

Discover Handy Tips to Help You Manage Your Files More Effectively

This article shows you how to:

- ✓ Set up File Explorer in the most practical way
- ✓ Use clever tricks to select and rename multiple files
- ✓ Get things done more quickly from the keyboard

For many of us, one of the most-used programs in Windows is File Explorer (or Windows Explorer as it's known in Windows 7). You might press  +  to start it, or click its icon on your taskbar, but all sorts of actions cause an Explorer window to open and show you the contents of a folder or a drive.



But are you using File Explorer as effectively as you could? Read on to pick up some useful tips and tricks to help you get things done more quickly and easily.

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Ensure File Explorer is Set Up for Easiest Use

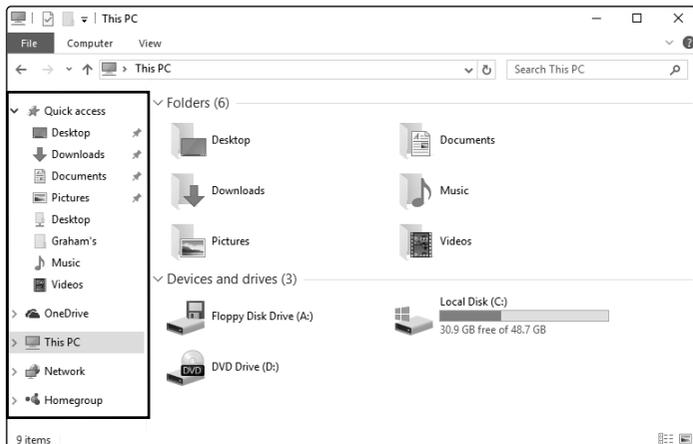
Applies to: Windows 10, 8.1 & 7

Check a couple of settings first

A curiosity of File Explorer is that it isn't set up in the most practical way. A couple of settings need changing to make it more useful and friendly. You may have changed those settings already, but if you haven't, you certainly should!

Open File Explorer

Press **Windows** + **E** to open File Explorer and we'll first make sure you can see the 'navigation pane' at the left of the window, indicated in the screenshot below:



Can you see the navigation pane?

If you can't see this navigation pane, we need to switch it on:

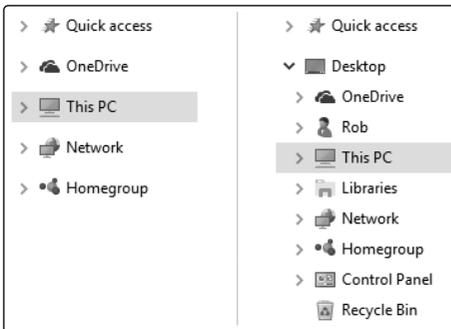
- **Windows 10 and 8.1:** switch to the **View** tab on the Ribbon, click the **Navigation pane** button at the far-left, then click **Navigation pane** on the menu that opens.
- **Windows 7:** click the **Organize** button on the blue toolbar near the top of the window, move the mouse to **Layout** and click **Navigation pane** on the flyout menu.

At the moment, that navigation pane may be too narrow to display the full names of items listed there. To put that right, move your mouse to the thin line dividing that pane from the main right-hand section and drag it further to the right to widen the navigation pane.



Now we'll turn our attention to the two settings I mentioned a moment ago. The first is an option named 'Show all folders'. This transforms the navigation pane from what you're probably seeing at the moment – shown on the left in the screenshot below – to the fuller list shown on the right. (The screenshot shows Windows 10, but the effect is similar in Windows 8.1 and Windows 7.).

The 'Show all folders' option



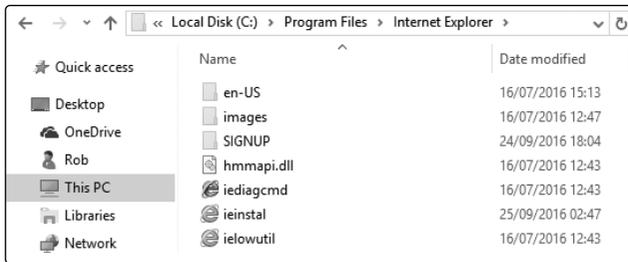
By doing this, you gain quick access to a few extra places in File Explorer. You can click on **Desktop** to see the files and shortcuts on your desktop; click the folder with your own name (**Rob** in my case) to see all your personal folders; and you also gain one-click access to **Control Panel** and **Recycle Bin**, saving you the need to go elsewhere when you need to open these items.

Quick access to a few extra folders

The second option we'll switch on is named 'Expand to open folder'. This is best explained with an example, which you

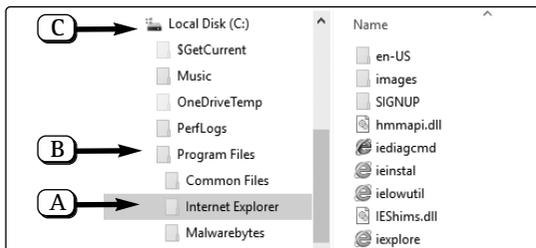
The 'Expand to open folder'

can try yourself. Start by clicking **This PC** or **Computer** at the left of File Explorer. In the right-hand section, double-click your hard drive's icon (whose name ends with C: in brackets), then double-click the **Program Files** folder, then double-click the **Internet Explorer** folder. You're now looking at the contents of that 'Internet Explorer' folder, but the navigation pane on the left probably hasn't changed:



The navigation pane shows where you are

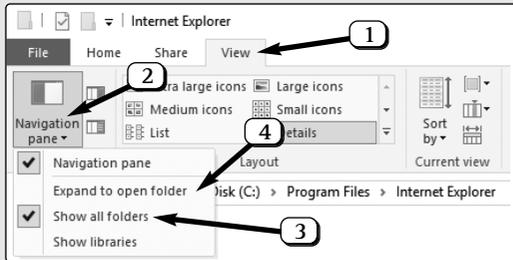
When we switch on this 'Expand to open folder' option, the navigation pane will update to show you constantly where you are. A glance at that left pane shows you that you're currently looking at the **Internet Explorer** folder (A), which is inside the **Program Files** folder (B), which is on your C: drive (C). Usefully, too, if you want to go back to your Program Files folder, or to some other folder on your C: drive, you can see it in that left pane and click it to open it. That's a great deal quicker and easier than having to do everything in the right-hand pane.



So, let's switch on those two options. Follow the appropriate steps below for your version of Windows.

Windows 10 and Windows 8.1:

1. Switch to the **View** tab on the Ribbon (1).
2. Click the **Navigation pane** button (2).
3. On the menu that appears, is there a tick beside **Show all folders** (3)? If there isn't, click that item to tick it and switch it on. That also closes the menu, so click the **Navigation pane** button again.
4. Now, is there a tick beside **Expand to open folder** (4)? If there isn't, click that item to tick it and switch it on. (If there is, just press the **Esc** key on your keyboard to close the menu.)



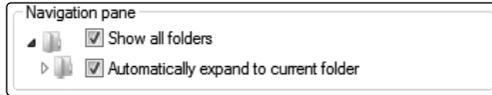
Switch on these two options

Windows 7:

1. On the blue toolbar near the top of the window, click on **Organize**.
2. On the menu, click on **Folder and search options**.
3. In the Folder Options dialog that appears, you'll see a 'Navigation pane' section at the bottom containing two checkboxes (pictured on the next page). Tick both boxes, if they're not already ticked, and then click **OK**.



Tick the box beside both options



Open Your Personal Folders from the Start Menu

Applies to: Windows 10

Put your personal folders a click away

When you open the Start menu in Windows 10, you see a column of small icons at the far left: the Power button at the bottom, Settings above it, and so on. You can also add icons for your personal folders here – Documents, Pictures, Music, and others – giving you a quick way to open those folders. Here's how:



Switch on folders to include on the Start menu

1. Open the Start menu and click the **Settings** (cog-shaped) icon.
2. In the Settings window, click on **Personalisation** and then, at the left, on **Start**.
3. On the right, click the link that reads **Choose which folders appear on Start**.
4. Now you'll see a list of items, each with an On/Off switch beneath it. The first two items – File Explorer and Settings – should be set to 'On'. Below those you'll see the names of folders such as Documents, Music and Pictures. If you visit any of these folders regularly, and you'd like to add it to your Start menu for one-click access, click the switch below it to turn it to **On**.



Icons appear at the far-left of the Start menu

5. You can keep the Settings window on your screen while you open the Start menu to see the result: the extra folders appear at the far-left of the Start menu. In the screenshot to the right, I've added the Documents,

Music and Pictures folders. When you've added all the folders you want, close the Settings window by clicking the x in its top-right corner.

Now, whenever you want to open one of your personal folders, you can go to the Start menu and click the corresponding icon.

Reach Your Most-used Folders Quickly

Applies to: Windows 10, 8.1 & 7

Just as you can keep a list of your favourite websites in your web browser (using its Favourites or Bookmarks feature), you can keep a list of your favourite folders in File Explorer.

As an example, perhaps inside your Documents folder you have a folder named 'Family Tree' where you keep all your genealogy research. You can get to your Documents folder fairly quickly and then double-click this folder to open it, but you'd like an easier way.

The solution is to use the 'Quick access' or 'Favorites' section at the very top of File Explorer's navigation pane. This section already contains several folders you might visit regularly, such as 'Desktop' and 'Downloads', but you can add others to it for one-click access. Follow the appropriate steps below to do that:

Windows 10:

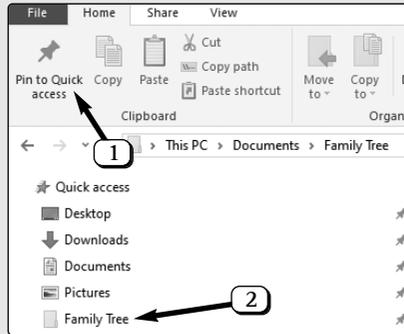
1. Open File Explorer and make your way to your frequently-used folder (in my example, the 'Family Tree' folder).
2. With that folder open in front of you, switch to the Home tab on the Ribbon (if necessary), and at the far left, click the Pin to Quick access button .



Quick links to favourite folders

Add favourite folders to the navigation pane

3. Straight away, you'll see this folder appear in the Quick access section at the top of the navigation pane (2). (You might have to scroll to the top of the navigation pane to see this section.)



Remove
unneded folders
from the list

In future, whenever you want to visit that folder, you can click this item. If you ever want to remove this folder from the Quick access list, just right-click it and choose **Unpin from Quick access**.

Windows 8.1 or Windows 7:



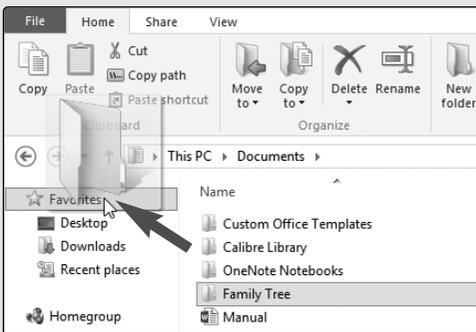
1. Open File Explorer and make your way to your frequently-used folder (in my example, the 'Family Tree' folder).
2. Now you're probably looking at the contents of that folder, so you need to go up one level to the folder containing this one (in my case, the 'Documents' folder). An easy way to do that is to press **(Alt) + (Up Arrow)** on your keyboard.
3. Now you can see the icon for that frequently-used folder. Just before you do anything with it, have a

look at the navigation pane on the left. Can you see the item at the very top, named Favorites? If not, scroll to the top of the navigation pane to bring that item into view.

- Next, move the mouse pointer to your frequently-used folder on the right, press-and-hold the left mouse button, and then drag it over to the Favorites item at the top of the navigation pane and drop it on to that item.

Drag and drop a folder to 'Favorites'

Be sure to drop your folder on the Favorites item itself, and not on one of the folders below it! If you were to drop it on to the 'Desktop' item just beneath it, for example, you'd move your folder to the desktop, which would be annoying.



- Straight away, you'll see this folder appear in the Favorites section. In future, whenever you want to visit that folder, you can click this item. If you ever want to remove this folder from the Favorites list, just right-click it and choose **Remove**.

Remove folders from this section if you don't need them there

Select Multiple Files Easily and Safely

Applies to: Windows 10, 8.1 & 7

To select, you normally hold **Ctrl** and click

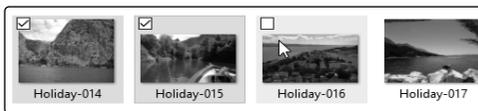
The usual way of selecting multiple files is to click one file in the normal way, and then to hold down the **(Ctrl)** key as you click the others. However, that carries a risk. If you drag one or more files while holding down the **(Ctrl)** key, Windows creates copies of them.

If you drag accidentally, copies are made

Although you're not intending to drag anything anywhere, it's all too easy to do it by accident. You've selected several files, you hold down **(Ctrl)** to select one more, and as you're clicking it you move the mouse slightly. You might have moved it an imperceptible distance, but Windows interprets it as dragging and makes copies of everything you've just selected.

The easier way: select files by ticking boxes instead

It's hard to avoid, especially if your hands are a bit shaky, but there's an alternative available. You can tell Windows to display checkboxes in the top-left corners of every file and folder. You then select files by simply moving the mouse over them and ticking their boxes: you don't hold down the **(Ctrl)** key, so there's no risk of making accidental copies.

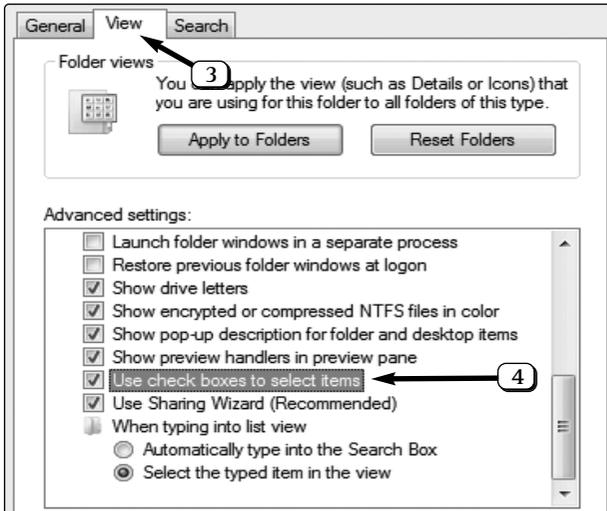


To switch this feature on, just do the following:

- **Windows 10 or 8.1:** switch to the **View** tab **(1)** on File Explorer's Ribbon and tick the box beside **Item check boxes** **(2)**.



- **Windows 7:** click **Organize** at the left of the blue toolbar and choose **Folder and search options**. In the dialog that opens, switch to the **View** tab (3), scroll to the bottom of the 'Advanced settings' list and tick the box beside **Use check boxes to select items** (4) and click **OK**.



Now, as you move the mouse over any file, a checkbox will appear above it or to its left. To select the file, just click inside the checkbox. (If you select a file by accident, click its checkbox again to remove the tick.) Helpfully, if you just want to select a single file, you don't have to do anything differently: rather than having to aim for its checkbox, you can just click its icon in the usual way.

Now move over a file and tick its box to select it

Select a large number of files in a folder

Here's a situation you might run into once in a while. You've opened a folder containing a large number of files, and you want to select the majority of them – not quite all – to delete them or to copy or move them somewhere.

Selecting the majority of files in a folder?

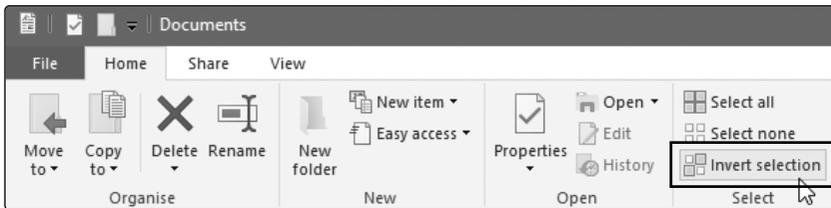
The traditional approach would be to select them all carefully, skipping the few you don't want to select. But there's a much quicker and easier way.

Select the others instead

Start by selecting the files you don't want to delete, copy or move instead – in other words, select the few 'wrong' files. When you've done that, follow the appropriate step below for your version of Windows:

Then 'invert' the selection

- **Windows 10 or Windows 8.1:** on the Home tab of the Ribbon, in the 'Select' section at the far-right, click the **Invert selection** button.



- **Windows 7:** press the **(Alt)** key on your keyboard (just to the left of the space bar) to display the menu bar, then open the Edit menu and choose **Invert Selection**.

The files you wanted are now selected

What this does is to deselect the few files you just selected and select all the others – exactly the result you wanted, but without all that tedious clicking!

Quick Ways to Rename Multiple Files

Applies to: Windows 10, 8.1 & 7

The 'typical' way of renaming files

When you want to rename a file or folder on your PC, there's a time-honoured way of doing it. You right-click it and choose **Rename** from the context menu, which puts the filename into 'edit mode', type the new name to replace the old and then press the **(Enter)** key to confirm it and switch off 'edit mode'.

Having to right-click and deal with context menus is rather fiddly, and you can avoid that by clicking the file once to select it and then pressing the **(F2)** key, which also puts the filename into 'edit mode'.

But imagine there's a whole series of files you want to rename: this is still going to be a slow process. For example, perhaps you've taken individual photos of everyone at a family gathering, and you want to replace your camera's anonymous filenames (such as DSCN0364, DSCN0365, DSCN0366...) with the names of the subjects (Lucy, David, Angela...).

Here's a quicker and easier way of doing it. Start by clicking the first file you want to rename, pressing **(F2)** to put its filename into 'edit mode' and typing the new name. However, when you've done that, don't press **(Enter)**. Instead, press the Tab key. In one neat manoeuvre, this confirms the new name of that file and takes it out of 'edit mode', and then selects the next file in the folder and puts that into 'edit mode', letting you immediately start typing that name. Press **(Tab)** again after doing so and you're instantly ready to type the name of the next file, and so on.

For a long series of files, it's slow

Instead, type the new name then press **Tab**



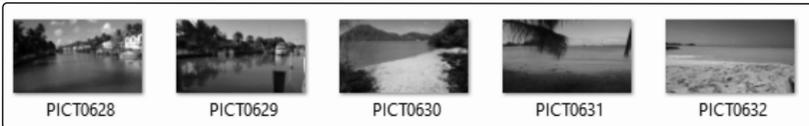
Two quick tips to accompany this. First, if you land on a file you don't want to rename, just press Tab again to leave its name unchanged and move to the next. Second, assuming your files are arranged alphabetically (as they probably are), they'll tend to jump around as you change their names, since Windows keeps them alphabetical, but ignore that and just keep going!

Ignore the way files are rearranged as you do this!

Rename files in a numerical sequence

Photos have anonymous names

Here's a quick tip that's useful for renaming collections of digital photos. When you import them from your camera or phone, they have anonymous names like this:



Rename them all quickly

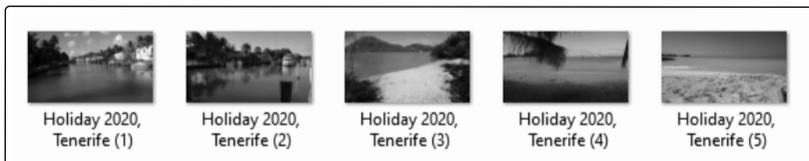
You'd like to give them better, more meaningful names, but that could be a slow and laborious job, even using the tip above. But File Explorer offers a quick way of renaming a sequence of files in one quick routine.

Start by selecting all the files you want to rename. Then right-click the first selected file and choose **Rename**. This puts that first file's name into 'edit mode'. Type the name you'd like to give to all these files:



File Explorer creates a sequence

Press the **(Enter)** key and File Explorer completes the job for you: all your selected files are renamed with the name you chose followed by a number in brackets:



Manage Your Files Faster Using Keyboard Shortcuts

Applies to: Windows 10, 8.1 & 7

Some of what you do in File Explorer is best accomplished using the mouse. However, certain things need a sequence of two or three clicks, or a fiddly right-click, and you can do many of those more quickly by pressing a single key or a key combination. Here are the most useful keyboard shortcuts to use in File Explorer:

Work faster from the keyboard

To do this:	Use this hotkey:
Open File Explorer	Win+E
Open a second File Explorer window	Ctrl+N
Open the selected drive, folder or file	Enter
Select all items in the current drive or folder	Ctrl+A
Display Properties (information) dialog for the selected drive, folder or file	Alt+Enter
Rename the selected drive, folder or file	F2
Delete the selected item(s) to the Recycle Bin	Delete
Permanently delete the selected item(s), bypassing the Recycle Bin	Shift+Delete
Search the current drive or folder	F3
Create a new folder in the current drive or folder	Ctrl+Shift+N
Jump to the first item in the folder	Home
Jump to the last item in the folder	End
Jump to the first (or next) item whose name starts with a certain letter	Type the first letter of its name

Step back to the last-viewed drive or folder	Backspace or Alt+Left arrow
Step forward again after stepping back	Alt+Right arrow
Go up to the parent folder of the current folder	Alt+Up arrow
View as Extra large icons (Win 10 & 8.1)	Ctrl+Shift+1
View as Large icons (Win 10 & 8.1)	Ctrl+Shift+2
View as Medium icons (Win 10 & 8.1)	Ctrl+Shift+3
View as Small icons (Win 10 & 8.1)	Ctrl+Shift+4
View as a List (Win 10 & 8.1)	Ctrl+Shift+5
View as Details (Win 10 & 8.1)	Ctrl+Shift+6
View as Tiles (Win 10 & 8.1)	Ctrl+Shift+7
View as Content (Win 10 & 8.1)	Ctrl+Shift+8
Show or hide the Preview pane	Alt+P
Show or hide the Details pane (Wins 10 & 8.1)	Shift+Alt+P
Show the menu bar (Win 7)	F10
Show the context menu for the selected item(s)	Shift+F10
Undo the last change you made (delete, copy, move or rename)	Ctrl+Z
Copy the selected item(s) to the clipboard (to copy them elsewhere)	Ctrl+C
Cut the selected item(s) to the clipboard (to move them elsewhere)	Ctrl+X
Paste the cut or copied items into the current drive or folder	Ctrl+V