Chapter 2: File Management

Learning Outcomes

In this chapter, students will:

- Discuss the importance of an organized file management system, for both physical and digital files
- Discuss various ways to organize the interior of a file
- Learn how to create an electronic file management system using Windows

Physical Files

Physical files always start with the introduction of a new client. The client is met by the paralegal and the new file opening sheet is given to the support staff member in charge of opening new files.

From Folders to Boxes

Each new file begins in a legal-sized file folder. There is a tab on the open side of the folder that is used to display information about each individual file.

Usually, the staff member in charge of opening the file will print a couple of labels. The labels will include the client's name, last name first, or company, as well as the file number and the reference line of the file.
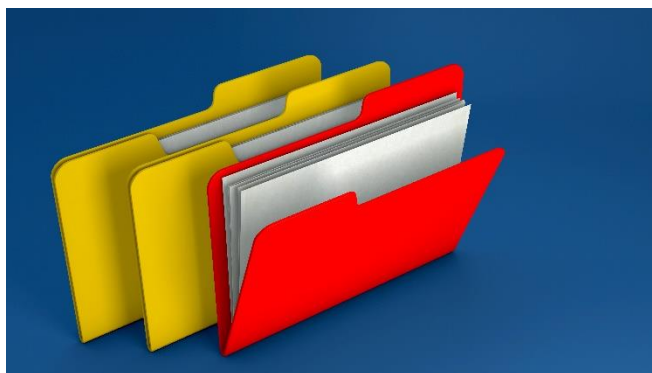
Labels may also include information on the responsible paralegal and file opening date. Here is an example of a file label:

ASSELIN, Barb   File No. 19826-20

RE: Asselin v. Short
         Small Claims (damaged vehicle)

Responsible Paralegal: Margaret Childs   Opened: May 30, 2020

As the firm works on a client's file, it will grow in size. Each time a letter or a memo or a document is prepared and sent to someone on behalf of a client, a copy is kept in the file folder. Each time a letter or a memo or a document is received by someone on behalf of a client, it is kept in the file folder. If the contents of a file are sufficient to warrant placing an elastic band around the file in order to keep it shut, the firm will use an expandable document folder to keep the file inside.

At this point, the contents of the file may be divided into segments such as correspondence, pleadings, accounts, documents, medical reports, etc. These are called sub-folders and new file folders will be used for the sub-folders. The original file folder will become the correspondence file and will contain all letters and memos regarding a file in chronological order from oldest to newest.

Each sub-folder will be a legal-sized file folder labelled to properly reflect which file it belongs to and what its contents are, in case someone removes a sub-folder in order to complete some work on the file.

If a file that has been "upgraded" to an expandable file folder becomes too large for the new folder, the firm will transfer the contents of the folder to a document box. The box will be labelled appropriately with the file name and

number on the outside of the box in black marker. The inside of the document box will be organized using file folders and expandable file folders and will be divided up according to the contents of the file. For example, a client who is the owner of several apartment buildings will likely need a document box that will contain a variety of file folders such as:

- Individual files for each tenant issue
- Individual files for small claims court actions where no remedy is available through the Landlord and Tenant Board, and
- Individual files for each apartment building's/unit's rent increases.

File Organization

The original file folder should be organized so that any document can be found quickly. Here are some best practices for keeping a neat and tidy file:

- On the inside cover of the file, tape the file opening information, which will include information such as the client's contact information, the opposing party, the opposing party's paralegal and contact information, the file number, the date the file was opened, and the responsible paralegal
- On the inside back cover of the file, consider taping a large envelope with the flap cut off and use the envelop to hold documents relating to the file, so that they are not loose in the file folder, and
- Consider keeping all letters, memos, invoices, and notes on a "correspondence brad" or within a clip of some kind, organized with the most recent item on the top and the oldest item on the bottom.

Location of Files

Now that we know how to organize our files, it is important to know how to store them.

Each firm is different in its storage of files. Each paralegal or law clerk may have the files they are working on in their offices. Or, there may be a centralized location for each department, such as the immigration law department, where all of the files are kept and you would go to the centralized location in your department to take the files you need to work on.

Alternatively, the entire firm may have a centralized file management system where all of the files are kept, regardless of the area of law.

Some firms require you to sign out a file when you remove it from the filing system, so that if someone else is looking for the same file, it will be clear where that file can be located.

Regardless of where the individual files are located, they should be filed in accordance with standard filing rules.

If your firm files its files numerically, they will be stored from lowest to highest by file number. This is not a common practice because you would have to memorize each file's file number in order to find it.

More likely, your firm will store its files alphabetically. They may be further divided by area of law and stored alphabetically within each area of law. The alphabetized system works like this:

- Numbers come before letters (i.e., 12345 Ontario Inc. is filed before ABC Realty)
- Nothing comes before something (i.e., A Plus Bakery is filed before Arthur Air Conditioning)
- Personal names are filed last name first, then first name (i.e., Barb Asselin would be filed under A for Asselin. If there are two clients with the last name of Asselin, Barb Asselin would be filed before Jacqueline Asselin), and
- Company names are filed as written (Barb Asselin Bakery Inc. would be filed under B for Barb since Barb is the first name in the company name).

Filing

Now that we know how to file our files and how to organize the interior of our files, it is very important to keep these files as up to date as possible. If you or a law clerk or co-worker is working on a file, that person will be able to work more efficiently if the file has all of the outstanding filing inside it. This means that each person in your firm should make an effort to do their filing on a daily basis.

If you receive or send an email on a file, you should print it out and file it in the file right away. If you receive correspondence or a courier or a fax on a file that needs to be reviewed by someone in the firm, consider attaching the correspondence to the file and giving it to the individual so that it can easily be filed once the letter is reviewed.

It is very difficult to work on a file that is incomplete. For example, if you are drafting a document for a client on a small claims court matter, it will be nearly impossible to complete if the notes that the paralegal took while meeting with the client are on the paralegal's desk buried under a stack of papers.

Electronic Files

We know how important it is to keep our files properly filed and to keep our filing up to date. It is equally important to file our electronic documents where they can easily be retrieved.

All of the computers in your firm are likely networked together, which means that each person working on a computer has access to all of the documents on the network. There can be many, many documents stored on a firm's network.

Let's do a quick math exercise to see how many documents could be stored in your firm's computer…

Let's suppose that you work for a mid-sized paralegal firm. There are 10 employees in total: three paralegals, three legal assistants, two law clerks, one office manager, and one receptionist.

In any given month, you may work on 30 files (probably more).

Each file may generate 20 documents (probably more). This is a total of 600 files you could generate in a month.

If everyone in your firm has the same workload, then your firm could generate 6,000 electronic files in a month.

Over the course of a year, your firm could generate 72,000 electronic documents. These documents are all found on the network drive for your firm and are accessible from your computer.

Also, the day you started working at this firm was probably not its first day of business, so let's assume your firm was in business for 10 years before you started working there (see how I'm keeping the math easy?).

This means that, over the past 10 years, the employees at your firm could have generated at least 720,000 electronic files, all of which are on your computer's network drive and accessible by you.

So…..if you created a document for a client five years ago and the client suddenly has a similar problem and you need to update that original document, what will you do? Will you re-type the 10-page document? Or, will you find it on your computer and simply revise it?

Of course, the quickest way to complete this client's new document would be to find the document on your computer and make the necessary changes. Will you be able to find it? What if someone else created the original document and that person is no longer with your firm? Will you still be able to find it?

Having an electronic system of organizing client and precedent files is critical to being a productive employee. There will likely be a system in place wherever you are hired to work. You will be responsible for saving all of your newly created documents in the correct place, so that:

- You can find them again to revise, if necessary
- Someone else can find your documents to revise or reprint if you are away, or
- You can find someone else's documents if they are away.

Windows

Windows is a program that allows us to organize our files however we see fit. By creating folders, we can create an organized system so that items are easy to find.

Let's create a system for this textbook, using Windows…

Creating a New Folder

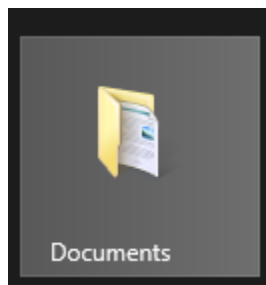There is an instructional video for students on this topic at:
Webpage: http://www.asselingroup.com/paralegals
Password: paralegals

First, open Windows on your computer by clicking on the file folder icon, either on the bottom taskbar of your computer:
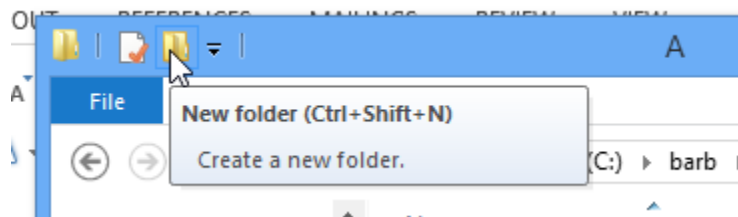
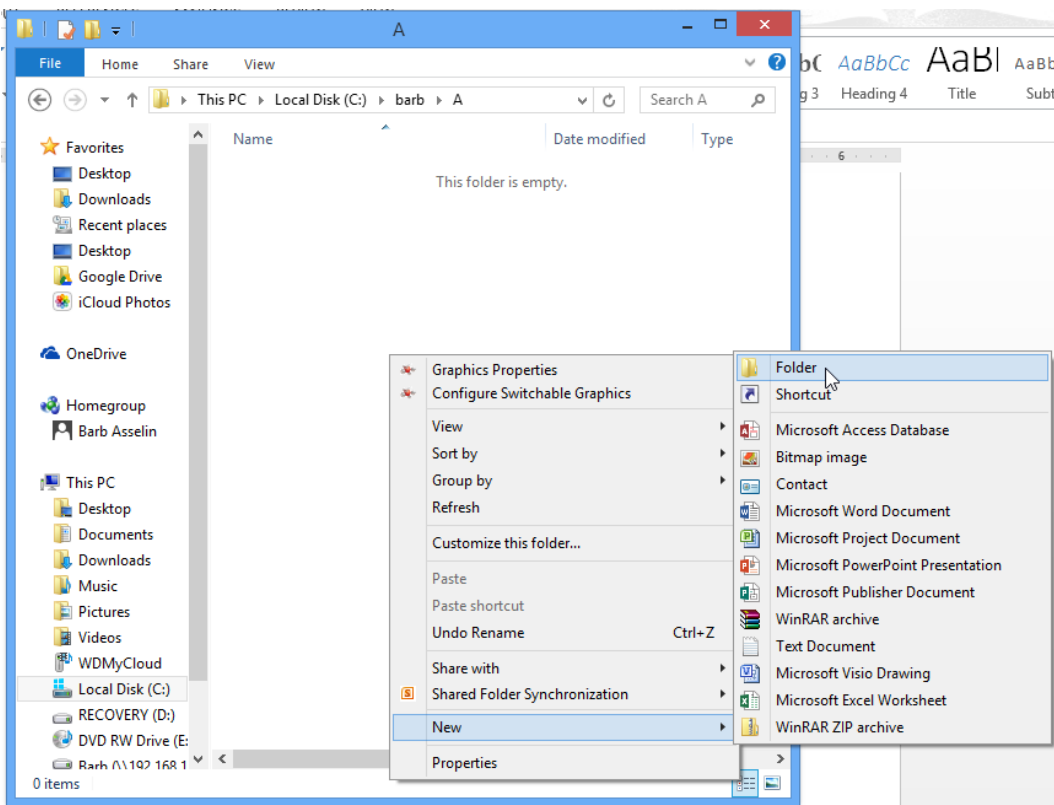Or in the Start menu of your computer:

Or on your desktop.

Next, create a folder called ***Computer Applications for Paralegals***. There are a few ways to do this:

1. Click on the New folder icon at the top left of your Windows screen

2. Press Ctrl + Shift + N, or
3. Right-click in the right-hand side of your Windows screen and then click New > Folder

Once you have a new folder, it should be active, or dark blue with the curser flashing after the new folder icon. If you ended up pressing Enter and your new folder is called New Folder, right-click on the name and choose Rename and call it ***Computer Applications for Paralegals***.
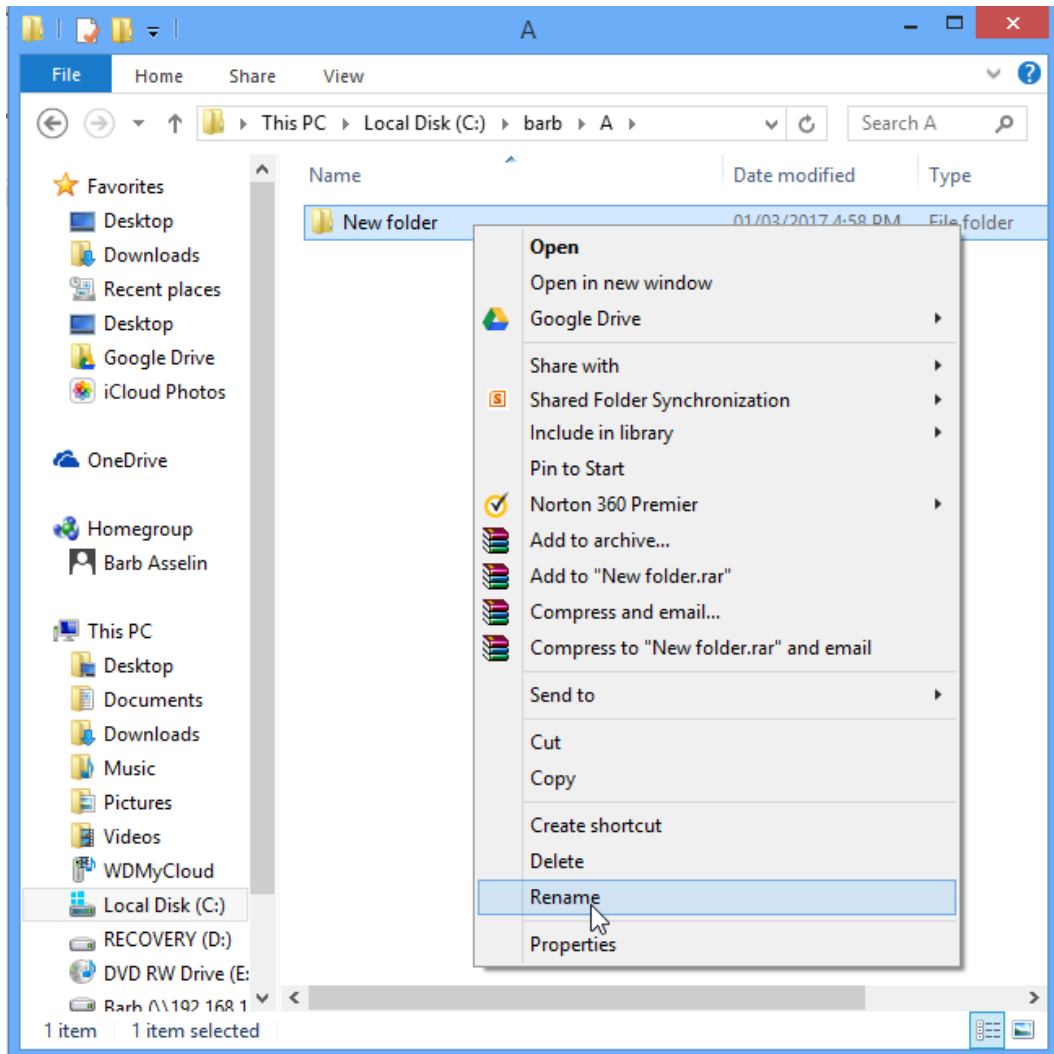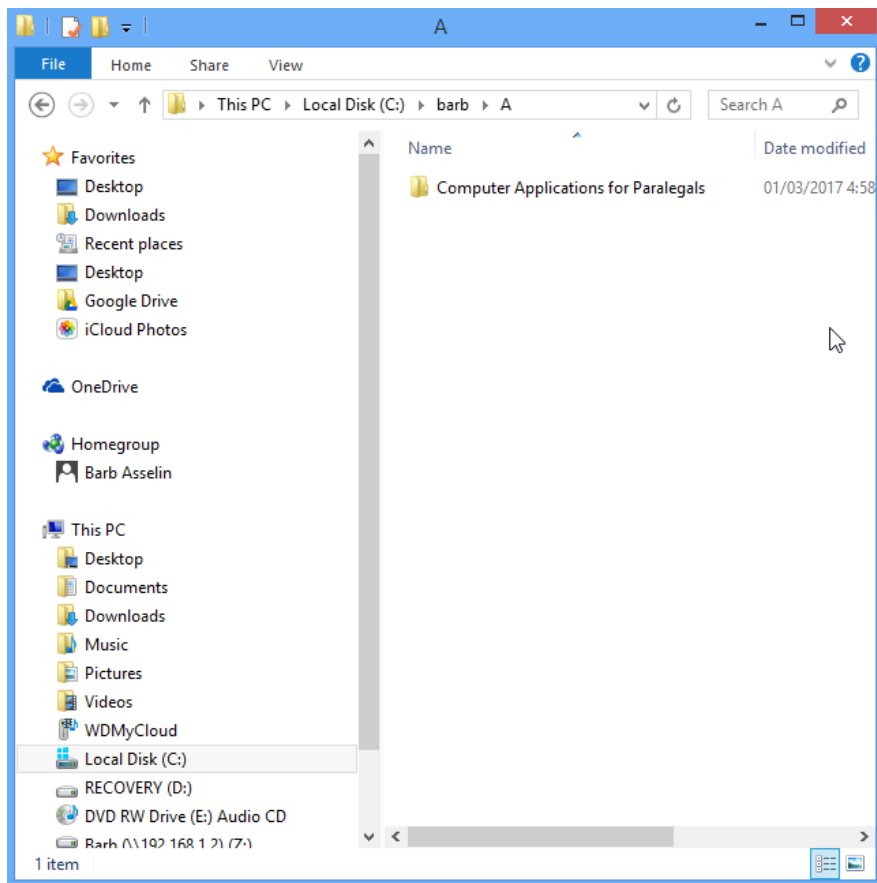
Now you should have a new folder like this one:
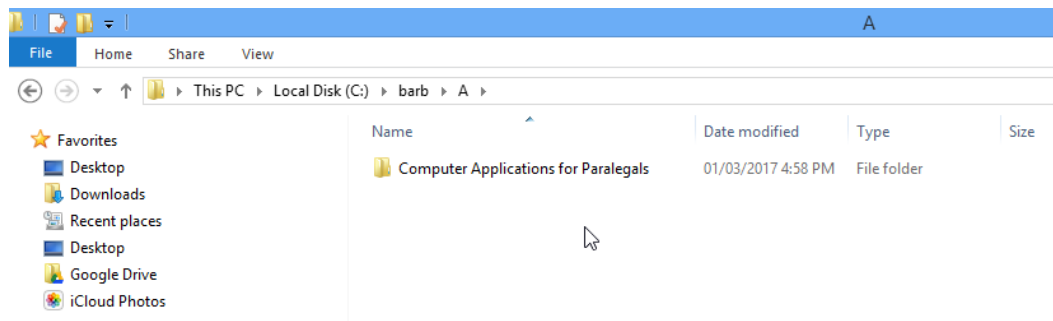
Navigating Windows Using the Left-Hand Task Pane

You can view the folders on your computer using the left-hand task pane of your Windows screen. Here is my Windows screen:

Note that your Windows screen will probably look different from mine. The left-hand task pane will be divided up into sections. The top section has commonly used area links such as Desktop, Downloads, and Photos. You may or may not have a middle section. The bottom section will be your computer and all of the various drives on it. You can see on mine, it is called This PC and contains links to the contents on the Desktop, Documents, Downloads, Music, Pictures, and Videos. After Videos, you will see all of the different drives on your computer. I have a C:/ drive (my laptop), a D:/ drive (for recovery), an E:/ drive (DVD), and a Z:/ drive (external hard drive). You may have a USB drive and/or a network drive.

Notice the symbols beside the various drives and location links. These are "expand" and "collapse" icons. The expand icon ▷ 📁 Desktop can also be a "+" sign and means that the folder includes other folders and can be expanded. If you click on the expand icon, the folder will expand to show any folders inside that folder.

The collapse icon ◢ 🖥 This PC can also be a "-"sign and means that the folder is already expanded to its fullest. If you click on the collapse icon, the folder will minimize itself.

Displaying Windows Content in the Right-Hand Task Pane

If you click on any of the folders in the left-hand task pane, the contents of that folder will display in the right-hand task pane of Windows. You will see any folders contained in that upper folder as well as any documents. Here is an example of the contents of one of my folders:
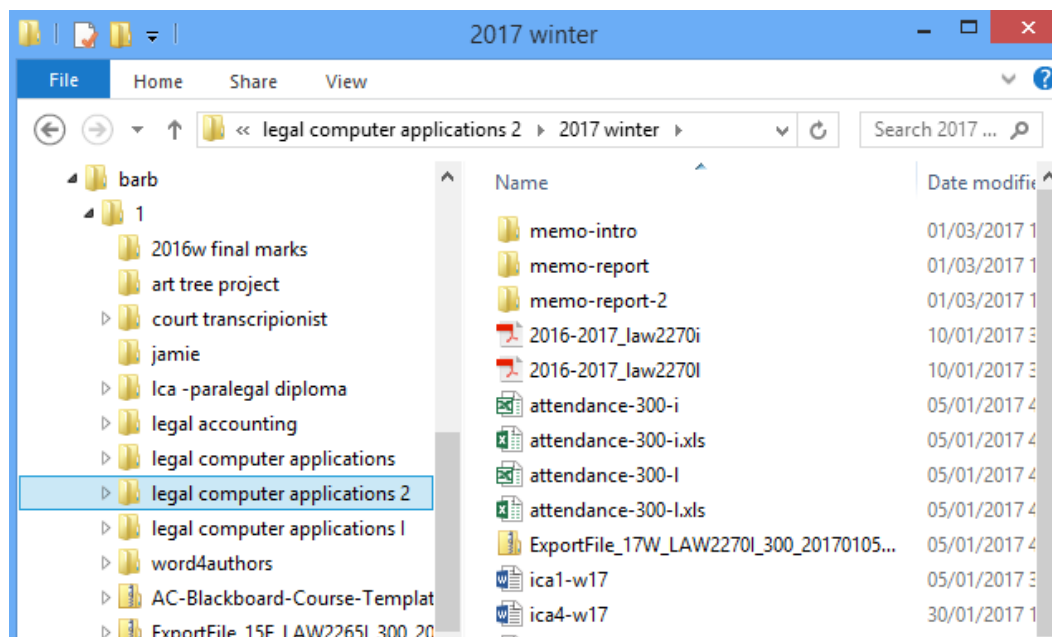
Notice that I have selected the folder *legal computer applications 2* (it is selected on the left) and that the contents of that folder are displayed on the right. Inside that folder are some other folders at the top and, below the folders, you can see some other documents displayed alphabetically. They are a variety of PDFs, Excel documents, zipped folders, and Word documents.

Congrats! You are now ready to create your own system of folders with the practice exercises at the end of this chapter.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, students learned the importance of an organized file and filing system for physical files, as well as some best practices for organizing files. Students also learned how to create a new file folder in Windows so that they can create and maintain an efficient digital filing system.

Exercises

Exercise 2.1

Open Windows and create the following series of folders:

1. Create a folder called ***Computer Applications for Paralegals***
2. Inside ***Computer Applications for Paralegals***, create the following folders:
    a. ***Chapter 1 Paralegal Firm***
    b. ***Chapter 2 File Management***
    c. ***Chapter 3 Outlook***
    d. ***Chapter 4 PowerPoint***
    e. ***Chapter 5 Excel***
    f. ***Chapter 6 Word***
    g. ***Chapter 7 Integration***
3. Inside each of the seven folders listed in number two above, create the following folders:
    a. ***Exercises***
    b. ***Templates***
4. Go to the private webpage for this textbook and download the letterhead precedent for your geographic region
5. Save the letterhead precedent to your ***Chapter 1 Paralegal Firm > Templates*** folder
6. Open the hierarchy of the ***Computer Applications for Paralegals*** folder in Windows on the left-hand side of your screen
7. Ensure that every folder you just created is displayed on the left, by clicking on all of the expand icons in your folder
8. Display the contents of the ***Chapter 1 Paralegal Firm > Templates*** folder on the right-hand side of your Windows screen
9. Maximize the window if necessary and show your professor once you have completed this exercise

Exercise 2.2

Open Windows and create the following series of folders:

1. Create a folder called **Paralegal**
2. Search the Internet to find your college's website and search the website until you find your program
3. Inside the **Paralegal** folder, create a folder for each semester of your program (i.e., **Semester 1**, **Semester 2**, etc.)
4. Inside each of the semester folders created in number three above, create a folder for each course in each semester
5. Inside each of the course folders listed in number four above, create the following folders:
   a. **Admin**
   b. **PowerPoints**
   c. **Assignments**
   d. **Precedents**
6. Go to the website for this course and download your Course Outline posted by your professor
7. Save the Course Outline to your **This Course > Admin** folder
8. Open the hierarchy of the **Paralegal** folder in Windows on the left-hand side of your screen
9. Ensure that every folder you just created is displayed on the left, by clicking on all of the expand icons in your folder
10. Display the contents of the **This Course > Admin** folder on the right-hand side of your Windows screen
11. Maximize the window if necessary and show your professor once you have completed this exercise

Exercise 2.3

Open Windows and create the following series of folders:

1. Create a folder called **Your Name Paralegal Firm**
2. Inside **Your Name Paralegal Firm**, create the following folders:
   a. **Employment**
   b. **Immigration**
   c. **Landlord and Tenant**

   d. *Precedents*
   e. *Provincial Offences*
   f. *Small Claims*
   g. *Summary Convictions*

3. Inside each of the seven folders listed in number two above (except the *Precedents* folder), create the following folders:
   a. *A-E*
   b. *F-J*
   c. *K-O*
   d. *P-T*
   e. *U-Z*

4. Go to the private webpage for this textbook and download the letterhead precedent for your geographic region

5. Save the letterhead precedent to the ***Your Name Paralegal Firm > Precedents*** folder

6. Open the hierarchy of the ***Your Name Paralegal Firm*** folder in Windows on the left-hand side of your screen

7. Ensure that every folder you just created is displayed on the left, by clicking on all of the expand icons in your folder

8. Display the contents of the ***Your Name Paralegal Firm > Precedents*** folder on the right-hand side of your Windows screen

9. Maximize the window if necessary and show your professor once you have completed this exercise

Exercise 2.4

Open Windows and create the following series of folders:

1. Create a folder called ***Immigration Law***
2. Inside ***Immigration Law***, create the following folders:
   a. *A-E*
   b. *F-J*
   c. *K-O*
   d. *P-T*
   e. *U-Z*
   f. *Precedents*
3. Create the following folders inside the appropriate alphabetized folders:

       a. ***Barnes***
       b. ***Ghaza***
       c. ***Li***
       d. ***Smith***
       e. ***Virtolli***

4. Create the following folders inside each client folder listed in number three above:
   - **a.** ***Accounts***
   - **b.** ***Correspondence***
   - **c.** ***Pleadings***
   - **d.** ***Research***
5. Go to the private webpage for this textbook (details on page 13) and download the letterhead precedent for your geographic region
6. Save the letterhead precedent to your ***Immigration Law > Precedents*** folder
7. Open the hierarchy of the ***Immigration Law*** folder in Windows on the left-hand side of your screen
8. Ensure that every folder you just created is displayed on the left, by clicking on all of the expand icons in your folder
9. Display the contents of the ***Immigration Law > Precedents*** folder on the right-hand side of your Windows screen
10. Maximize the window if necessary and show your professor once you have completed this exercise

Exercise 2.5

Open Windows and create the following series of folders:

1. You have decided to pursue a Criminology degree in your spare time in the evenings
2. Using your search engine of choice, find a Canadian University with a Criminology degree (if there is no university with such a degree near you, choose University of Ottawa's Major in Criminology degree)
3. Create a folder called ***Criminology***
4. Inside ***Criminology***, create the following folders:
   - **a.** ***Level 1***
   - **b.** ***Level 2***
   - **c.** ***Level 3***

        d. *Level 4*

5. Using the Criminology program that you found during your research, create folders inside each level folder in number four above – note that you will create one folder for each course in your researched program

6. Create the following folders inside each course folder that you created in number five above:
    a. *Admin Documents*
    b. *Assignments*
    c. *Instructions*
    d. *Lectures*

7. Go to the private webpage for this textbook (details on page 13) and download the PDF document, "Acceptance to Criminology Program"

8. Save the acceptance letter PDF to your ***Criminology*** folder (not in any particular level folder, just in the ***Criminology*** folder)

9. Open the hierarchy of the ***Criminology*** folder in Windows on the left-hand side of your screen

10. Ensure that every folder you just created is displayed on the left, by clicking on all of the expand icons in your folder

11. Display the contents of the ***Criminology*** folder on the right-hand side of your Windows screen

12. Maximize the window if necessary and show your professor once you have completed this exercise

Exercise 2.6

Open Windows and create the following series of folders:

1. Create a folder called ***Landlord and Tenant***

2. You have accumulated a lot of new clients, both landlords and tenants, and you need to organize your files

3. Inside ***Landlord and Tenant***, create the following folders:
    a. *Landlords*
    b. *Tenants*
    c. *Tribunal Information*

4. Create the following folders inside the ***Landlords*** and ***Tenants*** folders:
    a. *Clients*

      b. ***Precedents***
      c. ***Research***

5. Create the following folders inside each of the **two** the ***Clients*** folders listed in number four above:
      a. ***A-E***
      b. ***F-J***
      c. ***K-O***
      d. ***P-T***
      e. ***U-Z***

6. Go to the private webpage for this textbook and download the letterhead precedent for your geographic region

7. Save the letterhead precedent to your ***Landlord and Tenant > Tribunal Information*** folder

8. Open the hierarchy of the ***Landlord and Tenant*** folder in Windows on the left-hand side of your screen

9. Ensure that every folder you just created is displayed on the left, by clicking on all of the expand icons in your folder

10. Display the contents of the ***Tribunal Information*** folder on the right-hand side of your Windows screen

11. Maximize the window if necessary and show your professor once you have completed this exercise