Splitting a USB Flash Drive into Mac and Windows Partitions
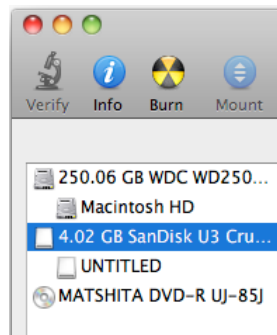
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USB flash memory sticks are cheap and ubiquitous. Today, even the smallest sticks hold 2 gigabytes and cost less than $10, so they're a great way to back-up important files before you leave on a trip, move files from one machine to another, or share files with friends.
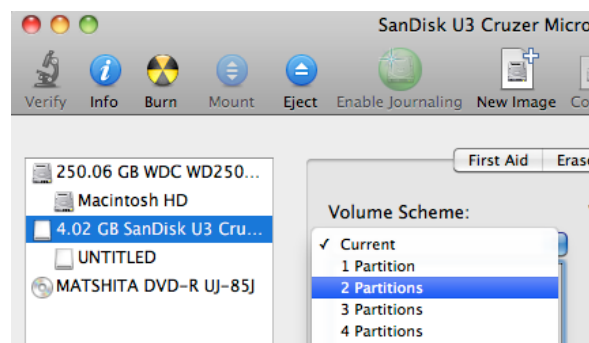
If you have both Macs and PCs in your household, you can divide the space on a single USB flash drive into separate Mac and PC sections. Having a dedicated section for both operating systems makes things simpler for the PC user, since their OS can't read and write Mac-formatted disks natively. The Mac user can read, write and even format an MS-DOS disk, so they can use both sides of this dual-format setup.
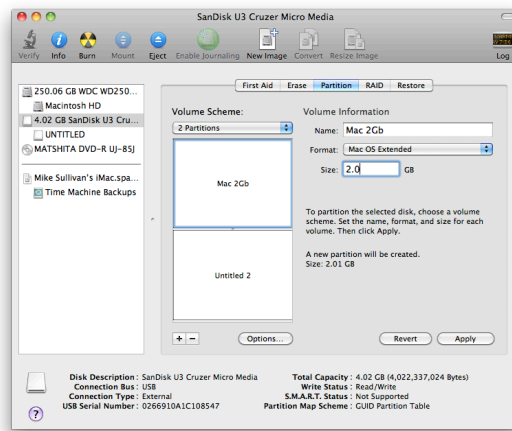
Here's how:

1. Insert the USB flash memory stick into one of the built-in USB ports on your Mac.

2. **MAKE SURE THERE IS NO DATA YOU WANT TO KEEP ON THE USB STICK!** This process will permanently erase ALL the data on the USB stick, and there is NO UNDO. Use the Finder to examine the contents of the USB stick and and back-up any data on the sticks that you want to save.

3. From the Finder, choose Utilities from the Go menu. The Utilities folder opens.

4. Double-click on Disk Utility.

5. When Disk Utility opens, find the USB flash memory stick listed in the left-hand pane and click once on the volume name (the topmost of the entries shown for that device).
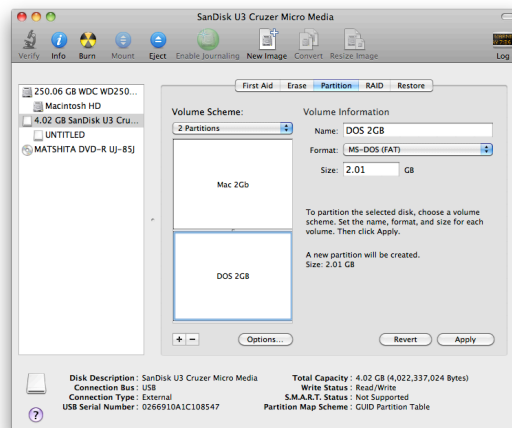

6. Click the "Partition" tab at the top of the right-hand pane.

7. Choose "2 Partitions" from the Volume Scheme drop-down list.

8. In the Volume Scheme diagram, click in the Untitled 1 area to select it.

9. In the Volume Information area, type a name to use for the Mac OS-formatted side of the USB memory stick. In the Format drop-down list, choose "Mac OS Extended." In the Size field, type the size in gigabytes you'd like to use for the Mac side of the memory stick.

10. In the Volume Scheme diagram, click in the Untitled 2 area to select it.

11. In the Volume Information area, type a name to use for the MS-DOS-formatted side of the USB memory stick. In the Format drop-down list, choose "MS-DOS (FAT)." In the Size field, type the size in gigabytes you'd like to use for the MS-DOS side of the memory stick.

12. Click Apply.

13. Confirm your settings shown in the Partition dialog warning, then click Partition.

Now, whenever you insert this USB memory stick into a Mac, TWO disks will appear in the Finder: the Mac partition and the MS-DOS partition. When you eject either of the two disks on your Mac, Finder will prompt you to eject just the partition you had selected when you ejected, or both partitions. Usually, you will want to eject both partitions, and then you may safely remove the USB memory stick from your Mac.

On a Windows PC, only the MS-DOS partition will be visible to the user, since a PC cannot natively read, write or format a Mac OS X disk.