File Explorer in Windows 11

File Explorer is the Windows 11 file management application and it looks and works much like its predecessors in Windows 10 and earlier Windows versions. But there have been some changes in this release too. In addition to its simpler new appearance, File Explorer now features a **tabbed user interface** similar to what's found in Microsoft Edge and other web browsers, an **updated home page** with new customization choices, and an **updated navigation bar**.

Get to know the Windows 11 File Explorer

Take a look at the new features first. **Tabs** The addition of a tabbed user interface is the most obvious change to File Explorer in Windows 11. As with the similar feature in web browsers and other apps, File Explorer tabs lets you manage multiple views, in this case of your PC's file system, at the same time in the same window.

To create a new tab, select the "Add new tab" button ("+") in File Explorer's title bar. The new tab will automatically display the File Explorer home page, which is the Home view, by default.

You can also press CTRL + T to create a new tab. To open a new tab to a specific location, right-click that location–in the navigation bar or elsewhere in File Explorer– and choose "Open in new tab." To close a tab, select its "Close tab" button (it resembles an "X"). You can also press CTRL + W to close the currently selected tab.

Basic tab management: Each tab works like its own File Explorer window, so you can navigate to whatever file system location you like in each. To navigate between tabs, simply select the tab you wish to display with the mouse. Or, press CTRL + TAB to switch to the next tab in the row. Or, press CTRL + SHIFT + TAB to switch to the previous tab. To reorder the tabs, grab the tab you wish to move and then drag it left or right to a new location in the row of tabs. Release it when it's where you want it.

Drag files between tabs: One of the many reasons you may have opened two File Explorer windows in the past was so that you could drag one or more files between two different locations in the file system. But the new tabs in File Explorer allow you to do so as well. To get started, make sure you have at least two tabs open: one for the location that contains the file you wish to copy or move, and one that is navigated to the destination where you would like that file to go. Then, simply drag the file up

to the row of tabs and over the tab representing the destination. Then, drag it down into the files area and release it. When you perform this operation normally, you will move the file from its original location to the destination. If you prefer to copy the file–leaving the original in its place and creating a duplicate in the destination–then right-drag the file instead. When you release it in the destination, a context menu will provide you with several choices, among them "Copy here." This assumes you are copying or moving a file between two folders on the same drive. The rules change when you cross over to a second drive or a network location: in those cases, the default operation on a drag and drop is copy, not move. If you wish to move the file between drives, right drag it and choose "Move here" from the context menu that appears.

A new home page: As with Windows 10, the Windows 11 File Explorer defaults to a home page that doesn't correspond to a file system location but instead prevents a simpler and potentially more useful selection of frequently-accessed folders and files.

But there have been some changes since Windows 10, too. First, the name of this view has changed, from Quick access to Home. And second, where the Quick access view in Windows 10 provided two sections, Quick access (frequently-used folders) and Recent (the most recently used documents and other files), the Home view in Windows 11 adds a third section, Favorites. This section displays any documents or other files that you have marked as being a favorite, similar to how the Microsoft Edge web browser works with web pages. To mark any file as a favorite, right-click it in File Explorer and choose "Add to Favorites" from the context menu that appears. Also, you can reverse this change by right-clicking it–in the Favorites section of the Home view in File Explorer or in its file system location–and choosing "Remove from Favorites."

A new navigation bar: The Windows 11 navigation bar has been redesigned to focus less on the complexity of your PC's file system and more on the folders and files you need to access regularly. As such, it provides three main sections from top-to-bottom, with Home and OneDrive in the top section, your Quick access folder locations in the middle, and two file system links–for This PC and Network–in the bottom. The Quick access section duplicates the folder list you see in the Quick access section of the Home view. And it's dynamic, so it will change as you use the PC.

You can customize the home page so that it opens to This PC or OneDrive if you prefer. To do so, select "See more" ("…") in the File Explorer command bar and then choose "Options" to display the Folder Options window. In the default General tab, select "Open File Explorer to:" to display the choices.

The **This PC view** is a sort of traditional file system view that displays your C: drive and whatever other drives are attached to your PC. But everyone has different preferences. By default, **Quick access** displays your Desktop, Downloads, Documents, Pictures, Music, and Videos folders, but as you access other folders frequently, they will be added to Quick access automatically. This behavior is also configured in Folder Options. You can find the relevant options in the Privacy section on the General tab and are all enabled by default: Show recently used files. This option determines whether recently used files from your PC are displayed, in reverse order, in the Recent section in the Home view. Show frequently used folders. This determines whether the Quick access view–in Home and in the navigation pane– dynamically changes to display folders you access frequently. If you don't want Windows changing your navigation pane, be sure to uncheck this option. Show files from Office.com. This option determines whether recently used files from Office.com on the web are displayed, in reverse order, in the Recent section in the Home view. Customize the navigation bar In addition to customizing Quick access, you can also customize–to some degree–which links the navigation bar provides.

To see most of what's possible, right-click a blank area of the navigation bar. When you do, a context menu appears. Some of these choices are obvious enough: you can remove the "This PC" and "Network" links, for example, though it's recommended not doing so. But the other three links require a bit of explanation. Show libraries. This enables easy access to a legacy Windows feature called libraries, which were virtual folders that displayed views derived from the actual contents of multiple physical folders. For example, the Documents library might display the contents of your personal Documents folder plus the Documents folder in your OneDrive. This feature was deprecated because most users found it too complex, and unless you know you need this, you should not enable it. Show all folders. You might assume that enabling this option would display a link called All folders, but that's not what happens. Instead, it changes the navigation bar into a folder node-based view similar to the old File Manager application from legacy Windows versions. So in addition to

not using three sections, it adds legacy file system nodes like Control Panel and Recycle Bin. It's not recommended that you make this change, but it may appeal to certain old-timers. Expand to current folder. When enabled, this option will cause the relevant link in the navigation bar to always expand to the location of the current folder or another view. For example, if you are displaying the contents of C:Windows\, the "This PC" link in the navigation pane will be expanded so that you can see the path–with "Local Disk (C:) and "Windows" nodes below it–to that location.

Most users are best served by the default navigation bar layout. All of the navigation bar customization options are also available in Folder Options. To see them, select "See more" ("…") in the File Explorer command bar and then select Options from the menu that appears to display Folder Options. Then, navigate to the View tab and scroll down to the bottom of Advanced settings. There, you will find a section called Navigation pane. Most of these options map to the options you see when you right-click an empty area of the navigation pane–"Expand to open folder" is the same as "Expand to current folder," and so on– but one option, "Always show availability status," is only available from this user interface.