

By Susan Harkins

The Windows 7 environment will spook some XP users at first. It isn't an extension of XP; it's an entirely new interface. Although the underlying file structure is the same, there's less to file management. The truth is, storing and accessing files in XP and earlier versions required some knowledge of the file structure. Windows 7 doesn't require that knowledge -- the file hierarchy is behind the scenes. Consequently, users new to the PC will find Windows 7 easy to use, but those upgrading from XP might be a bit disoriented. These five tips will help your users acclimate themselves to Windows 7 so they can get to work a bit faster.

1: Documents aren't files

Documents is the XP My Documents folder, only better. It's no longer just a folder. Documents is now a library. (I'll explain libraries next.) When you save an Office file, the application will default to Documents, just as it used to default to My Documents. While you're learning Windows 7, save files to Documents because they'll be easy to find later. Just click the Start menu and the Documents library is right there, with all your files. Or open Windows Explorer and click Documents in the Libraries group, as shown in **Figure A**. Until you learn your way around, saving your files to the Documents library will save you a lot of confusion.

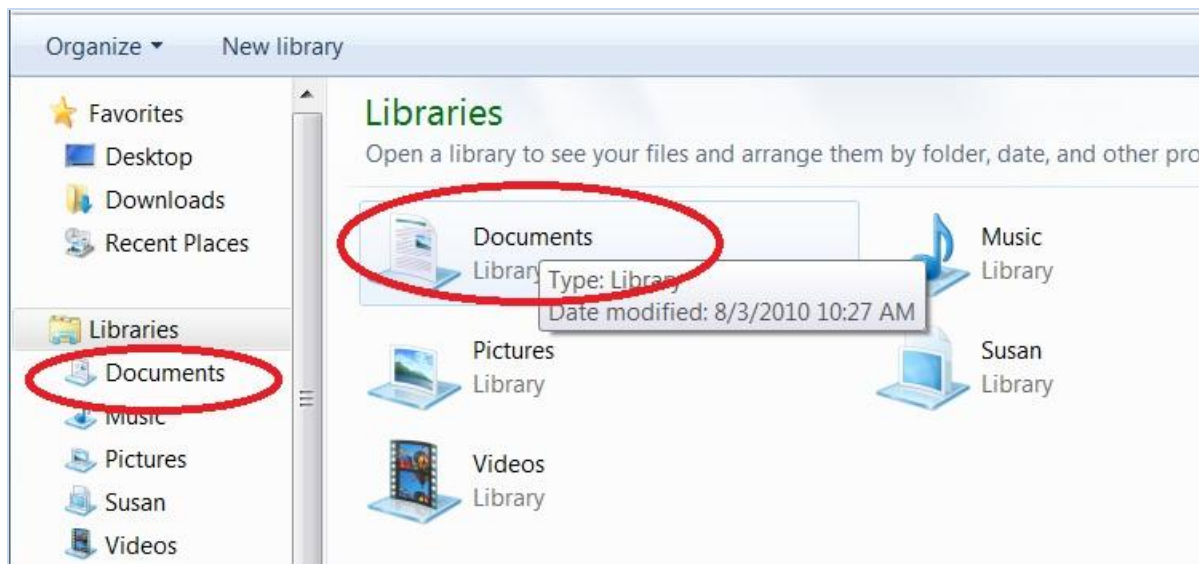


Figure A

2: Use libraries for quick access

In earlier versions of Windows, you saved files to folders. Windows Explorer displayed the file structure as dozens of folders housing hundreds of files. Depending on your folder structure, some files might be several subfolders deep. Now, remember the old file cabinet analogy? Imagine a long line of file cabinets. Functional, yes, but efficient? Not always. And the more folders and files you added, the more of them you had to wade through to get to what you needed.

A Windows 7 library is more like a storeroom. Imagine that you're in a hall with several doors. The sign on the first door reads "Documents." You open a door to find a few file cabinets storing all your files. The second door's sign reads "Pictures." File cabinets filled with your pictures are inside. Windows 7 knocks the older linear C:\ hierarchy of dozens of folders down to a handful of libraries.

Five tips for efficient file management in Windows 7

Libraries don't actually store your files. Your files are still stored in the traditional linear hierarchy. Libraries simply pull related folders into one spot for quicker access. It's a virtual view of your hierarchy. I recommend that you try to adjust to the library structure, but if you truly hate it, you can display a more traditional view. To do so, choose Folder And Search Options from the Organize menu. In the Navigation Pane section, check the Show All Folders option.

3: Avoid the HomeGroups password pitfall

HomeGroups are like libraries but they work with networked PCs. Any machine that's part of a HomeGroup can grant read and write access to other machines in the HomeGroup. As you might expect, HomeGroups are password protected. But rather than letting you enter your own password, Windows 7 generates a 10-character password for you. Write this password down and don't lose it! You'll only need it once, when you connect the first time. Once connected, you can change the password to whatever you like.

I don't know why Windows 7 forces this generated password on us, but it does, hence the warning. It's easy to get distracted and forget the password or lose it before you have a chance to connect that first time. In addition, this new feature works only with Windows 7 machines -- an unfortunate decision on Microsoft's part because most of won't be able to utilize it.

4: Save time with jump lists

Jump lists are one of my favorite features. You pin applications and files you use often to the Taskbar. It doesn't matter where you actually store the file. Once it's pinned, you have quick access to it. To add a program, do the following:

1. Click the Start menu.
2. Find the application and right-click it.
3. Choose Pin To Taskbar, as shown in **Figure B**. Windows 7 adds an icon, shown in **Figure C**, to the Taskbar.

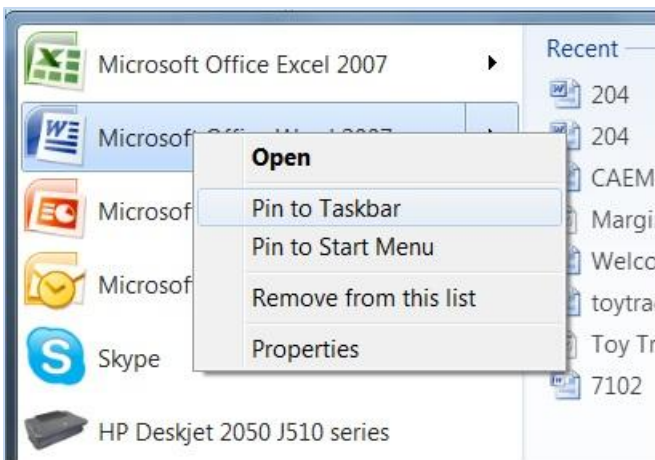


Figure B



Figure C

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You can pin individual files to their respective application's list. With the file open, right-click its program icon on the Taskbar. In the resulting list, right-click the file, as shown in **Figure D**. Once you've pinned a file, you can quickly open it. Simply right-click the program icon and choose the file from the Pinned section. You'll also see the most recently used files, but that list will change as you open and use new files. The Pinned list doesn't change unless you add or remove items.

5: Work efficiently with two instances of Windows Explorer

It's easy to work with two instances of Windows Explorer open at the same time, thanks to Windows 7's new snap behavior. First, open Explorer as you normally would by clicking the Explorer icon in the Taskbar. (That's a nice feature in itself.) Drag the window's title bar to the left until Windows 7 displays an outline around the left half of the screen. Release the window and Windows 7 will snap the window to the left half of your screen. To open a second instance, hold down the [Shift] key and click the Explorer icon on the Taskbar again. Repeat the process above, but drag the second instance to the right and release. You end up with two windows, side by side. Moving and copying files is a snap with two instances of the Explorer open.

Now, here's a useful tip for the keyboard users. After opening the first instance of Explorer, hold down the [Windows] key and press the left arrow key. Doing so will automatically align the window to the left side of the screen. Open the second instance, hold down [Windows] and press the right arrow key.

Additional resources

- [The 10 most useful Windows 7 keyboard shortcuts](#)
- [Top 10 Windows 7 desktop gadgets](#)
- [How do I get the Quick Launch Bar back in Windows 7?](#)
- [How do I customize the Windows 7 Start Menu?](#)
- [Take advantage of Sticky Notes in Windows 7](#)

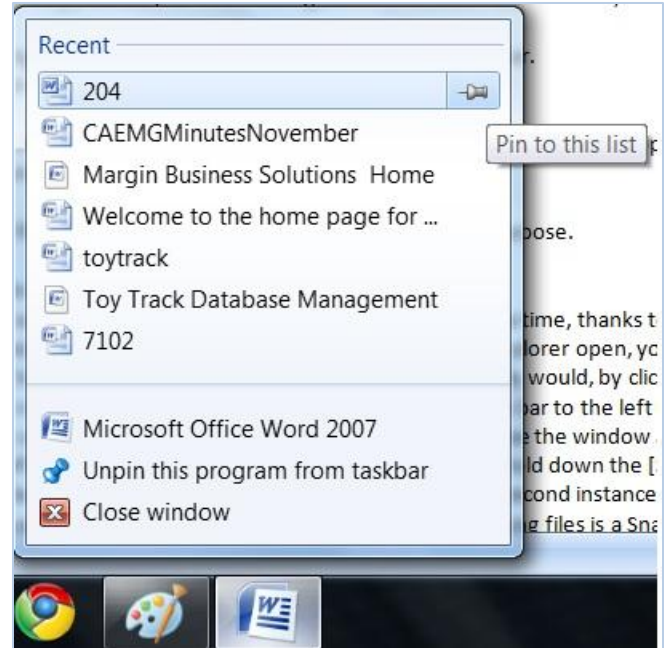


Figure D