ORGANIZING
– BASICS –

# HOW TO
SET UP
FINDER
FOLDERS

Mac Basics: Organizing Files and Folders

The inside of a Hard Drive looks something like this.

General Structure of the Hard Drive

The Hard Drive disk is the place where all the software and files are located in the computer. On a new Mac's hard drive some folders already exist and contain the software to run the computer and software applications for other operations. The names of these folders are: Applications, Library, System and Users. These are essential for your computer to work and you cannot change the names of these folders. There may be other folders, depending on which version of the operating system is installed.
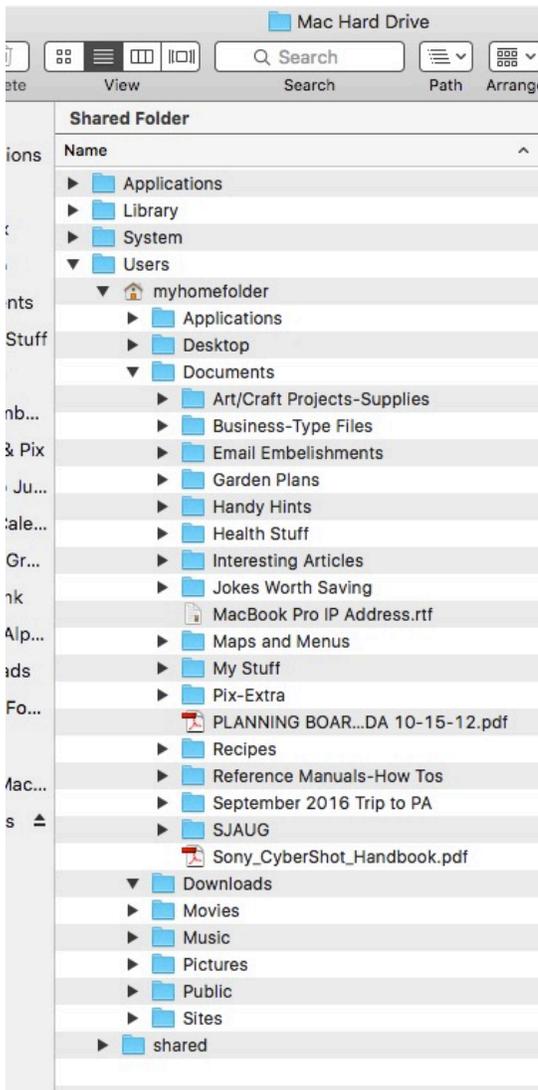
As you start creating new folders with names such as, for example, "SJAUG," "Finances," "Projects," "Work Stuff," or whatever you decide to name them, they should be kept in the **Documents** folder, which is inside your 🏠 **Home** folder. The Documents folder is an excellent place for *all* your personal folders and files. That keeps them separated from the folders that have been automatically created for you when the Mac is new that will contain the movies imported into iMovie, music files imported into iTunes and pictures imported into iPhoto or Photos. Keeping all your personal stuff in the Documents folder assures that files are not errantly saved or dragged into or out of those Movies, Music or Pictures folders.

Also note that the computer will not allow two folders or files with the same name to exist in the same location.

With this first step of organization in place, you will be able to find the folders and files that you create when you need them at a later time. Look at the image at the left with the expanded folders. *Everything* you create should be in the Documents folder or the Home folder.

There can be as many folders as you want or need in the documents or any folder inside of them. You can also keep individual files there that are not contained within a folder, but you might end up with a mess of files and won't be able to find anything.

Just as when you come home from a vacation trip somewhere, for example, you must put all your clean clothes away into the dresser, all your toiletries into the medicine cabinet, all the laundry into the hamper and so forth, you must regularly file your work properly so you will be able to find it easily when you want to use it later. There are helpful features built into the Mac for finding files, but for now, we will stick to discussing the good housekeeping habit of keeping all your stuff in the Home or Documents folder.

Do not add or remove any files from the Library or the System folders. One wrong move could be a problem and cause a malfunction. In newer versions of the OS, Apple has hidden the Library folder for that reason. You must enter the Administrator Password to be able to make any changes to those folders.

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Your Desktop is also a folder. It is the only folder that is on display at all times. Items on your desktop are actually in a folder named "Desktop" that is in your user folder. If you have lots of items on your Desktop and have difficulty finding what you are looking for, open the Desktop folder (double-click it) from within the User folder and you can more easily see what is there, especially if you have a fancy picture as your desktop.

NOTE: *You should not keep more than a few files/folders on your desktop; the computer will see each item on the desktop as an open window and will load everything that is on the desktop into its "working" memory, using up power that the computer normally uses to run programs and load files you are working on. That can make the system run more slowly if you have a lot of stuff on your desktop.*

Move most of those files and folders into your Documents folder *now*! Try to use the Desktop only for temporary storage. You can also create a "Desktop Junk" folder to hold stuff so that your Mac "sees" only one folder on the desktop in addition to the Hard Drive and, perhaps a back-up drive. File Desktop Junk properly ASAP.

Quick Access to Files & Folders

If you want to have quick access to those files/folders, there are other ways to do that;

1. Open a finder window. If you don't see the "sidebar" showing your hard drive, attached drives, and "Places," go to the "View" menu, and choose "Show Sidebar."

   You can drag any file or folder onto this sidebar to make a one-click access to it. (To remove an item, Command-drag it off the sidebar in either direction.)

2. You can also drag a document or a folder to the Dock (in the section with the Trash icon, either at the bottom or right end of the Dock). These are quick links, not the actual file or folder, which will stay in the original location. To remove the link, just drag it off the dock. POOF! It's gone!

3. You can also create an "alias" of any file or folder. An "alias" is an icon that is a link to the actual file; you put the alias icon in the secondary location you want to use to access the file. When you double-click on the alias, the original file will be opened.

   To create an alias, in Finder, locate the file you want to make the alias of, and select it (don't open it, just click once to select it); go to the File menu and choose "Make Alias" (Command-L). The alias will be created in the same location as the original file; it will have the same name as the original file, but with "alias" at the end of the name. The alias icon will have a tiny curved arrow in the lower left corner (see image at right). Drag the alias to the location where you want to have secondary access to the file (this can be another folder or the desktop).
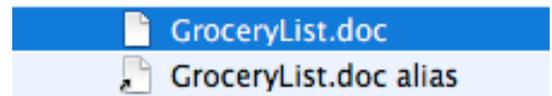
With the access tips above, you now have a few tricks to keep things organized and still have quick access to the files and folders that you use most often.

Now it's time to Organize All Your Stuff!

Now you need to look at your files and folders and consider how you will use them and how to arrange them so you can find what you want, and know where to put new stuff. What categories of stuff do you have? To help decide that, think about the documents or folders, what category or topic that they pertain to, and how you use them and how often.

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TIP: You can make a folder called "Current Projects," with a link in the Sidebar, that has aliases of things you're working on. The actual files are in the category to which they belong (which may or may not be quick access), but you can access them quickly in Current Projects through the alias icons.

Arrange all your stuff by categories; if it doesn't make sense to you to arrange by category, use whatever makes sense to you—just have a plan. Here are some suggestions for categories. Also see the image on the first page for other folder name ideas.

Financial
Bank and investment documents, budgets, etc.
Receipts (or file receipts within the items categories, putting a "receipts" folder in "Household Stuff" folder. Or use an alias. It's your decision!)

Household
Grocery list, recipes, maintenance info (and receipts), e-manuals for appliances (receipts for appliances),

Automobile
Maintenance docs (and receipts), e-registration docs, etc.

Family
Docs from or about your family, genealogy, family events, everyday schedules, etc.

Medical
Doctor info, appointments, internet research, health info, etc.

Computer
Tips and tricks, How-To Articles such as this one, system and software information, (receipts), e-manuals, etc.

You get the picture… it's going to take a bit of thinking, but once you have a plan, write it down on paper or electronically, and refer to it when needed. Don't be afraid to change it if you find something that isn't working. Just think it through first.

There are web resources and books about organizing that you can refer to if you want to look for a framework or starting point.