

Finder Tips & Tricks to Get & Stay Organized

by Mike Sullivan | Cove Apple Club | August 13, 2014

You can easily keep tens of thousands or millions of files and folders neatly organized and instantly accessible on your Mac by “tuning” some preferences in the Finder to make organization simple and nearly automatic.

Using these methods along with the simple steps outlined below will free you from tedious searching for the information, files or folders you need, and let anyone follow in your path if disaster strikes. Best of all, everything you need to make this system work are built-in to OS X on every Mac.

Set Finder Preferences:

To make the system as easy to use as possible, tweak the Finder’s default settings as follows:

1. From the Finder menu, choose Preferences
2. In the General tab:
 1. Choose your most-used folder in the “New Finder windows show:” For most users, this should be set to the Documents folder. If you plan to do a lot of work on one project for a period of time, set the preference to the “top” folder (the enclosing folder) for that project. Or, to always show the top-level of User folders on your Mac, choose your Home folder.
 2. Uncheck “Open folders in tabs instead of new windows.” This makes it easier to drag files and folders between folders when moving or creating folders.
 3. Check “Spring-loaded folders and windows,” and set the delay slider to Medium
3. In the Sidebar tab:
 1. Check the folders you’re most likely to use in your work and uncheck those you plan to use less often.
4. From the Finder menu, choose New Finder Window or type Cmd-N
 1. With the new Finder window displayed, choose “Show View Options” from the View menu
 2. Check “Always open in icon view
 3. From the “Arrange By:” drop-down box, choose “Kind”
 4. From the “Sort By:” drop-down box, choose “Name”
 5. Choose a grid spacing and icon size you like best. Try 80x80 for Icon Size and a medium value for Grid spacing as a start.
 6. Check “Show icon preview”
 7. Click “Use as defaults” to set these window view preferences as defaults for all new Finder windows

Use nested folders for EVERYTHING

For every project, topic, event, or other top-level organizational “hook” for your work, create a “top-level” folder named with the most obvious and shortest title that can describe what you plan to put inside it.

Inside each of those top-level folders, create additional sub-divisional folders to contain and collect discrete items. Continue making sub-divisional folders down to the most logical extent needed to segregate and distinguish the items you’ll collect in each folder

Inside each of those sub-divisional folders, place the items (files, PDFs, documents, photos, videos, bookmarks, etc.) that belong to that division.

Your ultimate goal is to have the system of nested folders resemble a traditional Cornell-style outline of the items being organized; i.e., for a year-long project to build a new Pickleball court, your nest of folders and items might look like this (items in bold are folders):

- Pickleball Courts - New 2015
 - **Budget**
 - 1st Draft item
 - **2nd Draft**
 - For signature
 - Signed budget
 - **Committee Records**
 - Org Chart
 - Monthly Progress Meetings
 - **Progress Reports**
 - 2014-09
 - 2014-10
 - ...etc.
 - **Landscaping**
 - **Drawings**
 - Photo
 - **Equipment**
 - **Fences**
 - Paints & Coatings
 - Nets

Note that the top-most folder has the keywords listed first (Pickleball Court), followed by the dates. It's much more likely you will look for a folder containing items about Pickleball in a folder starting with the word "Pickleball" than with the word "New" or the number "2015."

Now make it a habit to always and immediately file every document that crosses your desk into its proper place in the folder hierarchy. As the project or system requires it, create new folders and sub-folders.

Additional tips:

- For folders that will contain a number of similar documents across a range of dates, consider naming the files in the "YYYY-MM-DD Description" format. For example, for bank statements from 2013, create a folder named "2013," and inside it, name and place each month's statement using a scheme like "2013-06 Bank Statement.pdf," "2013-07 Bank Statement.pdf," etc.
- Review your folder system periodically to find and file any "loose" items that are not inside a folder of their own or with similar item types. It's fine to have a summary or general information file "loose" inside a top-level folder, but too many "loose" files lead to chaos and inefficient search and retrieval methods.