

Find Lost Files and Folders

By Lorrie Jackson

WHY A TECHTORIAL?

What will I learn today?

You will learn strategies for finding missing files and folders on your PC.

What hardware and/or software does the techtorial apply to?

Directions are written for Windows XP, but many of the tips also can be used, with some modification, with earlier versions of Windows.

Which National Educational Technology Standards for Teachers does the techtorial address?

The techtorial will help teachers accomplish standard IIIc in particular.

The International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) has developed a set of National Educational Technology Standards for Teachers. Standards or Performance Indicators are included for each techtorial to help teachers and administrators improve technology proficiency. For a complete description of the standards indicated, go to [NETS for Teachers](#).

WHERE, OH WHERE, HAS MY FILE GONE?

Lost a file? The first rule is: Don't panic! Computer files and folders are rarely lost, they're simply misplaced; most can be found with a little effort and/or ingenuity.

Take a deep breath, and then try one of these tools:

- My Recent Documents
- File command under Microsoft Office
- Windows Explorer Search

STEP ONE: MY RECENT DOCUMENTS

Don't be fooled by the name; My Recent Documents lists the files you most recently opened. Start here when searching for a lost file.

Click **Start** and then click **My Recent Documents**. Look for the missing file in the list that appears.

If you don't see My Recent Documents listed in your computer's Start menu, skip to Step 2.



Notice that when you "mouse over" (put your cursor on top of) a file in the list, text appears that describes where that file is saved.

In addition, an icon (picture) indicating what program the file was created in appears to the left of the file name. A blue "W" indicates a file made in Microsoft Word; a red circle and square is a PowerPoint slide show; a green "X" is a Microsoft Excel file; and a blue "E" (or possibly a blue "N" in a dark circle) indicates a Web page.



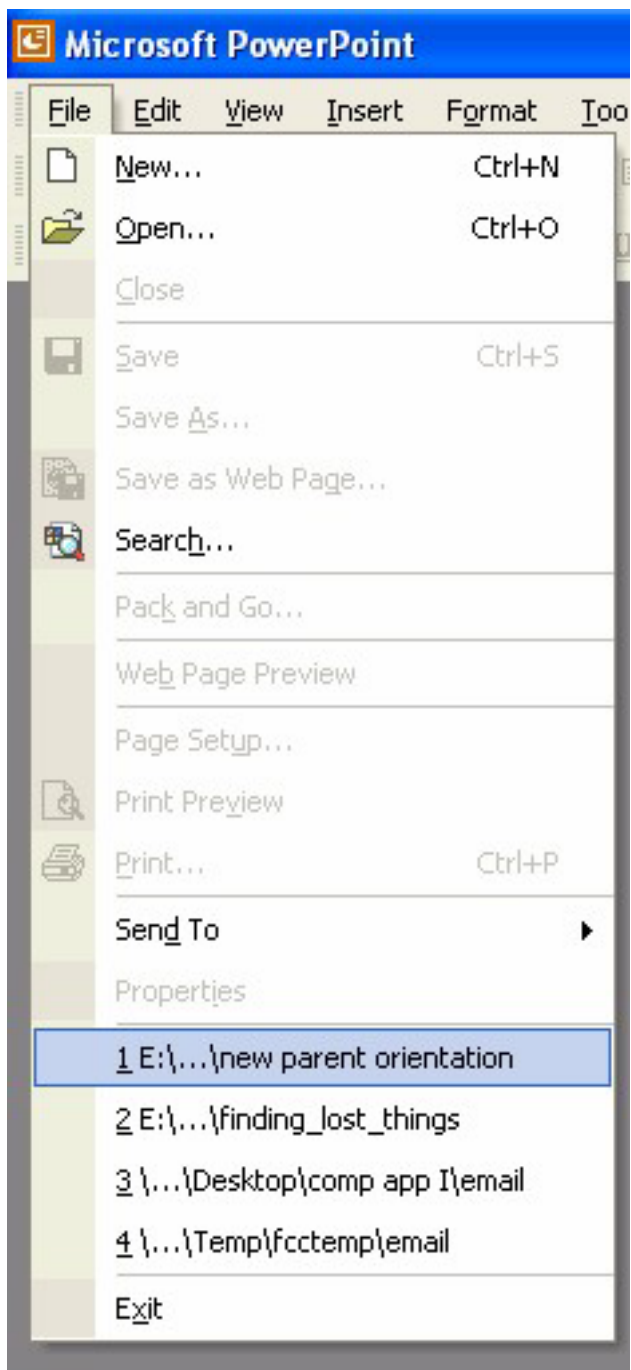
Did you find the file you were looking for? If so, click the file name to open it, and then go to the end of this techtorial for some important advice!

If you didn't find the missing file, even though you know you opened it recently, chances are you've opened many files since opening the missing one. Your file might be recent, it's just not as recent as a dozen or so others.

STEP TWO: INSIDE A PROGRAM

Still looking for your missing file? Click **Start** and then click **All Programs**. Open the program...Word, PowerPoint, Excel, ClarisWorks...in which the missing file was created.

Click **File** in the menu bar at the top of the program window; a list of options will appear. (Note: You might have to click the pair of arrows at the bottom of the drop down menu to see the entire option list.) Beneath the list of options, you will find a list of the files created with that program that were opened most recently.



Did you find the missing file? If so, click the file name to open it, and then go to the end of this tutorial for some important advice!

If you didn't find the file you were looking for, go on to Step 3.

STEP 3: SEARCH WITH WINDOWS EXPLORER

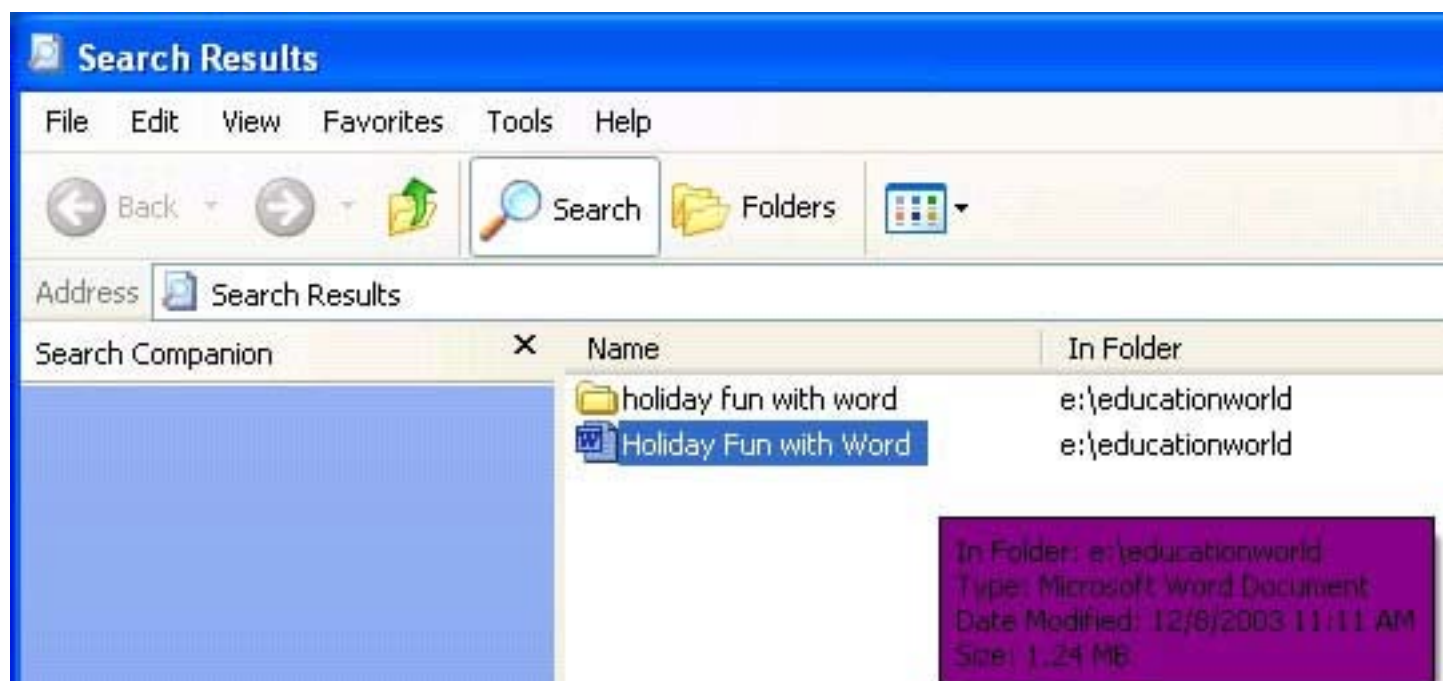
If the file you're missing isn't one of the files opened most recently, you're probably still hunting for it. If so, it's time to widen the search:

- Click **Start** and then mouse over **Search**. (Note: The Search option might be called **Find** on some versions of Windows.) Notice the mouse-over text that appears.
- Click **Search** to open the Search Results window.
[Insert 4startsearch]

On some versions of Windows, mousing over Search will open a menu listing various search options, such as *For Files or Folders*, *On the Internet*, and so on. Click **For Files or Folders** to search for a missing file.

- Click the correct category beneath *What do you want to search for?* on the left side of the Search Results window. You might choose, for example, *Pictures, music, or video; Documents (word processing, spreadsheet, etc.); All files and folders;....*
[Insert 5whatdoyouwanttosearchfor]
- Click **All files and folders**. A search criteria form will open.
[Insert 6searchcriteria]
- If you know the exact name of the missing file, type it into the first blank. If you know a word or phrase in the missing file, type it into the second blank. Click the arrow in the blank beneath Look in: and choose the drive or folder you want to search in.
- Click **Search**.

Windows Explorer will find and list any files with the name or containing the phrase indicated in the search criteria form. If the missing file is on that list, double-click the file name. Then go to the end of this techtorial for some important tips!



Date Modified: 12/6/2003 11:11 AM
Size: 1.24 MB

**There were 2 files found.
Did you find what you
wanted?**

→ Yes, finished searching


→ Yes, but make future
searches faster

No, refine this search and...

→ Change file name or
keywords

→ Look in more locations


→ Change whether hidden and
system files are included

 Start a new search

Back





 finding lost stuff - Mic...

 Search Results

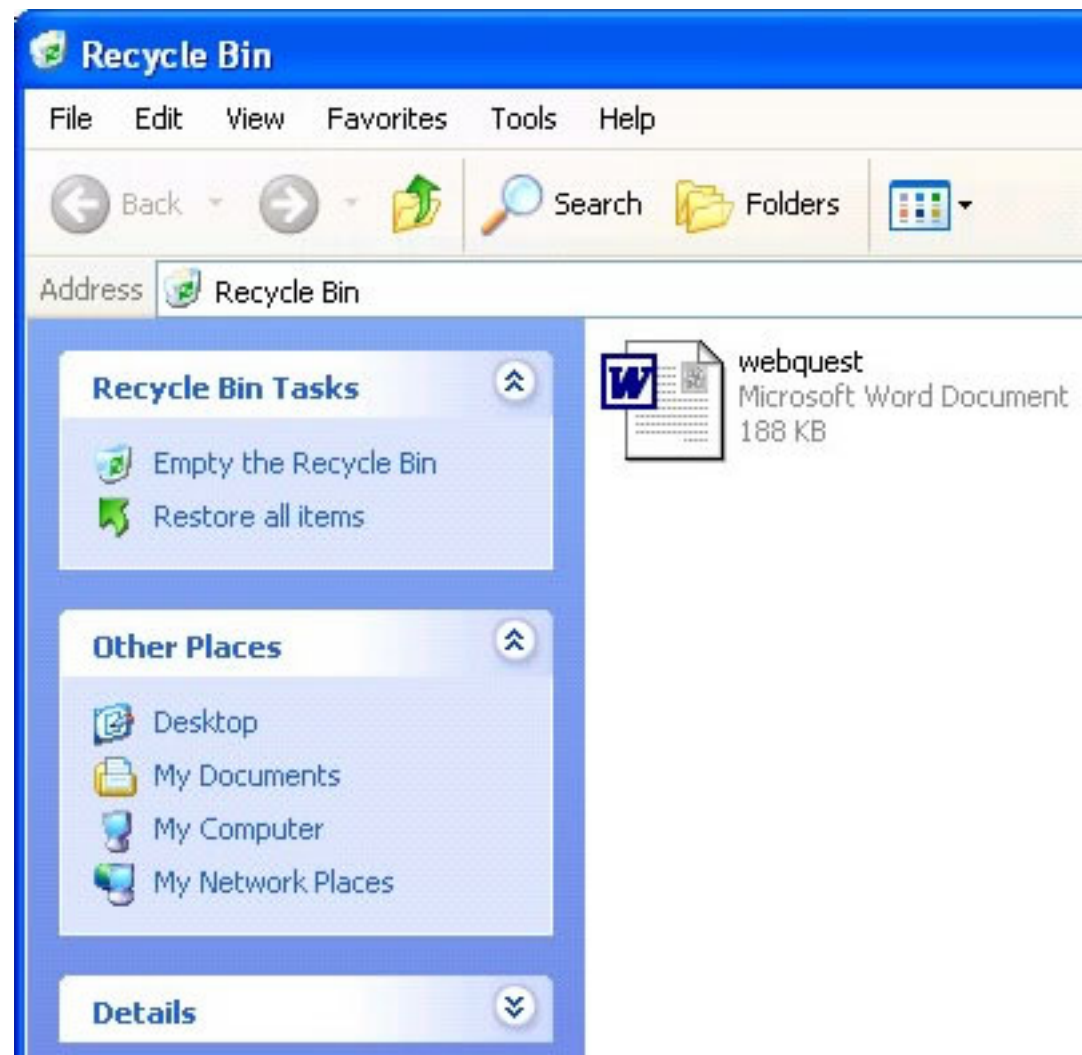
DON'T EMPTY THE TRASH!

So, you've followed all three steps and your file is still missing? You still have two measures to try:

- Look in the trash.
- Search "by hand."

Might you have deleted the file? To find out, double-click the Recycle Bin on the computer desktop to open it. Scroll through the list of deleted files. If you find the missing file, click and drag it out of the trash and onto your desktop. Then save the file to the appropriate folder.

Or...to restore the file to its original location, click to highlight the file name, and then click **File** in the menu bar at the top of the window. Click Restore in the drop down menu that appears.



SEARCH BY HAND

Is the file still missing? Your only choice is to search the computer "by hand." Most technology novices start their searches here, but it's the slowest and most frustrating way to search. This should be a last ditch effort. To search by hand:

- Double-click **My Computer** on the computer desktop.



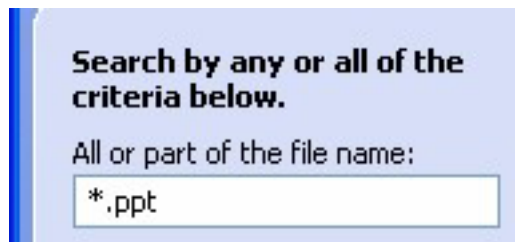
- Beneath Hard Disk Drives, double-click the Local Disk drive (usually C:). A list of folders will appear.



- Click to open each folder and search for the missing file.

WILD CARDS AND EXTENSIONS

What do you do if you don't remember the name of a missing file? Let's say you've created a PowerPoint show for parents of new students at your school. Now, a new student has enrolled, but you can't find the file and you've forgotten its name. You can use the wildcard and correct extension to conduct your search: Go to Start>Search>All Files and Folders. In the blank beneath *All or part of the file name*, type *.ppt, and then click **Search**.



The asterisk (*) in *.ppt indicates that any combination of letters, numbers, and/or punctuation can appear before the period in the file you're looking for.

Note: You also can use an asterisk to fill in the blanks if you remember part

of a file name, but not all of it. For example, if you know the Word document was called "Smith... something," because you always put your last name first in the file names of the worksheets you create, type Smith*.doc to find all the Word documents that start with the word Smith.

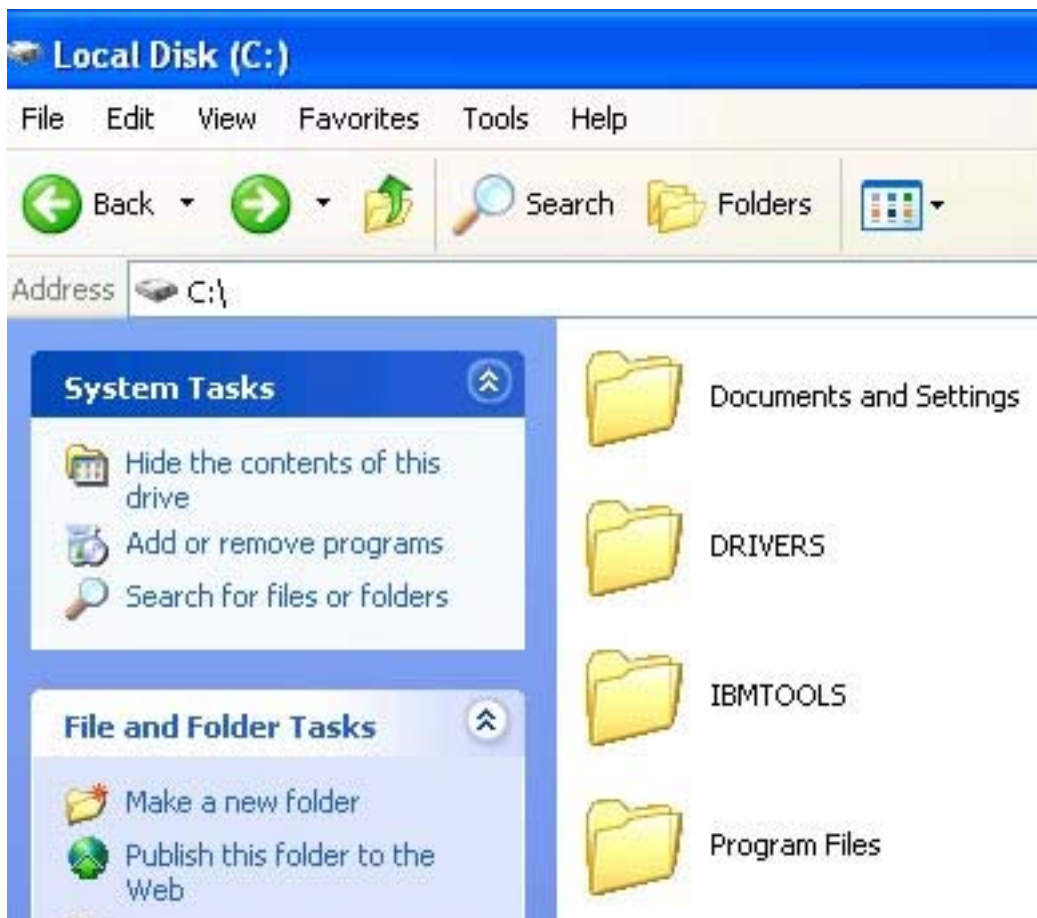
The .ppt specifies a search for PowerPoint files. So, *.ppt requests a search for all PowerPoint files.

The .ppt in the missing file name above is called an extension. All files have extensions indicating the program they were created in. Some commonly used programs and their file extensions are:

- .doc (Microsoft Word)
- .xls (Microsoft Excel)
- .txt (text file)
- .ppt (Microsoft PowerPoint)
- .wpd (Word Perfect)
- .cwk (ClarisWorks)
- .ins (Inspiration)

TIPS AND TRICKS

Documents and Settings: If several people use the same computer, and each user logs on with his or her own password or username, you might have created the file while another teacher or student was logged in. Depending on your system configuration, you might be able to open and search other users' folders, or you might ask each user to login and help you look.



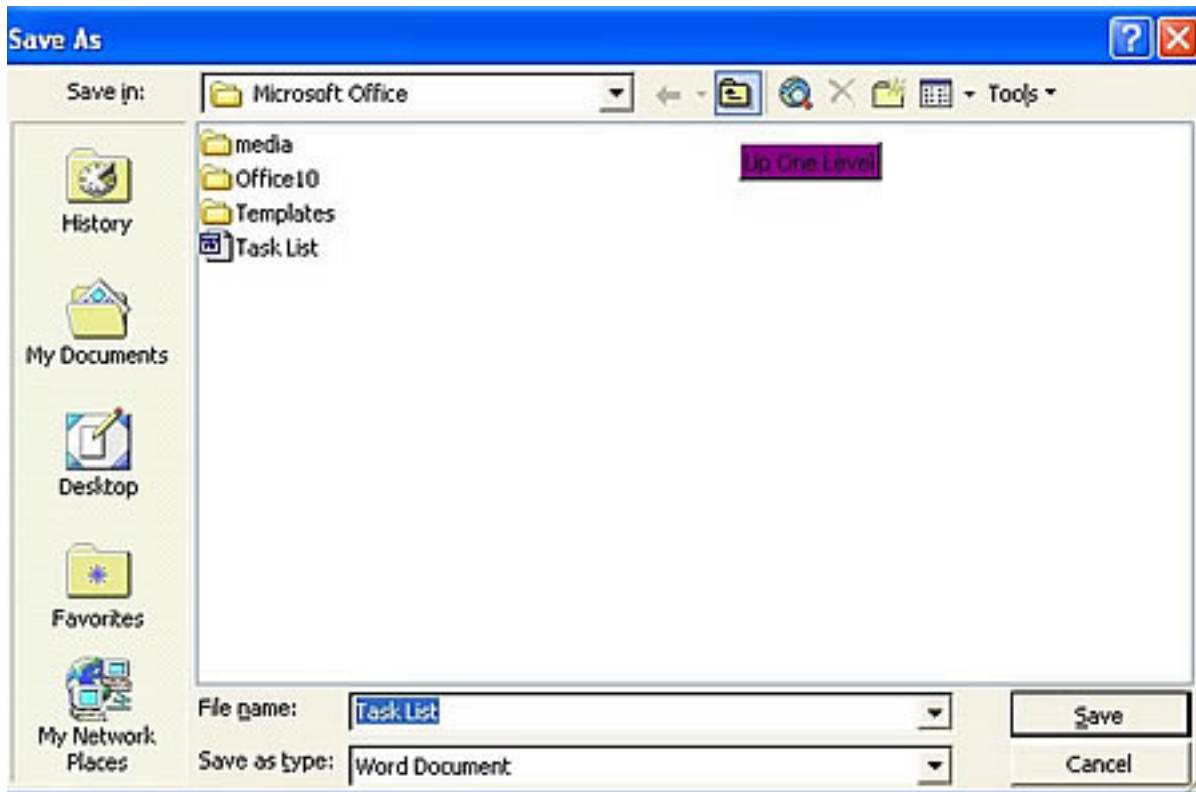
Program Files: Program files -- the files that Microsoft Word, Internet Explorer and other computer programs need to run -- are another, although less likely, place to look for a missing file. On rare occasions, a file might get saved in the folder of the program used to create it.

YOU FOUND IT! NOW WHAT?

Hopefully, you've found your lost file. (If not, before you give up hope, find a peer mentor or tech staff member to help you look.)

If you have found that errant file, however...

- Open it, and then click **File** and **Save As** in the menu bar at the top of the program window.
- The **Save As** window will open. In the blank next to **Save In**, you'll see the name of the folder in which the file is saved.



- Click the down arrow to the right of the folder name to see the file's path (the list of folder -- from general to specific - in which the file is saved.)



Now you know that the sample file above is saved in the Microsoft Office folder, which is inside the Program Files folder, which is on Drive C:/, which is in My Computer, which is located on the computer's desktop.

Will you remember that location the next time you want to open the file, however? Probably not! So, be sure to resave your found file in a folder that you'll be able to find easily next time.

Finally, to avoid future time-consuming file searches, be sure that *all* your folders and files are named clearly and appropriately and saved in easily accessible locations!

TELL ME MORE

For more information on using Windows, check out additional Education World [Tutorials](#) or visit Microsoft's [Windows XP Professional How-to Articles](#).