

# Understanding Libraries In Windows 7

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Some people think of a library as a building that houses a collection of books. It's an accurate physical description, but tells you nothing about a library's true value to society. A library is a reservoir of knowledge. From the ancient Library of Alexandria to the Library of Congress, the function of a library has been to make a civilization's knowledge available to those who wish to educate themselves.

Libraries in Windows 7 will probably never serve such a noble purpose, but they can be helpful instruments for those who care to organize their files in a logical, coherent manner. Windows XP used a basic format called Known Folders as places to store files. There was My Documents, My Pictures, and My Music. Vista added a few things, but the basic structure remained the same even though Microsoft removed the "My" portion of the name.

In Windows 7 Microsoft recognizes that people store information anywhere and everywhere on their PC. Libraries allow total control over the Documents Library folder structure. By including a folder in a library you tell Windows where your data is located and the library function will keep track of it. You can put folders located on different disk drives in the same library.

A library acts like a folder with a group of files or sub-folders within it. This is good because you don't have to learn anything radically new in order to start using libraries. It's important to understand however, that folders are not stored within libraries. They merely look that way. A library displays files and folders that may be stored anywhere on your PC including external hard drives.

Libraries have now become an important data management tool. You can create broad categories of information, such as documents or videos. Store them wherever you want in different folders on separate disk drives, and arrange the information by properties such as date, subject and author.

Windows 7 contains a default set of four libraries. There is the Documents library followed by the Music, Pictures, and Videos libraries. Each one works in exactly the same way, and they all replace the standard folders in XP and Vista. Each default library in Windows 7 has some default content which can easily be removed.

Browsing in a library is no different from browsing folders. View the data any way you please, then revise or delete information as desired.

From the Desktop, open the Computer icon. In the left pane under the Desktop miniature icon is the list of the four default libraries. Displaying the content of a library is as simple as left-clicking on the library name.

If you want to create a new library, right-click on the library icon and then select New/Library from the menu. Name the new library in the same way as you would a new folder.

To add a folder to a library, start by clicking on the Windows Explorer icon in the Taskbar. In the left pane, locate the folder you want included in the library and left click it to select it. Don't open the folder. In the toolbar at the top of the Windows Explorer window, click Include in library, and then select a library.

It really is that easy. You can have up to 50 folders in a library which should be enough for most people. To add folders stored on external drives, make sure that the drive is connected to the PC and turned on. Use the same procedure as outlined above.

Other than documents, the most common file types are videos, photos, and music. You can optimize a library for these specific categories. When you optimize a library you change the options that are available for arranging the files in that library. To optimize a library right-click the library you want optimized. Choose Properties from the menu, and choose the file type in the Optimize this library for list.

After a library has outlived its usefulness and you wish to delete it, the library is moved to the Recycle Bin. The files and folders that were stored in the library are intact. No information is lost, but the way the folders were organized is cancelled. If you inadvertently delete one of the four default libraries, it is easily restored by right-clicking Libraries and then selecting the Restore default libraries option.

Here are some basics about what can and can't be included in a library.

Any folder on your primary drive (C:) can be included in a library.

Any folder on an external hard drive can be included in a library provided the drive is connected to your PC and turned on. This includes thumb drives in general unless the manufacturer prohibits it for some reason. Like regular hard drives, content will not be accessible if the thumb drive is disconnected.

Any folder on an internal hard drive, including its partitions, can be included in a library. If your PC is part of a network, folders can be included in a library if the network is indexed or if the network is structured that the folder is accessible offline. You can't include folders stored on a CD or DVD in a library. :

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