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Sharing Documents via Network Folders

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Introduction

Sending documents and other files to the campus community via email lists is the least effective method for sharing files. Sending files via Email to large groups of recipients has several disadvantages. In effect, each recipient gets a copy of the file, which means there are multiple copies of the same file being stored in multiple message stores for each user. Typically, the recipient then saves the file outside of the local email container (a common scenario), which results in having two copies of the same file on the recipient's computer.

Multiply one or more documents per Email times the number of recipients results in many copies of the same file flowing through the NJCU Email system. Each copy is scanned by the SPAM and anti-virus filters, which delays delivery not only to the recipient but slows delivery for all users because of the extra work load the email system has to do.

IT provides two methods for sharing documents and other files to a large audience: Websites and Network Folders. This document discusses how to share files using Network Folders.

Accessing the Network Folder

Each department, association, and governing body (committees, etc.) has been assigned a network folder to share files among the members of that group. Accessing this folder and managing files stored there requires the use of Windows Explorer, a folder and file management utility that comes with the Windows operating system. This program is run from the Start button and is typically located in the Accessories sub-menu of the All Programs menu tree (figure 1). The default view shows a Folder pane on the left and a Contents pane on the right.

An alternate method of accessing the network folder is by double-clicking the My Computer icon (example left) on the desktop. This starts a modified version of

Windows Explorer with the Folders pane shut off. Turn the folders pane on by clicking the Folders button on the Standard toolbar (figure 2, next page).
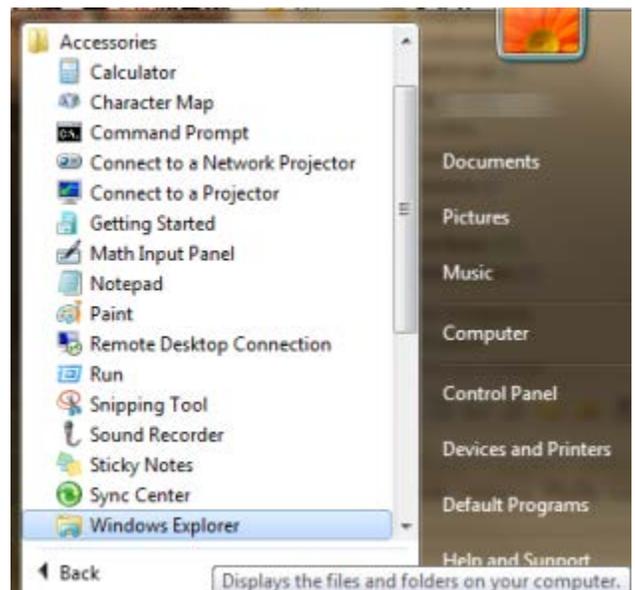

Figure 1. Windows 7 Accessories folder

The main difference between the two methods of starting Windows Explorer is that the program shows the contents of two different locations on the local hard drive. Starting the program from the Start button shows the contents of the My Documents folder. Starting the program from the Computer icon presents your internal and external (USB) drives, including DVD/BD drives. You will be working with a sub-folder under My Documents on your local hard drive and one of the pre-defined network folders.
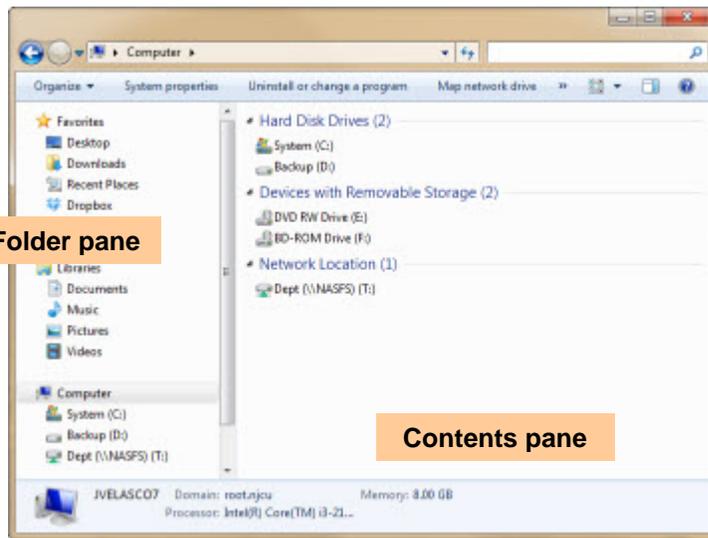
Figure 2. Windows 7 Explorer showing contents of Computer in Small Icon view.

There are two pre-defined network folders, called "Dept" and "Users". Both folders are located on a network drive, called "napp" and each folder has been assigned a unique drive letter (T: and U:, respectively). All shared folders are in Dept.

Double-click the Dept network drive icon (T:). The contents of this folder (lots of sub-folders) will be presented in the Contents pane. Find and click on your shared folder. If you have enabled the folder pane, then this folder will be highlighted in that pane and the contents of the folder presented in the Contents pane, including any sub-folders.

Copying Files to the Network Folder

The folder and content panes operate independently of each other. This allows you to view the contents of one folder and target a different folder to copy the files to. Scroll down the Folder pane and click the Plus symbol next to the My Documents folder icon. This will expand the folder tree one level, showing sub-folders that are below My Documents. Continue expanding sub-folders until the folder containing the file(s) you want to move show(s) in the folder pane. Click the folder and the contents of this folder will appear in the Contents pane.

Using the Folder pane scroll bars, adjust the folder pane view so that the network folder is visible in the pane again. *Do not click the folder.*
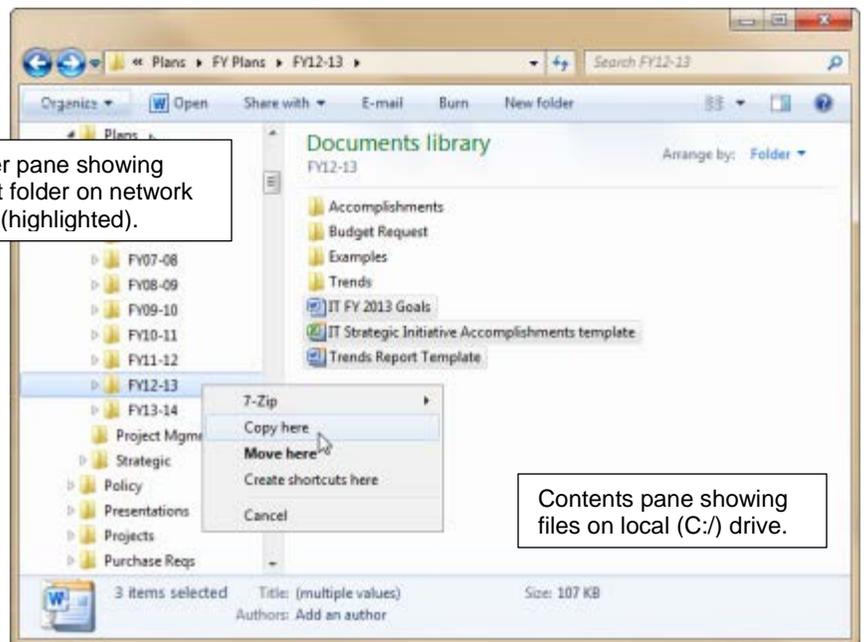

Figure 3. Copy files to Network folder

At this point, the Folder pane shows your target folder (the network folder where you want to copy files to) and the Contents pane shows the contents of the source folder (the files you want to copy to the target folder).

Select the file(s) you want to copy in the Contents window and drag them to the network folder in the Folder pane. NOTE: You can also use Cut (Ctrl-x) & Paste (Ctrl-v) to move the files.

Working with files on a Network Folder

Keep in mind that files on the network folder can be accessed by all members sharing that folder. Also, files on the network folder can be opened and edited directly. If someone is editing a file and a second person tries to edit the same file, the second person will get a warning that it is in use (locked) by someone else and given the opportunity to work on a copy of the file. *Do not create a copy.* Wait until the original is free for editing.

In order to track changes from edit to edit, you might want to save the edited file using version notation. Typically, this means appending a version number in parenthesis to the file name. To avoid over-writing the original, Save As... the next version *immediately* after opening the original document. For example, open "Access Instructions.doc" and Save As… "Access Instructions *(2)*.doc. As these files may be edited by multiple people, you might want to also append the editor's initials to the version number. For example, "Access Instructions (2-JV).doc".

In addition, be sure to turn Reviewing & Edit tracking on so that the changes are documented for each version during development. The second action when creating a new *version* would be to Accept all changes from the previous version's edits to begin a fresh edit tracking session, assuming that the previous edits were approved.

Referencing files on a Network Folder

Files on a network folder can be referenced using standard path notation based on a network drive letter, as follows: "T:\your_shared_folder\subfolder\filename.ext." However, *this method assumes that the drive letter is the same for all members* accessing the shared network folder. As an alternate, you can use network path notation, as follows:

$$\text{\\napp\dept\}\textit{your\_shared\_folder}\text{\\}\textit{subfolder}\text{\\}\textit{filename.ext}$$

Replace the placeholders "*your_shared_folder",* "subfolder" and "filename.ext" with the actual share, subfolder and file names. *A file extension is required.* Windows does not show file extensions by default[1] but the file icon will indicate the type of file. Table 1 shows common extensions for Office documents and the matching icon.

Table 1. Microsoft Office File Extensions

Icon	Extension	Application	Comments
	.docx	Word 2010	Default document document file extension.
	.rtf	Word, Wordpad, others	This is a generic extension used by many applications (OCR, alternate word processors, etc.) that preserves simple formatting that Word will recognize. It is also the default extension for WordPad. *Word uses the*

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[1] This feature can be turned on.

Icon	Extension	Application	Comments
			same icon as .doc for this format.
	.xlsx	Excel	Default 2010 workbook file extension.
	.csv	Excel, other	This is a generic extension used by other applications that can be imported to Excel. It is a plain text file with tabular data separated by commas representing fields, and each row representing a record. Access can also import CSV files. (Note the little "a" in the icon.)
	.pptx	PowerPoint	Default Pow extension.
	.mdb	Access	Default database file extension.
	.msg	Outlook	This is an Outlook Email message that has been extracted to a separate file.
	.txt	Notepad	This is a plain text file. There is no formatting information in this file but it can be opened in Word.
	.pdf	Acrobat	While not an Office document, it is used widely. A final document should always be converted to PDF for posting to a website, shared folder, or Email attachment for general viewing. This preserves the original content and is accessible to a broader audience using the free Acrobat Reader.
	.pub	Publisher	Default Microsoft Publisher vector image extension
	.vsd	Visio	Default Microsoft Visio document (vector image) extension. Visio is used for detailed diagramming.

Caveats

- Icons representing graphic files are different on each user's computer, depending on the application that is set to open the file by default. Further, the icons may be the same for different file formats depending on the default application it is assigned to. If this is the case, the only way to know the actual extension is to set Windows Explorer to show extensions.

- Word uses the same icon for .doc, docx and .rtf files. The only way to know the actual extension is to set Windows Explorer to show extensions. However, if the file was created by Word and saved as such (i.e. a Word document), then use the .doc extension.

Setting Windows Explorer to View Extensions

To view file extensions in Windows Explorer, select "Tools > Folder Options…" from the Menu bar. This will open a dialog window. Click the View tab. *Uncheck* the box next to "Hide extensions for known types" (Figure 4). You should also check the box next to "Display the full path in the Title bar" so that you can visually verify what folder contents you are actually looking at by glancing at the Title bar, as displayed in figure 3. Click "OK" to accept the changes and close the dialog window.
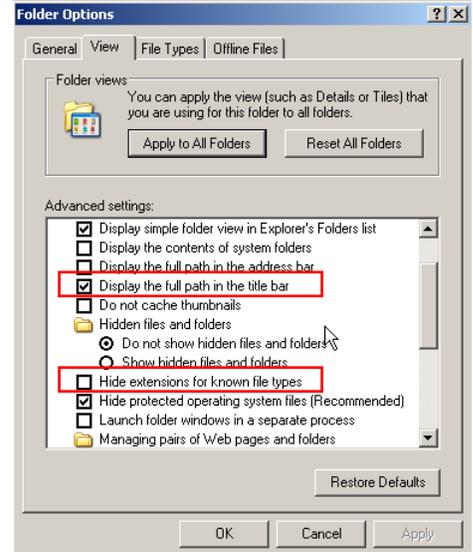
Figure 4. Setting Folder View options