All about Files & Folders
By Ted Fessler

All of the information in your computer is stored in **files**, units of storage located in the hard drive. This article will help you learn how to find, organize, and use files on your computer. Files contain information such as text documents, pictures, computer programs, musical pieces, movies, and so on. There are two special kinds of files we need to consider: **folders** and **pointers**.

Folders – Just like a filing cabinet, your computer allows you to store the files you create in folders. Those folders can hold not only files, but also other folders. A folder is little more than a container in which you can store files. If you put thousands of paper files on someone's desk, it would be virtually impossible to find any particular one when you needed it. That's why people often store paper files in folders inside a filing cabinet. Arranging files into logical groups makes it easy to locate any particular file. When you buy a computer, it will come with tens of thousands of files – most of them will be programs that make up the computer's operating system. Needless to say, these files are organized into many folders.

Pointers – A pointer file (often called a shortcut) is a very simple file, the sole purpose of which is to point to a file or folder. There are two places where we encounter pointers: icons on the desk top and in the Start Menu that you open by clicking on the Start button.

To manage the files, folders, and pointers, you need a program that can display the contents of your hard drive (your computer's long-term memory). On PCs using any of the Microsoft Windows operating systems, that program is Windows Explorer.

## How to use Windows Explorer to Manage Files & Folders

Windows Explorer is a computer program that lets you manage files and folders on your computer. I strongly recommend that you put a pointer to it on your desktop. Here is how to do that:

- Click on the Start button at the lower left of you monitor screen,
- Hover on (move the mouse pointer over) "All Programs" or "Programs",
- Hover on "Accessories",
- Right Click on "Windows Explorer",
- Click on "Copy" in the context menu that pops up.
- Back out of the Start menu by pressing the Escape key (upper left) on your keyboard.
- Right click on the desktop screen where you would like the Windows Explorer to appear,
- Click on "Paste" in the context menu that pops up.

Now, whenever you need to find or manage your files, just double click on the Windows Explorer icon.

I recommend that you customize Windows Explorer. Double click on the Windows Explorer icon and then click the **View** menu. Hover on Toolbars and make sure that **Standard Buttons** and **Address Bar** are checked. Now (still in the View menu) hover on **Explorer Bar** and make sure **Folders** is checked. And last, in the View menu, make sure **Details** is selected. The image below is a snapshot of the top of the Windows Explorer screen on my computer, which is running Windows XP.

The Folders column shows how our files are organized. Notice how the Address bar identifies the folder we're in. In the right pane are listed details of the files in the folder: Name, size, type, etc.
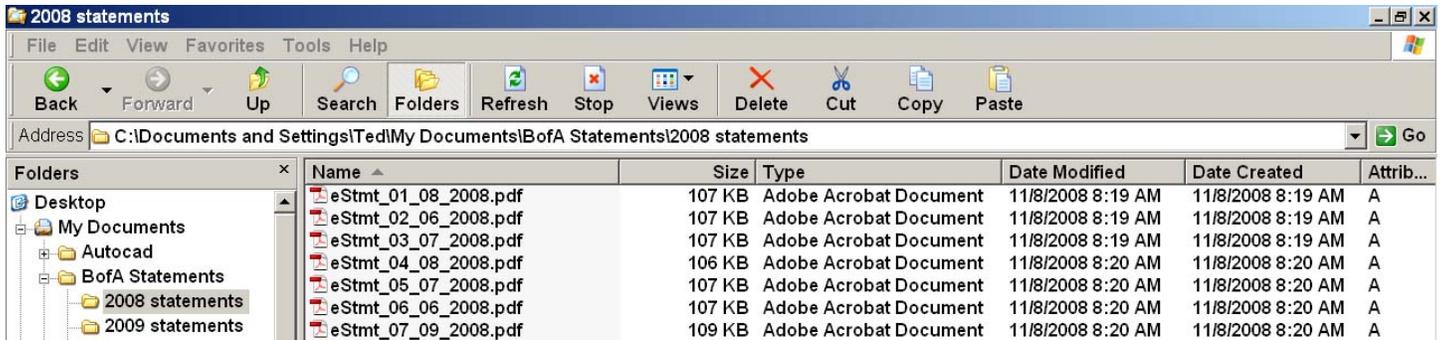
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The image on the left shows how complex the file structure is on my computer. But don't despair! Most of the time, you will only have to work with the files and folders contained in the My Documents folder. This picture shows where the My Documents folder is located, on the System drive.

To expand the contents of a folder, you click the little +box located left of the folder's name. The "+" box changes to a -box and the next layer of folders (if any) will appear below that folder.

As your files increase in number, you might want to create new folders for your different projects. To create a new folder, you click on the folder that will be its parent (the one that will contain the new folder). You then open the File menu, hover on "New", and then click on Folder. The computer creates a new folder named "New Folder" and it invites you to rename it. You should type in a more meaningful name and then press the <Enter> key to finish.

When you click on a folder in the Folders pane, the files and folders in that folder show up in the right (details) pane.

You can sort the information in the right pane by clicking on a column heading. A click on "Name" will order the data by alphabetical order in that column. A second click on "Name" will reverse the order.

Working With Files

A complicating feature of any of the Windows operating systems is that there are usually many ways to accomplish a particular task. I suggest that you use context menus to copy, move, and delete files. You get a context menu when you right click on something. (It is called a context menu because it tells you what you can do with that something.)

When you right click on a file name in the right pane of Windows Explorer, you will see that you can **copy**, **cut**, **rename**, and **delete** that file. Cut and copy work on files just like they do when you use a word processor. Cut moves a file to the "clipboard", and copy puts a copy of the file on the clipboard. If you right click on a folder name, you will also find **paste** in the context menu. If you have previously used cut or copy to put a file onto the clipboard, then you can paste it into a folder.   Rename and delete are pretty obvious.

Working With Programs

Programs are made of one or more files. When a program is installed on your computer, the installer program creates the files, folders, and pointers that are needed. The files and folders are placed in a master folder called Program Files. Pointers to these programs are placed on your desktop and/or in the program files folder that you access by clicking the Start button. Do not use Windows Explorer to search for programs. Instead, click the Start button then click on Programs or All Programs.

To start a program listed in the Programs menu, you just click on it. Notice how it opens in its own window. You can also start a program by double-clicking on a file made by or associated with that program. For example, if this document were located on your computer, double-clicking on its name in Windows Explorer would open Adobe Reader, a viewing program universally used to read **p**ortable **d**ocument **f**iles.