

Using Windows Explorer

By Len Nasman Copyright 2008 (may be copied with permission)

Understanding *Windows Explorer* is key to taking control of your computer. If you have ever created a file and later had a hard time finding it, or if you have downloaded picture files and want to organize them into a manageable system, Windows Explorer will help.

Just as *Microsoft Internet Explorer* provides a method of accessing the Internet in an organized fashion, *Windows Explorer* provides a method of examining and organizing your files. This tutorial is designed to provide the basic information needed to take control of your computer files through the use of *Windows Explorer*.

Computer Files

Did you know that every bit of information in your computer is organized into files? The *programs* that run *applications are stored in files*.

Applications are computer programs that allow you to do word processing and explore the Internet.

The *data* used to show the contents of an email message or a picture is stored in files. When you open an email *message* from someone, the message is copied from a file somewhere in the world to a file somewhere in the computer you are using. If you want to be in control of your computer, you have to learn about the filing system it uses.

Computer files are stored on disk drives. Disk drives take the form of *floppy* drives, *CD and DVD* drives, *flash* drives, and *hard* drives. The main storage location for computer files is the *hard drive*.

It might help understand how computer files are organized by thinking of

using an electronic file cabinet. The different disk drives in the computer are kind of like different drawers in a file cabinet. Each drawer can contain file folders where documents (or files) are stored. Also, it is possible to place several folders inside of a larger folder in a file cabinet drawer.

In the electronic computer file cabinet, the same thing is true. Each disk drive can be organized into folders, and a folder can contain one or more files. It is also possible to have a folder inside another folder that is inside another folder and so on. There is a tool that can be used to visualize how these electronic files are organized. This tool is the *Windows Explorer*.



Each computer file has a particular format, or method of organizing the bits of data that make the file. When an application program (like a word processor or a graphics program) saves a file, it organizes the data in a manner specific to that program. Data is organized differently in text documents than it is in picture or graphics files. To tell one kind of file format from another, a three letter extender is added to the end of the file name.

Opening Windows Explorer

NOTE: In this document, *select* means to position the mouse pointer on an object and then click the *left* mouse button *once*.

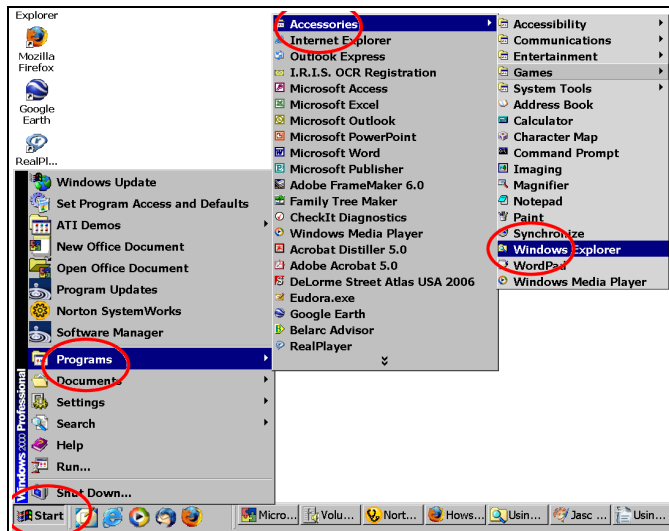
A good way to see how files are arranged in your computer is to use the *Windows Explorer*. You can open the explorer window any of several ways.

From the **Task Bar**, *select* **Start, Programs, Accessories, Windows Explorer**.



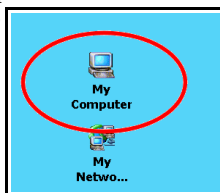
Inside a hard drive

Opening Windows Explorer



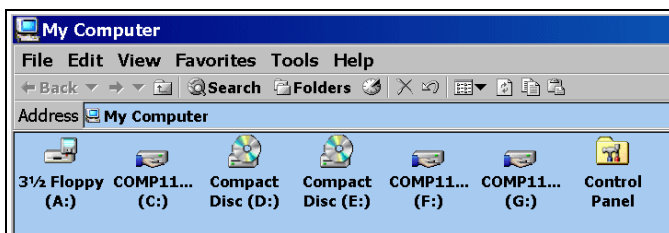
Another way to open *Windows Explorer* is to *double click* on the **My Computer** icon on the **Desktop**.

Some folks like to keep a shortcut to *Windows Explorer* on their desktop, but *my* favorite is a secret key trick.



Make a note of this secret. Hold the left **Windows key** down (the one between the left side **Ctrl** and **Alt** keys on most newer keyboards) and while holding it down, press the letter **E** key. This will pop open the **Explorer window**.

No matter how you open it, the *Explorer Window* will show all of the drives installed on your computer. In the example below, you can see that the computer has a floppy drive, 3 hard drives and 2 CD drives installed.

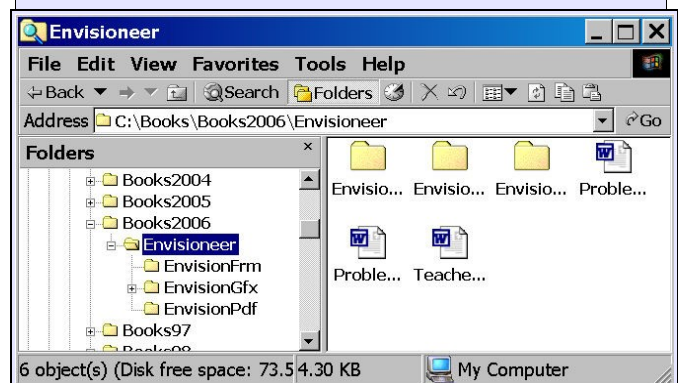
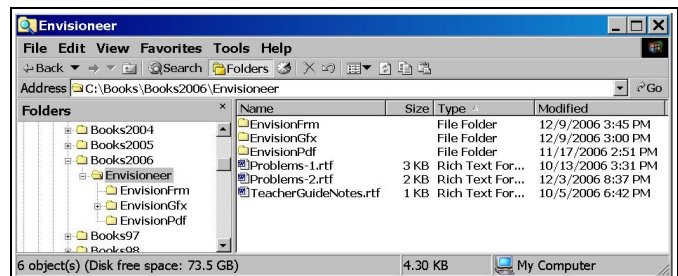


Viewing Files

This is a good time to review how devices, files and file folders are displayed in the *Windows Explorer*. Each of these can be shown either by an *icon*, or by

an entry in a list. Files have a small picture (or *icon*) that shows the program that is associated with the file. Folders have an icon that looks like a folder.

The two examples below show the same contents. The upper one shows a detail list while the lower one shows only icons.



I much prefer the detail list since it provides more information about the folders and files.

To switch between icons and details in the **Explorer window**, **select View** from the **MENU BAR** and pick the style you prefer.

The **Explorer Window** has a section on the left side with the heading **Folders**. The section on the right side of the window shows the contents of the folder selected on the left.

You should notice that if there is a **+** sign beside a folder it means that there is another folder inside of that folder. Just **select** the plus sign and you will see what is in the folder (it might be more folders).

Some beginners develop the habit of putting all of their folders and files on the *Desktop*. This makes it easy to locate things... until you have more than 5 or 6 or so. Before long, the *Desktop* will become so

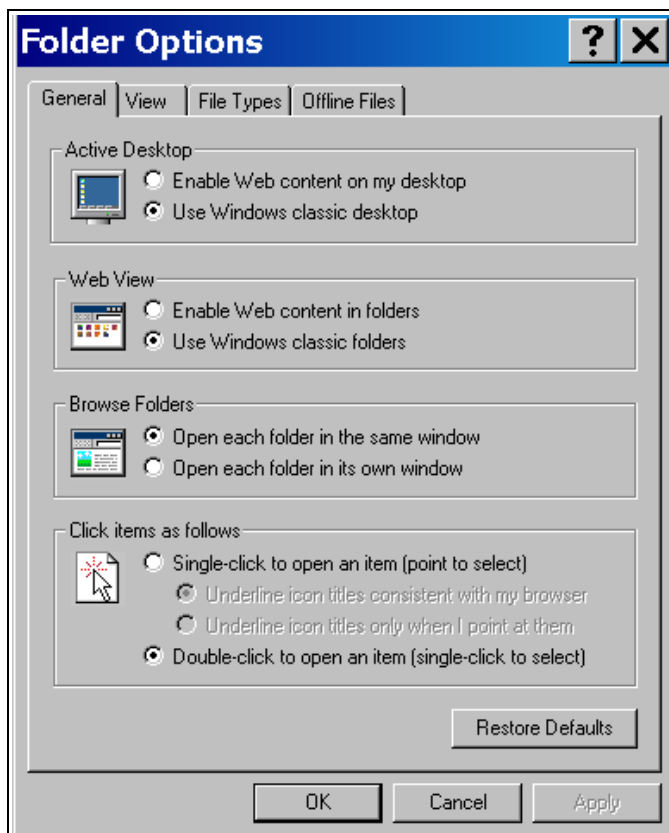
cluttered that you can't find anything. (I have tables and desks that are covered with stacks of papers and stuff just like that.)

The secret is to organize folders and files so that you don't go blind or crazy trying to locate a file you need.

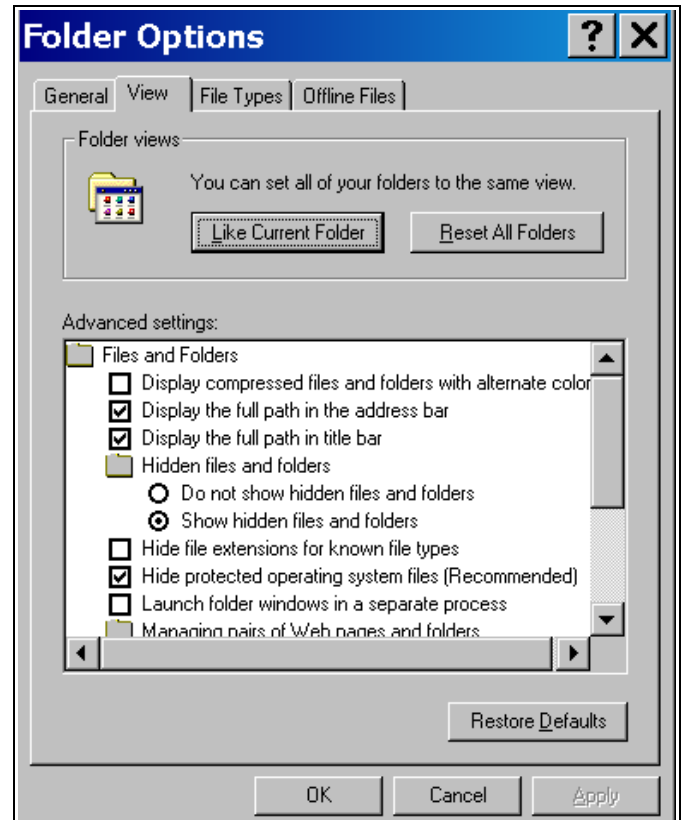
There are some additional viewing options for *Windows Explorer*. These are found under the **Tools** option in the **MENU BAR**.

With *Windows Explorer* open and a folder selected, from the **MENU BAR**, select **Tools, Folder Options**.

This will open the **Folder Options** dialog box. There are several tabs near the top of the dialog box. The general tab allows you to switch between Windows Classic and Web content mode. I prefer to use classic mode when dealing with files.



The **Folder Options View** tab allows for control of how files are shown. The settings I prefer include showing the path to files on the address and title bars.



I also always show the file extensions for all files. In my opinion, knowing the file extension is critical to knowing what kind of file you have. For some reason, Microsoft makes the default setting hide the extensions for known file types.

It is my opinion that *Hide file extensions for known file types* should always be turned **OFF**.

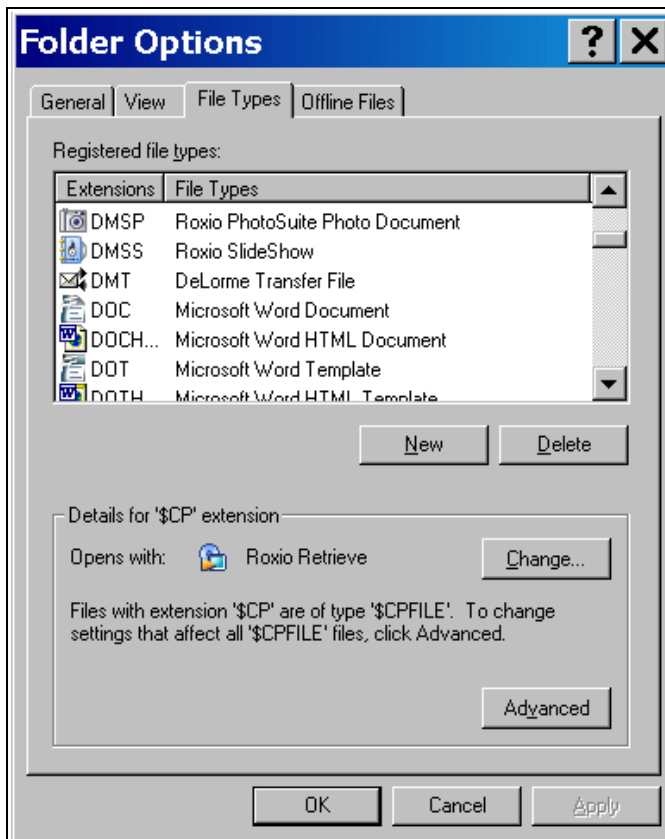
Once you have selected the **View** options, you should select the **Like Current Folder** button. This will cause the system to open all folders with the same settings.

There is one more tab in the **Folder Options** dialog box we will explore briefly. The **Folder Options File Types** tab reveals what program is *associated* with each file type.

Viewing Files

What this means is that each file type can be associated with a particular program. For example, the xls file extender is associated with the Microsoft Excel spreadsheet program. This means that if you double-click on a file with the xls extension, (and this double-click might be in *Windows Explorer*, or the Windows Desktop, or in an email attachment) Excel will automatically open and the file will be in view.

The **Folder Options File Types** tab provide for viewing the file associations, and it also provides for editing these associations. Sometimes when you install a new program it will, without asking, change file associations. This can be annoying. If you have more than one paint or graphics program installed, for example, you might want a particular paint program to open jpg files for viewing, while the program for downloading pictures from a digital camera might change jpg to be associated with it's own program. If you ever want to reassign file associations, the **Folder Options File Types** tab is where to do the task.

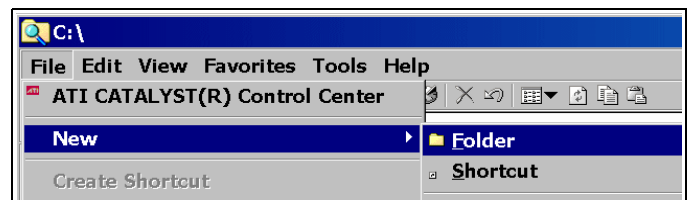


Creating Folders

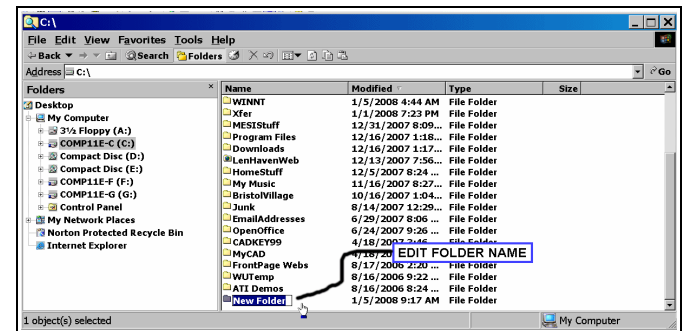
You can create and name a new folder and place it anywhere you would like withing the electronic computer filing system. Here is how to create a new folder.

First, open the *Windows Explorer*.

Use the *Windows Explorer* to highlight a folder where you want to put stuff. Then select **File, New, Folder**, and give your new folder a logical name. Then you can use the new folder to store your files in a predictable place.



As soon as the new folder appears on the list, edit the new folder name to reflect the contents you plan to add to the folder. For example, **My Vacation 2007** might be a good name for picture files.



Save Files Where You Want Them

When you create a new file with your word processor, or spreadsheet, or whatever, use **File, Save As** and adjust the path to point to your folder before you save the file.

Taking control of your files and folders using *Windows Explorer* will give you a great feeling of power and control over that stupid computer.

Windows Explorer Cousins, Open and Save As

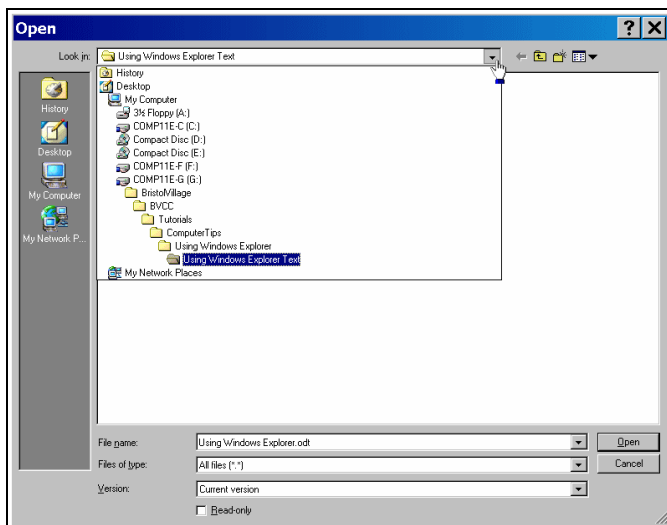
The dialog boxes that appear whenever you use either the **File, Open** or **File, Save As** commands from most programs are very similar to the *Windows Explorer*. Below is an illustration of the **File, Open** dialog box.

Observe that when the small arrow on the right side of the **Look in:** text box is selected, a pop down list appears. This shows the path to the currently selected folder. When you are looking for a file to open, you need to know what folder, in what folder, in what folder the file is in. Note that the appearance of this list is similar to the *Windows Explorer* format. Once you have set the appropriate folder in the **Look in:** text box, you can then select the file to be opened.

Observe that the **Look In:** text box has now been replaced with the **Save In:** text box. Otherwise the two dialog boxes work the same.

This version created February 3, 2008

For permission to copy, contact webmaster@bvres.org



A similar dialog box appears when you use the **File, Save As** option.

