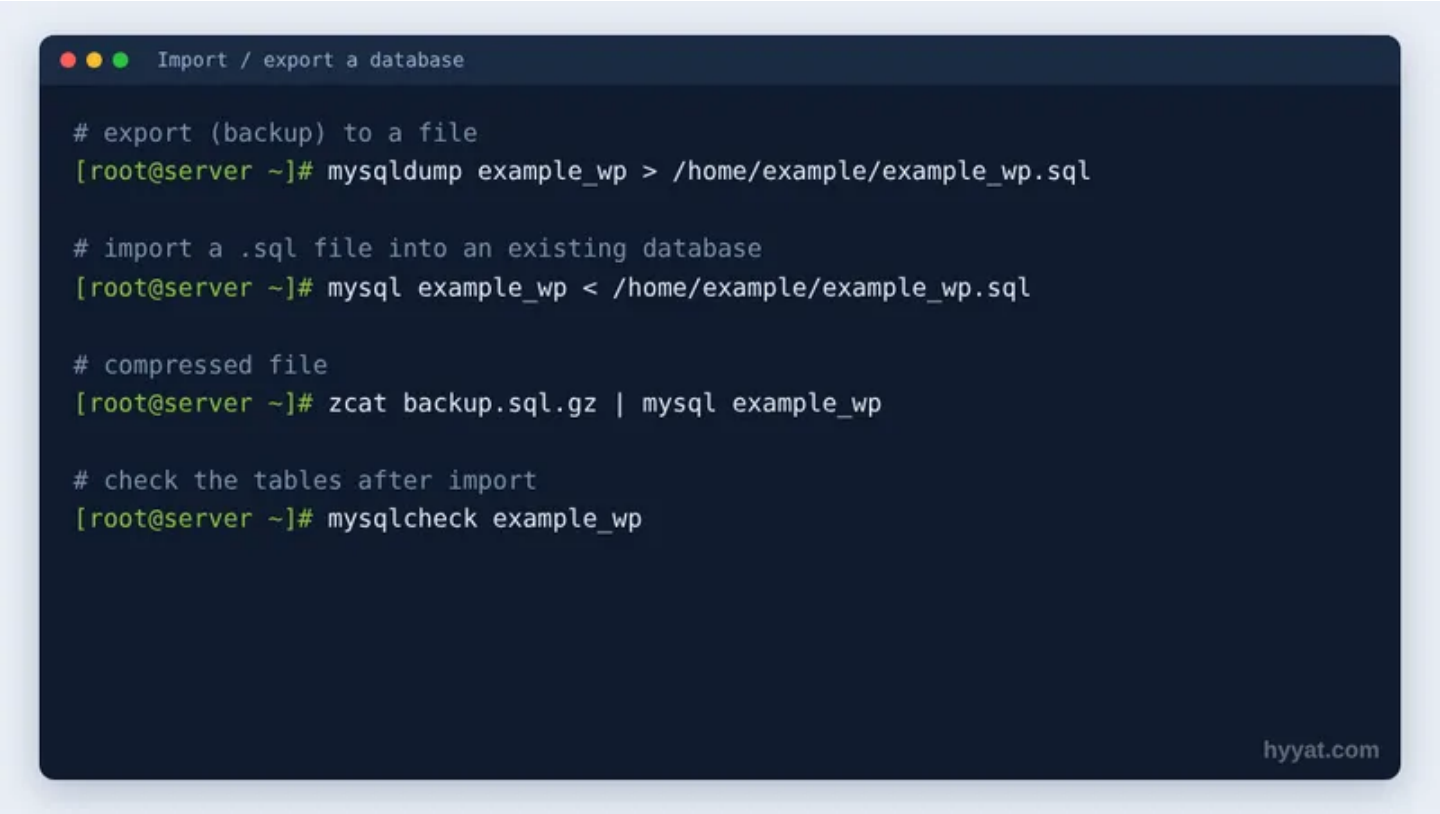
Importing and Exporting a Database from the Command Line: mysql and mysqldump for Large Files

Servers Without a Control Panel · https://www.hyyat.com/en/knowledgebase/import-mysql-database-ssh/

The two commands Export: `mysqldump db_name > file.sql`. Import into an existing database: `mysql db_name < file.sql`. Compressed: `zcat file.sql.gz | mysql db_name`. This route is not bound by phpMyAdmin’s upload limits.

Embedded media: https://www.hyyat.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/11/hyyat-srv-sqlimport-en.mp4?_=1

The idea: An SQL file is text holding the commands that rebuild tables and data. Exporting writes those commands to a file; importing runs them on another database. Over SSH the only size limit is disk space.



Exporting (a backup)

```
mysqldump example_wp > /home/example/example_wp.sql
mysqldump example_wp | gzip > /home/example/example_wp.sql.gz   # compressed
mysqldump --single-transaction example_wp > db.sql            # without locking InnoDB tables
```

`--single-transaction` helps for a live site: it takes a consistent copy without stopping writes to InnoDB tables.

Importing

1. **Create the database first** on a cPanel server, create it in the account's cPanel with its user so it shows in the interface.
2. **Upload the file** to the account's home over SFTP, not into public_html.
3. **Run the import** `mysql example_wp < /home/example/example_wp.sql`.
4. **Check** `mysqlcheck example_wp`, then open the site.
5. **Delete the file** the SQL file holds the whole site's data, so do not leave it on the server.

Import problems

Message	Fix
`MySQL server has gone away`	Raise max_allowed_packet in Edit Database Configuration in WHM
`Unknown collation: utf8mb4_0900_ai_ci`	The file came from MySQL 8 and the server runs MariaDB. Replace the collation with utf8mb4_unicode_ci in the file before importing
Arabic text shows as odd symbols	Set the encoding: `mysql --default-character-set=utf8mb4 db < file.sql`
`Table already exists`	The database is not empty. Import into a new one, or drop the tables first after a backup
`Access denied; you need SUPER privilege`	The file has a DEFINER for a missing user. Remove the DEFINER lines or export without them

Importing over a live site's database replaces its data. Take a mysqldump copy before importing over it.

If the file is small and you prefer a screen, phpMyAdmin is covered in import and export with phpMyAdmin, and its upload limits in raising the import size.

Moving a database directly between servers

If the two servers can reach each other over SSH, you can move the database with no intermediate file:

```
mysqldump example_wp | ssh root@203.0.113.20 "mysql example_wp"
```

It exports on this server and imports on the other in one step. Create the empty database on the target first. On a slow link, add compression: `mysqldump example_wp | gzip | ssh root@... "gunzip | mysql example_wp"`.

Import and export questions

How long does a large import take?
It depends on size, indexes and disk speed. Run it inside screen so it survives a dropped connection.

Can I export every database at once?
Yes, mysqldump --all-databases, but one file per database is easier for restoring a single site.

Is a mysqldump enough as a site backup?
It covers the database only. Files need copying too, or use a full cPanel backup.

Related guides

- Working with MySQL and MariaDB from the Command Line: Logging In, Querying, and Creating a Database and User
- Raising the phpMyAdmin Database Import Size on a cPanel Server: The Right Setting in WHM
- Export and Import a Database with phpMyAdmin in cPanel: Backups and Site Moves
- Automatic Backups in WHM (Backup Configuration): Daily, Weekly and an Off-Server Copy

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