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Windows 11 File Explorer - Still the Keys to the Kingdom

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The first time I wrote about (Windows) Explorer was way back in 2009 when we were using the Windows 7 Operating System (OS). Then, I realized that (Windows) Explorer was the “Keys to the Kingdom.” The tool allowed you to create, delete, copy, move, rename, and inspect your files and folders; basically, it allows you to organize everything on your computer. Then as we progressed to Windows 10, it was confirmed again in 2016 that it was still the “Keys to the Kingdom.” In the new Windows 11 era, it is still the “Keys to the Kingdom,” but its name has been changed to File Explorer. It has always been a tool for exploring files and folders, also known as a file manager, and so now its name, File Explorer, better indicates its intended use.



The look of keys has changed over the years, but their functionality has remained; they still unlock treasures. Similar to the way the look of keys has changed, Explorer has changed its looks in the newest version that comes with Windows 11, but the functionality has remained. Many things in Windows 11 look different from the equivalent in Windows 10, but many differences are not in the functionality provided but where you have to go to find the functionality. Once you get there, you’ll find that the feature works just the way it did in Windows 10. All the well-known controls are located in the Ribbon at the top of the File Explorer window. Some icons are immediate, like Delete, Copy, and Paste; others provide a menu of possibilities like View and “…”.File Explorer still uses two panes to help you find files and folders on your computer. The left pane is for navigation, used to find a folder of interest. Once a folder is selected in the Navigation pane, the contents thereof are shown in the right pane. Yes, there is a possible third pane, the Details or Preview pane, which can be enabled by selecting “View” in the Ribbon. Then selecting “Show” to check the pane you wish to show. (Note that Details and Preview are mutually exclusive; at any time, you can show one or the other but not both.) This is also the place to enable “File name extensions.” Just check the option, and you’ll always know the file type, which helps you know if the file is a .jpg (picture) or a .mp3 (music), or some other type.

Once a folder has been selected in the Navigation pane and the contents are visible in the Contents pane, folders can easily be created and named. If you want to create a new folder under the folder selected in the Navigation pane, right-click the Navigation pane selected folder and look at the menu of choices. In Windows 10, the “New” selection would have been in the list, but it is not there in Windows 11. However, “Show more options” is at the bottom of the list; click this, and you will find “New” in the list. Just hover over “New,” and you will find the familiar “folder” option. Click on folder and then name the newly created folder. So, the functionality was there, but you had to go through one more step in the process. The same situation exists for deleting or renaming a folder or a file. You can add a folder quickly using the “New” tool on the Ribbon. Click “+ New” followed by “folder,” then name the new folder. The only drawback to this technique is that it is incumbent on you to have previously selected the correct parent folder; otherwise, the new folder may end up under the wrong parent folder.

Some things haven’t changed at all if you’ll remember; moving or Copying files from one folder to another, using the graphical interface is just finding the file (or folder) to be moved in the contents pane and with the mouse dragging and dropping the file to the new location in the Navigation pane. (I’m sure you remember from our “File Explorer “class that we always drag and drop items from right to left, from the Contents pane to the Navigation pane.) So this process is precisely the same in Windows 11 as in Windows 10.

Moving or Copying a file (or folder) can be quickly done using the immediate tools in the Ribbon. In Windows 10, you had to right-click a file in the Contents pane, select Copy or Cut, and then go to the desired location in the Navigation pane and again right-click and find Paste in the menu. In Windows 11, you can select the item in the contents page, click the immediate “Copy” or “Cut” tool in the Ribbon, and then go to the desired destination and click the immediate “Paste” tool on the Ribbon. So this manipulation may be a bit faster in Windows 11 than in Windows 10.

Keep in mind that each folder on your computer has a specific layout, the way to show the contents of that folder; all of the familiar layouts, such as “Large icons” and “Details,” are available under the “View” tool on the Ribbon. Just pick your choice for the folder selected. One of the “Icon” choices is probably best for a folder containing pictures or graphics, and “Details” is my choice for a text-oriented file folder. The choice of layout is strictly a personal choice. The layout chosen should help you identify the contents of the folder.

So, though File Explorer looks a little different in Windows 11, with a little practice, you’ll find it as easy, if not a bit easier, to use in Windows 11 than Explorer in Windows 10.