Windows 11 File Explorer

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Introduction

Understanding **Windows 11 File Explorer** is key to taking control of your computer. If you have ever saved a file and later had a hard time finding it, or if you have downloaded picture files and want to organize them into a manageable system, Windows 11 File Explorer will help. If you want to transfer files to or from flash drives or an external hard drive, Windows 11 File Explorer can make the job easy.

The Windows 11 File Explorer presents a significant change from Windows Explorer that was included with earlier versions of Windows. If you are bothered by the changes, fear not. If you spend a little time going through this document and learn to use the new File Explorer, you will find it easy to use and more powerful then the old Windows Explorer.

Just as Microsoft Internet Explorer (or Edge) provides a method of accessing the Internet in an organized fashion, **Windows 11 File Explorer** provides a method of examining and organizing files in your computer. This tutorial is designed to provide the basic information needed to take control of your computer files through the use of Windows 11 File Explorer.

Computer Files

Nearly every bit of information in your computer is organized into files. The programs that run **applications** are stored in files. **App**lication**s** (Apps) are computer programs that allow you to do word processing, enhance pictures, read and write email, explore the Internet, or do anything at all with your computer. The data used to show the contents of an email message or a picture is stored in files. When you receive an email message from someone, the message is copied from a file somewhere in the world to a file in your electronic mailbox. If you want to be in control of your computer, you have to learn about the computer filing system.
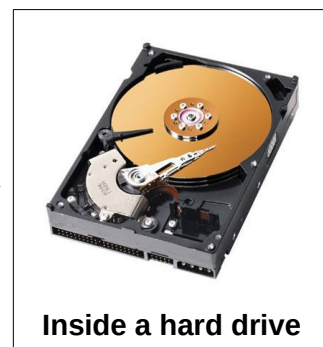
Inside a hard drive

Computer files are stored on disk drives. Disk drives take the form of hard drives, CD and DVD drives, flash drives, memory cards, and, in the old days, floppy disk drives. The main storage location for most computer files are hard drives, and the main hard drive in a Windows computer is identified as **C:** along with a drive name.

It might help understand how computer files are organized by thinking of using electronic file cabinets. The different disk drives in the computer are kind of like different file cabinets. Each file cabinet can have several drawers, and each drawer can contain file folders where documents (or files) are stored.

In the electronic computer file cabinet, each disk drive can be organized into **folders**, and a folder can contain one or more **files**. It is also possible to have a folder inside another folder that is inside another folder and so on. The tool that can be used to visualize how these electronic files are organized, and the tool that gives you control over all of these disk drives, folders, and files is **Windows 11 File Explorer**.
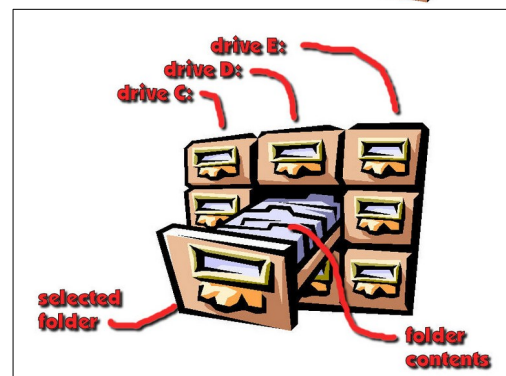
Each computer **file** has a particular **format**, or method of organizing the bits of data that make up the file. When an application program (like a word processor or a graphics program) saves a file, it organizes the data in a manner specific to that program.

Figure 1 shows that hard drive **C:** is selected. It also shows a list of folders in drive C:, and the contents of a selected folder.

Data is organized differently in text documents than it is in picture or graphics files. To tell one type of file format from another, a three letter **file name extension** is added to the end of the file name. For example, if you save a document using a word processing program and name the document mine, the name of the file that is saved might be mine.doc. If you create a picture using a paint program and name the picture **mine**, the file that is saved might be mine.jpg or mine.png. (There are several different

Figure 1: File Explorer 11, C:

formats for picture or image files including **jpg** and **png**.)When you want to retrieve your document or picture, Windows can tell from the three letter file name extension the difference between document and picture files, and knows which program to use to open the file.
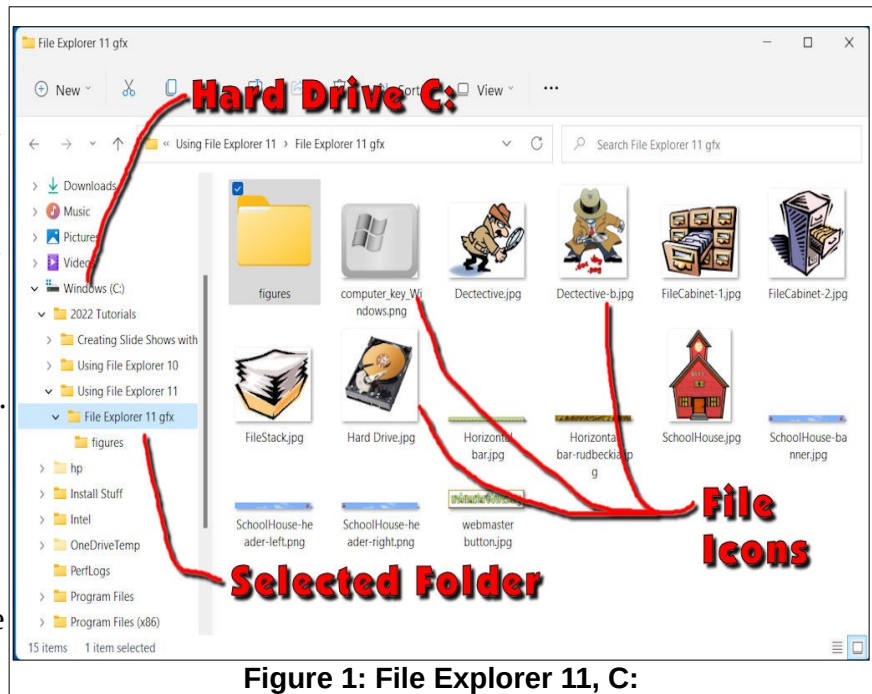
Windows 11 uses a **Desktop** screen. The Desktop screen display will contain a number of **Shortcut** icons and has an area of the display known as the **Taskbar**.

The **Taskbar** is typically along the bottom of the display, but can be moved to the top, left or right of the display. When **File Explorer** is open, the system will show a **File Explorer window** on the Desktop display.
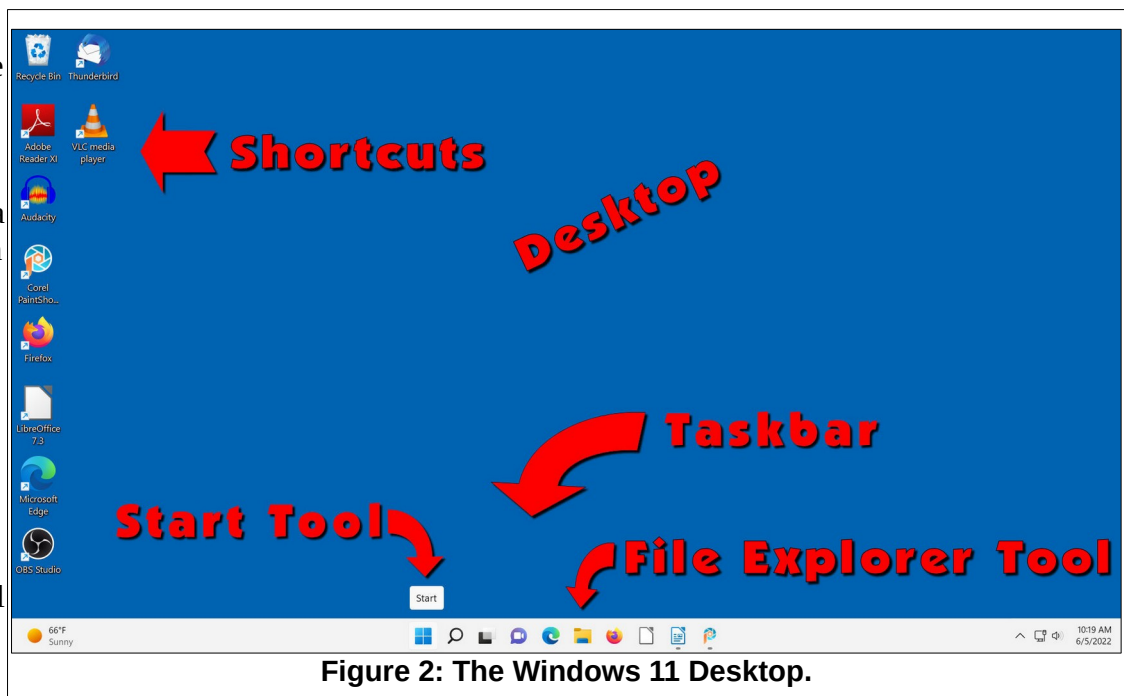

Figure 2: The Windows 11 Desktop.

Opening Windows 11 File Explorer

NOTE: In this document, *select* means to position the mouse pointer on an object and then click the *left* mouse button *once*.

Now it is time for you to start exploring the features of Windows 11 File Explorer. There are several keyboard shortcuts you *must memorize* to efficiently use File Explorer and other Windows applications.

Shortcut Keys

+ E	**Open File Explorer**
Ctrl + C	**Copy**
Ctrl + V	**Paste**
+ Left Arrow Key	**Force active window to left half of display**
+ Right Arrow Key	**Force active window to right half of display**
Ctrl + Z	**Undo**
Ctrl + Y	**Redo**

NOTE: When you position the mouse cursor over a tool icon for a few seconds (*hover*), a **Tool Tip** will appear that describes the tool function.

Open Windows 11 File Explorer – Method 1

Open Windows 11 File Explorer from the Desktop display by selecting the **File Explorer Taskbar tool** (See Figure 3).

Figure 3: File Explorer Taskbar Tool.
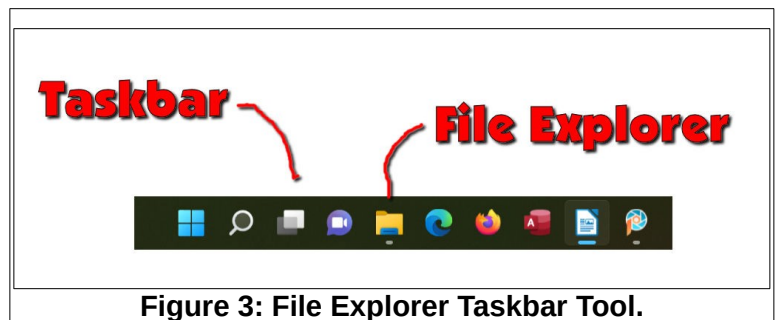
Open Windows 11 File Explorer – Method 2

Open Windows 11 File Explorer by holding the **Windows Key** down and, while holding the Windows Key down, press the **E** key.

Both of these methods have the same result, they open a new **File Explorer** window on the Desktop. Use the method that is the most comfortable for you.

The **File Explorer** window has a column on the left side that provides different file **Access Options** (see Figure 4). Each of these can be expanded by selecting the small arrow on the left side of each option.

In Figure 4, observe that the **File Explorer 11 gfx** folder has been selected and this folder is in the
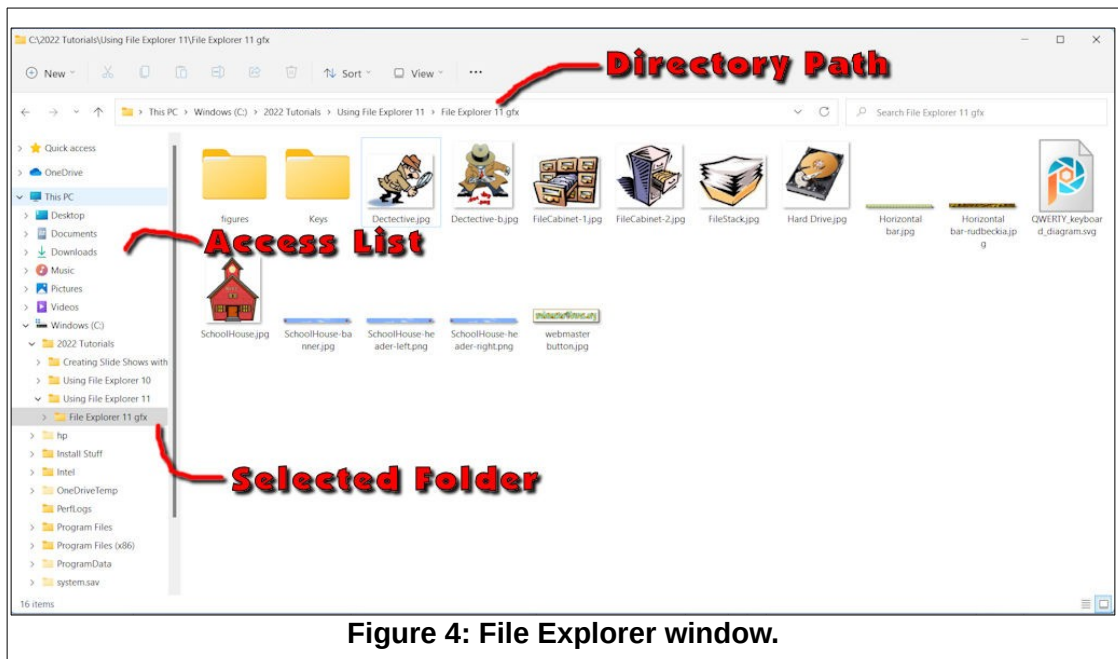

Figure 4: File Explorer window.

Using File Explorer 11 folder, which is in the **2022 Tutorials** folder, which is in **Drive C:**. The **Directory Path** text line shows the location of the selected folder.

NOTE: One of the file Access Options in Windows 11 is the **One** Drive. This is a collection of hard drives in the **cloud** that are owned and controlled by Microsoft, and require an Internet connection and an active Microsoft Account to use. Because I am a control freak and want to own my files, I never use cloud storage. There may be some advantage for some people who do not want to maintain their own hard drives, or who need access to files from different computers in different locations through the Internet. However, I prefer to have complete control of my files. Companies that offer cloud storage are taking control and ownership of peoples personal files, in my opinion a bad idea for most users.

The **Quick Access** option shows lists of recently accessed folders and data files. The **Quick Access list** can be opened or closed by selecting the small arrow to the left side of the **Quick Access** option.

The **This PC** option shows a list of the different drives installed on the computer. If you insert a flash drive, external hard drive, or a camera memory card, the drive will appear on this list. In Figure 5, two flash drives, XFER (D) and INSTALL (E) appear on the **This PC** list.

Note that the **Display Toggle** will switch between showing icons or showing details.
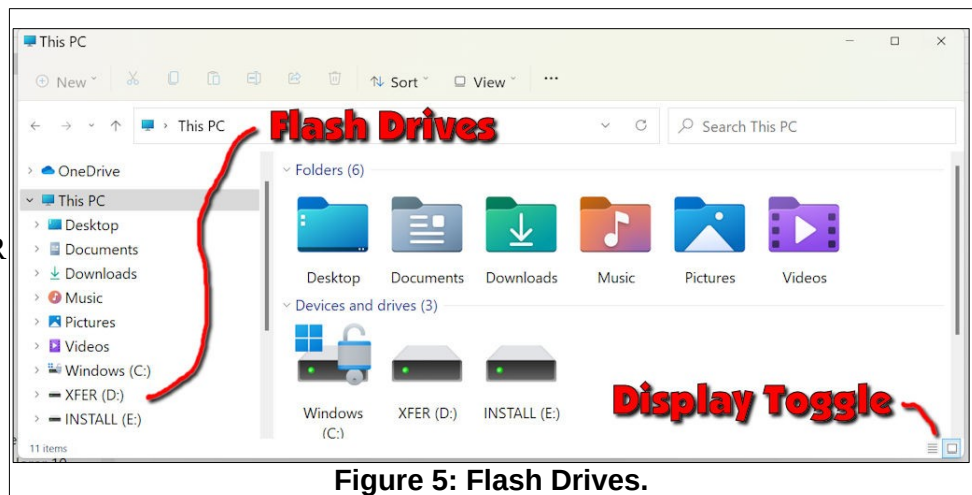
Figure 5: Flash Drives.

You can rename drives. *Right click* on the drive in the list, select *Show more options*, and select the *rename* option from the context menu that appears.
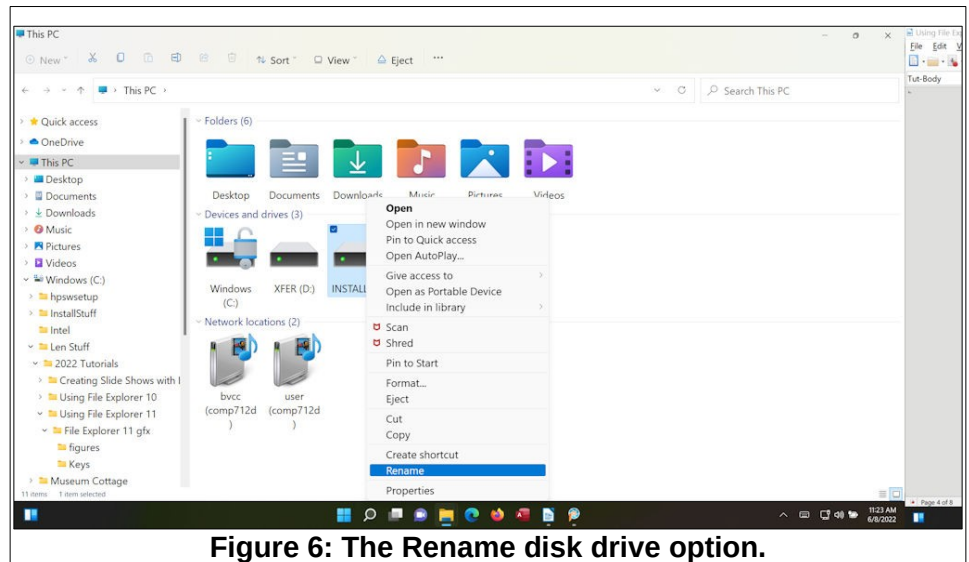

Figure 6: The Rename disk drive option.

The *Network* option shows a list of the different computers available if the computer is part of a local net-work. The network administrator must set permissions on these drives before they can be accessed from a different local network computer.

Figure 7 shows an example of a local area network list. The list shows both network computers and network printers.
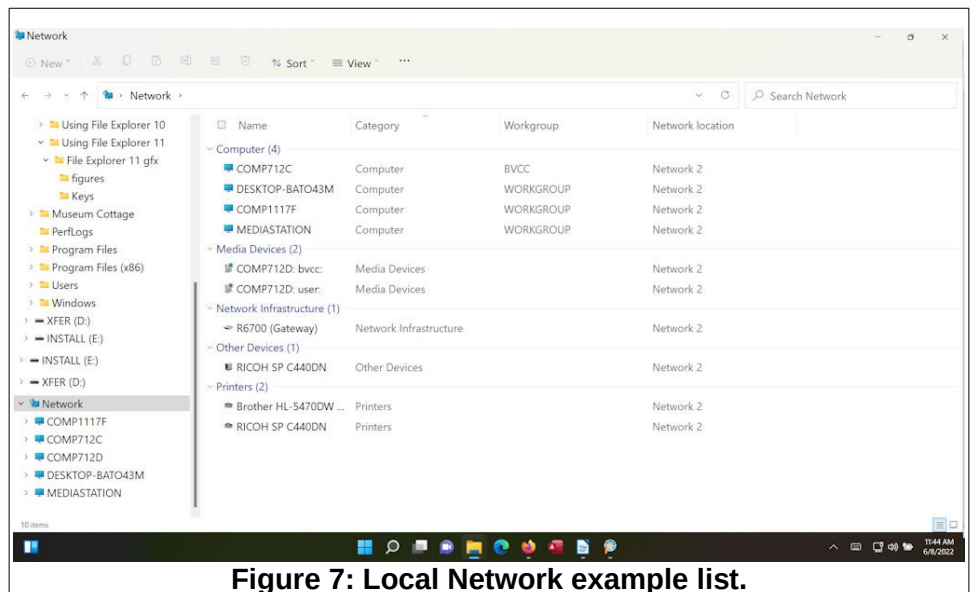

Figure 7: Local Network example list.

The File Explorer Menu

Windows 11 replaced the Windows 10 Ribbon menus with a new menu. Figure 8 identifies the different menu options. Some options are only available when something has been selected.
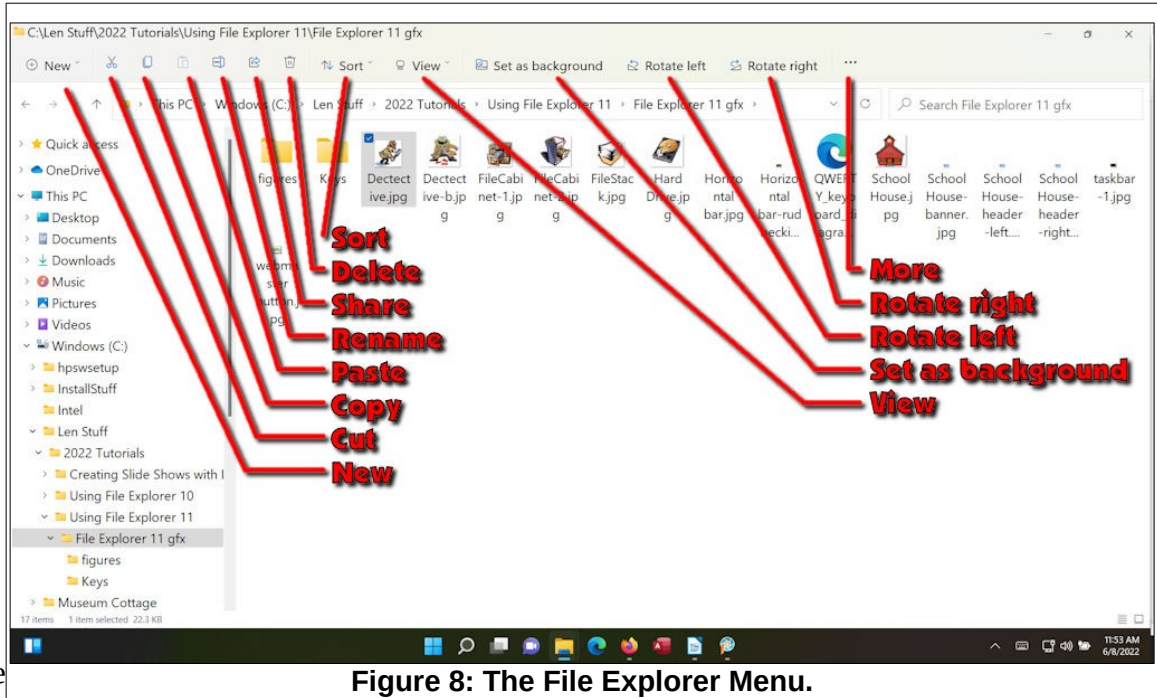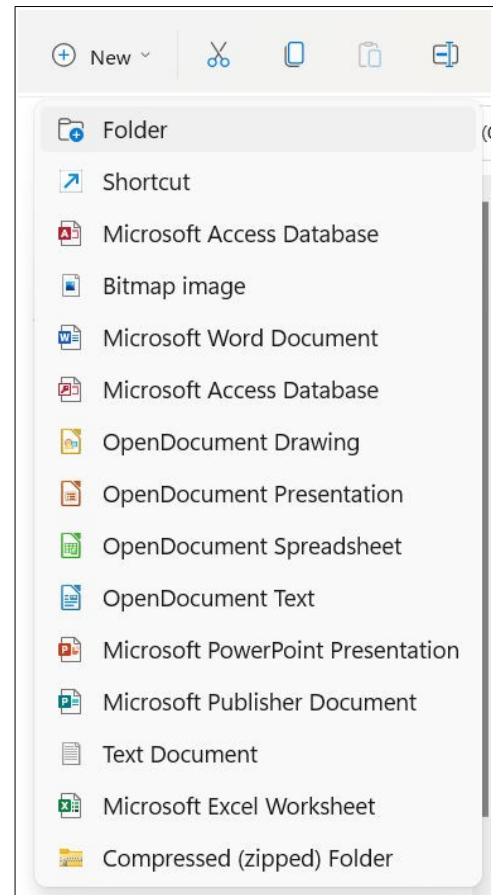

Figure 8: The File Explorer Menu.

Several of the menu listings have additional pop down options.

The New Menu

The New Menu allows creation of a new folder. It allows creating shortcuts from the current folder to new documents.
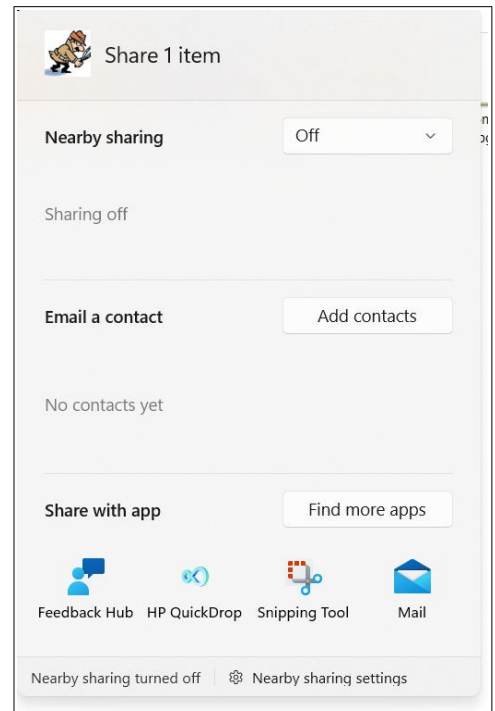
The **Cut, Copy, Paste, Rename, Delete, Set as Background**, and **Rotate left and right** options are self explanatory. The other options require more info.
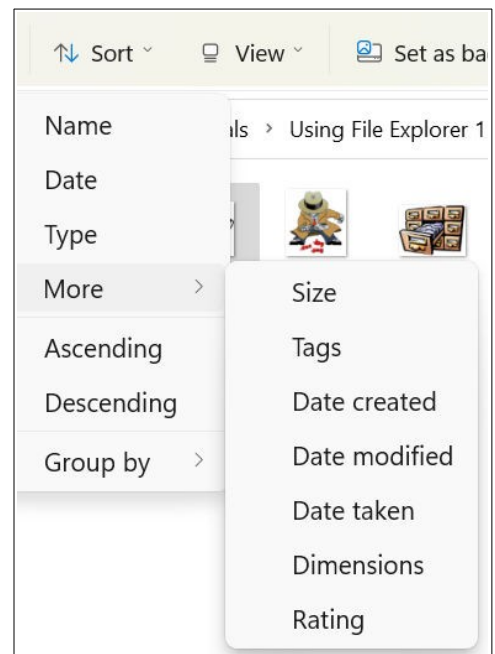
The Share Menu

The **Share Menu** has a number of options including opening email with the current selected file attached.

The Sort Menu

Files can be sorted by Name, Date, Type, and More. They can be sorted in Ascending or Descending order.

The View Menu

The **View Menu** provides for displaying files by different icon sizes, and other options. You should experiment with each of these View options.

There are also different **Show** options. These can be toggled **ON** or **OFF**.

The **Navigation pane** refers to the **Access list** on the left side of the File Explorer window.

The **Details pane** opens an area of the right side of the File Explorer window that shows a thumbnail image and information about the file.

The **Preview pane** shows a thumbnail image of the file. This is particularly helpful when the small icons, Details, Tiles, Content, or Compact View options are in use.

When **Item Check** boxes are toggled **ON**, multiple files can be selected for copying, or whatever.

File name extensions should always be toggled **ON**. Otherwise it will not be known what apps will apply to the different files.
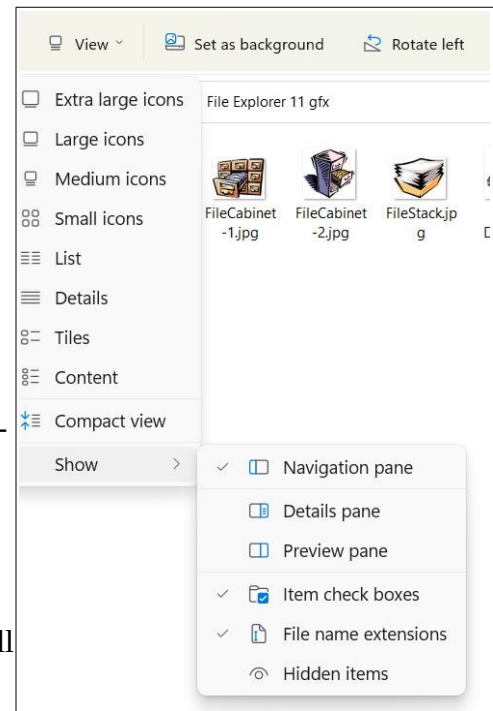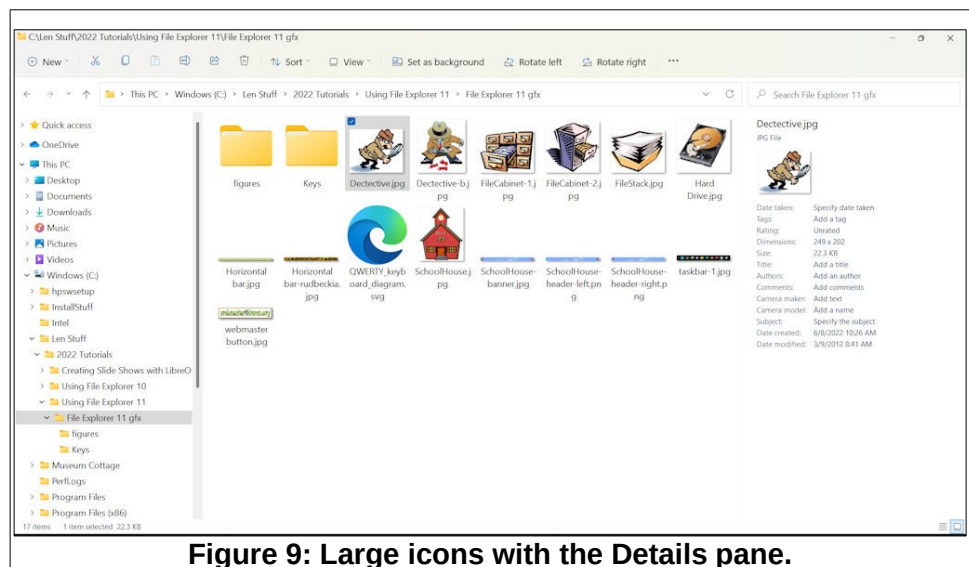
Figure 9 shows the File Explorer window with **Large Icons,** and the **Details pane** toggled on.

Figure 9: Large icons with the Details pane.

Copying Files or Folders from one drive to another

There are many times you want to move files from one place to another. Maybe you want to copy files to a flash drive to share them with someone using **sneaker net** (you put on your sneakers, grab the flash drive, and carry it to a new location). Perhaps you want to move documents or pictures (which are simply files) from one place to another just to keep things organized. Everyone should make backup copies of their important files and keep the copy safe. It's not a question of whether your computer might crash. It will if you keep using it long enough. You need to take action to prevent big blue bruises on your forehead. "*I knew I should have made a backup copy of that file.*"!

> By the way, I recommend that you get an external hard drive. The price of hard drives keeps getting lower. If all you want to do is back up word processing files, any external hard drive will be big enough. If you are backing up picture files you will need a drive that is at least as big as your C drive (250, or 500 GB, or perhaps 1TB). If you do a lot of video editing go for a bigger drive maybe 2 or 4 TB.

You can use flash drives for moving files around, but they are not the best for long term storage. The mean time between failures is not as good for flash drives as it is for hard drives.

Here is a trick for copying files from one drive to another.

✔ Hold the **Windows key** down and press **E** to open a *File Explorer* window.
✔ Hold the **Windows key** down and press the **left arrow key** to force the window to the left half of the display.
✔ Hold the **Windows key** down and press **E** to open a second *File Explorer* window.
✔ Hold the **Windows key** down and press the **right arrow key** to force that window to the right half of the display.

You should now have two File Explorer windows open on the display.

✔ In the left window, select the folder or files you want to copy and press **Ctrl+C** to copy the folder/s or file/s to the secret clipboard.
✔ Select the folder or location for the copy and then press **Ctrl+V** to paste the file/s.

> ➢ **If you have toggled the check boxes option on, you can select several different files at the same time.**
> ➢ **You can hold the Ctrl key down while you select different files for copying.**
> ➢ **To select a series of files, select the first file, then hold the Shift key down and select the last file.**
> ➢ **To select all the files in a folder, select a file, then press Ctrl+A to select all the files.**
> ➢ **You can also select one or more folders for copying.**
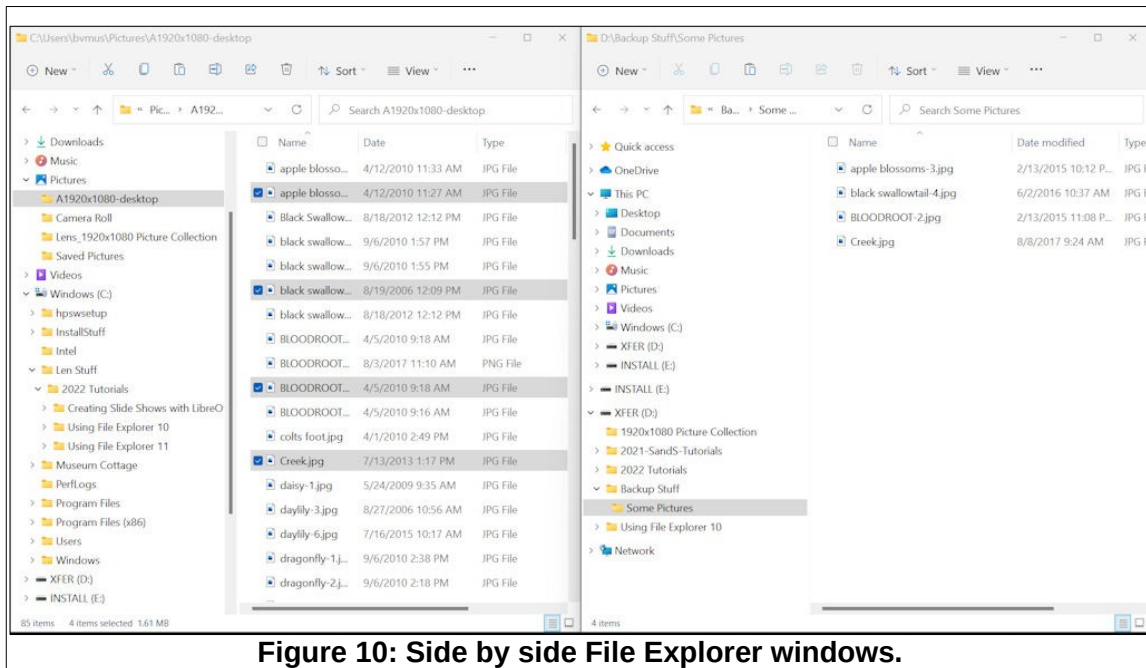
Figure 10: Side by side File Explorer windows.

Figure 10 shows two open File Explorer windows. The left window show that several files have been selected. The right window shows copies of the selected files.

Remember that flash drives SD camera cards, and external hard drives, show up on the File Explorer access list as just another drive..

HINT: To keep track of the contents of your flash drives or external hard drives, use the *Rename* option to give each drive a different name.

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