7 Tips to Manage Your Files Better

You work with documents, presentations, graphics, and other files all day. And then how much time do you spend looking for files that you worked on? A couple minutes here and a couple minutes there. On a daily basis, it can all add up.

There is a better way to stop the clutter: manage your files more effectively. Managing files on your computer is a lot like managing paper files. They can be organized using folders and then stored in specific locations for when you need them. And just like paper files and folders, if you don't have a way to organize them, things can get lost.

Whether you save your files on your computer's hard drive or a shared network location, you can use these seven tips to help save time and reduce the headaches of searching for files.

Tips for Managing Your Files

Use these tips to help manage your files.

1. **Use My Documents.** For many reasons, it's smart to take advantage of **My Documents** feature in Microsoft Windows. To open My Documents in Windows, click **Start**, and then click **My Documents**. **My Documents** provides an easy way for you to store your personal documents. By using **My Documents**, you will be better able to:

   - **Find files.** Windows provides easy access to the **My Documents** folder (and its subfolders) in many places: through the **Start** menu, the task pane in Windows Explorer, common **File Open** and **File Save** dialog boxes, and other places.

     Note: Windows Explorer displays the structure of files and folders on your computer. To open Windows Explorer, click **Start**, point to **All Programs**, point to **Accessories**, and then click **Windows Explorer**. You can also use the shortcut hotkey of **<Win>E**.

   - **Back up files.** Keeping all your files in one place is an essential first step in developing a practical backup strategy.

   - **Keep files separate from programs.** By separating document files and program files you reduce the risk of accidentally deleting your documents when you install or upgrade programs.

2. **Adopt consistent methods for file and folder naming.** Develop a naming scheme for the kinds of files you create most often and then stick to it.

3. **Keep names short.** Even though Windows allows you to use long file names, it does not necessarily mean you should. Long names produce cluttered displays. Brevity promotes clarity.

Let your folders do some of the naming. For example, rather than create a file called **Great American Novel Chapter One First Effort.doc**, you can build a structure like:
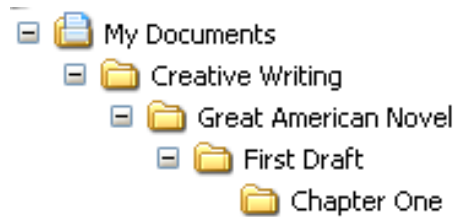

Figure 1. Suggestion of how you can keep folder names short.

4. **Separate ongoing and completed work.** To keep the **My Documents** folder from becoming too unwieldy, use it only for files you're working on. This reduces the number of files you need to search through and the amount of data you need to back up. Every month or so, move the files you're no longer working on to a different folder or location—preferably not in **My Documents**. You can archive them on a folder on your desktop (you could even label it **Archives**) or move them to a backup tape or recordable CD. Your **My Documents** folder, which you should back up frequently, remains relatively small.

5. **Store like with like.** Restricting folders to a single document type (or predominantly one type) allows you to take advantage of folder templates in Windows Explorer. This makes it easier for you to find files. For example, with all your graphics in a single folder, it's easy to use the Filmstrip view and slide show feature in Windows Explorer to find the right picture for your newsletter.

6. **Avoid big folder structures.** If you need to put so many subfolders in a folder that you can't see all of them at a glance, consider creating an alphabetic menu. An example is shown in Figure 2.
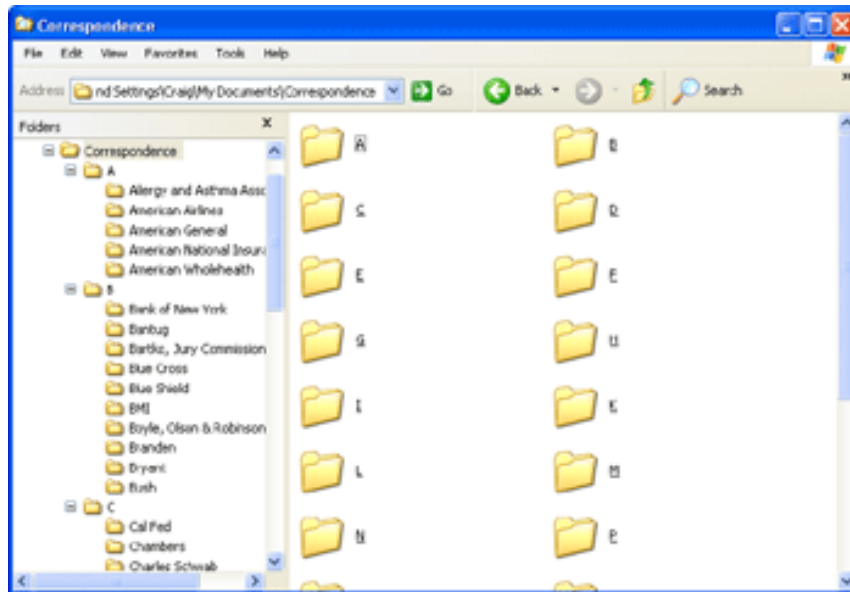
Figure 2. Example of how you can avoid big file structures by using an alphabetic menu.

7. **Use shortcuts and shortcut links instead of multiple copies.** If you need to get to the same file from multiple locations, don't create copies of the file. Create shortcuts to it instead. To create a shortcut, right-click on the file and click **Create Shortcut**. You can drop-and-drag the shortcut to other locations.