the next available drive letter. This is the letter assigned when the File Manager identifies the drive.
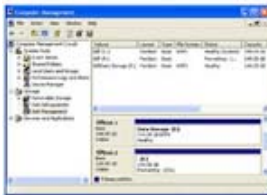
Specify Format Options
Choose NTFS file structure and the default formatting options for most situations.

Confirm
Review the settings. This is the last chance to abort.

Click the Finish button to begin formatting the external hard drive.

Start the Formatting Operation
It takes about 20 seconds for anything to happen. The progress information in the right panel for the external drive should say Drive Healthy then show progress in %.

It can take over an hour to format a large drive. You can minimize the window and do something else while the formatting is in progress.

Formatting Compete
On completion, the drive status panel will show the new assigned drive letter, available capacity and status as Healthy.

Rename External Hard Drive
Close the formatting screen on completion.
Launch My Computer.
Right click on the new external hard drive.
Select Rename.
Type in a new identification like External Backup.

In Windows Explorer it is easy to drag and drop a complete hard disk to your new formatted external drive to ensure you never lose your valuable files in the event of a hard disk failure.