Folder Hygiene: Downloads and Trash

Keeping these two folders clean will give you peace of mind and make your computer happy.

Windows and Mac computers include a **Downloads** folder for files you save from emails and websites, and a **Trash** (or **Recycle Bin**) for files you no longer want. It's easy to overlook these folders, which can fill up with all sorts of flotsam and jetsam, resulting in an unhealthy backup and possible explosion of bits and bytes that you'll be sweeping up for years. Like glitter.

Actually, that's not true. Computers can't explode. I was just trying to make a point.

Downloads Folder

Downloads is a default folder for everything you download from websites, screenshots, email attachments, third-party software installation files (more about these in a minute), and videos from your cousin's recent trip to Bayonne.[1] When I request a PDF copy of my bank statement from PNC. com, it goes into my **Downloads** folder, as do the graphics I download from clipart.com that you see in this article.

Sharon is absoultely ecstatic after cleaning out her Downloads folder. Sharon needs to get a life.

I move important documents from **Downloads** into my permanent documents folders, and move what I don't need into the **Trash** folder.[2]

The Downloads folder is also the repository for software installation files. For example, if you download a new or updated version of Microsoft 365, you might see a file in your **Downloads** folder called "microsoft365install.exe" if you use Windows or "microsoft365.dmg"[3] if you use a Mac computer. These files take up a lot of space and are only used to install new or updated software. Once you've installed the application, you should move these files to the **Trash**.

Trash (a.k.a. the Recycle Bin)

When you delete a file, Windows moves it into its **Recycle Bin**, and MacOS moves it to **Trash**. The file is still there so you can retrieve the instructions for your Aunt Sarah's favorite gefilte fish recipe that you deleted last week.

At some point, you have to empty the **Trash**. Ignoring your **Trash** folder will result in a gigantic landfill of files with old sell-by dates and hordes of virtual sea gulls swirling over your keyboard.

You can set Windows and MacOS to automatically empty the **Trash** after a set time—I suggest thirty days.

If You Need Help

Remember, if you need tech help, just fill out one of our tech help requests at **princetonsenior.link/tech-assist**.

Steve faces the consequences of the lack of computer file hygiene.

---

1 Video files usually end in ".mp4," and can be hundreds of megabytes. Even from Bayonne.
2 Windows can be set to remove Download items after a set time.
3 ".exe" means "executable application;" ".dmg" refers to "disk image file."