Mac Basics: The Finder organizes all of your files

The Finder in OS X provides access to your files, folders, and drives, and helps you to keep them organized.

What is the Finder?

The Finder is the app that helps you navigate all of the files and folders on your Mac. The Finder lets you browse your apps, disks, files, and folders in a variety of ways. You can use the Finder to organize these items the way you want. You can also use the Finder to search for items, delete files you no longer want, and more.

Finder windows

To open a new Finder window, click the Finder icon in the Dock, then select File > New Window.
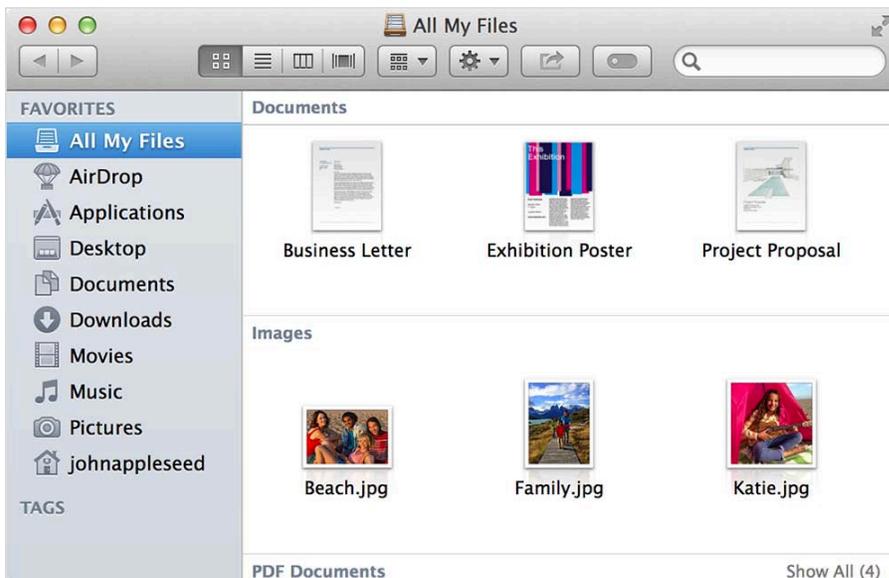
All My Files

The first window you may see in the Finder is "All My Files". This is a special window that shows you all of the documents you have access to on your Mac.

Changing Views

You can change how items are displayed in Finder windows by dragging them, arranging them, or changing their view. Use the View menu to change the view of the current Finder window. You can also

click the corresponding View button in the Toolbar that appears at the top of Finder windows.

Icon View

Choose View > as Icons to see a small image that represents each file. You can move each item by dragging the icon that represents the file.


List View

Choose View > as List to see the items in a consecutive order. You can change the sort order of the list by clicking the headers (Name, Documents, Kind, Date) at the top of the list view. Click the same header a second time to switch between ascending and descending order.
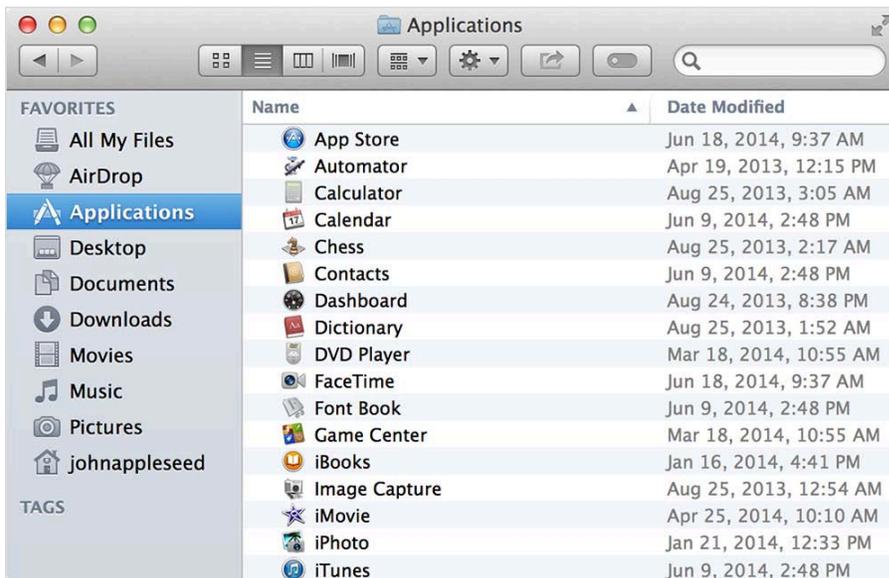
If an item is within a folder, you can click the triangle next to the folder name to see any items stored within that folder.

Column View

Choose View > as Columns to see a preview appear to the right of an item when you select it.
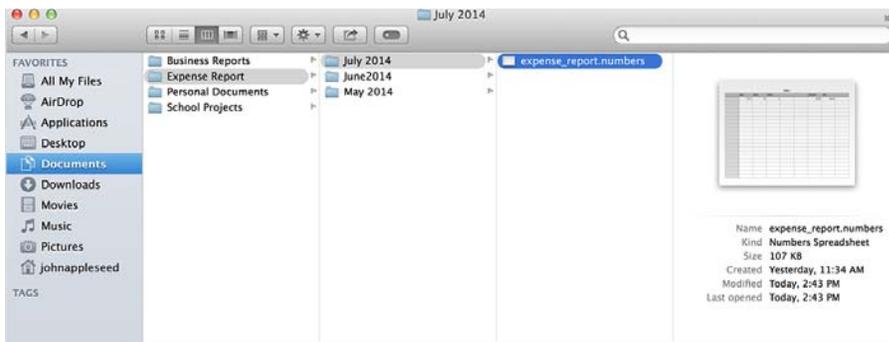
If you select a folder in column view, an additional column appears to reveal the items within the folder. As you select additional folders within folders, columns are added to the Finder window. Resize or scroll through the Finder window to move forward or backward through the nested folders.

Cover Flow

Choose View > as Cover Flow to see a preview of each item in the window presented as a carousel above the list of files.

Scroll through the carousel, or use the left and right arrows on your keyboard to move through each item. Drag the divider between the preview pane and the list of items to make the preview larger or smaller.

Arranging items

You can arrange items in a folder from the View menu as well.

For example, if you are viewing your files as icons, you might want to sort the icons alphabetically. Choose View > Arrange by name to tell the Finder to re-sort the items in alphabetical order. The Finder keeps the window organized this way until you select another option from the View menu, or until you select None.

Using folders

The Finder shows you the files contained on the disks and drives connected to your computer. You can organize these files into folders. You can even store folders within other folders.
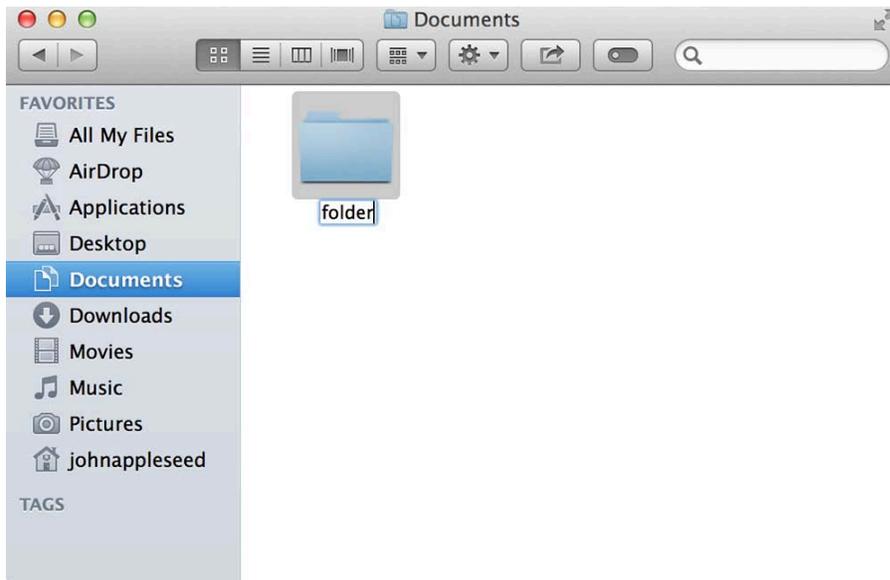
To create a new folder, use these steps:

1. Click where you want the folder to appear, such as on the desktop.
2. Choose File > New Folder.
3. Drag any of the files or other folders into this that you want filed into the folder.

You can also create a folder quickly by selecting multiple items.

1. Select the items you want to place in a folder.
   - click and drag your pointer across the items to create a selection box
   - or hold down the Command key on your keyboard and click each item you want to select
   - or select the first item you want in a list, then hold down the Shift key and select the last item
2. Choose File > New Folder with Selection.

After finishing these steps, the items are then placed in a folder. You can type a new name for the folder once it appears, like "book report" or "staff meeting".

To view the items stored within the folder, double-click the folder to see its contents. The name of the folder is shown at the top of the window to let you know which folder you are viewing.
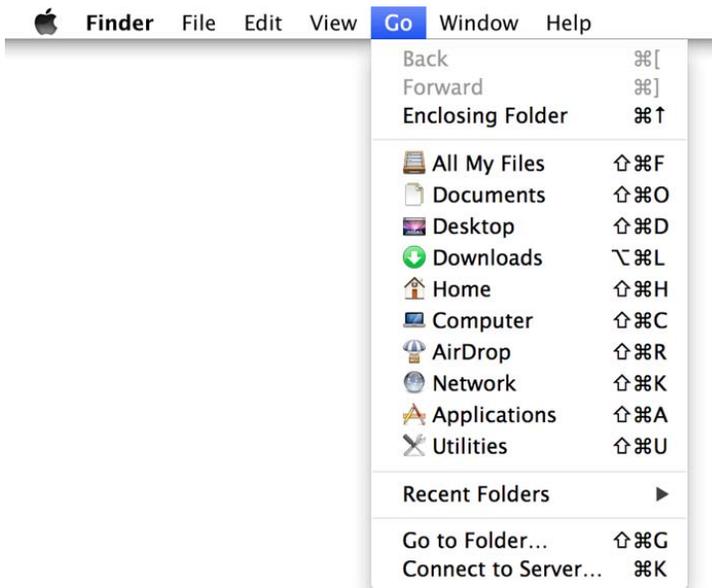
Special Folders

OS X includes some folders that are already created for you, such as Applications, Documents, Music and Pictures.

You can jump to these folders in the Finder by using the Finder sidebar.

You can also jump to certain folders from the Go menu. Select the folder from the menu and the Finder displays its contents.

Applications folder

The Applications folder holds all of your apps. Double-click an app to open it. You can also open an app using Launchpad.

Home folder

OS X creates a Home folder for every user you have set up on your Mac. The Home folder holds all of the files that belong to you. These items are grouped into folders within the Home folder:

- Documents stores your word processing documents, spreadsheets, presentations and more.
- Music stores your iTunes music library.
- Photos stores your iPhoto library.
- Movies stores your iMovie and Photo Booth movies.
- The Desktop folder stores items you have placed on your desktop.

To store an item in one of these folders, use your pointer to drag the item from where you see it into the folder.

Renaming Items

If you want to rename a file or folder that you've created, simply click it's name in the Finder, then type a new name and press the Return key.
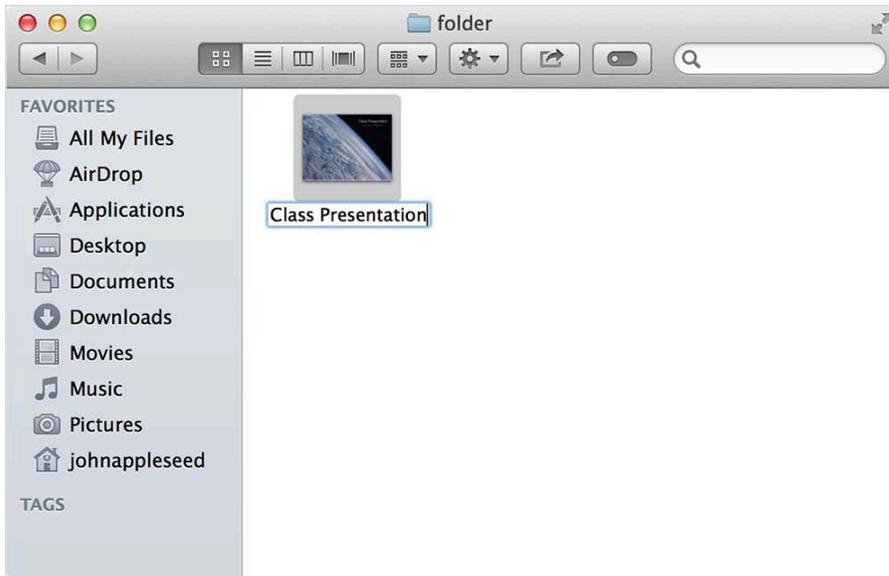
Deleting items

When you no longer want an item, you can delete it. Select the item (or folder of items) in the Finder, then choose File > Move to Trash. The Finder then moves the item to a special folder called "Trash" so that you no longer see it. You can view items that are marked for deletion by clicking the Trash icon in the Dock.

If you decide you don't want an item deleted that you placed in the Trash, you can drag it out of the Trash. Click the Trash icon in the Dock, then drag the item from the Trash window to another folder in the Finder, like your Documents folder, or your desktop. You can also put an item back where it was before you deleted it by selecting the item in the Trash, then choosing File > Put Back.

When you're sure you no longer want any of the items placed in the Trash, choose File > Empty Trash. This recovers the disk space that was used by these items.

Learn more

You can learn more about the Finder by selecting a topic below. You can also learn more by choosing Help Center from the Help menu when you're in the Finder.

Sidebar

Finder windows include a sidebar that gives you convenient access to frequently used folders, drives, documents and other features like AirDrop. You can add and remove items from the Finder sidebar so that it only displays what you want.

Adding items to the sidebar

You can add an item to the sidebar in a Finder window by simply dragging its icon to the Favorites section of the Sidebar.
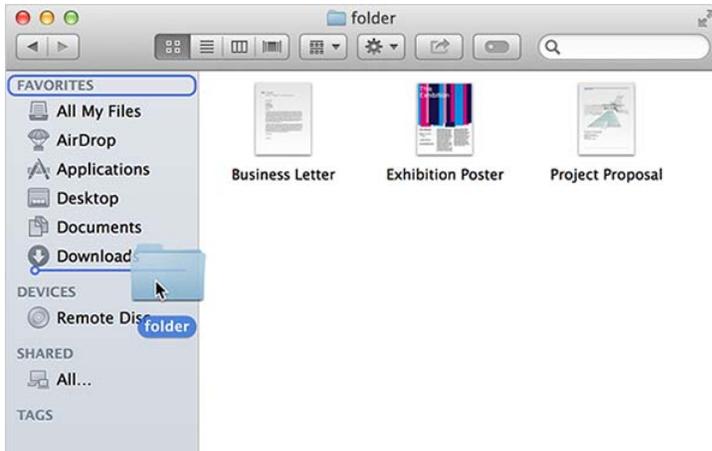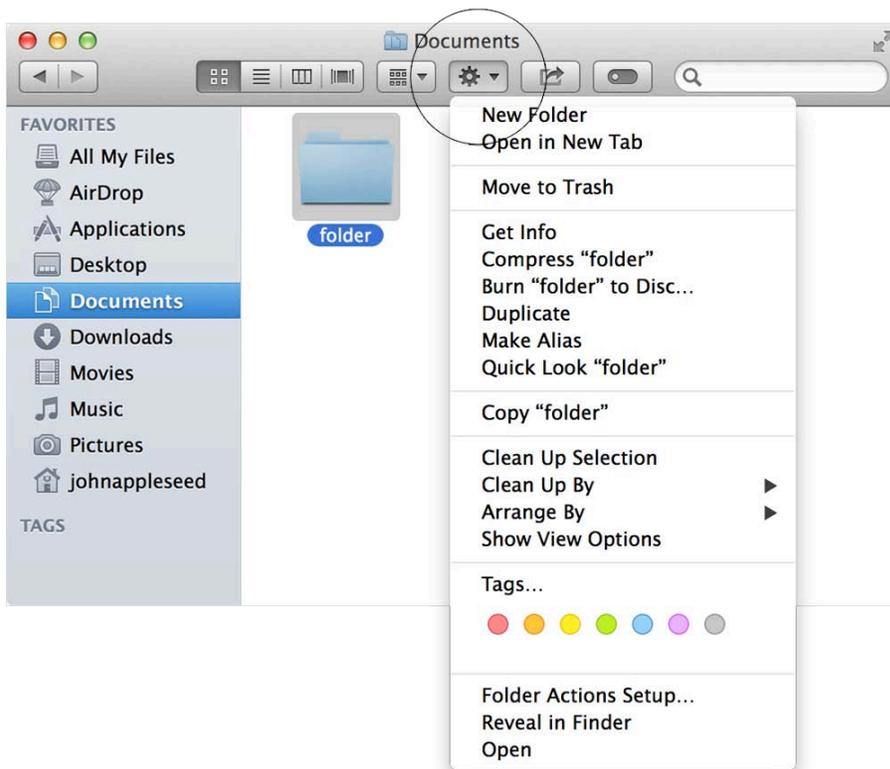

Toolbar

At the top of your Finder window is a toolbar. This Toolbar includes shortcuts to common actions such as switching views, tagging items, or searching for files or folders.

Share button

You can quickly share an item over email, or through any Internet Accounts you've set up by selecting it and clicking the Share button ⬏.

Action button

The Action button includes shortcuts to common actions available in Finder menus, such as copying, tagging, or compressing an item.

Searching

The Finder toolbar also includes a search field. This field searches the files and folders on your Mac and disks that are currently connected. Click the field and begin typing terms you are looking for. As you type, items named with these terms or that contain these terms appear.
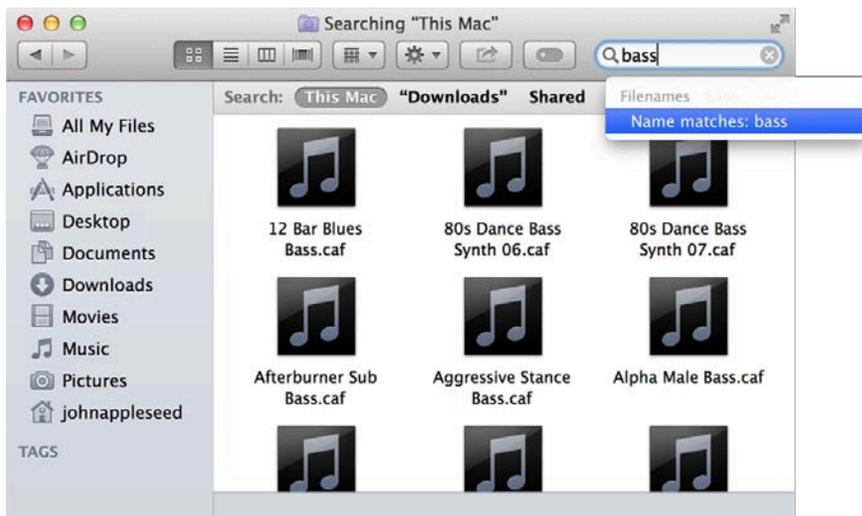
You can narrow your search further by selecting a search token for each term. Search tokens such as "Name matches" appear as you enter a term. Click the token you want to attach it to that term.

To change a token type, click the token and select an option from the menu that appears.

You can also select Search criteria to narrow your search from the menus that appear at the top of the search window, such as Name, Kind, or Contents.

To combine search criteria, click the Add Criteria button (+) to the right of the current criteria. Combine multiple search criteria to narrow your search further.

If this is a search you use often, you can save the search as a Smart Folder.

1. Click the Save button in the Finder window.
2. Enter a name for this search, and select a location to store this folder.
3. Click Save.

Opening this folder shows you the latest results that match these search terms.

Quick Look

You can get a quick preview of any item in the Finder by selecting it and then choosing File > Quick Look. This is helpful if you're not sure if an item you've located is the one you're looking for.
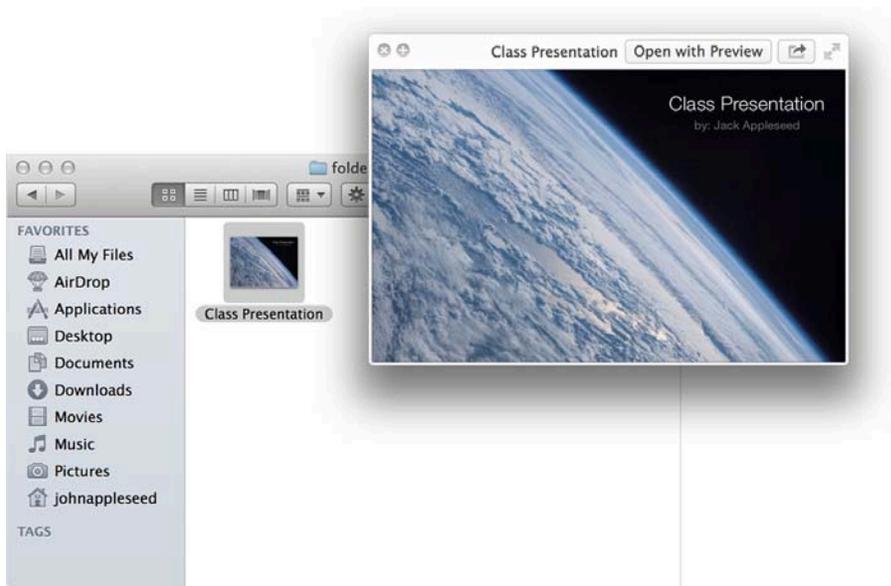
Quick Look opens a preview pane without opening the app associated with a document. You can even preview movies and audio files from the Finder. As a shortcut, press the spacebar when an item is selected in the Finder to open the Quick Look window.

Last Modified: Feb 12, 2015

Helpful?   Yes   No

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OS X Lion

OS X Mavericks

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