

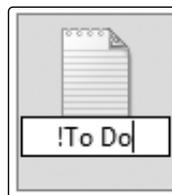
Name Your Files Carefully and They Should Always be Easy to Find!

This article shows you how to:

- ✓ Keep your files in order with nifty naming tricks
- ✓ Sort files in different ways to locate them more quickly
- ✓ Stay organised by being consistent in your choices of filename

Do you ever find yourself trawling through a jumble of files, trying to find the one you want but struggling to remember what you might have named it? When you have years'-worth of files on your PC, that's never a happy situation to find yourself in!

There are a few tricks you can use to track down a file when you're stumped on its name, and I'll explain those in this article. But there's really nothing to beat applying a little care and logic in choosing what you call your files, and I'll also give you some useful tips to help you pick the best filenames.



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The Vital First Step: Use Folders!

Windows creates four folders for you

When it comes to keeping your files organised, Windows gives you a head start by creating four folders for you – one each for general documents, pictures, music and videos. Depending on your version of Windows, these folders are named ‘Documents’ or ‘My Documents’, ‘Pictures’ or ‘My Pictures’, ‘Music’ or ‘My Music’, and ‘Videos’ or ‘My Videos’.

Use these folders to organise your files

It makes sense to take full advantage of these folders, putting all your picture files inside the Pictures folder, your music files in the Music folder, and so on. That’s a useful first step towards keeping things organised, and it ensures you should always know roughly where to look for a file you need. However, it’s not the whole story.

The folders could become chaotic...

Take the Documents folder: that’s obviously where you’ll end up keeping anything that isn’t a picture, music or video file, but that means you’ll keep an awful lot of different files there. It becomes a sort of ‘anything and everything’ folder.

...so create additional folders inside them

So a second step towards keeping things organised is to create folders inside the four given to you by Windows. For example, inside your Documents folder you might create folders named ‘Letters’, ‘Accounts’, ‘Family Tree’ and so on, just as you might use labelled cardboard folders to manage your household paperwork.

To create a folder inside the folder you’re currently viewing, press **Ctrl** + **Shift** + **N**, type a name for the new folder and press **Enter**. You can then move files into this folder by dragging them onto its icon. If you haven’t already organised your files like this, it really is worth the effort!

Still too many files?

However, it’s still not quite the whole story. Some of your folders are likely to contain quite a number of files, and perhaps various types of files. As an example, a ‘Family Tree’

folder might well contain photos, notes and research, To Do lists, PDFs and various other files. They all belong together, and that's the way you want to keep them, but when you're faced with dozens of files in one folder it can be tricky to find the one you need.

Fortunately, there are other things you can do to make your files easier to manage, and we'll explore those over the coming pages.

Try a Different Way: Sort Files by Date, Type or Size

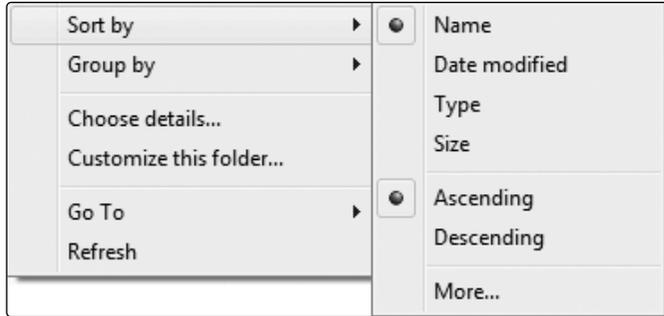
Whenever you open one of your folders to look inside it, you probably find that its files are sorted alphabetically by name. That's an arrangement that most of us prefer, but it's not the only way to sort them, and it's not always the best way. Windows offers several other sorting options, and sometimes – even just temporarily – it can be helpful to use one of those instead.

Use sort options to find files more easily

The way in which you sort your files into a different order varies according to which version of Windows you're using:

How to sort your files

- **Windows 10 or 8.1:** switch to the **View** tab on the Ribbon at the top of the folder window. In the 'Current view' group, click the **Sort by** button and choose the sort option you want to use from the first group of items on the menu that appears.
- **Windows 7:** press the **(Alt)** key to display the menu bar at the top of the folder window, then open the **View** menu. Move the mouse down to **Sort by** and choose the sort option you want to use from the first group of items on the submenu.



There are four basic sorting options available (although you'll occasionally see a few others, particularly in Windows 10 and 8.1). These are:

Alphabetically

- **Name:** the familiar arrangement in which your files are sorted alphabetically from A–Z.

By file size

- **Size:** this sorts your files according to their size, with the largest first. This can be useful if you know the file you want to find is particularly large or small.

From newest to oldest

- **Date modified or Modified:** this option will organise your files according to the date on which you last edited them (or the date they were created if they haven't been edited since then). The files changed most recently appear first. This is a handy way to find a file you were working on a few days ago if you can't remember what it was called, since you know it will appear first (or near-first) in the folder.

By grouping similar files together

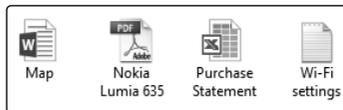
- **Type:** this will sort the folder's files into groups according to what type of file they are. The result is that all Word documents appear together, all JPEG photos appear together, all PDFs appear together, and so on. If you know you're looking for a Word document in this folder, for instance, you should track it down more quickly by having them all grouped together like this.

You can also choose to sort the files in the opposite order via the **Ascending** and **Descending** items on the same menu. For example, if your files are sorted by **Name** and you choose **Descending**, they'll be arranged from **Z–A**; if they're sorted by **Date modified** and you choose **Ascending**, they'll be arranged from oldest to newest.



Use Details View to See More Information at Once

It's all very well to be able to sort your files by date, size or type, but you're probably still looking at normal-sized icons which show only the names of your files. There's nothing to tell you what those dates, sizes or types actually are. This is known as 'Medium icons' view.



Typical icons show only a file's name

Here's an option you might find more useful at times: to switch to 'Details' view. Using this option, your files are presented in a list with information about each file arranged in columns beside its name.

Details view tells you more

Name	Date modified	Type	Size
Map	25/04/2013 11:49	Microsoft Word Document	342 KB
Nokia Lumia 635	18/05/2010 18:05	Adobe Acrobat Document	8,309 KB
Purchase Statement	22/05/2008 10:17	Microsoft Excel 97-2003 Worksheet	30 KB
Wi-Fi settings	06/03/2009 20:16	Text Document	1 KB

To switch to Details view, do the following:

- **Windows 10 or 8.1:** switch to the **View** tab on the Ribbon. In the 'Layout' group, click on **Details**.

- **Windows 7:** press the **Alt** key to display the menu bar at the top of the folder window, then open the View menu and click on **Details**.

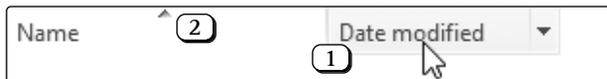


In the same place, you'll also see the 'Medium icons' view, and you can switch back to that – or to one of the other views – just as easily.

Along with showing you more information about your files, Details view has two extra benefits:

Sort quickly by clicking a column header

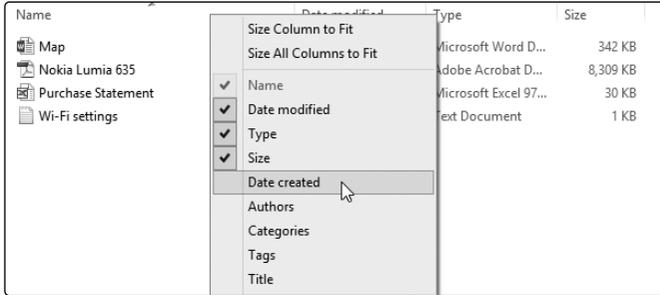
- **Quicker sorting:** you can sort your files in different ways just by clicking the header bars at the top of the columns. For example, to sort your files by date, click the **Date modified** (or **Modified**) header bar **1**. A little arrowhead **2** in one of the headers shows you how the files are currently sorted (by Name in the screenshot below). If you click the same header bar again, your files will be sorted in the opposite direction (for instance, from Z–A or from oldest to newest).



Display more columns to show extra details

- **See more information by adding columns:** the columns you see in Details view vary a little according to what type of files are in the folder. If you look at your Music folder in Details view, for example, you'll see columns such as 'Artist', 'Album' and 'Track Number' (although there's some variation from one version of Windows to another). But if you want to see more columns containing extra information you can do so. Just right-click one of the column headers and you'll see a menu showing all the most popular columns, with ticks beside the ones that are currently displayed. Click one of those that isn't ticked, and Windows will add

that column and fill it with the corresponding information about your files.



If you click the **More...** item at the bottom of this menu, a little dialog will appear listing all the possible columns you could display – dozens upon dozens of them! You certainly wouldn't want to display all these columns, and many of them won't be relevant to the types of files in a particular folder, but you might like to display the # (track number) column in a folder containing music files, or the **Camera model** and **Date taken** columns in a folder containing photos. To add columns, just tick the boxes beside them and then click **OK**.



Top Tips and Tricks for Naming Your Files

Besides keeping your files in suitably-named folders, the real key to keeping your work organised is to choose your filenames carefully and systematically. Over the next few pages, I'll give you some tips and suggestions to illustrate what I mean by that. To a large extent, you can apply these tips interchangeably, using a 'mix-and-match' approach to produce naming systems you think would be helpful for your own files.

Useful tricks for naming your files

Tip 1: Use numeric prefixes to keep files in order

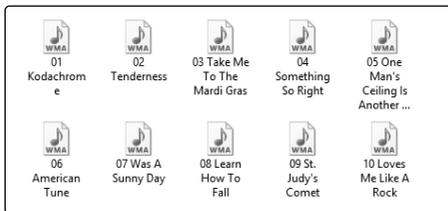
Put files into numeric order

Let's imagine you have a folder containing the tracks from a music album. Each one is named after the title of the song, so you can easily tell which song is which. The trouble is, those files are shown in alphabetical order by name, whereas what you'd really like is for them to be listed in the order they appear on the album.



Quick steps for renaming a file

The solution is to prefix those filenames with a two-digit number starting from '01'. For each file, just click it once to select it, press the **(F2)** key to rename it, type the appropriate number at the start of its name and press **(Enter)**. The result: the files now appear in the order you want, and you can still see at a glance which song is which:



After renaming a file, you may find that Windows doesn't automatically adjust the order of the files in the folder. The solution is to press the **(F5)** key: this tells Windows to 'refresh' the list.

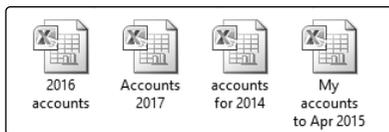
In the example above, two-digit numbers are needed because there are 10 tracks. (For consistency, I always use two digits in this situation, even for albums with only half a dozen tracks.) If you needed to use this trick in a folder with more than 100 files (or one that might grow to contain more than 100 files), you'd use three-digit numbers starting from '001'.

Use two or three digits as necessary

Tip 2: Prefix filenames with dates or years

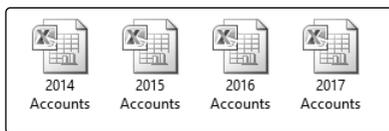
Perhaps you create a new spreadsheet each year to track your household accounts. Those files could easily end up looking like this:

Date-related filenames?



Using a similar tip to the one above, take a more systematic approach to ensure those files always appear in consecutive order:

Prefix the name with the year or date



Or, if you create a new file each month, use a year-month system that works in the same way: Accounts 2018-01, Accounts 2018-02 and so on.

Tip 3: Use matching names for matching files

Of course, not all files will need numbers or dates, but it still pays to be systematic about naming them, using the same naming scheme for all similar files. For example, when you write letters, you might ensure their filenames all begin with 'Letter' (such as 'Letter to John, party' and 'Letter to Mary,

Use similar names to keep files grouped together

theatre tickets'). If you download manuals in PDF format for your electronic devices, name them 'Manual for [device]', and so on.



If you download documents from the Internet with the intention of keeping them, don't forget you can rename those too! A lot of documents you download will have nonsensical names that won't mean much to you in a month's time, so give them names you'll recognise before filing them away.

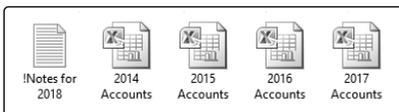
Tip 4: Keep a file at the top of the list permanently

Make an important file easy to see in a folder

You have a folder containing a large number of files, and you want to add another file to this folder in such a way that you'll notice it each time you open the folder. For instance, in a folder of family tree files or a project you're working on, you might want to add a 'To Do' file listing your next steps. Or perhaps there's one file you refer to frequently, and it's tiresome having to scroll through all the rest to find it.

Prefix its name with an exclamation mark

Here's a trick I've been using for years: rename that file to put an exclamation mark as its first character (and, if necessary, press the **(F5)** key to make Windows refresh the folder and show the updated name):



In the same way that Windows puts numbers before letters, it puts certain symbols before numbers, and the exclamation mark is one of those symbols. If a filename begins with this symbol, it will be placed before all the other files in the folder, right at the top of the list, making it easy to find and always noticeable.