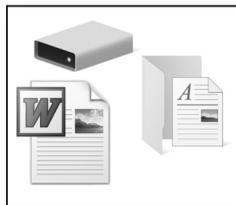


## Take Control of Your Documents and Pictures to Make Everything Easy to Find!

### This article shows you:

- How files are organised on disks and in folders
- How to keep track of your files by sorting them into easily-found folders
- How to fix mistakes when moving or deleting files

Do you seem to spend more time looking for your files than working on them? Do your folders contain a confusing jumble of unrelated documents and pictures? If so, it's time to organise your files and folders so that everything you need is exactly where you expect it to be! In this article, I'll explain the basics of disks and drives, folders and files, and show you how to get everything organised so that you'll always know exactly where to look.



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## Disks and Drives – Your PC’s Filing Cabinets

*The hard disk is your PC’s most important disk*

The organisation of your files starts with the disks on which they’re stored, and there are many different types of disk you can use with a PC. One disk you certainly have is a hard disk: it’s tucked away inside your PC’s case where you can’t see it, but it’s permanently connected to your PC and always available. It’s by far the most important of your PC’s disks, because it’s the one on which Windows and all your programs are installed, and the one on which you store all your personal files.

*You may have other disks and drives*

Besides the hard disk, you probably have several other disks and drives. You quite likely have a DVD drive, again permanently connected to your PC; you may have one or more little flash drives that you plug into a USB socket on your PC when you want to copy files to them or from them; and perhaps you have an external hard disk that sits on your desk and plugs into a USB socket. An external hard disk is usually kept permanently connected to your PC, and it’s ideal for storing backups (safety copies) of your personal files.



What the difference between a ‘disk’ and a ‘drive’? The disk is the device on which computer files are physically stored; the drive is the device that reads what’s on the disk and writes data to it. A DVD, for instance, is a silver disk containing files, but it’s no use for anything until you put it in your DVD drive so that those files can be read. The difference between ‘hard disk’ and ‘hard drive’ is less clear-cut, because the disk is enclosed in a sealed case which also contains the drive mechanism, so both terms essentially refer to the same device and tend to be used interchangeably.

*How to see all your PC’s drives*

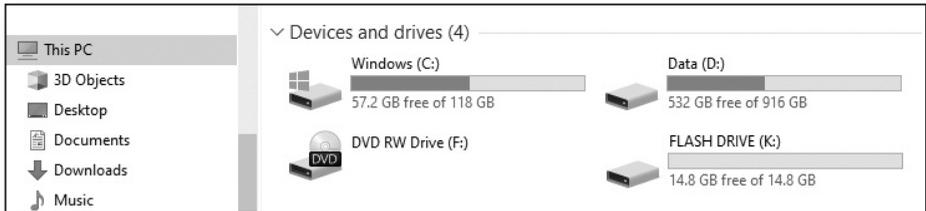
To see and use the disks and drives attached to your PC, press the keyboard shortcut **Win+E** and at the left of the window click on **This PC** (or **Computer** in Windows

7). The window that opens contains icons for each of your PC's drives.

Each drive has a name (such as 'Local Disk' or 'Windows') for your hard drive, or 'DVD RW Drive') to help you recognise it. In addition, Windows assigns a single letter to every drive. Your main hard drive is always assigned the letter 'C', and any other hard drives you have, including external hard drives, are given the letters 'D', 'E' and so on. Your DVD drive is given the next available letter.

*Each drive has an identifying letter*

As you connect other drives, such as flash drives, they're assigned the next unused letter. This is known as the 'drive letter', and it's always shown with a colon after it, so your hard disk is referred to as drive C:.



In many ways, your disks are like old-fashioned filing cabinets. They're where you keep your files (albeit electronic rather than paper files), and you can organise these 'cabinets' in any way you like, choosing what to keep where.

## Folders: How Your Disks Are Kept Organised

If you were to throw paper files willy-nilly into a filing cabinet, you'd be in disarray almost immediately. You wouldn't do that, of course: you'd use labelled folders or dividers in the cabinet to organise it into sections, and you'd file each document where it belonged.

*Paper documents are organised with folders or dividers*

*Computer files are organised into folders*

Disks can have their contents organised in a very similar way, by organising files into 'folders', and for exactly the same reason: trying to find one file in a list of many thousands would be a slow and painful process!

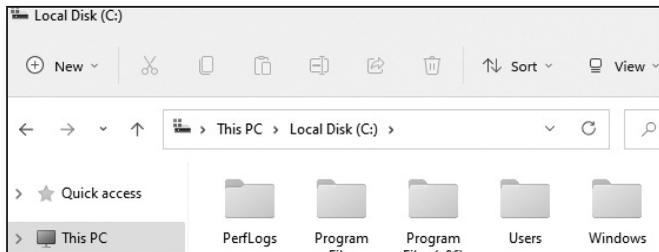
*Windows created several folders for itself and your programs*

When Windows was installed on your hard disk, it created numerous folders. One of these is a folder named 'Windows' where the vast majority of Windows' own files are stored. Another is named 'Program Files', and it's where your programs are installed. (You may actually have two Program Files folders with subtly-different names, with your programs divided between them: this is just an oddity of the way recent versions of Windows work.)

*How to explore your hard disk's folders*

Starting from the This PC (or Computer) window mentioned earlier, there are two ways to see the folders on your hard disk:

- In the larger, right-hand section of the window, double-click the icon for your hard drive (the drive named 'C:'). That section of the window will change to show all the folders on the disk. You can double-click one of these in the same way to see what it contains.



- In the left-hand section of the window, click the little chevron or triangle to the left of **This PC** or **Computer**, then the same to the left of your C: drive, and you'll see a list of the folders on that disk. Click one of these to see its contents displayed in the right-hand section of the window.

A folder can contain yet more folders, making things even more organised. If you look in the folder named 'Program Files', for instance, you'll see that it contains a number of folders, each relating to a different program installed on your PC.

*You'll find folders within folders*

## Find Your Personal Folders, Home to Your Own Files

Most of the folders on your hard disk are there to make your PC work. They contain the files required by Windows itself, and the programs installed on your PC, and they're generally best ignored.

A good rule of thumb is to regard any file or folder you didn't create yourself as 'out of bounds'. You can look inside those folders, but don't delete, rename or move anything unless you're certain you know what you're doing and what effect it will have!



There are several folders that do belong to you, and they were created for you by Windows to give you obvious places to store your own files. In Windows 11, 10 and 8.1, these folders are named 'Documents', 'Pictures', 'Music' and 'Videos'. In Windows 7 they have the same names but with a 'My' prefix.

*Folders especially for your own files*

To reach these folders, here's what to do:

- **Windows 11/10:** press **Win+E** to open File Explorer and click **This PC** at the left. You'll see your personal folders in the 'Folders' section at the top of the window.
- **Windows 8.1:** press **Win+E** to open Windows Explorer and you'll see your personal folders in the 'Folders' section at the top of the window.
- **Windows 7:** open the Start menu and click your name and the top of the right-hand panel. In the window

*How to find your personal folders*

that opens, you'll see a small collection of folders, including the four personal folders mentioned above.

*These folders encourage some simple organisation*

You can tell from the names of these four folders that Windows is giving you a little encouragement in keeping your files organised. The 'Music' folder is the obvious place to keep your music files, for example. And documents such as letters, spreadsheets, user manuals and family tree research (in fact, any files that aren't music, pictures or videos) are prime candidates for the 'Documents' folder.

*Your folders could quickly contain a jumble of unrelated files*

After a few months of using your PC, this folder could contain a confusing jumble of files of all sorts. You could have a variety of letters – to family, to friends, and to companies and organisations – mixed in with financial records and household accounts. Among this lot, there are the files relating to your family history, and numerous other unrelated files. There's so much that comes under that loose banner of 'Documents' that, before long, finding anything here will be like looking for a needle in a haystack!

### Getting Organised: Create Your Own Folders

*You can create more folders of your own*

The solution to this filing mayhem is to follow Windows' lead and create more folders of your own. Windows doesn't know whether you write a lot of letters or research your family history, so it doesn't clutter up your PC by giving you folders named 'Letters' or 'Family Tree' which you may never use. Instead it leaves you to organise things in your own way.

*Organise your files into these clearly-named folders*

Over the next few pages, I'll explain how to get your documents organised, and the routine is very simple. Just like organising a mess of paper documents into labelled sections of a filing cabinet, you begin by

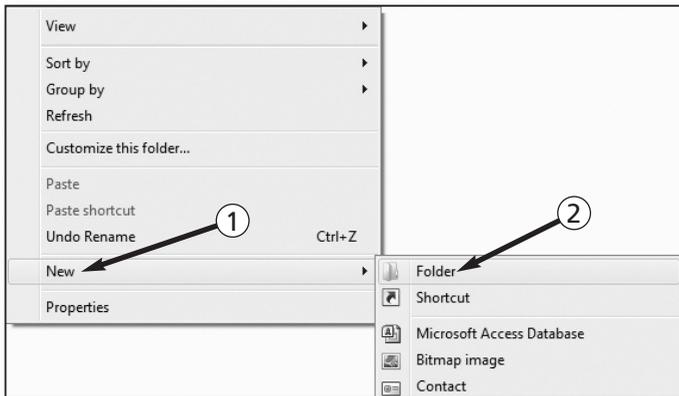
creating your own folders, giving them names that tell you exactly what they contain, and then move documents into the appropriate folders.

Creating a new folder is a quick and easy job. Here's what to do:

*How to create a folder*



1. Start by making your way to your 'Documents' (or 'My Documents') folder so that you can see what it contains.
2. Right-click a blank white space in the right-hand section of the window and move the mouse down to **New** ①.
3. On the menu that appears alongside this item, click **Folder** ②.



4. A new folder will appear among the items in your Documents folder, with the unimaginative name 'New folder'. This name is highlighted with a bold box around it for you to type something more descriptive.



5. Type any short name you like for this folder.



6. Press **Enter** to confirm this name, and your new folder is ready to use.



To create more folders inside your Documents folder, go back to step 2.

### Further organisation by creating subfolders

Following the steps above, you've taken the first steps towards getting organised by creating folders named, perhaps, 'Letters', 'Accounts', 'Family History', and so on. In a moment, I'll explain how to move files into these folders to complete the organisation. First, while we're on the subject of folders, I'll mention something else you may want to do – either now or later – which is to further divide your files into subfolders.

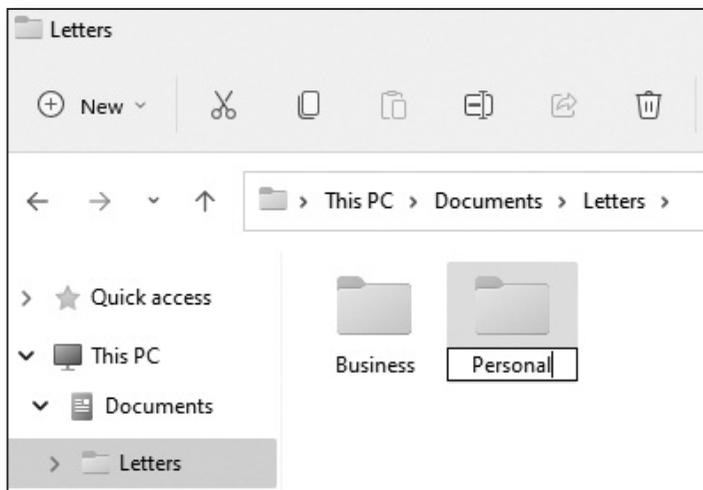
*A folder within a folder*

A 'subfolder' is just a folder inside another folder, and it's really no different to the folder you created above. (Indeed, that was a subfolder – it's inside your 'Documents' folder.)

*Use subfolders to categorise your documents even further*

Let's say that you created a folder named 'Letters' and you plan to move all your letters into it from the Documents folder. However, you have dozens of letters, some personal and some business. Rather than lumping them all together in your 'Letters' folder, you could take your organisation a stage further by creating subfolders named 'Personal' and 'Business' inside that 'Letters'

folder and putting each letter exactly where it belongs. To do that, double-click your 'Letters' folder to open it, and then follow the earlier steps to create those two subfolders in exactly the same way:



There's an alternative way of approaching this which you may prefer. Rather than creating a folder named 'Letters' in your Documents folder and then adding these two subfolders inside it, you could create folders named 'Business Letters' and 'Personal Letters' in your Documents folder. At the risk of being boring, let me repeat that the right way of organising things is the way that makes the best sense to you!



## Moving Your Files into Folders

The last step in getting organised is to actually move your files into the folders you've created for them. This is a two-step process: you begin by selecting one or more files to be moved, and then either drag them to

*The basics of moving your files*

the required folder or use the Windows clipboard to cut and paste them into it.

*Select one or more files to be moved*

**Selecting files:** to select a file just click it once using the left mouse button. If you're happy to move just one file at a time, that's all you have to do. However, if you'd like to move several files into a particular folder in one go, you can hold down the **Ctrl** key on your keyboard as you click other files and each file you click in this way will also become selected. (If you select the wrong file by mistake, hold **Ctrl** and click it again to deselect it.)



As you're holding down the **Ctrl** key and clicking files, be very careful not to move the mouse during the click! If Windows detects that the **Ctrl** key is down, the left mouse button is down, and the mouse is moving, it creates a copy of the file (or files) currently selected.

Having selected one or more files, you can choose between two methods of moving them:

*You can drag the files to your new folder to move them*

**Drag and drop:** if you can see the file you've selected (or one of the several files you've selected), and you can also see the folder to which you want to move them, make sure you've let go of the **Ctrl** key and, using the left mouse button, click and drag the file on to the folder. When the mouse pointer is over the folder, let go of the mouse button: the file(s) you selected will be moved into the folder.



**Cut and paste:** the 'drag and drop' method above is quick, but you may find it uncomfortable, or you may not be able to see both the file you're copying and the folder you're copying it to, so this method offers a straightforward alternative. Press the key combination **Ctrl+X**; this 'cuts' the files you've selected from the Documents folder, and places them on the clipboard. Now double-click the folder into which you want to place them so that it opens to show its contents. Press **Ctrl+V** and the files you selected will be moved into this folder. You can then press **Backspace** to return to your Documents folder and continue moving files.

*You can move files using the clipboard*

### Making copies of files

For organisation purposes, you generally wouldn't want to copy files: having two (or more) copies of a file leads to confusion about which is the copy you actively work on and/or which of the two you edited most recently. However, copying is certainly a common file-management task, so let's run through the methods of copying one or more files you've selected:

*Copying a file can sometimes be useful*

**Copying via drag and drop:** use the right mouse-button to drag the files to the desired folder. When you release the mouse button, a menu will offer a choice between moving and copying the files. Choose **Copy here**.

*Drag and drop using the right mouse button*

**Copying via the clipboard:** press the key combination **Ctrl+C** to copy the files to the clipboard. Open the folder in which you want to place the copies and press **Ctrl+V**.

*Copying via the clipboard*

### How to Rename or Delete Files & Folders

An important aspect of organisation is choosing names for files and folders that tell you clearly what they are or what they contain. As with everything else in life, this

*Clearly name your folders*

is something you won't always get right first time: perhaps you realise there's a file that you always struggle to find because you didn't give it a sufficiently recognisable name. Or perhaps you have a document named 'Letter to Bill' which seemed fine at the time, but needs a rethink now that you're about to write to Bill again?

*Press **F2** and type a new name*

Renaming files and folders is a quick and simple job, and it works the same way for both. Simply select the item you want to rename and either press the **F2** key on your keyboard or right-click the item and choose **Rename**. You'll see a bold box appear around the name (as you did when naming new folders earlier); you can use the arrow keys on your keyboard to move around the name, editing as required, or simply type a completely different name to replace it. When you're done, press **Enter** to confirm and keep the new name.



Just to quickly repeat my earlier warning, only rename files and folders you created yourself! Don't rename the 'Documents' (or 'My Documents') folder, or any of the other folders or files created by Windows.

*How to delete unwanted files or folders*

If there are files or folders you no longer need – and you're sure you don't need them! – you can delete them, and that's simpler still. After selecting one or more items to be deleted, either press the **Delete** key on your keyboard or right-click one of the selected items and choose **Delete**. A message will appear asking whether you want to move the selected item(s) to the Recycle Bin: if you're sure you do, click **Yes**.

## Stay Organised by Saving Documents in the Right Folder

*How do you save into one of your new folders?*

Let's say that you've created a folder named 'Letters' inside your Documents folder, and your letters are all now stored inside it. You start your word processor and

begin work on another letter. Clearly this new letter should be saved into your 'Letters' folder too, but how do you do that?

When you press **Ctrl+S** or choose **File > Save** (or the equivalent option in your word processor) to save the document for the first time, you'll see a dialog showing the contents of your Documents folder. Among the items it contains will be your 'Letters' folder. Double-click that folder to open it. You can now type a name for this new document and click **Save**, and it will be saved into the folder you've just opened – your 'Letters' folder.

*Double-click the required folder to open it*

## Problems? Quickly Put Right Any Mistakes

We all make mistakes. We create a folder in the wrong place, delete the wrong file by accident, move a file when we meant to copy it, or move a file to the wrong folder. Fortunately, it's always easy to put these things right.

The quick way to fix a mistake is to press **Ctrl+Z**, the keyboard shortcut for 'Undo'. If you move, delete or rename the wrong file, and you realise you've done so before you've had a chance to do anything else, this key combination will undo it.

*You can quickly undo the last thing you did*

Alternatively, right-click a blank white space in the window and the menu that appears will contain an item beginning with the word 'Undo'. If you deleted a file accidentally, and this item says 'Undo Delete', you can click this item to undelete the file. However, if the item says 'Undo Move' or 'Undo Rename', you must have since moved or renamed something, so this 'Undo' feature won't bring back your deleted file.

Even without the benefit of the Undo feature, recovering from accidents isn't difficult, so if you discover

*No Undo option available?*

your mistake too late to use Undo, these tips will help you put it right:

*Fix mistakes in moving files*

- If you've moved the wrong file by mistake, open the folder it's now in and move it back to where it was. If you moved a file to the wrong folder, open that folder and move the file to where you wanted it.

*Fix mistakes made when copying files*

- If you copied a file when you meant to move it, open the folder containing the unnecessary copy and delete it. If you moved a file when you meant to make a copy, open the folder it was moved to and copy the file back to where it was.

*Created a folder in the wrong place?*

- If you created a folder in the wrong place, one option is to delete it (assuming you haven't yet placed any files in it) and then create it in the right place. If you did move or save files into the folder, just move it to where you want it using either of the two methods explained earlier for moving files.

*Recover files deleted by accident*

- If you delete a file or folder by mistake, double-click the **Recycle Bin** icon on your desktop to see all your deleted files. When you find the file or folder you deleted by accident, right-click it and choose **Restore** and it will be put back where it was. Alternatively, you can drag that file or folder out of the Recycle Bin window and drop it onto your desktop (thus restoring it to your desktop instead), and from there you can move it to wherever you want to keep it.



Be particularly careful when working with files on flash drives, memory cards, and other types of removable disk. If you delete files or folders from these, they won't be moved to the Recycle Bin, but will be deleted from the disk straight away.