

Effective File Management for Teachers

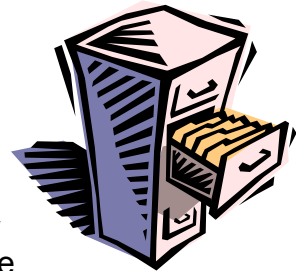
There are some things in life that should not be neglected. Regular oil changes, visits to the dentist, calls home to mom, and organization of data on your computer. Without careful planning, the data on your computer will begin to look like the bottom drawer of your dresser. No rhyme or reason, just a convenient catchall. As teachers, many of us possess a modicum of organization as a necessary aspect of our professional lives. You just wouldn't know it looking at our computers. In reality, it isn't much of a stretch to extend our general organizational skills to data management.

After completing this tutorial, you will be able to do several things.

- Understand the basic organizational structure of individual computers and networks
- Be able to develop an organizational structure that serves your needs
- Be able to define drives, folders and files
- Find a file or folder faster than that lost sock in your bottom drawer

What kind of data is stored on computers?

- Key terms: files, folders



Data on computers uses the familiar filing cabinet metaphor. All data on computers takes the form of a *file*. The data itself may be a text document created in a word processor, a song by an artist of whom your students have never heard, a photo of the student you have sitting front and centre, or a video clip reminding you why you started teaching. The format, or kind of file changes but the metaphor remains the same. All data are files.

Files are stored by name and file extension separated by a period. The name is exactly that. "Mathtest1" and "newsletterdec4" are examples. The file extension is a 3 or 4 letter code that tells the computer what kind of file it is. Listed below are examples of common file types. There are many others but don't let that make you anxious.

- letter.doc – a file called letter produced by Microsoft Word
- presentation.ppt – a PowerPoint file called presentation
- essay.wpd – a file called essay produced by WordPerfect
- family.avi – one of several video formats
- kids.jpg – one of a number of graphic formats which includes .gif, tiff and .png

Because files may have distinct extensions, two files may have the same name.

1. Example: bike.jpg, bike.avi – the first is an image the second a video clip



Files are stored in *folders*. These folders serve the same function as folders in a filing cabinet. They gather files into categories to aid you in cataloguing and later retrieving data. It often makes sense to have folders within folders. Unless the user has a masochistic streak the name on the folder will (we hope!) have some association with the types of files contained within them. Therefore we would expect a folder named Home Expenses to contain files such as energy.xls, and food.doc. A further example is Eng9A/Earlyclass/Janedoe. A teacher of 2 sections of English creates a folder for the subject Eng9A, a subfolder for the specific class Earlyclass, and files or a folder for each student Jamedoe etc.

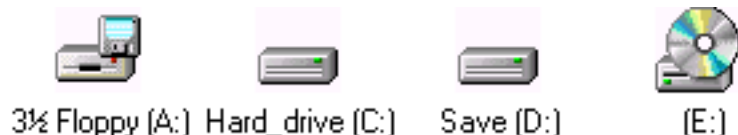
What is file management?

File management is the practice of organizing files and folders in some logical manner. This logic should make sense to others beside you. The process begins with a consideration of how organization will be maintained over time. Your drives will become populated with data and it will pay to consider this. Five hundred files with discrete names and no organization only leads to doses of Extra Strength Tylenol. Later in this tutorial you will learn the process to building file and folders.

How is data stored on a computer?

2. Key terms: directory (directories), C drive

Information is always stored in some kind of device. The most common devices are hard drives and CD-ROMs. Some of us still make use of floppy drives and other devices such as USB memory keys, Compact Flash cards for digital cameras and others are increasingly popular. This is a screen shot




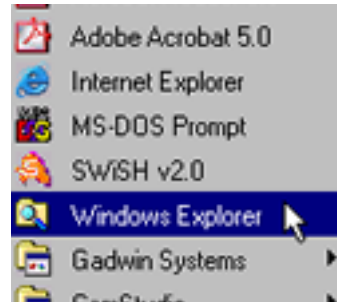
showing some of the storage devices available to the computer on which I am typing. Each successive device has a letter as an identifier. These storage devices may not even be located within the computer in front of you. Network drives are those that are located on a computer somewhere else, often elsewhere in the building. This centralized storage helps the Information Services (the techs) manage and maintain the system.



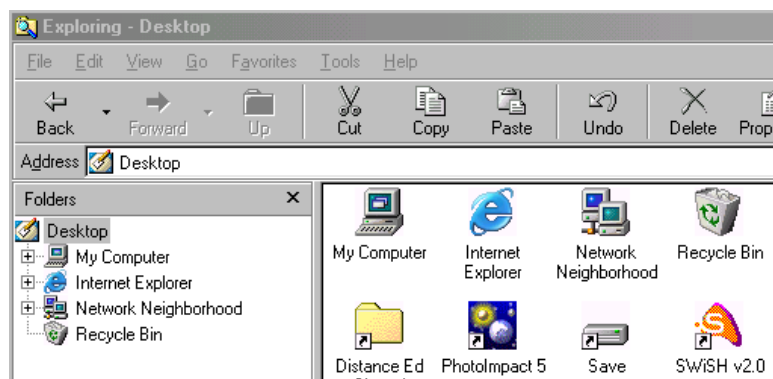
You can see the list of available devices on your computer by clicking on an icon that looks something like this.

You Try It! – Viewing the directory tree. Follow these steps to view the directory structure, also known as the directory tree of your own computer. Depending on the version of Windows you are using the procedure varies slightly. If you are using any version prior to Win95, go look at your calendar. You will note that we are well into the new millennium. We affectionately call computers that old, doorstops. Also, if you are using an iMac or other Apple product, you have my sympathies, but you will need to seek help elsewhere.

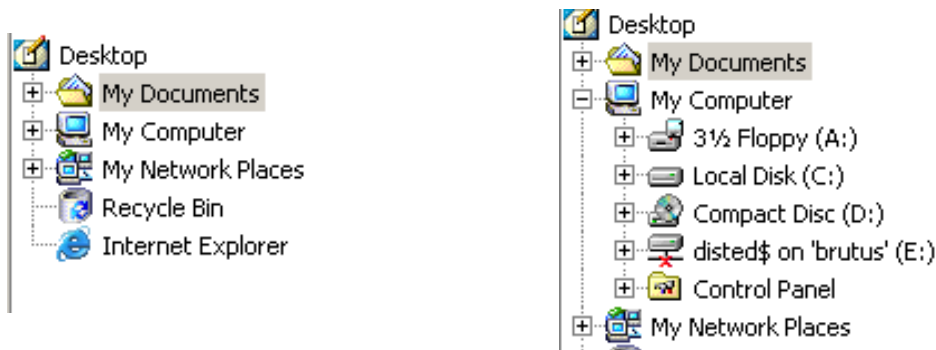
1.  Click the start button.
2. Go to Programs and look for Windows Explorer in the dialogue box that appears. Some versions have it located within the Accessories tab. Click.



3. The Windows operating system organizes everything within the computer into directories. In the left pane, the *My Computer* icon provides a listing of all accessible drives. We only need concern ourselves with the My Computer icon. World peace is of course also important, but not covered in this tutorial. This directory at its *highest level* looks similar to this graphic. This means the tree is not displaying its contents.
4. Click on the “+” sign next to *My Computer* if one is showing. Click on any plus sign next to the C drive. The C drive is the alphabetic identifier for the main internal storage of most computers. Other storage areas may follow but will



have letter designation of D or higher. The exception is the A drive associated with the 3.5” floppy disk. Wherever you see a + sign it indicates that further folders exist within that heading. The images show a *collapsed* and *expanded* view of the same directory tree.



Organizing and Saving Files/Folders

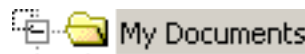
Key terms: My Documents

Now that you have some exposure to the data structure of Windows based computers we will proceed to describe principles of creation of folders and files. There is a certain art to this aspect of computing. Left brained users please take a deep breath and relax. There is still a significant amount of structure to this activity.

Imagine you are the lucky recipient of a brand new computer. The machine is loaded with the latest version of Windows and a robust selection of productivity software. You sit down and pen the world's greatest lesson plan. It is a shining example of the latest pedagogy, child centred, constructivist in focus and detailed in design. You save the file as lessonplan. You are done. Whenever you need to call on that plan, you will go to your computer and open the file.

Unfortunately, you soon realize that you will teach five lessons a day, 190 days a year. You need more than one plan, a lot more. Worse, you also require a system to organize the 900 plus lesson plans you will use that year. You could go with lesson1, lesson2, lesson3 etc. The drawbacks are immediately clear. That perfect plan, and they all are, aren't they, demands an equally flawless organization structure. A system that allows you to find, edit, and reuse files quickly and with minimal aggravation.

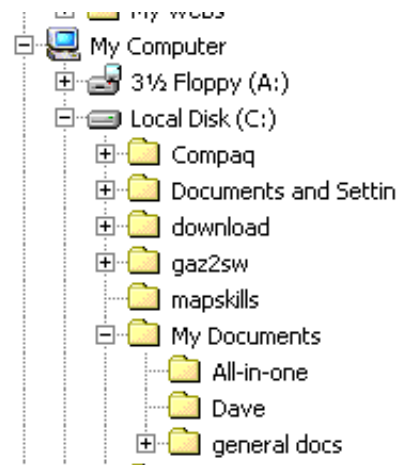
Windows attempts to help you refrain from hurting yourself with an organizational cue. By default the system has predefined folders for images and music. The default catchall folder is called. *My Documents*. It suggests itself as the repository of most of the files the average user will create. It may be an icon on your main screen called the desktop. It is also a folder within the C: drive. While some may prefer to establish their own routine, for many this folder is a handy place to start for file storage. It is just the beginning however. We still need a system for our 900 lesson plans. Here are a few tips. Ignore them at your peril.



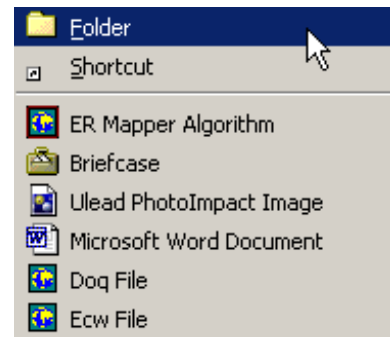
- Create broad categories within which separate folders and in turn files can reside. In other words, hide subfolders within main folders. Give the subfolders clearly named titles.
- Limit the number of top-level folders as much as possible. Studiously avoid creating new categories when old ones will work. If you create a folder called Math, insert all math related material within it. If desirable and necessary, create subfolders such as Algebra and Data Mgt.
- Use as system that is straight forward and logical and stick to it. The expression, "*You can never go back*" was penned for computer users. This is not entirely true but to undo the mess may require counseling and bribing a technician.

You Try It! – Creating new folders In this exercise you will create a number of folders within the *My Documents* folder. This is a sample of the kind of organization that a teacher might use to best manage his or her data.

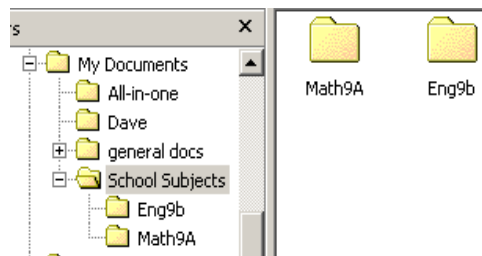
1. Click on Start – Programs – Windows Explorer. Some versions of Windows require Start – Programs – Accessories - Windows Explorer.
2. For our purposes, we are going to use the following method. If necessary, click on the + sign to open the My Computer directory. Click again next to the C: drive. You may have been instructed to save on a different local or network drive. If this is the case, substitute C: for the appropriate drive.



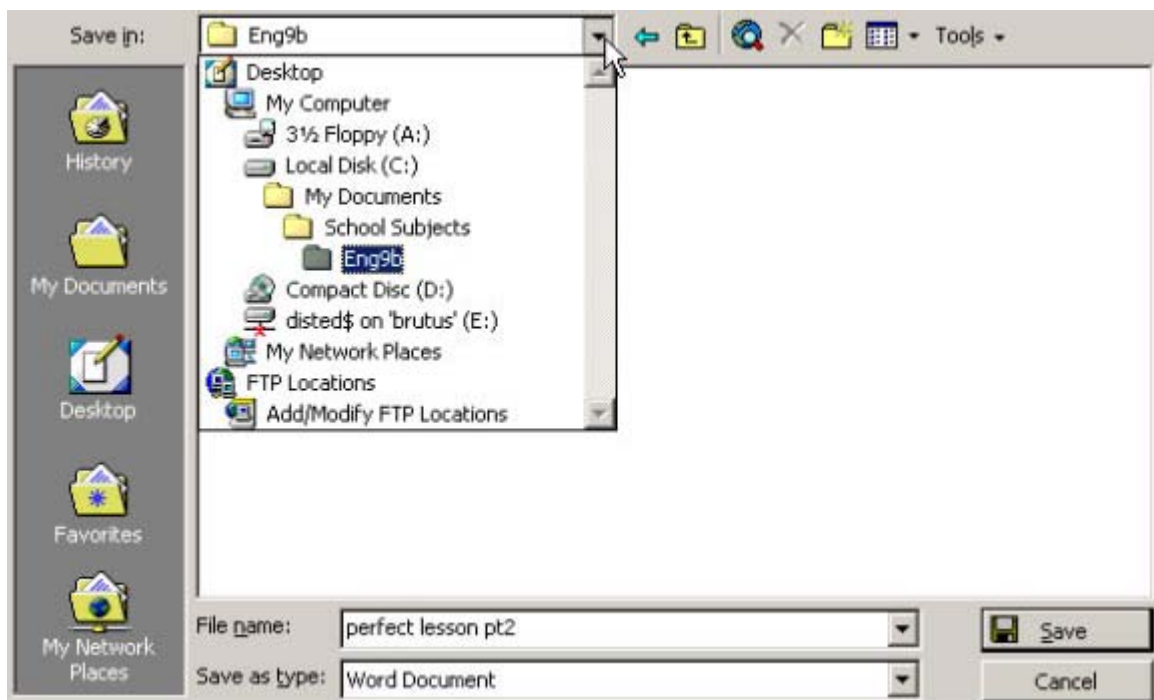
3. You will see a list of folders. One of them will be the *My Documents* folder. If there is a + sign, click on it to view the subfolders.
4. We are going to make 3 new folders. They will consist of a major heading for schoolwork containing 2 folders for curriculum areas. Click on the *My Documents* folder. In the pane on the right you will see all the folders contained within it. Right click over the white space in the right pane. Choose the option New Folder. A folder icon appears. At its base is a space to type its name. Call it *School Subjects*. We now have a major folder to logically store all curriculum materials.



5. The next step is to create nested folders within *School Subjects* to hold the distinct subject areas. Left click once on *School Subjects* to choose it. Again right click in the right pane. Repeat the previous steps and choose New – Folder. We will name this folder, *Math9A*. Notice that a + sign appears next to *School Subjects*. This indicates that it contains at least one folder. It is of course the Algebra folder you just created. Now we can create the second folder using the same technique just employed. Ensure *School Subjects* is highlighted and right click in the right pane and choose New – Folder. Name this second folder *Eng9B*. These folders will each hold all the pertinent information related to that subject matter. You might include lesson plans, class lists, and resource materials, among other things.



- The last step is saving files to your directories. Imagine that in a moment of brilliance you have created the second superlative lesson plan. Twice in one lifetime. Who would have guessed? You now need to save it so others can admire your legacy to the teaching profession. We will imagine the file is a .doc file produced by Microsoft Word. We need to deposit it into the appropriate directory. This works similarly with whatever word processor you currently use. Open a blank document. Type a few words on to the page. Click File – Save. You will be given options on the name of the file and where it is to be stored. Use the drop down menu to locate the Eng9b folder and select it. Name the file perfect lesson pt2 and click save. That lesson is now safely stored for future use in a location that makes sense.

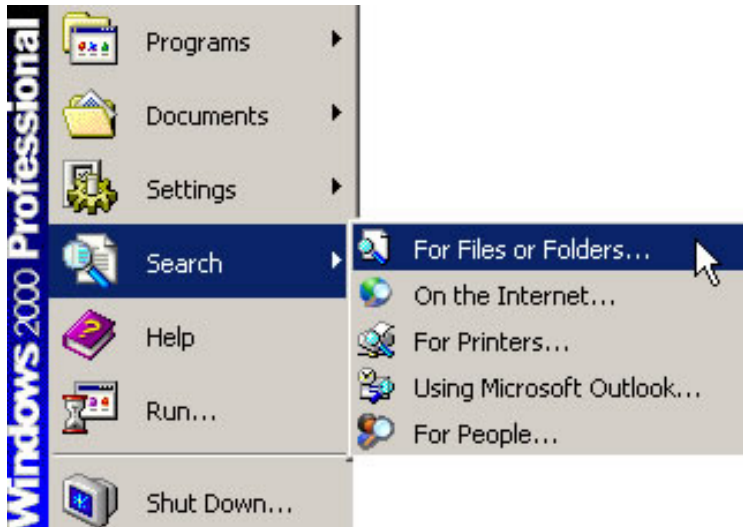


Steps to Finding Data

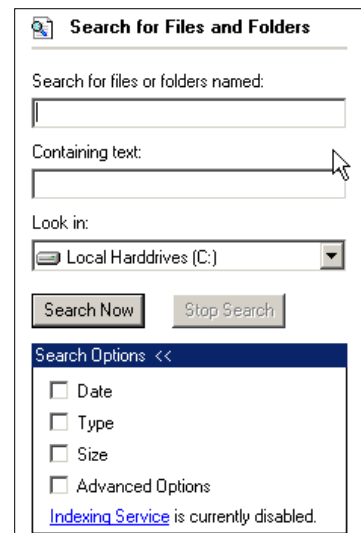
Even with the best organizational system, it is sometimes necessary to search for files. If you have developed and maintained a straightforward structure to your folders and files you will find this task relatively painless. You may not recall much about the specific file. However, if you know it was an outline for a grade 8 novel study its likely a quick look in the School Subject directory and LA folder will bring you close to it. The Windows operating system does possess tools to aid us in locating local (saved on your computer) files. Here are steps to finding files using the search function.

You Try It! – Using the search function The procedure differs slightly depending on the version of Windows.

1. Click the Start button.
2. Choose Search – For Files or Folders. Some versions say Find.



3. You are presented with a search tool that provides options for the parameters of the search. The simplest method is to type the nearest match into the first box. If you remember a specific phrase or statement of text within the file insert that in the second box. The *Look in* drop down menu allows you to narrow your search. If you know that file resides on the C: drive you want to avoid searching other devices.
4. Lets try locating a kind of file that is common to all Windows machines. We will search for a readme file. These are text files often associated with instructions or tips regarding programs on your computer. Type readme into the first box and hit search. After a few moments of sound and fury the system will return a list of matches in the right pane. You may have only a few or dozens depending on your configuration.



That's it. You are on your way to a new life of personal organization, riches and fame. Well, at least personal organization. Now you need to go follow your own advice to students. Practice makes perfect.