# Windows 11 File Explorer Cheat Sheet

## Sidebar

Operating Systems · Windows 11 File Explorer Cheat Sheet

Configuration, display options and shortcuts for File Explorer in Windows 11, starting with the two things people most often want to switch off: the Today / Yesterday / Earlier this week grouping and the preview pane. The menu paths were first checked against published guides, then against screenshots taken on this machine (Windows 11 Pro, build 26300), and the wording below follows the screenshots, which are at the end. Items that were not visible in a screenshot are marked as such. Menu wording and the layout of the View menu change a little between Windows 11 builds.

## STOP THE DATE GROUPING (TODAY, YESTERDAY, EARLIER THIS WEEK)

| | |
|---|---|
| `Why it happens` | The folder is grouped by *Date modified*. Downloads usually comes this way by default, and any folder can be set to it |
| `Right-click method` | Right-click an empty area of the folder > *Group by* > *(None)* |
| `Toolbar method` | Command bar > *Sort* > *Group by* > *(None)*. The Group by list is Name, Status, Date modified, Type, Size and (None), then Ascending / Descending and *More...* (screenshots 2 and 3) |
| `Collapse a group` | In Details view, click the arrow beside a heading such as *Earlier this month* to fold it away, without removing the grouping (screenshot 9) |
| `Keep newest first` | Then *Sort* > *Date modified* and *Descending*, so ungrouped files still list the newest at the top |
| `Per folder` | The setting belongs to the folder you changed. Repeat it for every folder that groups, or copy the view with *Apply to Folders* (see Folder Memory) |
| `Group by something else` | Name, Type, Size and others are in the same *Group by* menu. Each has Ascending / Descending |
| `If it keeps coming back` | Reports say Downloads has been unreliable at remembering this, and that newer Windows 11 builds are better. Update Windows, then try again |

## THE PREVIEW PANE: TURN IT OFF

| | |
|---|---|
| `Alt+P` | Toggle the preview pane on or off from the keyboard |
| `View menu` | Command bar > *View* > *Preview pane*: a dot beside it means on, click it again to turn it off. On this build it sits on the View menu itself, below the layouts, not under *Show* (screenshot 5) |
| `Preview button` | The *Preview* button at the far right of the command bar toggles the same pane (screenshot 1) |
| `Empty pane` | With no file selected the pane shows *Select a file to preview*; it stays open until you turn it off |
| `Drag the divider` | The pane can be dragged narrower, but only the toggle removes it |
| `Alt+Shift+P` | The Details pane, a different pane: properties of the selected file, not its contents |
| `Switch off previews entirely` | Folder Options > *View* tab > untick *Show preview handlers in preview pane*. The pane then has nothing to show (this option is further down the list than the screenshot shows, so I have not seen it on this machine) |

## WHERE EXPLORER STARTS, AND HOME

| | |
|---|---|
| `Folder Options` | Command bar > the three dots (*See more*) > *Options* |
| `Open File Explorer to` | General tab, a drop-down at the top (set to *This PC* on this machine; *Home* is the other usual choice). Then Apply / OK (screenshot 6) |
| `Home` | The landing page called Quick access in Windows 10: pinned folders, favourites and recent files |
| `Browse folders` | General tab: *Open each folder in the same window* or *in its own window* |
| `Click items as follows` | General tab: single-click or double-click to open an item |
| `Privacy (General tab)` | Four ticks: *Show recently used files*, *Show frequently used folders*, *Show recommended section* and *Include account-based insights, recent, favourite and recommended files* |
| `Clear history` | The *Clear* button beside *Clear File Explorer history*, on the same tab |
| `Pin a folder` | Right-click it > *Pin to Quick access*, or use the same item in the three-dots menu (screenshot 10) |
| `Network drives` | One guide warns that opening to This PC can be slow when a mapped network drive is unreachable |

## THE VIEW MENU: LAYOUT AND SHOW

| | |
|---|---|
| `Layout` | Extra large, Large, Medium and Small icons, List, Details, Tiles, Content |
| `Details` | The usual choice for working with files: columns for name, date, type and size |
| `Details pane / Preview pane` | On the View menu itself, below the layouts. The Details pane shows properties of the selected item (Alt+Shift+P) |
| `Show >` | A submenu at the bottom of View, listing Navigation pane, Compact view, Item check boxes, File name extensions and Hidden items (screenshot 5) |
| `Show > Navigation pane` | The folder tree on the left |
| `Show > Compact view` | Reduces the spacing between rows |
| `Show > Item check boxes` | Tick boxes beside files, handy for selecting with a touch screen or without Ctrl |
| `Show > File name extensions` | Shows `.txt`, `.docx` and so on after names |
| `Show > Hidden items` | Shows hidden files and folders, faded |

## SORT, GROUP AND COLUMNS

| | |
|---|---|
| `Sort` | Command bar > *Sort*: Name, Status, Date modified, then *More* for Type, Size and the rest, with Ascending / Descending and *Group by* at the foot (screenshot 3). *Status* is the OneDrive sync status |
| `Click a column heading` | In Details view, click to sort; click again to reverse |
| `Right-click a heading` | Tick the columns you want, or choose *More* for the full list |
| `Drag a heading` | Reorder columns; drag the edge between headings to resize |
| `Size all columns to fit` | View > *Size all columns to fit* (or Ctrl and the plus key on the number pad) |
| `Group by` | Sort > *Group by*. *(None)* removes grouping; see the first card |

## FOLDER OPTIONS: THE VIEW TAB

| | |
|---|---|
| `Hidden files and folders` | Choose *Show hidden files, folders and drives* (the View menu does the same, under Show) |
| `Hide extensions for known file types` | Untick to show extensions |
| `Decrease space between items (compact view)` | The same as Show > Compact view |
| `Display the full path in the title bar` | Shows the whole path in the window title |
| `Enable window preloading for faster launch times` | Keeps Explorer ready in the background so it opens faster |
| `Display file size information in folder tips` | The tooltip on a folder shows its size |
| `Hide empty drives` | Card readers and drives with no media are not listed |
| `Launch folder windows in a separate process` | Each Explorer window runs on its own, so one crash does not close the rest |
| `Use check boxes to select items` | The same as the View menu item |
| `Show status bar` | The item count and selection size along the bottom |
| `Always show icons, never thumbnails` | Faster in big picture folders, but no thumbnails |
| `Restore previous folder windows at logon` | Reopens the Explorer windows you had open |
| `Show preview handlers in preview pane` | Allows the preview pane to display file contents |

## FOLDER MEMORY: APPLY AND RESET

| | |
|---|---|
| `Apply to Folders` | Folder Options > *View* > copies the current folder's layout to all folders of the same type. It is greyed out in This PC and libraries |
| `Reset Folders` | Same tab: returns every folder to the default view, after a confirmation |
| `Restore Defaults` | Resets the Advanced settings list on the same tab to their defaults |
| `Folder type` | Right-click a folder > *Properties* > *Customise* tab > *Optimise this folder for*: General items, Documents, Pictures, Music or Videos, with *Also apply this template to all subfolders* below it (screenshot 8). The template sets the default columns and view, but a folder can be grouped by hand whatever its template: the folder in the screenshots is *General items* and was still grouped by date |
| `Odd behaviour` | Community reports say the subfolder option is unreliable in Windows 11 and that Downloads may ignore this setting. Treat as unverified |
| `Open / Save dialogs` | These keep their own views and are often not changed by Apply to Folders |

## MOVING AROUND

| | |
|---|---|
| `Win+E` | Open File Explorer |
| `Alt+Left / Alt+Right` | Back / forward |
| `Alt+Up` | Up one level |
| `Alt+D / Ctrl+L` | Select the address bar; type or paste a path and press Enter |
| `F4` | Open the address bar's list of recent paths |
| `Backspace` | Back (as in older Windows versions; behaviour can differ by build) |
| `Ctrl+Shift+E` | Expand the navigation pane to the current folder |
| `F5` | Refresh |

## TABS AND WINDOWS

| | |
|---|---|
| `Ctrl+T` | New tab |
| `Ctrl+W` | Close the current tab |
| `Ctrl+Tab / Ctrl+Shift+Tab` | Next / previous tab |
| `Ctrl+1 … 9` | Go to that tab (as with browsers; not tested here) |
| `Ctrl+N` | New window |
| `Middle-click a folder` | Open it in a new tab |
| `Drag a tab out` | Turns it into its own window |

## FILES AND SELECTION

| | |
|---|---|
| `Ctrl+Shift+N` | New folder |
| `F2` | Rename the selected item |
| `Ctrl+A / Ctrl+click / Shift+click` | Select all / add or remove one / select a range |
| `Alt+Enter` | Properties |
| `Shift+Delete` | Delete permanently, skipping the Recycle Bin (it asks first) |
| `Ctrl+C / X / V` | Copy / cut / paste |
| `Ctrl+Shift+C` | Copy the selected item's full path (newer builds; otherwise right-click > *Copy as path*) |
| `Shift+right-click` | Open the full classic menu directly, without *Show more options* (or press Shift+F10) |
| `Ctrl+Z / Ctrl+Y` | Undo / redo the last file operation |
| `Three-dots menu` | Command bar > *See more* (the three dots): Undo, Pin to Quick access, Select all, Select none, Invert selection and Options (screenshot 10) |

## SEARCH

| | |
|---|---|
| `Ctrl+E / Ctrl+F / F3` | Go to the search box (searches the current folder and below) |
| `Search tab` | Filters appear when you search: kind, size, date modified and so on |
| `kind:` | `kind:document` or `kind:picture` limits the search to a type |
| `datemodified:` | `datemodified:last week` or a date range |
| `size:` | `size:>10MB` finds large files |
| `ext:` | `ext:pdf` matches an extension |
| `Indexing` | Folders outside the search index are searched slowly; add one under Indexing Options |

## THE REGISTRY BEHIND THE OPTIONS (READ-ONLY)

| | |
|---|---|
| `Where` | `HKCU\Software\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\Explorer\Advanced` |
| `HideFileExt` | 0 shows extensions, 1 hides them |
| `Hidden` | 1 shows hidden files, 2 hides them |
| `LaunchTo` | The *Open File Explorer to* choice (value meanings are not listed here) |
| `ShowStatusBar` | The status bar |
| `SeparateProcess` | Launch folder windows in a separate process |
| `AutoCheckSelect` | Item check boxes |
| `Verified` | These names exist on this machine; the meanings of 0 and 1 for the first two are from my own knowledge. Use the settings, not the registry, to change them |

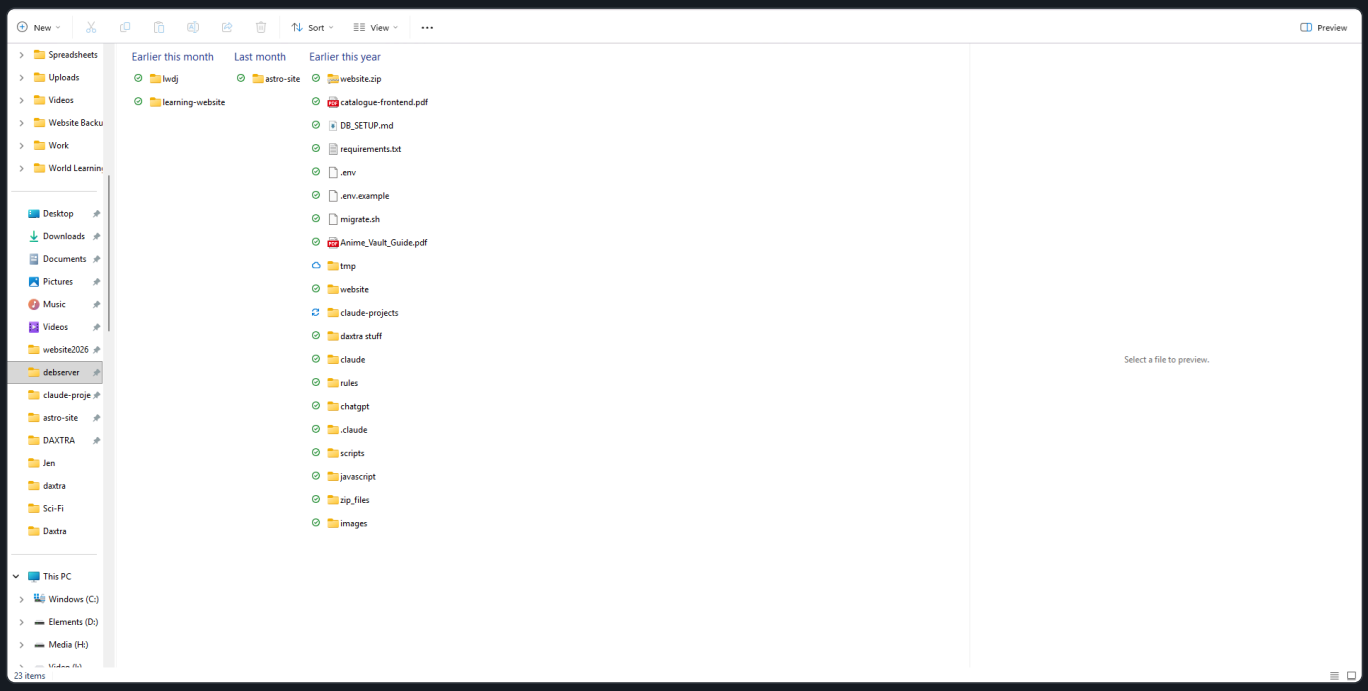
### GROUP BY (NONE) IS PER FOLDER

Turning grouping off in Downloads does not turn it off in your other folders, and a newly created or newly visited folder starts from its template. If the date groups return, check which folder you are in and what *Optimize this folder for* is set to before changing anything else.

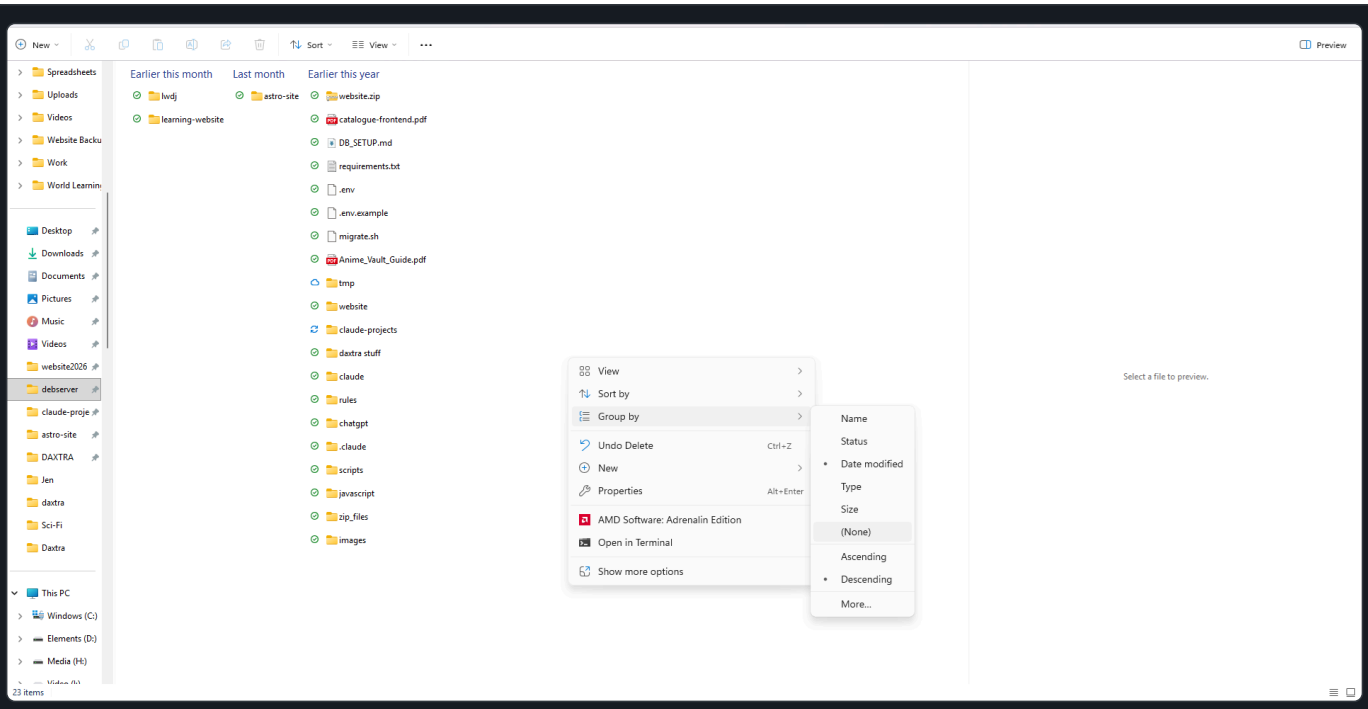
### A FILE THAT "IS OPEN IN ANOTHER PROGRAM"

The preview pane may hold on to the file you have selected, which can stop a delete, rename or move. If Windows says a file is in use, press Alt+P to close the preview pane (or select another file) and try again. This is a commonly reported cause and I have not reproduced it here.

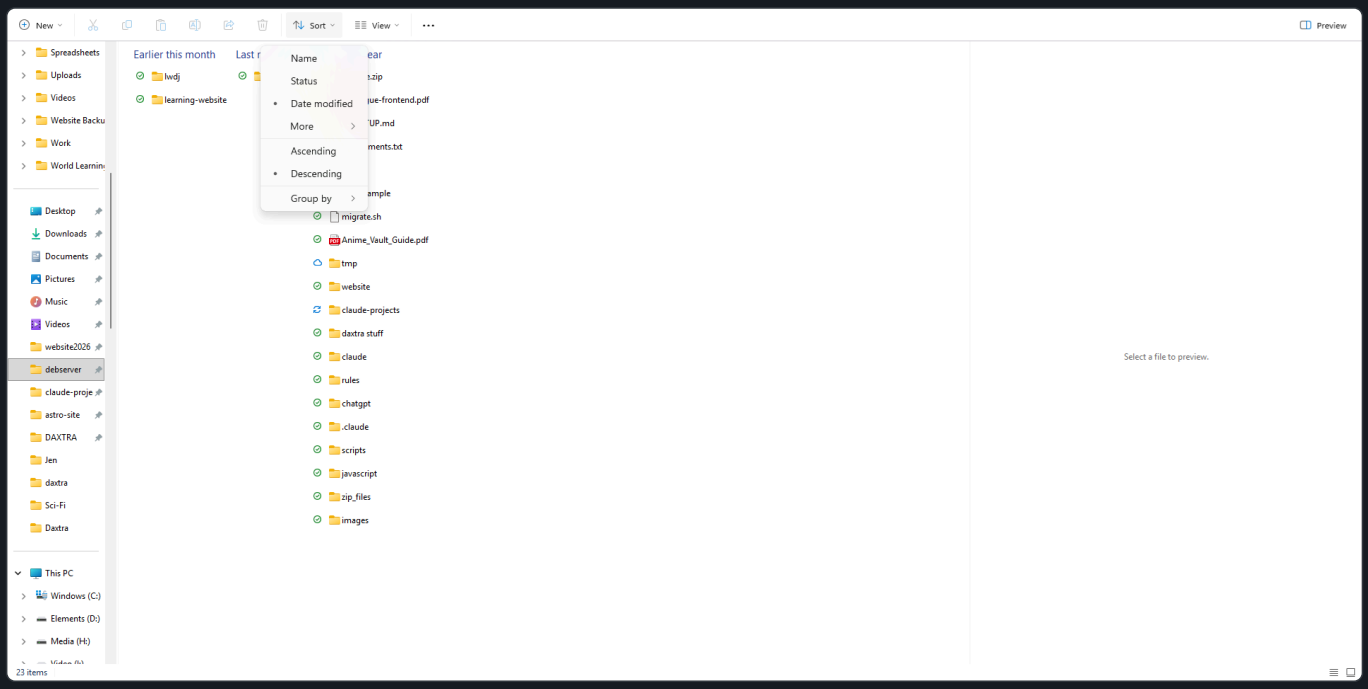
## SCREENSHOTS (THIS MACHINE, WINDOWS 11 BUILD 26300)



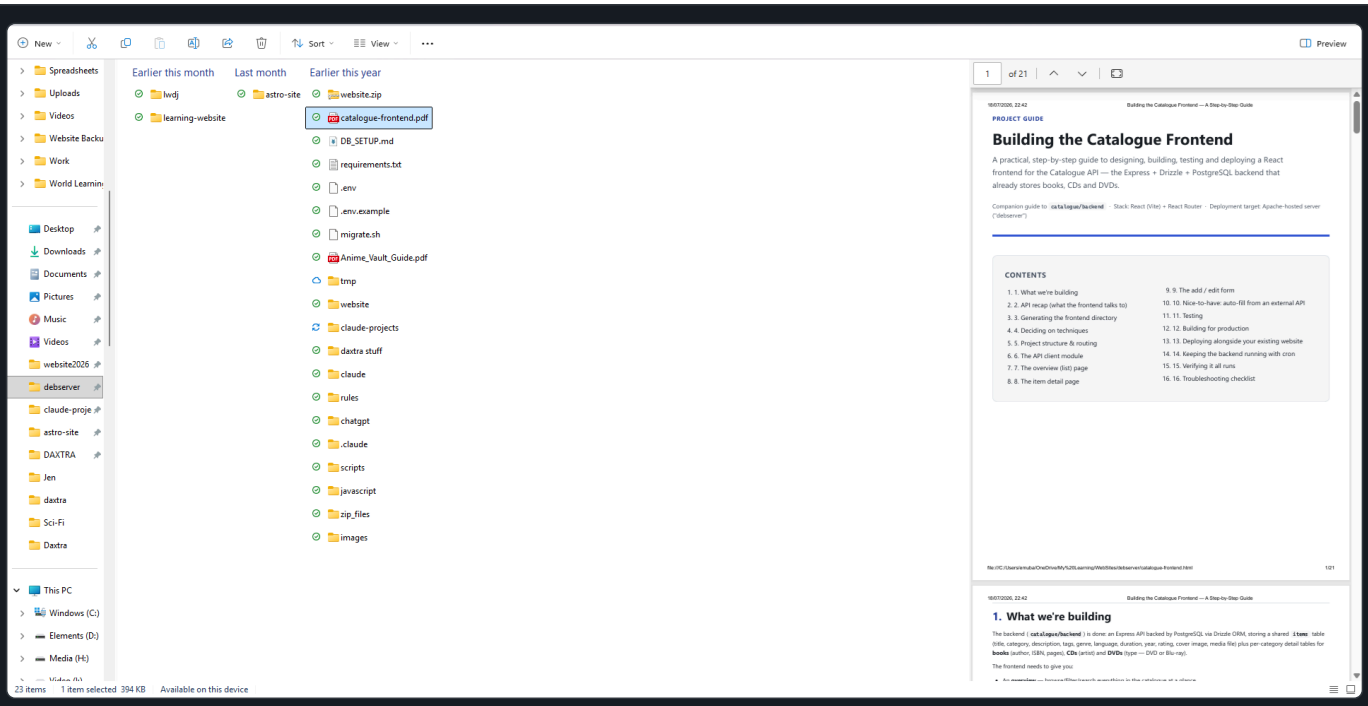

1. A folder grouped by Date modified: the headings are Earlier this month, Last month and Earlier this year. The Preview button is at the far right of the command bar, and the pane is open with nothing selected.



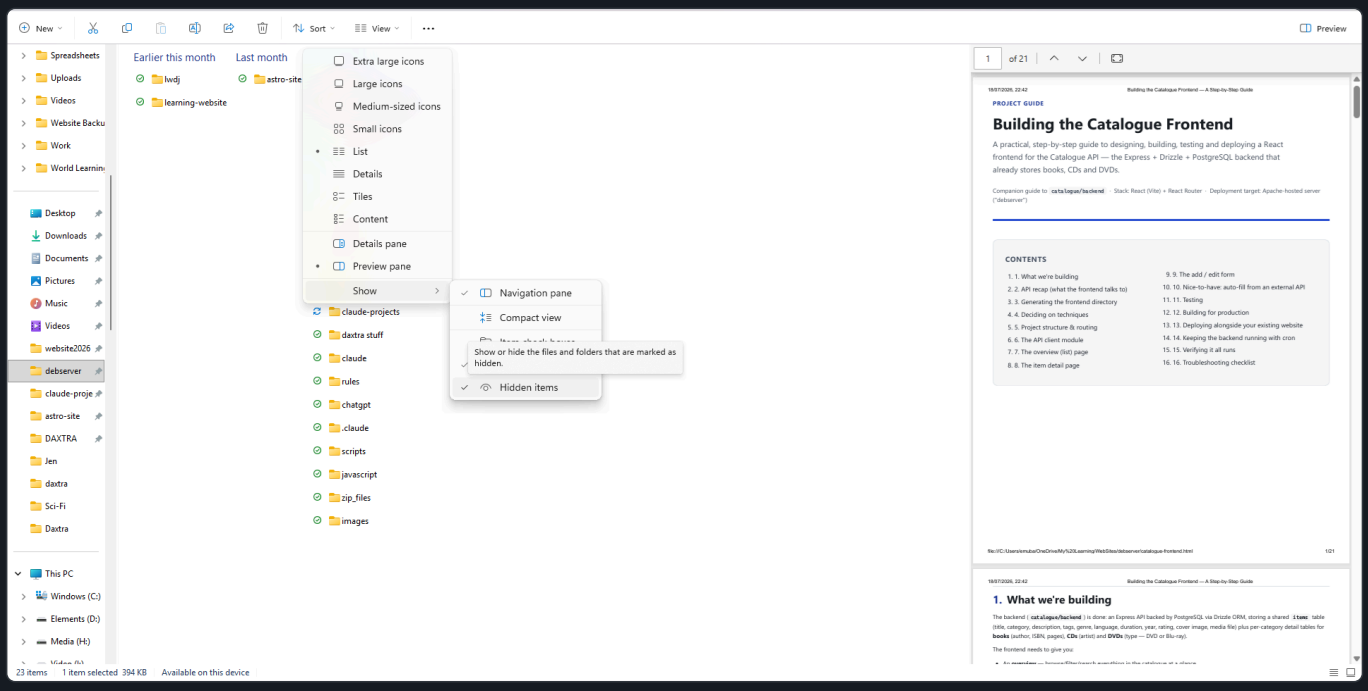

2. Right-click an empty area, then Group by: the choices are Name, Status, Date modified, Type, Size and (None). The dot shows the current grouping.



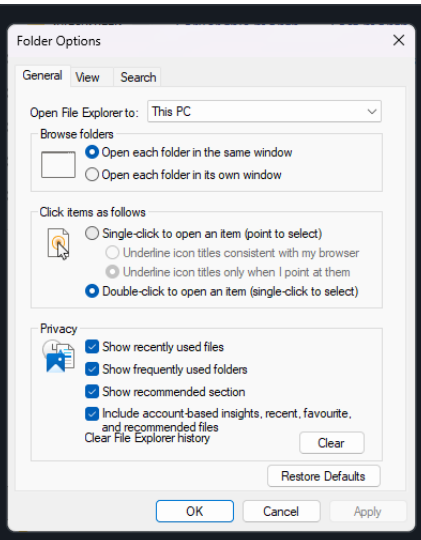

3. The Sort button's menu: Name, Status, Date modified, More, Ascending / Descending, and Group by at the bottom.



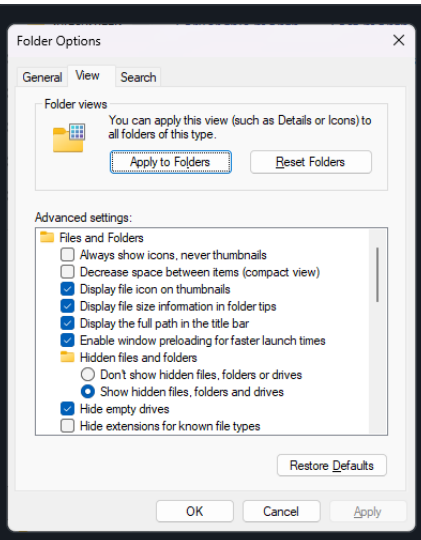

4. The preview pane on, showing the first page of the selected PDF.



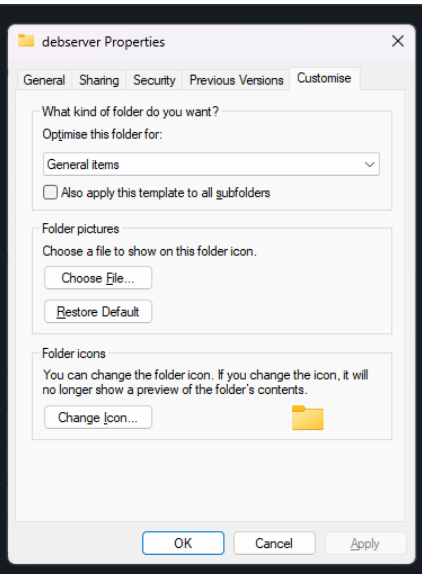

5. The View menu: layouts, then Details pane and Preview pane (the dot marks Preview pane as on), then the Show submenu with Navigation pane, Compact view, Item check boxes, File name extensions and Hidden items.



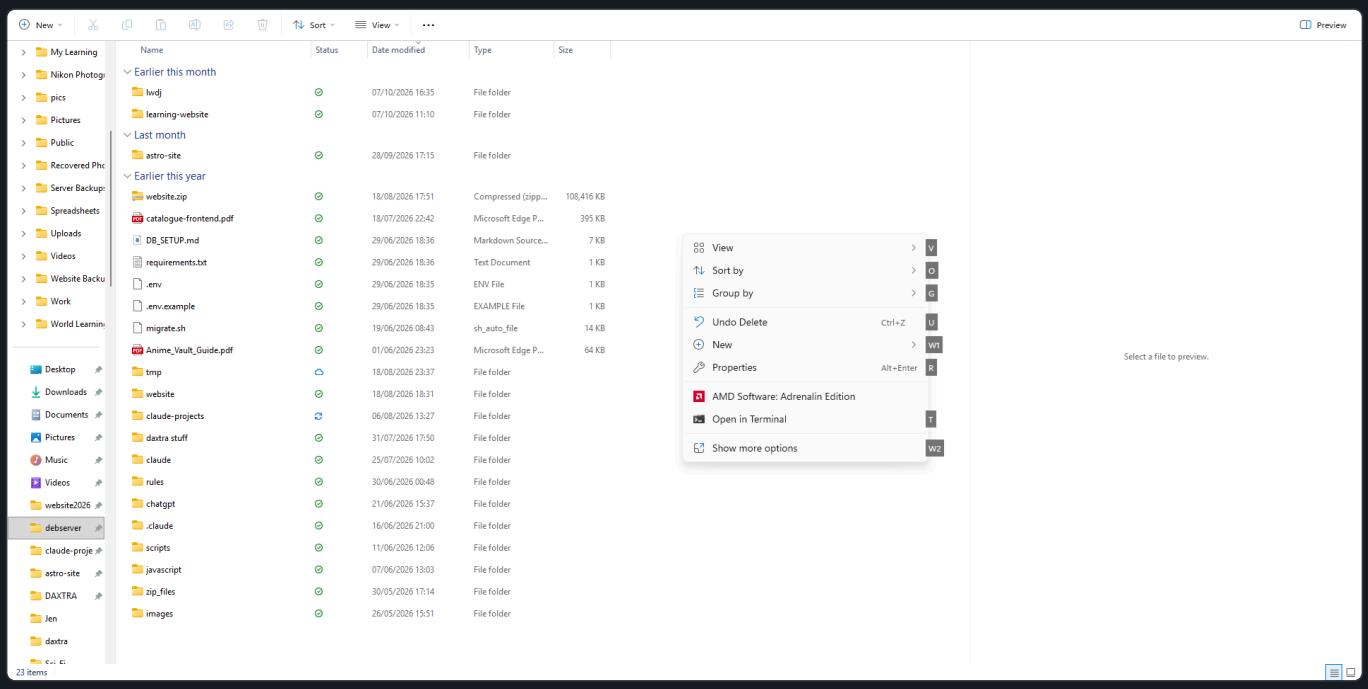

6. Folder Options, General tab: Open File Explorer to, Browse folders, Click items, and the Privacy ticks.



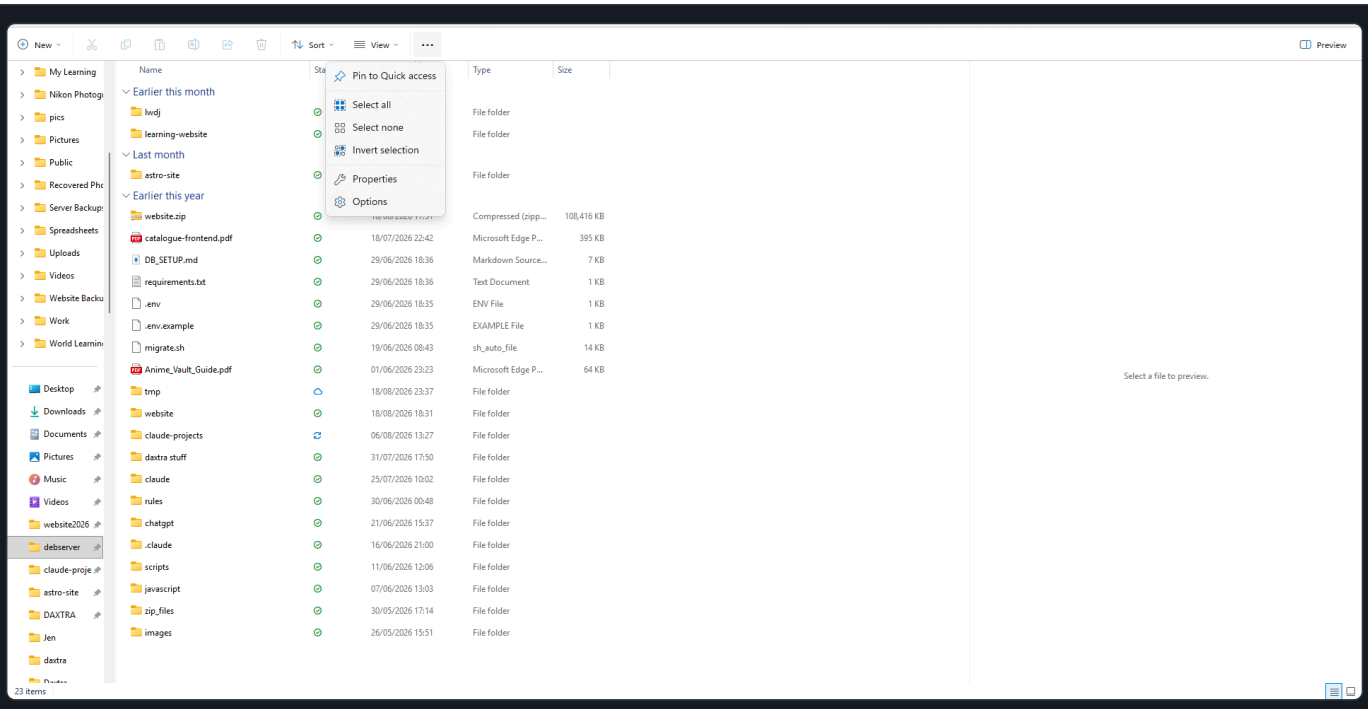

7. Folder Options, View tab: Apply to Folders and Reset Folders, and the top of the Advanced settings list.




8. A folder's Properties, Customise tab: Optimise this folder for.




9. Details view with the date groups expanded, and the Status, Date modified, Type and Size columns.




10. The command bar's three-dots menu (See more): Undo, Pin to Quick access, Select all, Select none, Invert selection and Options.