10 Tips: How to Manage Your Files With Windows 10's File Explorer

M. SALTER | PALM CREEK COMPUTER CLUB – FEBRUARY 2018

Adapted from article by Lance Whitney (PC magazine)

File Explorer—formerly known as "Windows Explorer"—has gone through a bunch of changes in look, feel, and functionality over the years. But its basic goal has always been to help you manage, view, and launch the array of documents and other files nestled on your PC.

Whether you're moving to Windows 10 from Windows 8.1, Windows 7, or Windows XP, you will find some handy new features in the Windows 10 File Explorer, as well as older favorites that continue to remain useful.

For those of you upgrading from Windows 8.1, a new section dubbed Quick Access displays your most frequently used folders and recently used files. This saves you from having to sift through your hard drive or solid-state drive to track down that file from yesterday or last week that you want to open again.

You can also now share documents and other files from File Explorer via a dedicated Share button. You just select a file, then pick an app with which you want to share it. And for those of you who use Microsoft's OneDrive to store your files in the cloud, you'll find that OneDrive is now baked directly into File Explorer, so you don't have to go hunting for your online files.
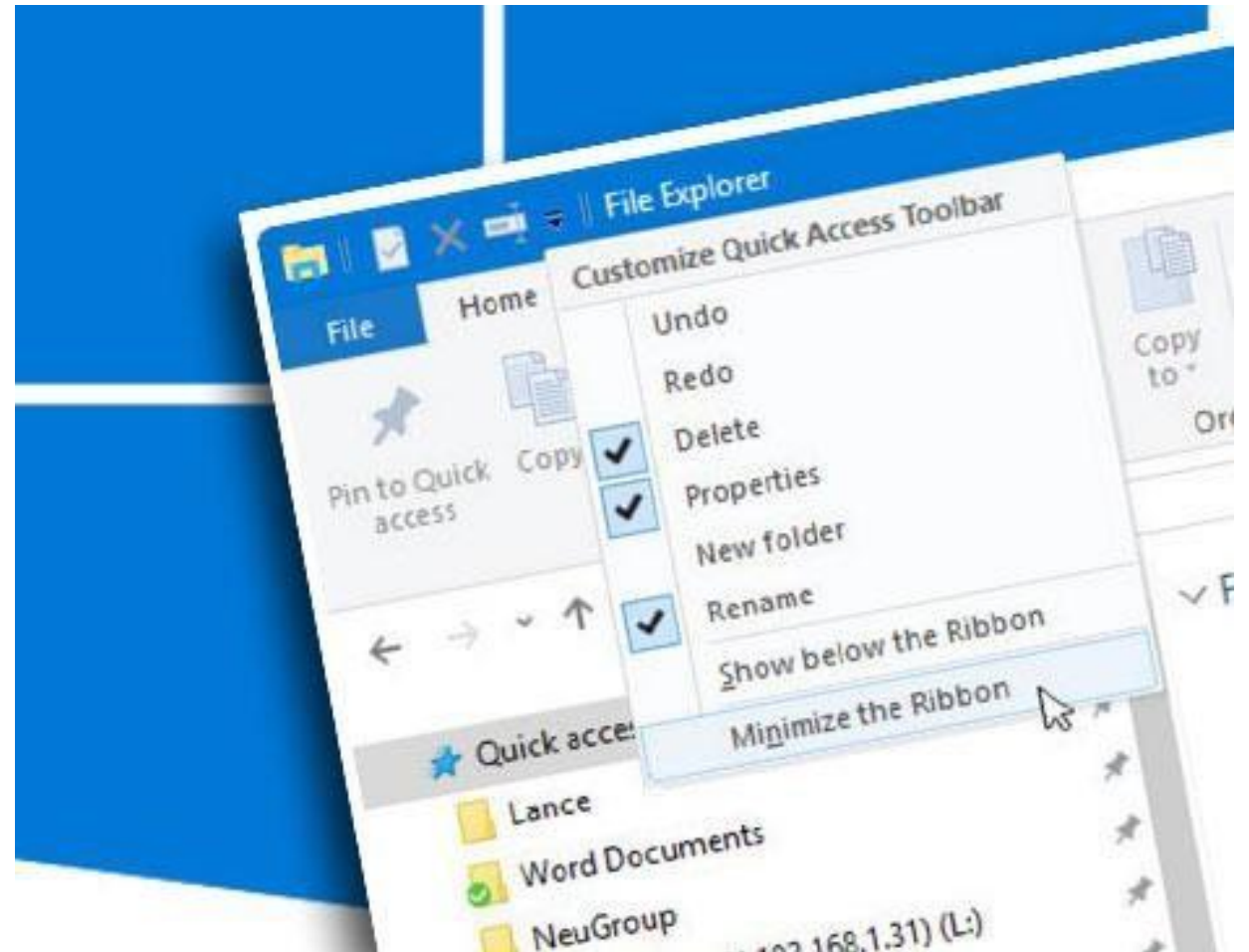
Those of you trekking to Windows 10 from Windows 7 will find additional changes. Instead of offering a series of pull-down menus with different commands, the Windows 10 File Manager goes the route of the ribbon, just as in Windows 8.1. Click on a command at the top of File Explorer, and a ribbon appears with various icons to perform different functions. This follows in the footsteps of other Microsoft applications, such as Office, which adopted a ribbon interface a few versions back.
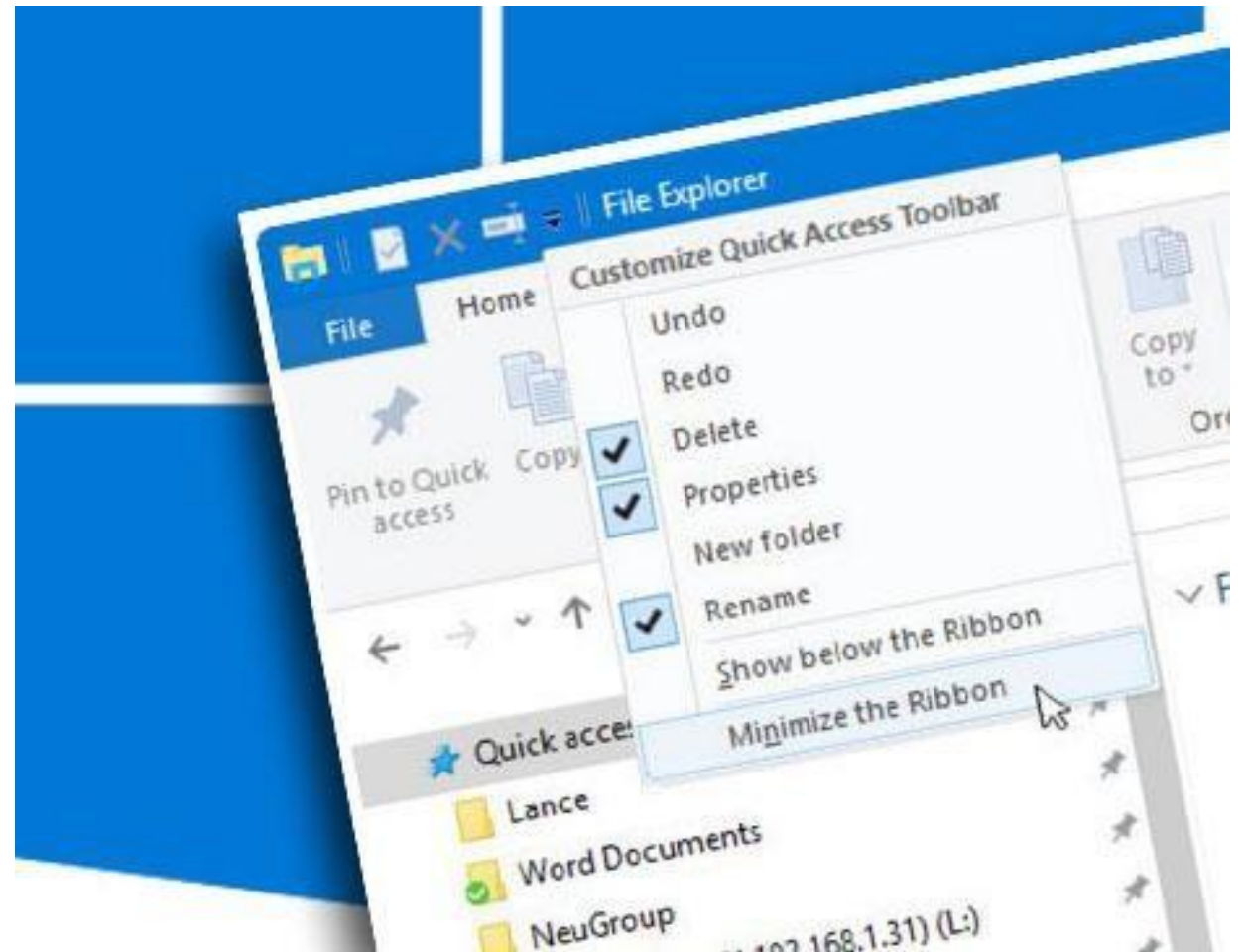
Also in Windows 10 and 8.1, My Computer is now known as This PC. The name has changed, but the feature still performs the same task of displaying all of your disk drives, be they hard drive partitions, network locations, or removable storage. Further, your libraries, which you can populate with frequently used locations, won't appear by default. You'll have to add them to the Windows 10 File Explorer to access them.
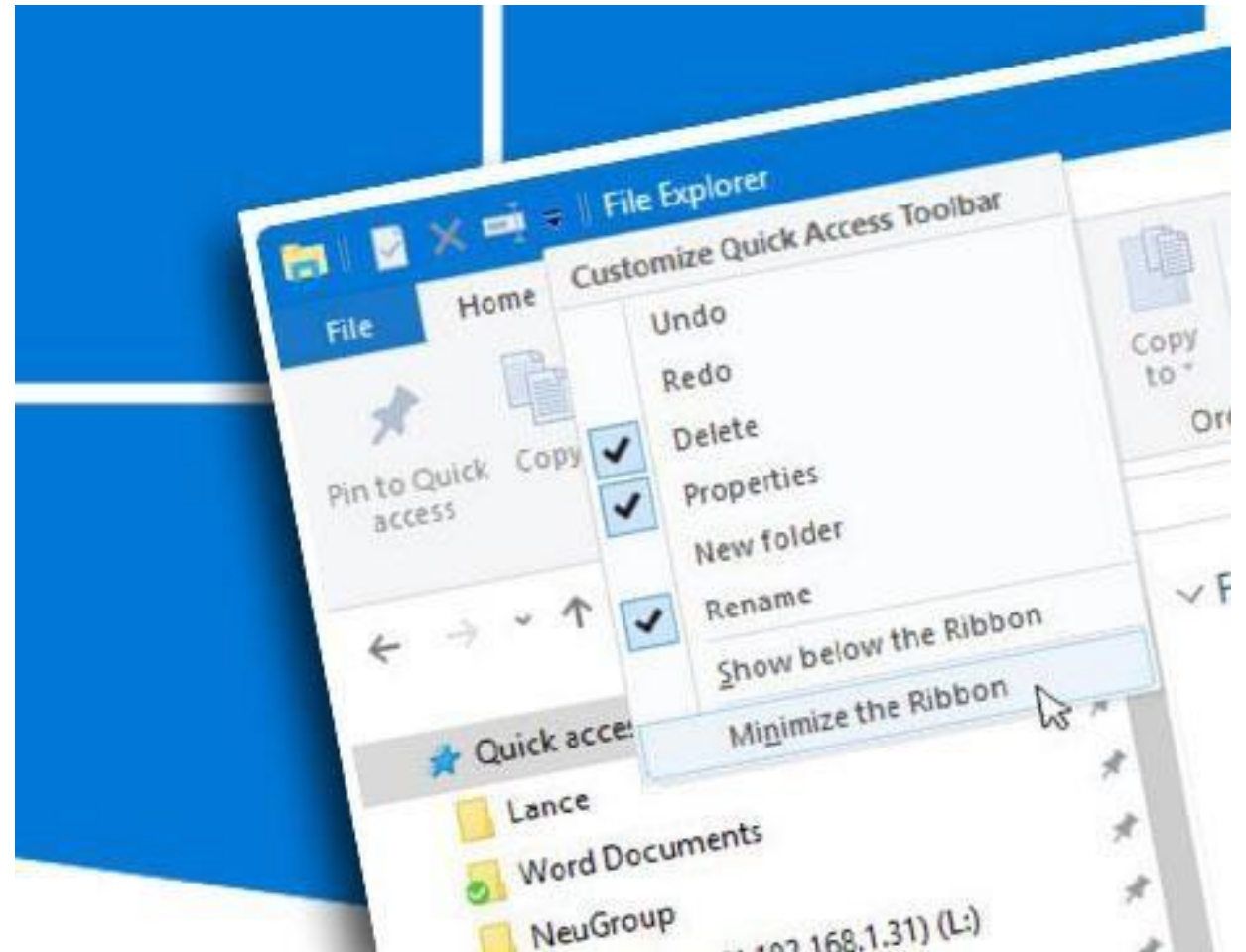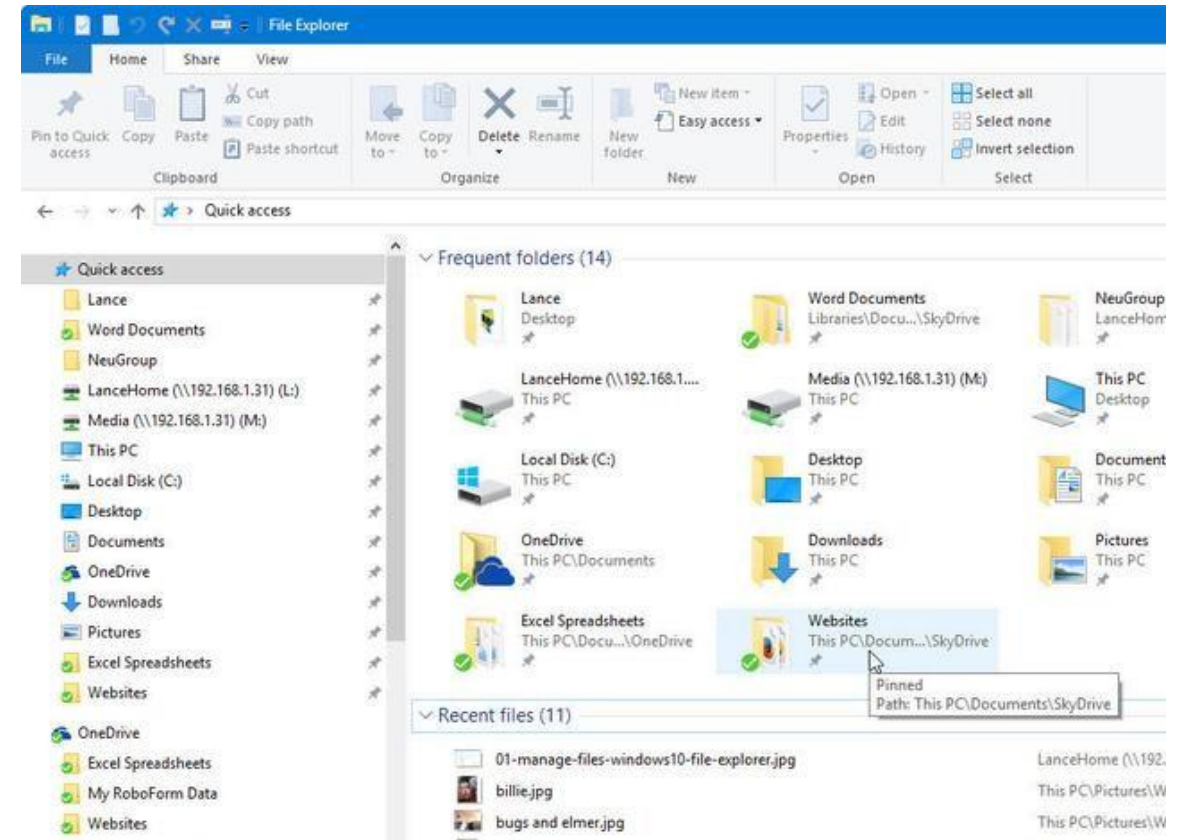
1) How to Use, Customize Quick Access View

One handy new section in File Explorer is Quick Access, which appears at the top of both the left and right panes. As we said, this area displays your most frequently used folders and recent files, the idea being that these are the folders and files you'll want to find most often. Sounds cool, but you can customize the Quick Access view to make it even more useful.
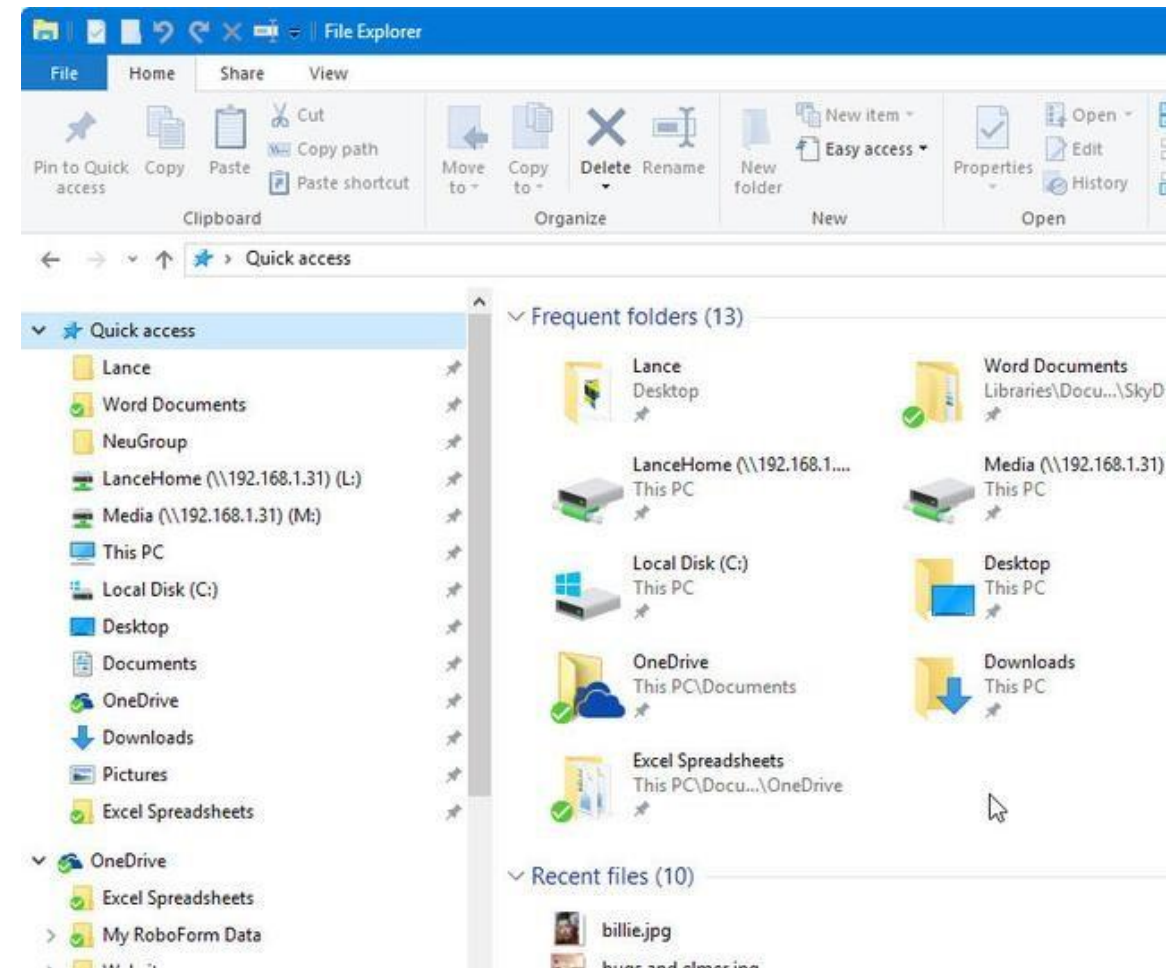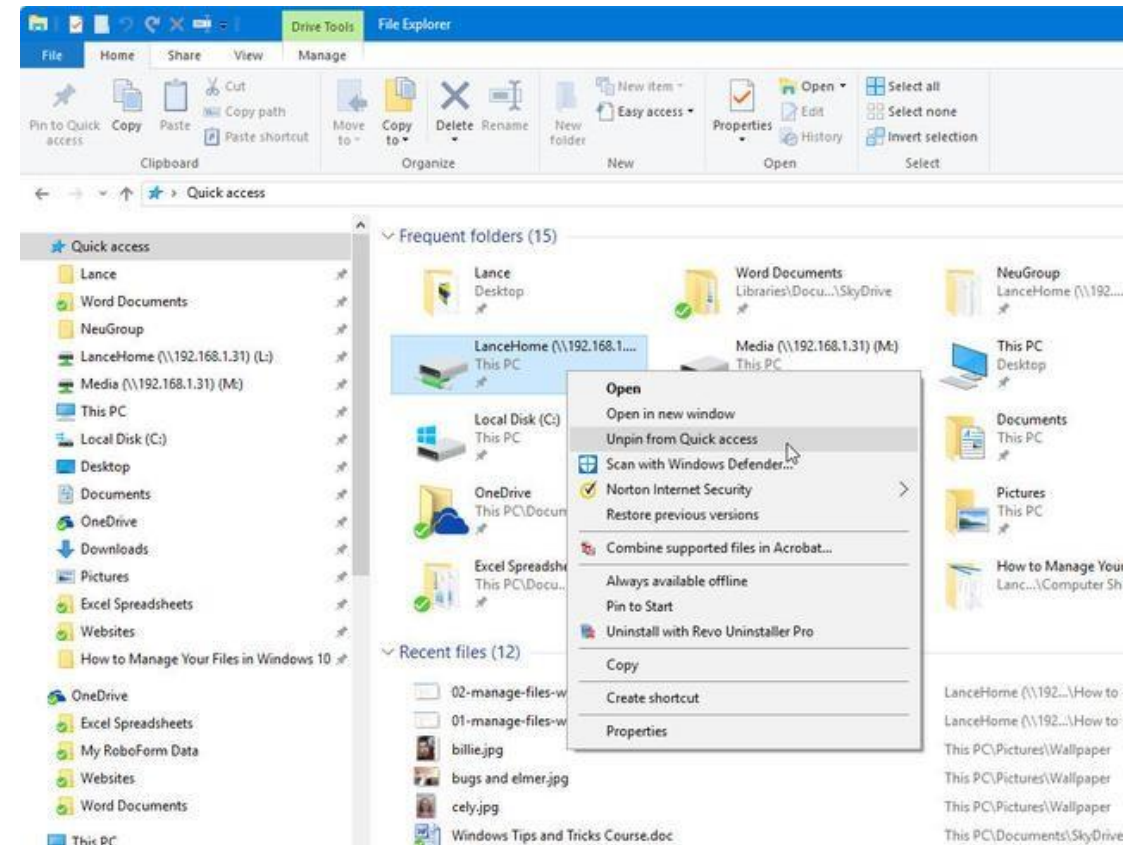
1) How to Use, Customize Quick Access View (cont'd)

You can add other folders to the Quick Access section, in addition to your most frequently used ones. To do this, right-click on a folder in File Explorer. From the pop-up menu, click on the "Pin to Quick access" command. Scroll to the left pane's "Quick access" section, and you'll see that folder appear in the midst of the others. We did that below with a folder called "Websites."

1) How to Use, Customize Quick Access View (cont'd)

If there's a file or folder in Quick Access that you no longer use very often, you can remove it. To do so, right-click on the file or folder. From the pop-up menu, click on the command to "Unpin from Quick access."

1) How to Use, Customize Quick Access View (cont'd)

Not too crazy about Quick Access? You can stop it in its tracks. In File Explorer, click on the View tab at the top to display the View ribbon. Click on the Options icon at far right. From the Privacy section of the General tab, click off the check marks for "Show recently used files in Quick access" and "Show frequently used folders in Quick access." Your recently used files will disappear and no longer populate. Your frequently used folders will still appear but stop populating.
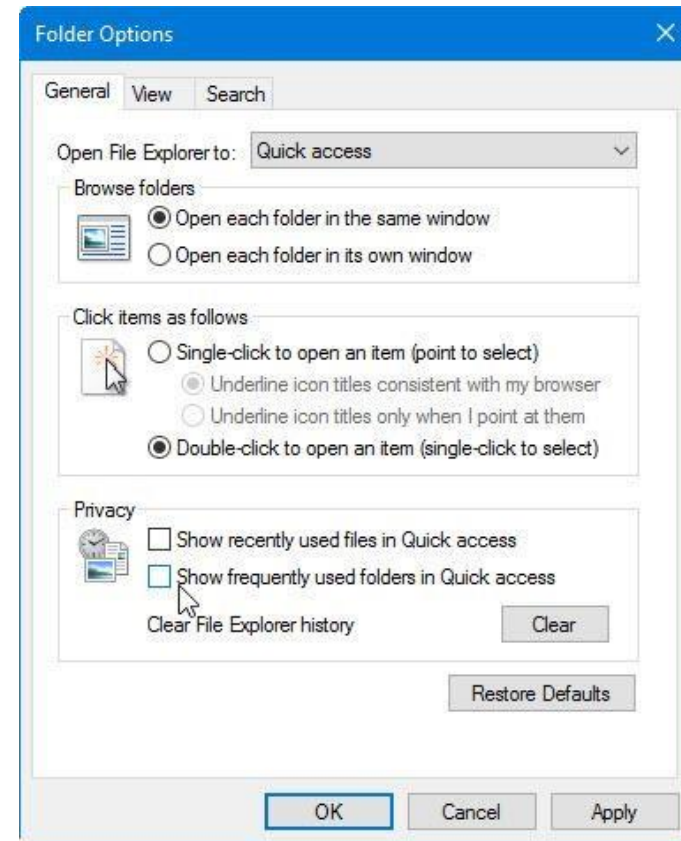
2) How to Launch File Explorer to Show "This PC" By Default

In Windows 7 and 8.1, File Explorer automatically launches in "This PC" view so you can see all of your drives and default folders right off the bat. In Windows 10, File Explorer launches in Quick Access view instead. But you can tweak File Explorer in Windows 10 to revert to "This PC" view by default. Here's how.
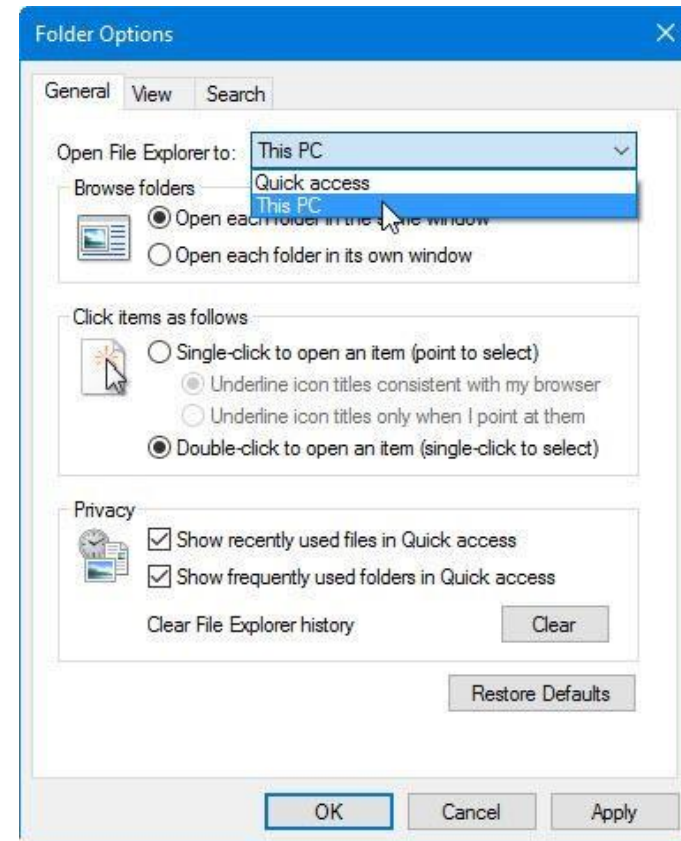
2) How to Launch File Explorer to Show "This PC" By Default (cont'd)

In File Explorer, click on the View menu, then click on the Options icon just above its down arrow. From the Folder Options window that pops up, click on the "Open File Explorer to:" setting and use the pull-down menu to change that setting from "Quick access" to "This PC." Click OK, then close File Explorer. The next time you open File Explorer, it will display the "This PC" view.
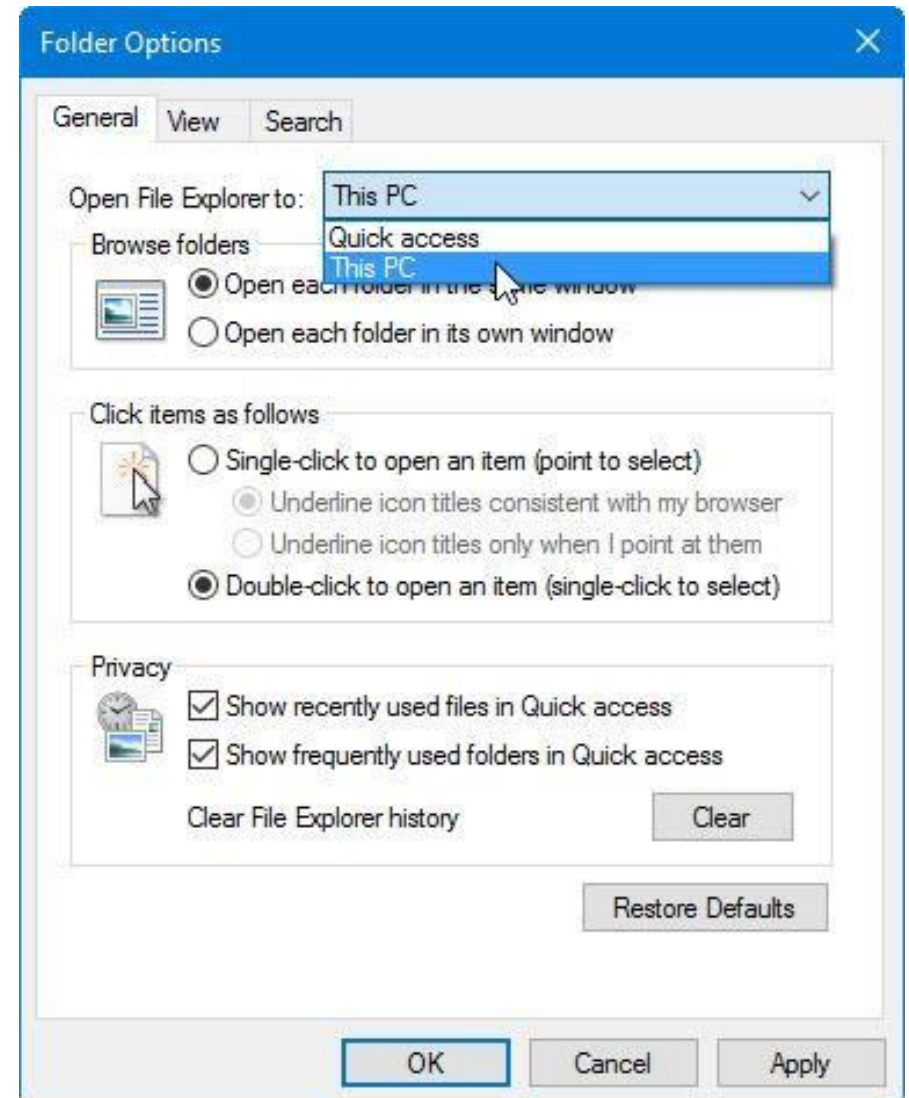
3) How to Turn the Ribbon On or Off

File Explorer displays a ribbon chock full of commands for the various categories, namely Home, Share, and View (when set to Quick Access rather than This PC view). By default, you have to click or tap on the tab to display its ribbon. That saves space, since the ribbon appears only when you need it. Click on another part of the screen, and the ribbon disappears. But you may want to always see all of the commands that are part and parcel of the current ribbon. Easy enough.
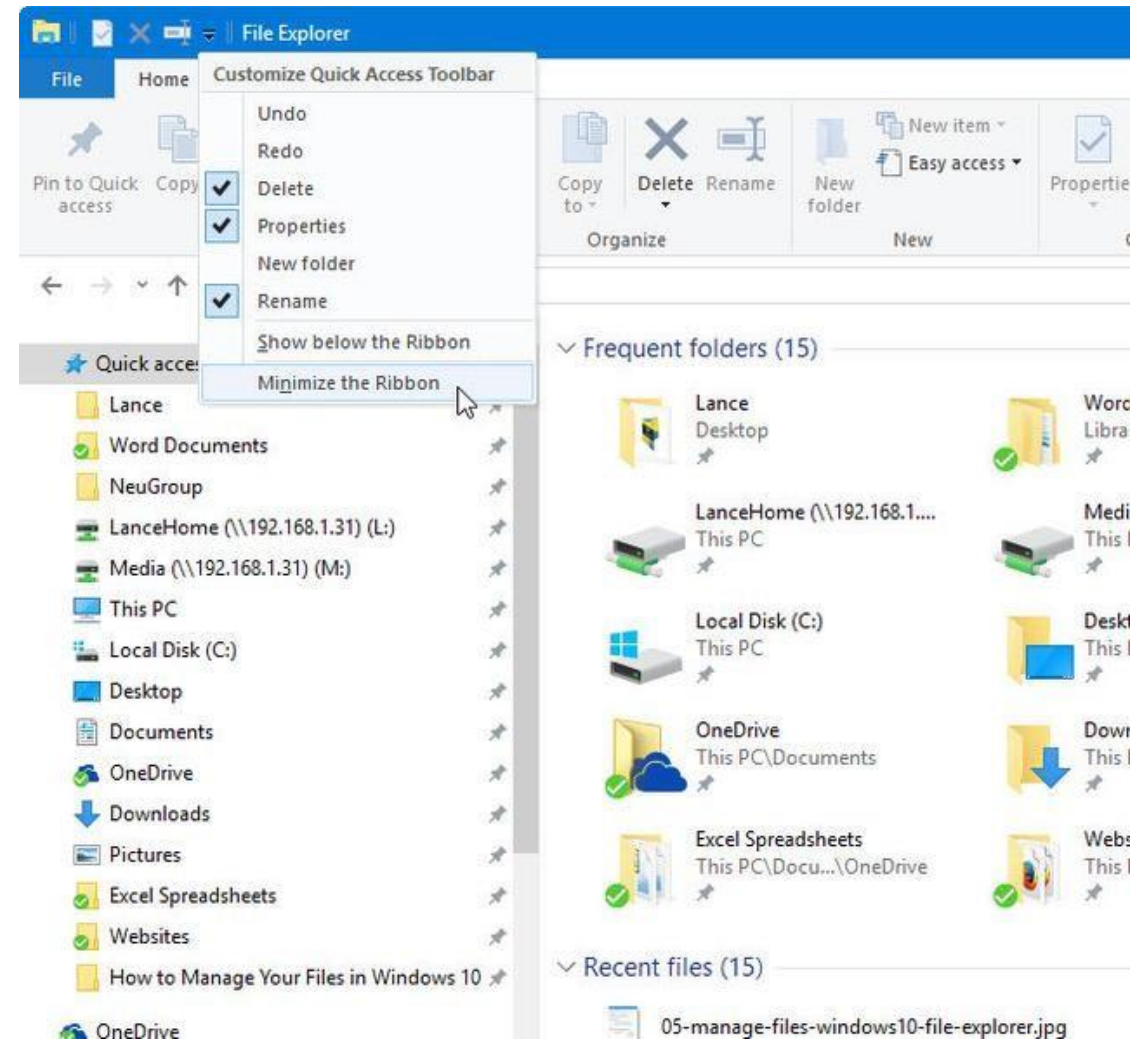
3) How to Turn the Ribbon On or Off (Cont'd)

At the top of the File Explorer window, click on the "Customize Quick Access Toolbar" arrow to the right of the other icons (left of the words "File Explorer"). You'll see a menu with various commands, including one to "Minimize the Ribbon," which will likely sport a check mark in front of it. To maximize the ribbon (meaning display it in full view all the time), click that command to remove the check mark. Now, the ribbon for whatever tab you click on will appear and stay on all the time.

No longer want to see the ribbon all the time? Just click on the "Customize Quick Access Toolbar" arrow and restore the check mark for "Minimize the Ribbon."
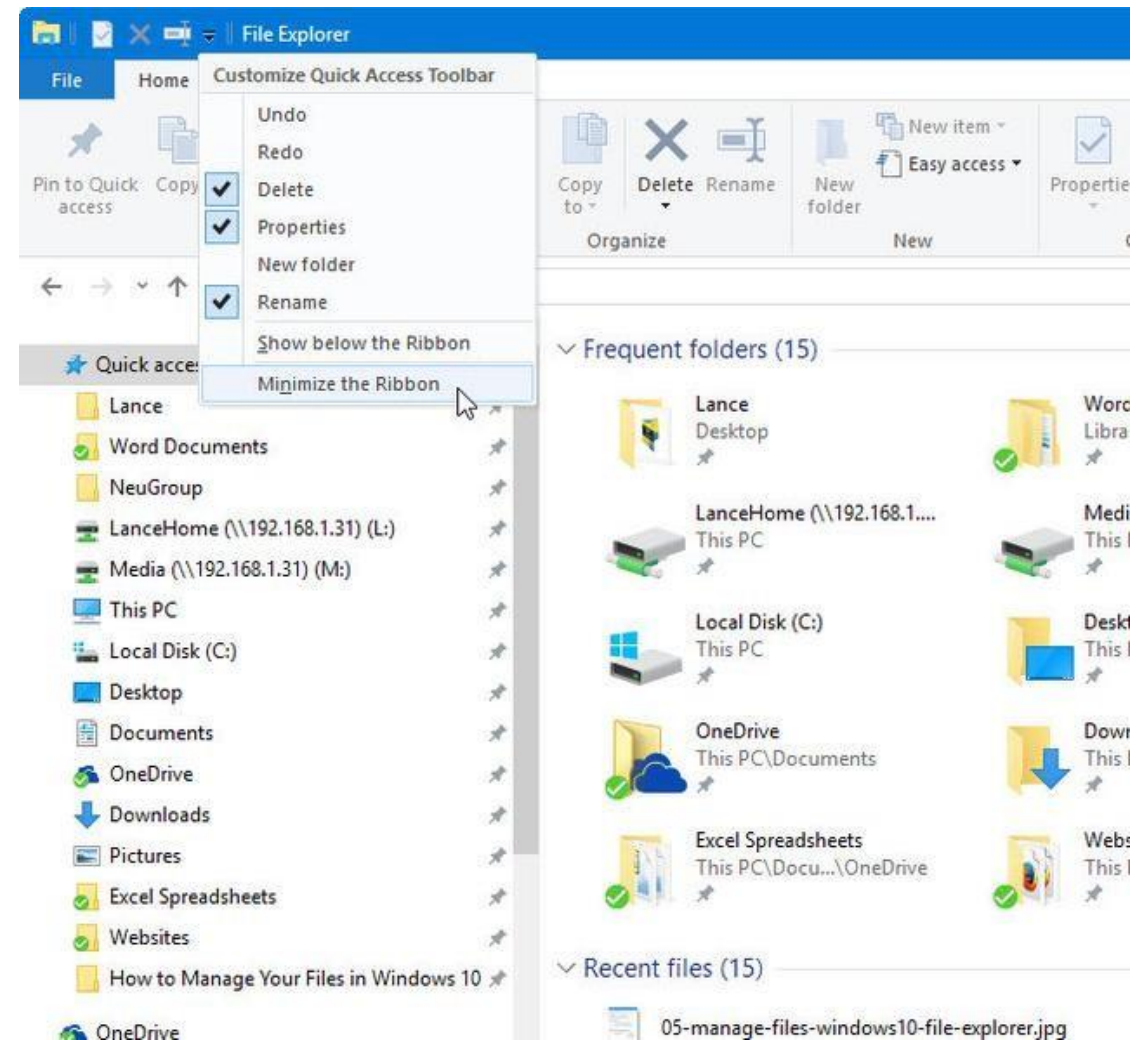
4) How to Show or Hide File Extentions

File extensions are a key way of revealing the types of files displayed in File Explorer. A file with a .DOCX extension is a Word document. A file with a .JPG extension is a JPEG image file. And a file with a .WAV extension is a sound file. But sometimes you may not want or need to see the extension, if you already know the file type based on its name or location.

You can turn file extensions on or off easily enough. In File Explorer, click on the View tab at the top to display the View ribbon. You'll see an option called "File name extensions." Click on the box next to it to turn on the check mark and reveal the extensions. Click off the box to remove the check mark and hide the extensions.
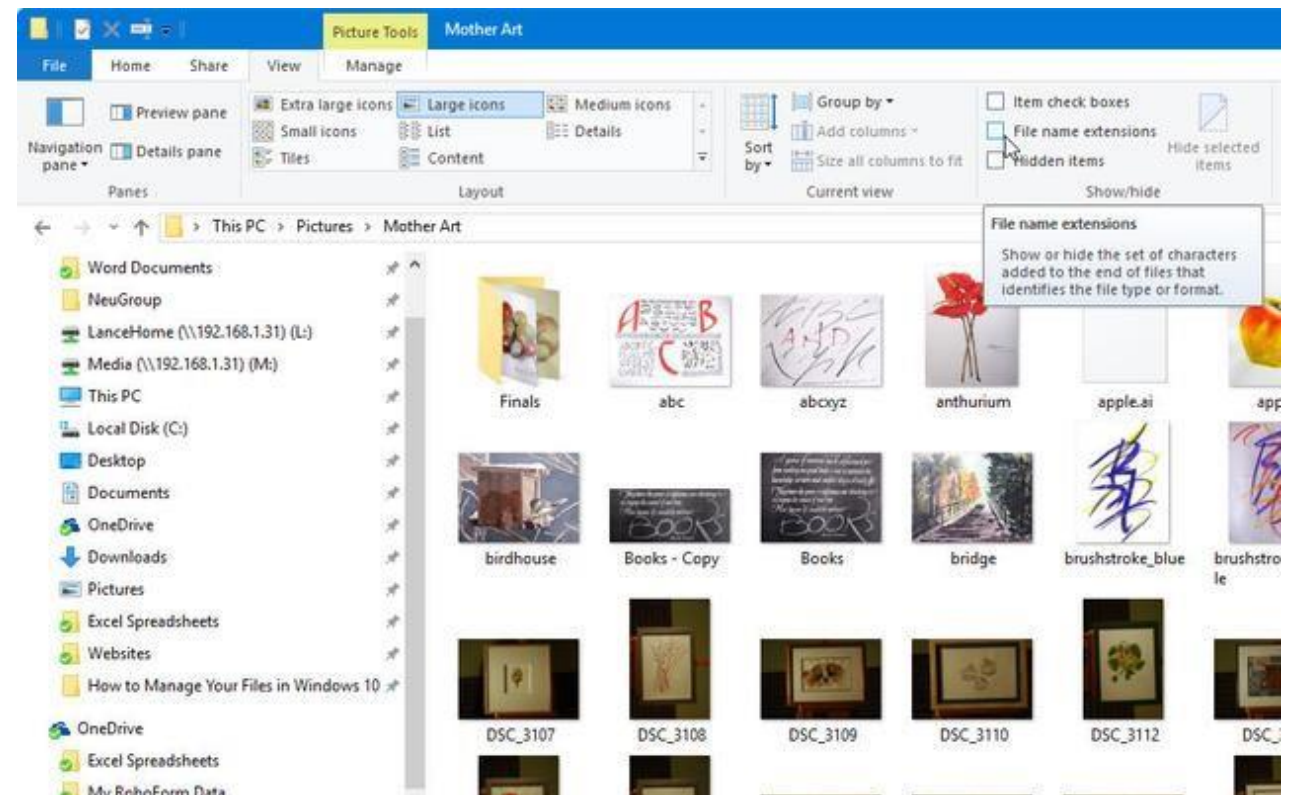
5) How to Display Your Libraries

Like Windows 7 and 8.1, Windows 10 offers a Libraries feature in which you can house your most often used folders. But like Windows 8.1, Windows 10 does not display your libraries by default.

If you like to use libraries and want them easily accessible, you can set them to display in File Explorer. To do so, click on the View tab, then click on the icon for "Navigation pane." From the menu, click on the check mark to "Show libraries." Your libraries then appear toward the bottom of the left pane in File Explorer.
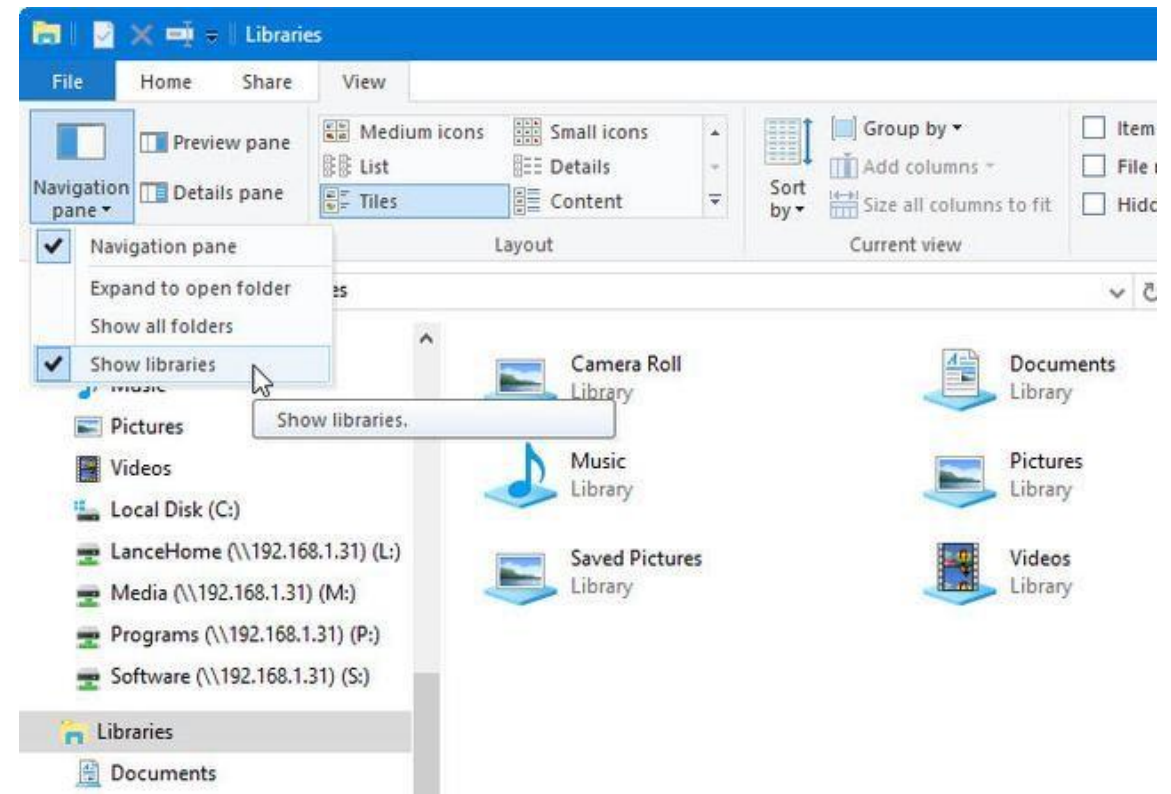
# 6) How to View Different Panes in File Explorer

File Explorer offers various panes to display or preview certain information about folders and files. You can turn those panes on or off to see or hide certain details.

To start, the Navigation pane down the left side of the window displays all the drives and folders on your PC, so you can easily explore them. You'll likely want to leave this pane alone, but if you wish to turn off the pane to create more space in the window, simply click on the View tab in the ribbon, click on the "Navigation pane" icon, and uncheck the check mark next to "Navigation pane." To re-enable the pane, click on the icon and click the command back on again.
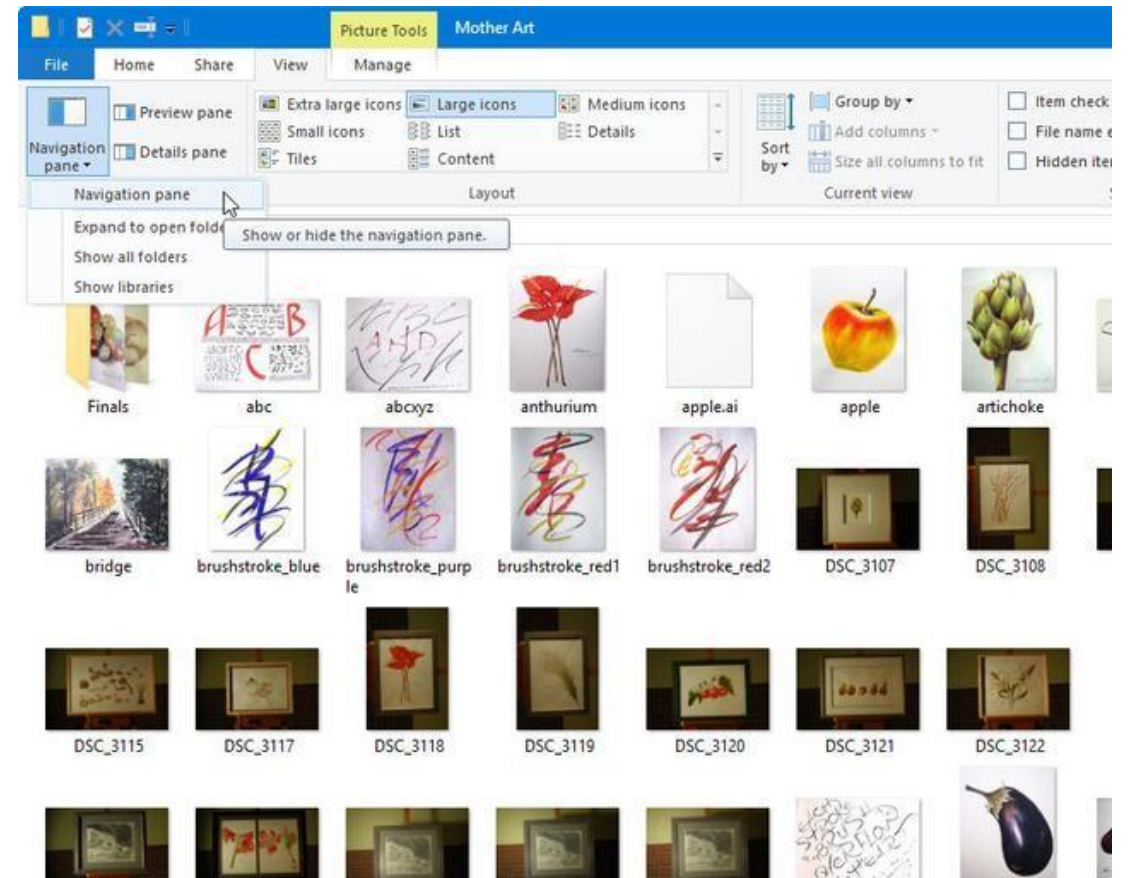
6) How to View Different Panes in File Explorer (Cont'd)

The Preview pane lets you see the contents of certain types of files without actually opening them, such as photos, Word documents, Excel spreadsheets, PDFs, and more. It's a handy way to peek at a file without having to launch its associated program. To enable the Preview pane, click on the View tab. Then click on the option for "Preview pane." Now click on a particular file, such as an image or PDF, and you'll see it previewed in the far-right pane of File Explorer.
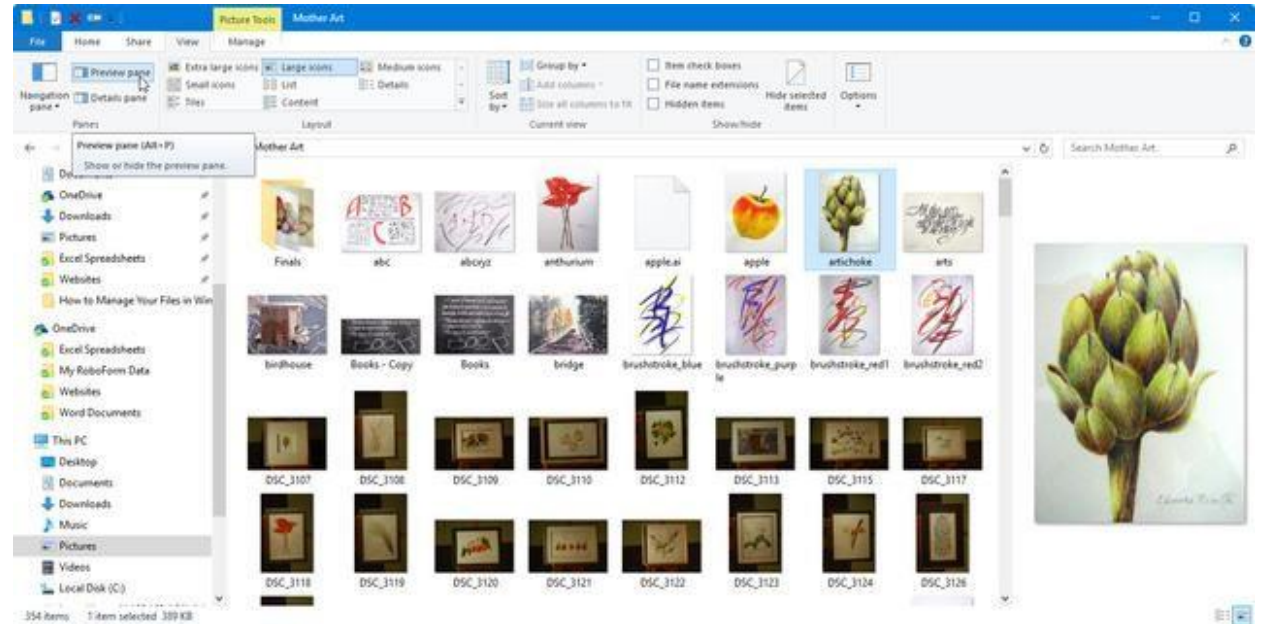
7) How to Share Files With Specific Apps

You can share a file with an application of your choosing, another handy option that saves you time and effort. Click on a file that you wish to share. Then click on the Share tab at the top of the screen to display the Share ribbon. Click on the Share icon, the first one on the ribbon. You'll see a pane appear on the right side of the screen with a list of apps with which you can share that file. The number of apps will depend on the type of file and which apps are already installed. Click on the app with which you want to share that file.
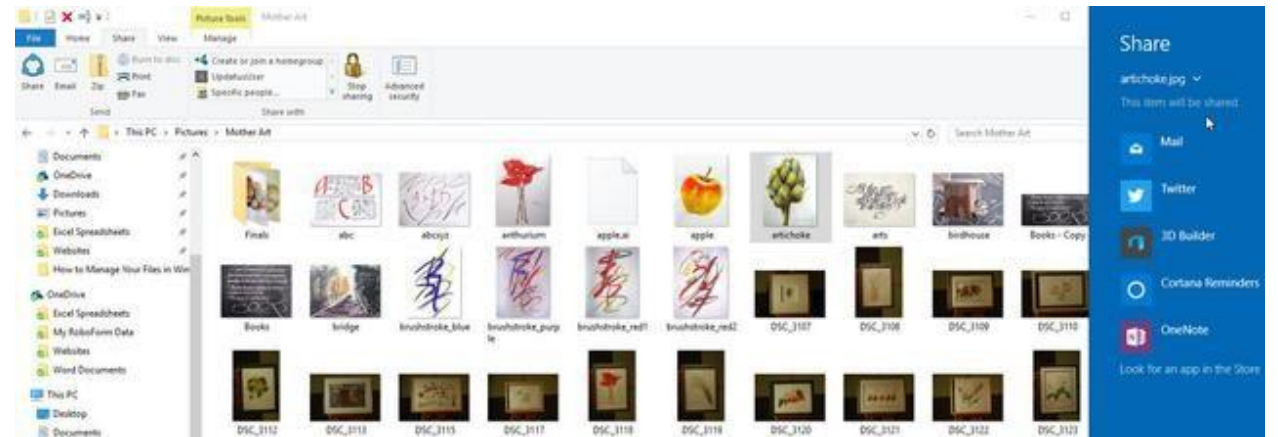
# 8) How to Send Files to Your OneDrive Online Storage

You can share a file with an application of your choosing, another handy option that saves you time and effort. Click on a file that you wish to share. Then click on the Share tab at the top of the screen to display the Share ribbon. Click on the Share icon, the first one on the ribbon. You'll see a pane appear on the right side of the screen with a list of apps with which you can share that file. The number of apps will depend on the type of file and which apps are already installed. Click on the app with which you want to share that file.
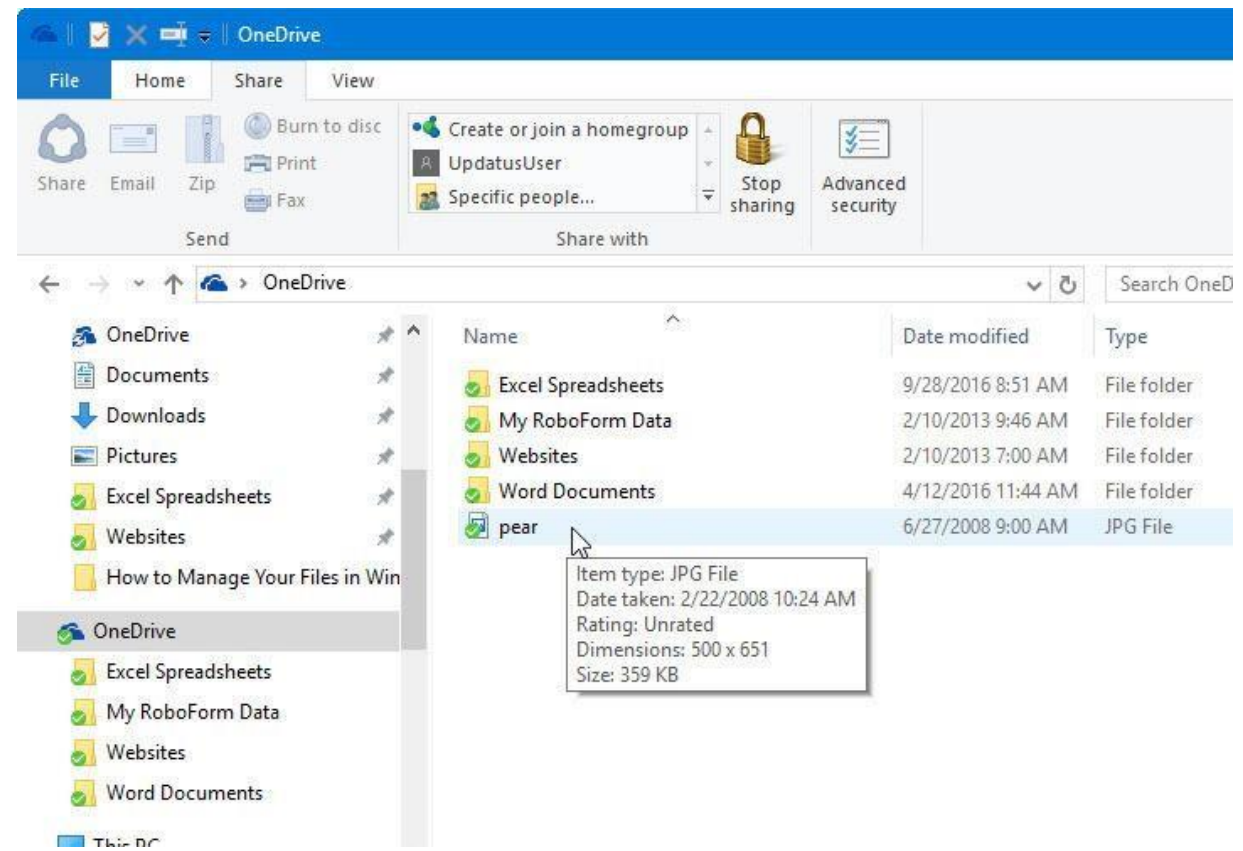
9) How to Manage Your Photos and Images

You can tweak your photos and other image files in File Explorer, to some extent. Here's how.
Let's assume you've stored a bunch of photos in your Pictures folder, some of which need to be rotated to display correctly. Right-click on such a photo. From the pop-up menu, click on the command to "Rotate right" or "Rotate left" depending on which option will fix the photo.
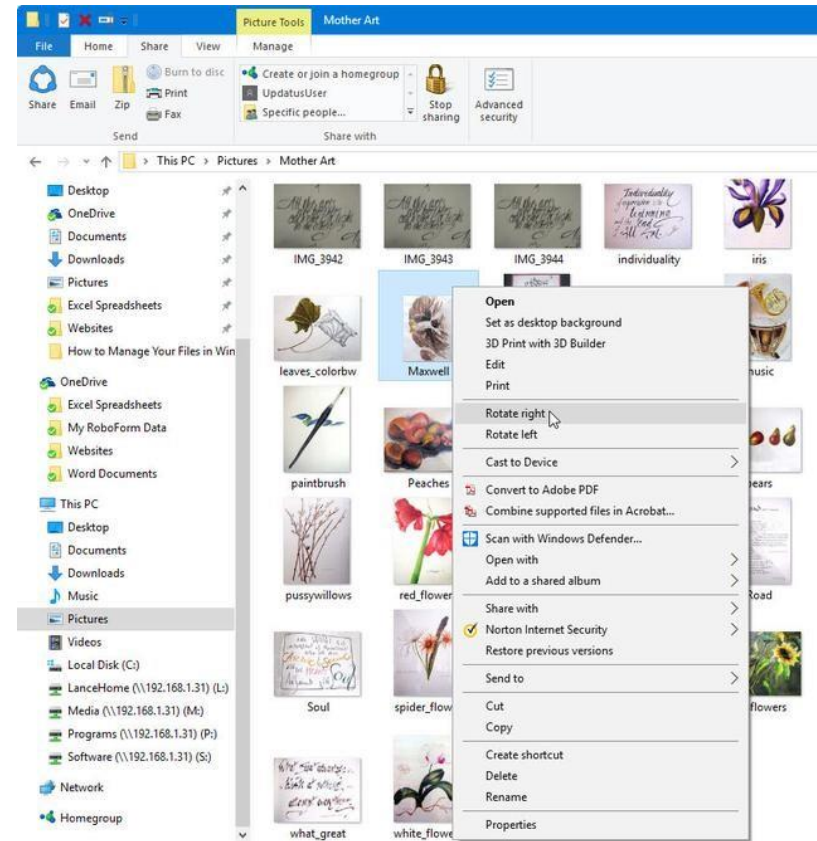
# 9) How to Manage Your Photos and Images (Cont'd)

If you'd like to turn a particular photo into your Windows wallpaper, right-click on it and select "Set as desktop background" from the pop-up menu.

Finally, you can watch a slide show of all the photos in a particular folder. To do this, click on the Manage tab to enable the Manage ribbon. From the ribbon, click on the "Slide show" icon. Now just sit back and enjoy the show. Each image appears for about five seconds, but you can click an image to advance to the next one. Right-click on any image in the slide show to display a popup menu, and you can change the speed, go forward or backward, pause the show, or exit it completely.
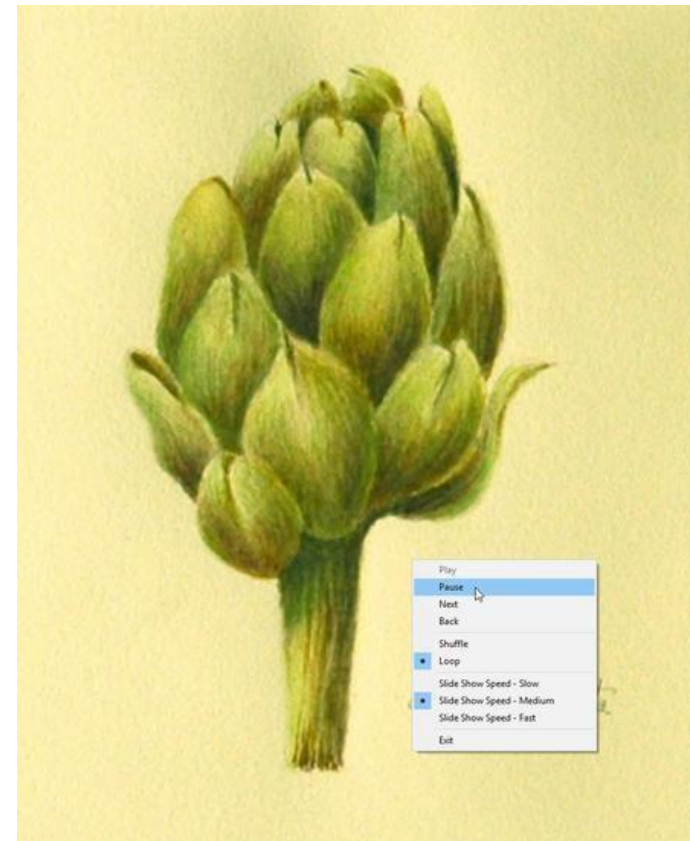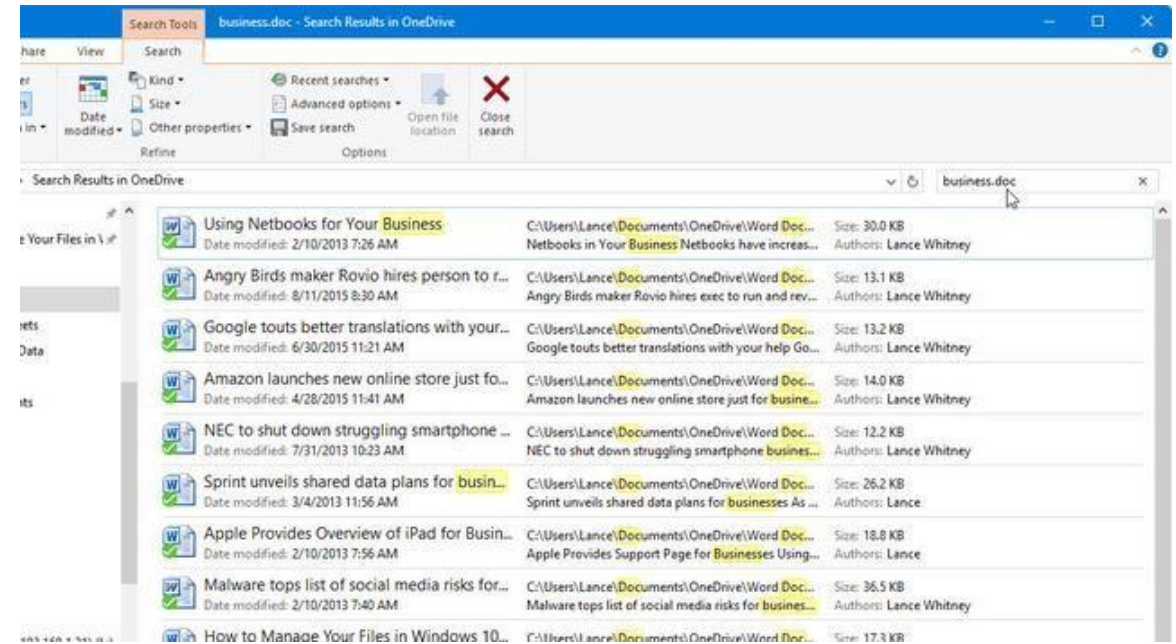
10) How to Search for Files and Documents

In Windows 10, you can search for specific files by name, extension, or other attributes. You can also use the always popular "?" or "*" wildcard characters to seek out a file or files with certain names or extensions. In File Explorer, click on the folder that contains the file you wish to find. In the upper right corner, you'll see a search field with magnifying-glass icon. (In the image below, the field has the arrow pointer set near it.) Let's say you're looking for a file with the word "business" in the title or contents. In the search field, begin typing that name until File Explorer displays it among its results, like so...
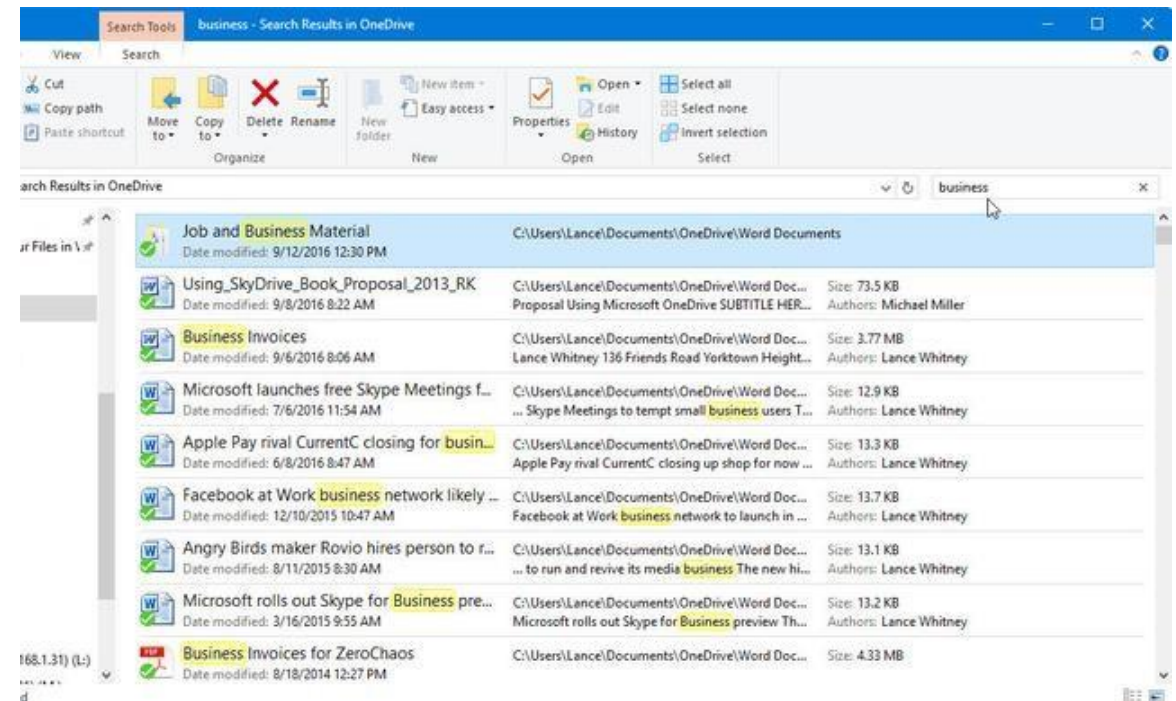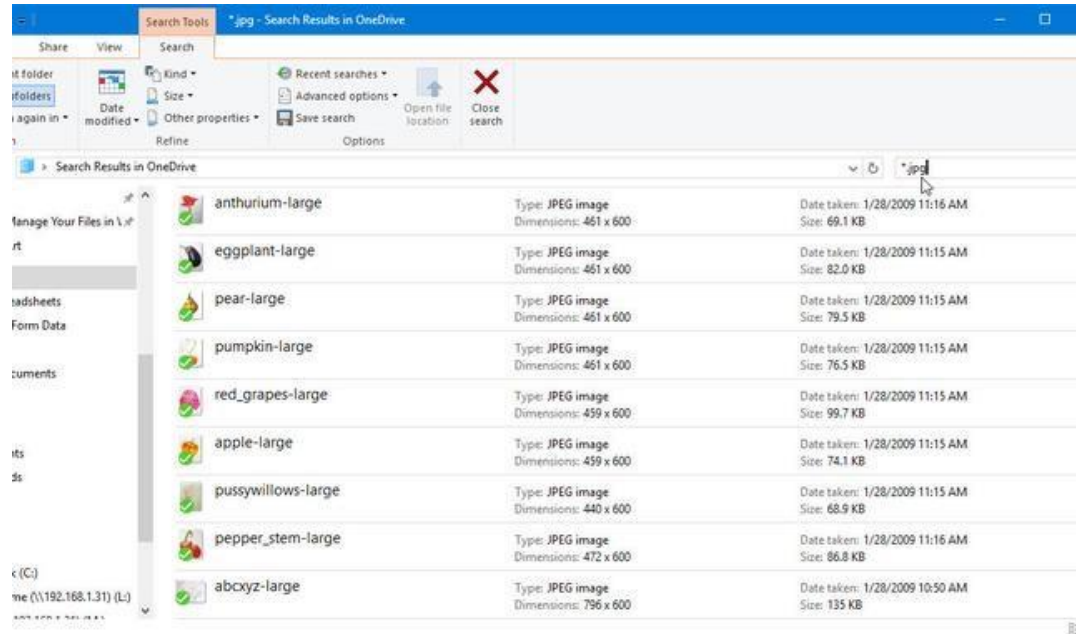
10) How to Search for Files and Documents (Cont'd)

Now, let's say you want to narrow the search to only Word documents with "business" as part of the filename. In the search field, type business.doc, and File Explorer returns only Word documents in the results.

10) How to Search for Files and Documents (Cont'd)

You can further expand your search to include every file of a specific type. Maybe you're looking for all JPG files. Simply type *.jpg in the search field.

10) How to Search for Files and Documents (Cont'd)

Finally, you'll notice the Search ribbon contains a host of other ways to refine the search. You can search by kind, size, modified date, and other properties. You can save your search to use it again in the future. You can also expand your search by looking for your file or files across your entire computer by choosing "This PC" as the destination.