

**President's Corner: June, 2015**  
**Computers 101: File Management**  
**By Eric Moore**

A common subject that comes up in Don Wiegel's monthly SIG is file management. Organizing and finding files on a computer is something that many need help with. At the May meeting, I gave a presentation on this topic, titled "Computers 101: File Management." Since not everyone was able to attend, I decided to write a short column on this topic for those who missed my presentation.

Please note that this article focuses on features first introduced with Windows Vista and carried over into Windows 7, 8, and 10. For more information, I recommend searching the Internet with a descriptive phrase such as *Windows 7 search files* or *Windows 8 sort files*. Be certain to include the version of Windows in your search phrase for the most relevant results, since the features in one version of Windows may not be available in another version. If seeing a demonstration is more helpful than text or pictures, then be sure to search for what is available on YouTube. Many Windows tutorial videos have been posted on YouTube, so you may easily find many that are relevant to you.

### **Using Subfolders**

When saving a file, the software you use will generally default to one of several predefined folders created by Windows. Folders specifically for storing pictures and photos, videos, music, downloads, and documents are created for each user on a Windows computer. These are really only suggested locations for saving your data. For instance, a photo of your family need not be saved to the Pictures folder; it could be saved to your Documents folder instead. The important thing to remember is to develop a system that makes sense to you, so as to make it easy to find what you need.

Although you can save every file without creating subfolders (using a "flat" folder organization), I do not recommend it for a large number of files. I recommend that you create subfolders (folders within folders) under Documents, Pictures, Music, and Videos, to categorize your files. There are many ways to organize your files. For example, under Pictures, you may wish to sort your pictures in subfolders named for the subject matter, such as Vacations, Family, Pets, etc. When organizing materials for a job search, you may wish to create a subfolder under Documents named "Job Search" and then create subfolders to organize your files, such as Resumes, Cover Letters, and Thank You Letters (or, perhaps, by the names of the employers you apply to). The key is to categorize and sub-categorize your files to make them easier to search through.

Although you could organize your data ten subfolders deep or more, finding and opening files will be more laborious. For instance, when you need to find a particular cover letter that you sent to an employer, and it is located six levels deep, you will need to do a lot of double-clicking in your word processor as you navigate to the folder that contains the file you need. Deep folder arrangements will also make it slower for you to switch from one document to another, as you may need to navigate back up several levels and then down several other levels to another subfolder for what you need. Finally, very deep folder arrangements will result in files that have very long *file paths* that cannot be handled by certain programs. (The file path is the full description of a file's location, consisting of the drive letter, subfolder location, and the file's name. An example would be E:\Documents\Resumes\2015.docx, which specifies a Word document named 2015.docx located on the E: drive under the folder/subfolder \Documents\Resumes.)

## **File Naming Conventions**

Giving your files descriptive, meaningful names is another key to making it easier to find the files you need. Windows supports up to 255 characters for a single folder or file name, but I recommend using much shorter names, say no more than thirty characters. The main reason is that when you view a list of files, either in Windows Explorer, or when looking for a file to open from your favorite program, only part of the file name will be displayed. More to the point, if you have a series of files that are similarly named, but the distinguishing information is at the end of the file name, then you will have a difficult time finding the right one. An example would be a file named “My resume for electrical engineering jobs I applied for in 20...”, where you would specify the year at the end of the file name. When viewing the list of files in Microsoft Word, you may only see the phrase “My resume for electrical engineering jo...” The rest of the file name is left off, making it difficult for you to distinguish one from the other. Shorter is better. Or at the very least, place the distinguishing information at the beginning of the file name. In this example, placing the year at the beginning of the file name would be more helpful.

Another alternative to packing a large amount of information in the file name is to remove such details from the file names and use them as the names of subfolders, by which you may organize your data. For instance, rather than placing the year in which a cover letter was used, create a subfolder named “2015” for saving such files. Rather than placing the job title or employer's name in the file name, create subfolders named for the job titles and employers' names.

When using numerical data such as an index or date in a file name, and proper sorting is important, I recommend inserting extra leading zeros so the width of each numeric expression is the same across multiple files. For example, when using numeric indices, if you have ten or more files, then enter the indices as 01, 02, 03, ..., 09, 10, 11, ... If you have more than one hundred files in a series, then enter the indices as 001, 002, 0013, ..., 010, 011, ..., 100, 101, ...

For dates, use 01 for January, 02 for February, etc. Dates with a single number for the day should be entered as two digits. For example, January 3 can be represented as 01-03 or 0103. July 4 can be represented as 07-04 or 0704. For full dates, always enter the year first, followed by the month, and then the day to ensure the files are sorted in chronological order. Examples would be 2015-01-02 for January 2, 2015, and 2014-05-25 for May 25, 2014.

## **Searching for Files**

Beginning with Windows Vista, Windows Explorer has a field in the upper right corner of the window for searching your files. If you enter a text phrase in the Search box, Windows will then attempt to find any files and folders that match the information. By default, Windows will search by the names of the files and folders, as well as any text data contained in your files. For example, if you enter “test” for the search phrase, files containing the word “test”, as well as files and folders with “test” in their names, will be matched. You may also be given other options within the Search box, such as finding files that are bigger than some particular size, or were modified after a particular date.

If you wish to restrict the search to text in the name of a file, while ignoring what text is contained inside the files, you may use the wildcard character, which is the asterisk (“\*”). For example, if you

need to find any type of file that contains “test” in the file name, whether at the beginning, middle or end of the name, you may enter “\*test\*.\*” as the search term. If you wish to restrict the search to files with “test” at the beginning of the file name, enter “test\*.\*”. For files with “test” at the end of the file name, enter “\*test.\*”. You may also restrict the results to a particular file type. For example, if searching for Word 2010 documents that contain “text” anywhere in the file name, you would enter “\*test\*.docx”. (The default file extension for Word 2010 documents is .docx.)

Multimedia files such as photos and music tracks are not text files as such, but they can still be searched as in the case of PDFs and spreadsheets. Various types of multimedia files have headers that contain *metadata* about the contents of the file. To access this information, right-click the file and then click Properties. Depending on the type of file, you may see a tab labeled Details, in which are several fields with information about the file. JPEG files have fields for the title, the date on which the picture was taken, the subject, the author's name, copyright information, the camera settings, etc. Many of the fields may be modified by clicking on them and then entering the data from the keyboard (you may need to press F2 to open the field for editing). One useful field to modify is Comments. The Comments field is useful for entering descriptive information of what the photo contains. For a family photo, you may wish to enter the names of the persons in the photo and the occasion. In like manner, MP3 files have fields for recording comments, as well as the song title, artist's name, the name of the album, the track number, genre, etc. Entering descriptive information in these fields will make it easier for you to find what you need when searching your multimedia.

If you use a particular file search frequently, you may save it for later use. After performing a search, if what you find is useful again, look for an option on the menu bar of Windows Explorer to save the search. Give the search a meaningful name. You will then see it in the left sidebar of Windows Explorer, listed in a folder named “Search Results”. You may then reuse it later by simply clicking the saved search. The search is dynamic, so if any files matching the criteria are created since the time you created the saved search, the new files will be listed as well as the old ones.

## **Sorting and Grouping Files**

By default, Windows alphabetizes the list of files in a folder by the file name. You can change the sort order to your liking to easily find what you need. When viewing the files in a folder, you may click any of the column headings to change the sorting order. For example, clicking the Name heading will toggle the sort order between first to last (A to Z) to last to first (Z to A). Clicking the Date Modified heading will sort the files according to when they were last changed. Clicking the Type heading will sort the files by the type of data they contain. Clicking the Size heading sorts the files by how much data they contain.

If you right-click any empty space within the window where the files are listed, a context menu will appear with other options for displaying your files. One option is to Group By one of several criteria. For instance, you can group the files by the file type, so that the list is divided into sections, one for Microsoft Office Word, one for Microsoft Office Excel, one for Adobe Acrobat, etc. Grouping your files by size will divide the list into different size ranges, such as documents that are 100 KB to 1 MB in size, 1 to 16 MB, 16 to 128 MB, etc. Grouping by Date Modified will divide the list into files modified earlier this week, modified last week, modified earlier this year, and modified a long time ago. If you select More, you will be presented many other attributes by which you may group your files. To ungroup the items, right-click an empty space, click Group By, and then click None.

Another option on the context menu (see previous paragraph) is to Stack By one of several criteria. When you stack files, they are divided into virtual folders which you may then double-click to open and view. You may stack by name, which splits the files into stacks based upon the beginning of a file's name—0 to 9, A to H, I to P, Q to Z, and Other. Stacking by date modified has the similar effect of grouping by date. Stacking by type divides up the files by the type of data they contain. Stacking by size has the similar effect as grouping by size. Just as when grouping files, you may stack them by many other file attributes. To unstack the items, right-click an empty space, click Stack By, and then click None.

## **Downloading Files**

When downloading files from the Internet, it is important to know where the files are saved so you can find them later. Web browsers as a rule will default to saving any downloaded files to a special folder named “Downloads”. You may change this behavior so files are saved to a different folder, or so the browser will prompt you to choose the location for each file you download. The steps for changing this setting are different for every browser, so you will need to find the information. My recommendation is to search the Internet with a phrase such as *change Firefox download folder* or *change Internet Explorer download folder* to find the instructions you need to change this setting.

## **Programs with Unknown Defaults**

Some programs do not prompt you as to where your data files are created and stored, so finding them may be a problem. For instance, you may create a new account in your finance software and nowhere are you prompted as to where the file is created. Finding the location of the file is important if you ever need to back it up or move it to another computer. I recommend reading the program's help file or searching the Internet for information on where the files are stored. (A helpful phrase to use in your favorite search engine is *how to back up Quicken* or *how to back up Google Chrome*.)

One trick to finding this information is to use the Save As feature (assuming it exists). Try clicking File > Save As... and then seeing where the program defaults to as to the folder to save the data. Wherever it defaults to may be the folder you are looking for you. The program may also have an option to export or back up the data to another folder. If so, then you have control over where to save the copy, so you can then create a backup.