What is a file?

A file can be a lot of different things: a document, an image, a slideshow, a video, a piece of audio, a spreadsheet, and more! There are as many file types as there are software applications we use on the computer. When a file is opened, it displays the content of the files in a program that knows how to read it.

What is a file extension?

A file extension tells you what kind of file you're looking at. File types are important because it cues us in on the software application that can open and interpret the contents of the file.

Here are some common file types you may see:
- → A **word document** is indicated by the file extension **.docx**
    - Word documents are primarily text based.
    - These can be opened and edited on a desktop or laptop computer using Microsoft Word or other free, default applications. If you own a Mac, your default program for word documents will be Pages.
    - These files can be edited on mobile phones and tablets, but will need the help up an app, such as Google Docs or the Microsoft Word app.
- → An **Adobe Acrobat Document** is indicated by the file extension **.pdf**
    - These typically open either in a web browser (such as Google Chrome), or through a program called Adobe Acrobat Reader.
    - These documents may have fillable boxes built in that allow you to type, but in general are not as easy to edit without access to paid Adobe software.
- → A photo could be either a **JPEG, PNG, of GIF** indicated by a file extension of **.jpg or .jpeg, .png, or .gif**
- → A file that contains a **spreadsheet** will typically have the file extension **.xlsx or .xls**
    - These files will typically open in Microsoft Excel.

Intro to the File Explorer

The file explorer contains a directory of the data that is stored on your computer's hard drive. This includes your documents, pictures, videos, and music, as well as your program files (application files, executables, and so on).

To access the file explorer, click on the icon in the bottom toolbar that looks like a folder. You can also access the file explorer through the start menu.

Tip: clicking the name of a folder from the file explorer through the start menu, such as "computer," or "documents," will open that folder within the file explorer.

There's a lot in here, but the good news is that it is organized in a way that makes it easy to find the things you need to access! You can navigate through the parts of the file explorer by clicking to open the folders on the left-hand side of the window. Clicking a folder will show you the contents of that folder.

Note that there can be folders inside of other folders (known as *nested folders*) for optimal organization.

Most computers are set up to save all downloaded files to a folder called "Downloads.' This can be accessed through the file explorer. Try searching for your document here first if you can't locate it.

Viewing File Characteristics in the File Explorer
Files that appear in the file explorer will have certain attributes that you have ability to view. This includes the file type and the file size.

You may be able to tell what the file extension is by seeing the icon associated with the file, but you can also view the file type by viewing the column to the right of the file titled "type." For example, a .docx file will be listed as a "Microsoft Word Document."
You can also right click a file and click on "properties" to see the file extension name.

As you navigate your file explorer, you may notice that some files display as line items with details, whereas others display as icons. Did you know that you can change the way your files are displayed?
To change the view, you'll navigate to the top right of the corner and look for an icon

with an arrow next to it. It may look like this:
Click on the arrow and drag the bar up and down to change the view. You can view your files as large icons, a list, a list with details, and so on. Try out a few and see what works best for you.

Where do my downloads go?
Let's say, for example, that you have downloaded a file from an email, or from a webpage. You clicked the button, but it seems nothing has happened. Where did your download go? Where your downloads go will largely depend on the default settings of your device.

After the download, some devices will ask you where you would like to save your file. It will generate a pop-up of the file explorer that will allow you to choose a folder, name or rename your file, and click "Save."

Others will save your download to a default location. There are a few things you can do to find your file.

If you downloaded the file from within a web browser, take a look at the bottom of the web browser window. You will likely see a bar, and a block that contains the title of your document.

📕 1040 Tax Form.pdf ^		Show all	✕
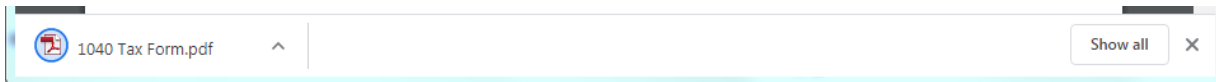
In most cases, you can simply click that block to open your file.
You may also choose to select the arrow to the right of your box and select "show in folder." This prompt a pop-up of the file explorer, including the specific folder that your document has landed in.

If you by chance closed out of this bottom block, that is okay! There are two other methods to find where your document went.

If you are using Google Chrome, navigate to the three dots in the top right corner of the window, and from that menu, click on "downloads."
(This same spot is accessible in Internet Explorer by clicking on the gear in the top right, then clicking on "view downloads")
You can also press CTRL and J to access this page.

The browser will now display its memory of the files you have downloaded during your internet session. Clicking the title of a document will open it up. You will also have the option to select "Show in folder" here as well.
Note that your browser will show you all of your downloads, but you can only open and access files that still remain saved locally to the device. If you have deleted the file, you will not be able to open it from this view.

Finally, you have the option to look for your file in the file explorer. If you remember the title, you can enter a part of the title in the search box located on the top right-hand side of the screen. If you don't, you can browse your folders until you find it. It's likely that it will be inside of the download folder.

Uploading Documents

You may have been asked to send a document as an attachment in an email or asked to upload a document to a website. What does this mean?

It means that you must upload the document, which will send a copy of the file somewhere else. To do this step, you will need to have your file saved somewhere you can access it. For this example, we'll assume it's saved locally to your computer.

If you are submitting a file through a website, there is typically a button that will say "upload" or "browse."

File to upload | Choose File | No file chosen

Clicking the available option should prompt a pop-up your file explorer! This will allow us to browse our folders and find the document we wish to upload. When you find your file, double click it, or click it once, then press "open."
You can typically confirm that the correct file has been attached by looking at the name that appears next to the file upload option. If it is not the correct file, you can click "choose file" again.
(Note that depending on the website, these spots may look different)

File to upload | Choose File | 1040 Tax Form.pdf

Once you have attached your file, you may need to complete your upload by hitting "upload,' "submit," "save," or navigating to the next page (such as on a job application.)
It largely depends on how the page has been built and formatted.

Some websites will have required file formats, and maximum file sizes that they will accept. Keep an eye out for any small text around the upload area that tells you this, or any text that appears after you attempt to upload a file.
Remember that you can view your file format and file size in the file explorer.

This method is pretty universal for all types of file uploads, including photos.

If you need to upload a file to an email, the steps will vary a little bit depending on your email provider.
You'll need to begin by composing an email. To compose an email, you will need the recipient email address.
Once you have entered a descriptive subject line for your email (this tells the recipient what to expect inside) and have entered in a message in the body, you're ready to upload your file.
Look for an icon that looks like a paperclip. This is the universal symbol for an attachment. Clicking this will prompt the pop-up window for the file explorer.

From here, you'll simply select your file, click "open" and you should see your attachment appear.

Note that email services typically will not allow you to send many large files in one email. If you attempt to send many photos this may happen to you. In this case, a solution may be to split the large files between multiple emails.

Local Storage Vs. Cloud Storage

Local storage means saving your document to a hard drive—either internal, or external drive (such as a USB flash drive).
When you save a file locally, this means you must have that device to be able to retrieve your file.
Save your file locally if:
- It is your personal device
- You will send or upload the file somewhere accessible by the time you are finished using the device.

Cloud storage is accessed online through an account login (usually through an email account) and stores your documents in the hosts' servers.
This means that you can access your file wherever you can access the internet.

Save your file to the Cloud using an online Drive Service if:
- You have an account for that service (such as a Gmail account for Google Drive)
- You will need to access the document from different devices.

Most options for saving will include saving a local copy for storage first.
When you are using the library and are working on a document you'll need to access later, you'll either need a flash drive, or will need to upload that document to something that can be accessed via the internet (either a cloud service or email).

* Note that you can save a file to the hard drive of a library desktop or laptop computer but once your session ends, you will be unable to retrieve that document.

File locations & Syncing Document Changes
Say you composed the document on your personal computer, uploaded a copy to Google Drive. This is great! Now you can access this file wherever you can access the internet.

Now say that you made changes to your document on your home computer, and saved it. But when you opened Google Drive at the library, your document didn't save the changes. What happened?

Unless you are editing a document online through a web application (such as Word online, or Google Docs) you are likely editing a document locally. Your documents do not talk to documents of the same name stored in the cloud or documents stored on external drives, unless you have set up syncing options otherwise.

This means that any changes you make to a file will need to first be saved, then reuploaded to the cloud service or copied to your flash drive (unless you opened the file from your flash drive).

For Additional Resources, please visit: edu.gcfglobal.org/en/basic-computer-skills/

$\rightarrow$ Check section 4, "Understanding File Extensions" and section 5, "Downloading and Uploading"