

# Get the Most Out of Windows 10's File Explorer

By Lincoln Spector on January 26, 2017 in Best Practices, Top Story

You probably use Windows 10's File Explorer a hundred times a day. You already know how to use it to move around your hard drive. Why bother to learn it better?

Because you'll work more efficiently. This truly excellent file manager has little-known tricks that makes it even more powerful and convenient. You can control what folder the program opens to. You can hide and unhide the ribbon. You can make your favorite File Explorer tools more readily available. And you can use keyboard shortcuts to make everything easier.

I'm not going to tell you how to use File Explorer. I assume you already know the basics. But I'll take you to the next level, and make File Explorer easier and faster for you.

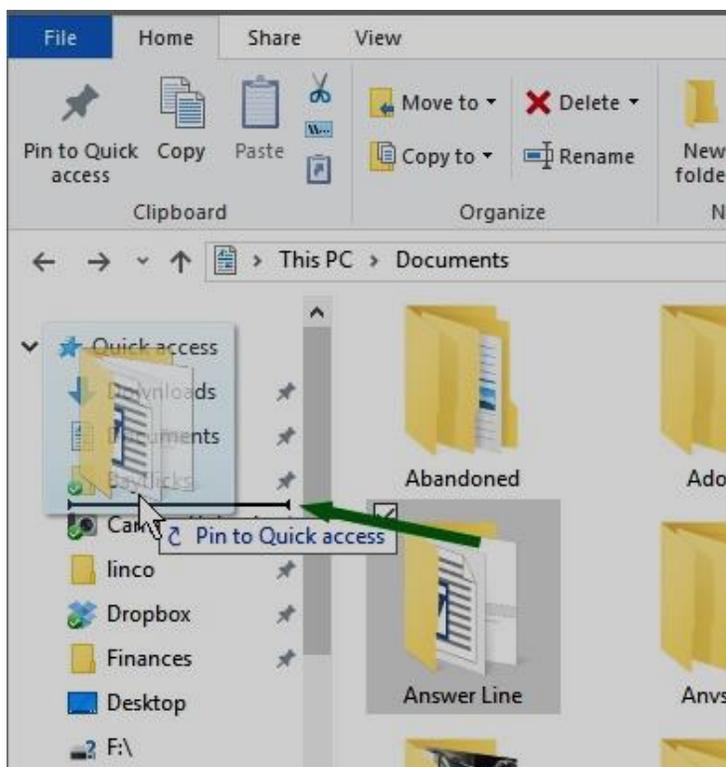
## The Many Ways to Open File Explorer

Of course you know how to open File Explorer. But do you know the fastest and simplest way to do it? Or how to control what folder it opens to?

The fastest and easiest way to open File Explorer doesn't involve your mouse or touchscreen. Simply press **Win-E** and up comes a File Explorer window. If you're already running the program, it opens another File Explorer window.

That window opens to File Explorer's default location. You *can* change that default, but the options are very limited. To change the default location, select *File>Change folder and search options*. In the *General* tab, pull down the "Open File Explorer to" menu and select your choice.

Unfortunately, that menu has only two options: *Quick access* and *This PC*. The first displays folders and files you may likely want based on past usage. The second displays library folders and drives.



Fortunately, you can create a shortcut to open File Explorer to any specific folder. All you need do is drag your desired folder into the Navigation pane's *Quick access* section. That's the top section of the Navigation pane, and it's connected to the File Explorer icon on the taskbar. Don't worry; dragging the folder will not move it. You can create several of these shortcuts.

Then, when you want to open File Explorer to your desired folder, right-click the File Explorer icon on the taskbar and select the folder.

At some later date, you may want to remove the shortcut to a folder

from that pop-up menu. To do that, right-click the File Explorer icon on Windows' taskbar, point to the folder on the pop-up menu, and click the thumbtack icon next to it.

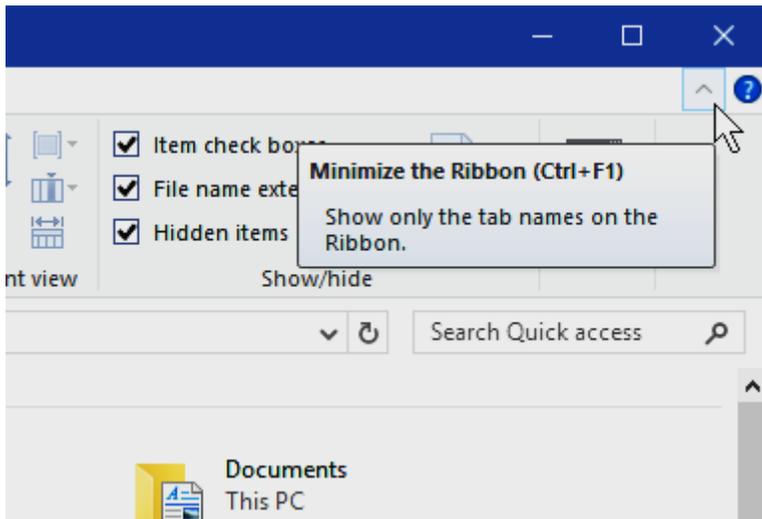
## The ribbon and the toolbar

Somewhere along the line, Microsoft decided that File Explorer should look like a part of Office. Instead of menus, it has ribbons. Ribbons are better than menus on

a touchscreen, but they take up a lot of screen real estate.

To hide the ribbon and regain that real estate, click the tiny chevron in the upper-right corner, directly below the X that closes the window.

Or you can use the keyboard. Press **Ctrl-F1**. You can still access the ribbon while it's hiding. Click or tap on any of the ribbon names (*File*, *Home*, *Share*, or *View*), and that ribbon will temporarily appear. To bring back the ribbon permanently, click the chevron or press **Ctrl-F1** again.



File Explorer also has a configurable Quick Access toolbar, which makes your favorite tools always conveniently available. You'll find it at the very top-left corner of the File Explorer window. Unlike the ribbon, it doesn't take up much room. To add something to the Quick Access toolbar, right-click the item on the ribbon and select *Add to Quick Access Toolbar*. To remove an item, right-click the icon on the Quick Access Toolbar and select *Remove from Quick Access Toolbar*. But that small size has a price. The toolbar icons are so tiny that they're difficult to identify, and on a touchscreen, difficult to tap. The Quick Access toolbar doesn't have to be at the very top of the menu. You can move it to directly below the ribbon. Click the little arrow to the right of the

Quick Access icons to pull down a menu. Select *Show below the Ribbon*.

### Search tools

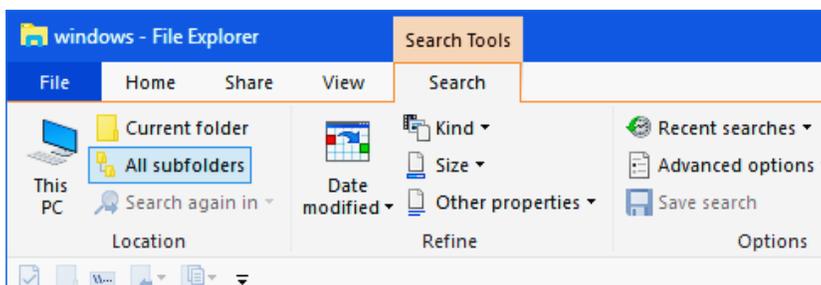
Searching in Windows 10 can seem pretty obvious. You type your criteria in the Search field below the ribbon on the right side of the File Explorer window.

Type in a word, and files containing that word pop up.

However, if you want a more complex search – i.e. you need to narrow it to a certain type of file, or files of a certain date — you have to remember all sorts of criteria.

But just look up from the Search field, to the File Explorer ribbon. As soon as you clicked that field, the Search tab appears on the ribbon. **While the ribbon is hidden, the ribbon tabs remain, and in this case, the Search ribbon appears. All the user has to do is click the tab.**

Here you can control where you want to search. *This PC*, *Current folder*, *All subfolders*, and *Search again in* are all pretty clear options. If *Search again in* is grayed out, do your intended search and that option will become available.



You can also refine your search by *Date*, *Kind*, *Size*, and *Other properties*, which includes the confusing option *Type*. To clarify this, Picture is a *Kind*; Jpeg is a *Type*. In other words, specific file formats are types.

Additional options let you repeat previous searches, control whether to search in .zip files, and to save searches. By default, searches are

saved in the Search folder within your Users folder (probably `C:\users\yourname\searches`).

### The keyboard shortcuts

The great thing about keyboard shortcuts is that you just type them and the action happens. The bad thing is that they're useless unless you memorize them. Here are seven File Explorer shortcuts that are worth memorizing. I've mentioned a couple of them in the article already, but I'm repeating them here for easy lookup.

**Win-E:** Opens File Explorer. If it's already open, this will open a new window. Unlike the other shortcuts below, this one works whether or not you're in File Explorer.

**Ctrl-F1:** Hide or unhide the ribbon.

**Alt-P:** Toggles the preview pane.

**Alt-Enter:** Opens the selected file's Properties dialog box.

**Alt-Up:** Go to the folder containing the current folder. In other words, if you're in `D:\Libraries\Documents`, this shortcut will bring you to `D:\Libraries`.

**Ctrl-N:** Opens a new window to the current folder.

**Ctrl-Shift-N:** Create a new folder.

Microsoft has turned File Explorer into a very powerful tool. The more you study it, the more tricks you'll learn.