Browse through folders on your storage drive

Most people store documents, pictures, and other types of files on the storage drive on their computer. Like a filing cabinet you might have in your office. File Explorer is the tool that you use to browse through those files and folders. I have a shortcut for File Explorer on my task bar, so it would be very easy to launch from there. If you do not have that shortcut on the task bar, you can click the start button to open the start menu. Click the button for all apps and find file explorer here in the list of applications and click on it to launch it from there. Or if you need to pin it to the task bar, you can right click it here. Then go to more and look for the option to pin it to the task bar. Since I already have it pinned to the task bar, I see the option to unpin it. So from either location you can click on File Explorer to launch it, and this is the File Explorer window. On the sidebar on the left, you can choose one of these locations. Then on the right you can navigate through the contents of that location. I'll start by selecting this PC in the sidebar on the left. This is a good starting point. This is like standing in front of the filing cabinet. Everything on your computer is stored inside here. Now when you select this PC, at the very least, you should see a drive labeled with the letter C like this. Storage drives in windows are each labeled with a letter, and historically the primary storage drive on your computer has always been the C drive. If you have another storage drive or a CD drive or external drive like this USB memory stick that I have connected, then you'll see it listed here as well, and it will have a different letter designation. This

USB memory stick is identified as the D drive on my computer, but let's open up the main storage drive, the C drive. You could double click on it here, or back in the sidebar. You could click the arrow next to where it says this PC to show or hide the drives that are connected to this PC, And you could select the C drive from here. So opening the C drive is like opening your computer's main filing cabinet, and now we see it contains several folders. Now we're not going to identify any specific folders quite yet. For now, you should see that you can double click on a folder and it will open that folder and show you the contents, which in this case is just more folders. It's very common to have folders inside of folders inside of other folders and so on. Just like with a physical filing cabinet in the real world where you could put a few paper folders inside of another folder. Now, as you're navigating through these folders, it's always important to note where you are, and that's why you have the path bar near the top of the window. I can see that I started on this PC, then I went into the C drive into the folder called users, and the contents of that is what we're seeing here. This path shows you exactly which folder you're currently looking at along with each proceeding folder that got you to that point, and I can click on any item on the path bar to back up to that location, and then I could double click on a different folder to open that up and see the contents. And you can take one step up in the folder structure at any time by clicking this up arrow in the toolbar at the top, or to just take one step back to the previous folder you were looking at, you can click the back arrow. That's the arrow pointing to the left. So let's pause here.

For now, you should take a look around and start getting familiar with opening folders and navigating around in File Explorer.

Essential folder structure, including the user folder

Before you store and organize your own files, it's important to understand the folder structure that already exists in Windows, so you can work within that established organization. I'll open File Explorer, and this time I'll just use the shortcut for File Explorer in the task bar. And I want to go to the starting point in my file structure. So on the left side, I'll select This PC. Then I want to open my main storage drive. So I'll double-click on the drive labeled with the letter C. And I

do want to mention the way files and folders are displayed in this window on your screen might look a little different from my screen, but don't worry about that for now. We'll talk about how to change the view settings in another video. So I'm in my C drive. This is the contents of my main storage drive. You might see more folders than I see here, but here's the easy part. You don't have to worry about most of these folders. Now I will point out that Program Files and Program Files (x86) are kind of interesting. These folders are where your applications are stored. So if you go to the Start menu, to the list of all applications, these applications are actually stored inside of one of these Program Files folders. Now you could double-click on one of these folders to open it up and then double-click on some of the sub folders and keep digging until you find an actual application and you could double-click on it to launch it. But nobody really does that. You generally just launch applications from the Start menu. So you usually don't need to go into these folders. It's just

good to know that this is where your programs are. So let's reset. On the left, I'll go back to This PC and open up the C drive again. Now the one folder here that I think is the most important is the Users folder. So I'll double-click on that to open it. And inside of the Users folder, you will find a folder with your name on it or an abbreviation of your name. This is your home folder, and it's where all of your personal files should be stored, your documents, your pictures, your music, everything that belongs to you except your applications. Of course, if you have an external storage drive, you can feel free to store files there as well. But for your files on your main storage drive, this is your stuff. And if you have more than one user account set up on your computer, each user will have their own home folder, and you'll see those listed here. You cannot see inside of another user's home folder unless you sign into their account. And we'll see how to set up multiple user accounts later in this course. So I'm going to open my home folder. I'll double-click the folder with my name on it. And inside of that, we see the

default folders that are set up by the computer inside of each home folder. These sub folders are pre-made for the different types of files that you might have. Now you don't have to use these folders, but using them keeps things much cleaner, and lots of applications will assume that your documents are in the Documents folder, that your pictures are in the Pictures folder, your videos are in the Videos folder, and so on. So I strongly recommend you follow this pattern and store all of your personal files in this pre-made structure. Now there's one important thing to point out here. In these pre-made folders, you should see a

Desktop folder, a Documents folder, a Music folder, a Pictures folder, and a Videos folder. You might just see those listed directly here in your home folder, but if any of those folders are not listed here, it's probably related to a setting for OneDrive. You should see a folder here called OneDrive and you can double-click to open that and you may find those folders here instead. In another video, I will explain how OneDrive works and why these folders might be in one location rather than the other. But regardless of whether these folders are here inside of the OneDrive folder or back here inside of the main level of your home folder, the overall idea is the same. All of this is stored inside of the home folder, even if there is an extra level of organization for some of them. It's important to store your personal files somewhere in the home folder. And later, when you learn how to create new folders, I strongly encourage you to work within this existing file structure. This will help you stay organized and will keep your files tied to your user account.

Understand OneDrive and folder organization

As you learn how to store files in File Explorer, there is one detail everybody should be aware of related to OneDrive, even if you don't remember setting up OneDrive. OneDrive is an online storage tool offered by Microsoft. You can store

files on OneDrive, and those files are automatically synchronized to a Microsoft server. I encourage you to watch this course, Learning OneDrive, for more information, but the detail I want to talk about is this. OneDrive might be set up and working for you automatically, and it's possible that you don't know it. And if you use OneDrive, it will affect how some

important folders are organized within your Home folder. So I have a File Explorer window open, and I'm looking at the contents of my Home folder, as we saw in another video. And in that other video, I mentioned that you may not see the Desktop, Documents, Music, Pictures or Videos folders here inside of your Home folder, depending on how OneDrive is set up. If you do have OneDrive set up, these folders may be stored inside of this OneDrive folder or, and this may get a little confusing, you might see a Documents folder here inside of your Home folder. And if you open up the OneDrive folder, you may also see a folder called Documents there. So it's important that you know which of these is your main Documents folder. To clarify that, we should look at some settings, and we'll start in the Task Bar. And we're looking for an icon here in the bottom right that looks like a cloud. If you don't see it, you can click this arrow to open up this menu with more options, and then we find that button with the cloud. If you don't see this OneDrive button, then you don't have OneDrive set up, and you probably don't need to worry about this. But if I click on this OneDrive cloud button, it opens up the OneDrive panel. We can click this gear button near the top right, and from this menu, choose Settings. Then on this window, we'll go to the left and choose Sync and backup. Then click Manage backup, and this is your key here. If one or more of these folders are set up to be backed up to OneDrive, then the main versions of those folders will be inside of that OneDrive folder. And they call this a backup because everything you put in those folders will also synchronize to OneDrive automatically, essentially creating an instant backup. If for any reason you do not want these folders to be backed up, you can disable

the switch here next to each one. Or if the folders are not being backed up, and you do want them to be, you can enable them here. If those folders are being backed up, they will be located inside of the OneDrive folder that we saw in File Explorer, and if they're not being backed up, they will just be in the normal Home folder. So the big reason why many people like to have this backup enabled is clear. Anything you store in the backup folders will synchronize to OneDrive, so it's an automatic backup copy, but there are a few reasons why you might not want to use these folders to synchronize to OneDrive. Maybe you prefer to manage your own backup, and you don't want a copy of your personal files on Microsoft Servers. And another big factor there is a limit to how much you can store on OneDrive. Now down here at the bottom, we can see that my account will store up to one terabyte of data, but you should look at this number on your computer. If you are using a free OneDrive account, it might offer much less storage space. And if you reach the limit of your storage space on OneDrive, you'll either need to pay for additional storage or continue working but some of your files will not be backed up, or you can come here and disable the backup, which would move those folders back to the Home folder, as I said before. Some people prefer to avoid that confusion by coming here and turning this off upfront, but backups are important, and in another video in this course, we will talk about other options for backup systems. For now, I'm going to leave this set so that it is not backing up my folders to OneDrive. I'll click the Close button here to close this, and back here in OneDrive Settings, let's click the tab on the left for Account. And here down at the bottom, you can check to see

how much storage space you have available in OneDrive. And there will also be an option that will say, "Get more storage," or it will say, "Manage storage." You can click that to see the options, where you can pay to upgrade your account to get more storage space. So on one hand, that explains why some folders might be in a different location, but I hope you also

understand the trade-offs and the costs of using a OneDrive backup and how you can disable it if you need to.

Use shortcuts to essential folders

To find files or folders on your storage drive, you can go digging through a long path of folders, or you can use shortcuts, instead. Here in File Explorer in the sidebar on the left, there's a section where we see shortcuts to important folders. This section is also known as the Quick Access section. A few of the standard folders are here, like the Desktop folder, the Documents folder, the Pictures folders, and so on. So I could just click on the shortcut for my Documents folder to go straight to the contents of my Documents folder. Now, I do hope you remember that you can go the long way to get to your Documents folder, and it is good to know the real full path. On the left, you could select This PC, then go to the main storage drive. That's the C drive. Double-click that to open it. Then double-click on the folder called Users to open that. Inside there, you will find a folder with your name on it. This is the home folder. You can double-click to open that. And inside of the home folder, you may see your Documents folder there, or the Documents folder may be inside of the OneDrive folder. And you can double-click on your Documents folder to open that up and see the contents. Now, if

you think it's a tedious waste of time to actually go through all of those steps, I completely agree. Most of the time it just makes much more sense to open File Explorer then click on the shortcut in the sidebar on the left, which will take you straight there. But I always teach it this way because it is important to know that full path and to know where the shortcuts are taking you. Shortcuts that have been permanently pinned to the sidebar will have this thumbtack icon next to them. If you want to remove one of these shortcuts, you can right-click on it, and you'll see an option to unpin it

from Quick Access. Over time, you may see other shortcuts automatically appear on this list, and that's because the computer can identify folders that you use most often, and can automatically place shortcuts for them here. If you have a shortcut that appeared automatically, it will not have the thumbtack icon next to it. But you can also right-click on those automatic shortcuts, and you will see an option to pin it to Quick Access, so you can do that if you want to keep it here permanently. And there will also be an option there to remove it from Quick Access if you want it gone. Or if you have an important folder that you're working with a lot that does not appear as a shortcut here, you can manually make a new shortcut. For example, here in my Documents folder, I'll open this subfolder called Client Projects, where I have several other folders. And I'm going to be working with this folder a lot this month. So I can click on it to select it, then right-click on it, and choose the option to pin it to Quick Access. So now I have a shortcut for that folder right here in the sidebar. I can click that

to take me straight to the contents of that folder. Or another option is to pin a folder to the Start menu. So I'll reset by going straight to my Documents folder, then open that Client Projects folder again, and then I'll choose the folder that I want. So I'll click on it to select it, then right-click on it, and there's an option here to pin it to Start. So now, in the future, when I open up the Start menu, you might expect to see a shortcut for that folder right here. But the reason we don't see it immediately is because we have to scroll up and down on this list. So I can see it's at the bottom of the list. So it may be a good idea to drag this up to change the order so it's a little higher in the organization. And then, in the future, when you want to go to that folder, you can go to the Start menu, click on that shortcut. It opens a File Explorer window, showing you the contents of that folder. And of course, you can remove those shortcuts later if you want to. You can go to the Start menu, you can right-click on that shortcut, and choose Unpin from Start, and it will be removed from the Start menu. Or back in the File Explorer window,

you can go to one of the shortcuts here, right-click on it, and choose Unpin from Quick Access to remove that shortcut. Now, clearly I do think it's very important to know where all of your files and folders are stored so that you can keep them organized and you can find them on your drive. But for day-to-day access to things that you use constantly, there is nothing wrong with using a shortcut.

Use tabs in File Explorer

Selecting transcript lines in this section will navigate to timestamp in the video

There may be times when you need to look at the content of two or more folders at the same time. In those situations, you can have more than one window open in File Explorer, or you can use tabs in the File Explorer interface. Here in File Explorer, I'll start by using the shortcut on the left to go to my documents folder, then I'll open up this sub folder called Client Projects. And I want to compare the contents of two of these project folders. Now, one option is to right click on a folder and then choose the option to open it in a new window. So now I have two separate windows, so I've got the contents of this folder in one window, and I can navigate to the contents of a different folder in another window. And I can even use the snap layout options to set them in a split screen view and compare them very easily. But let's reset. I'm going to close this window, then I'll drag this window to the middle, and then I'll just click the back button to take a step back. And this time I want to right click on a folder, and instead I'll choose Open in New Tab. And now I have two tabs up at the top. I can see the contents of this folder, and if I click on the other tab, I can see the contents of this folder, and I can click on these tabs to switch back and forth between them. There's another way to open a new tab. You can simply click the plus button to the right of any existing tabs, and that opens a

new tab and you could navigate to another folder here in this tab. And now I have these three folders open, and I can switch between them by clicking on the tabs up at the top. If you ever want to close a tab, you can just click the X on that tab and it will close it. Or of course, if you close the file explorer window,

that will close all of the tabs in that window. Or if you find that you have multiple tabs open, but you want them as separate windows, you can drag a tab down and let go, and it will break it out into a separate window.