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Get to Work!

Three strategies for finding files faster

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Rock star Mick Jagger once wailed, "You can't always get what you want." That may be true. However, GIS users often have the files they need; they just can't seem to find them right away. The three simple work habits in this article will help you locate files more easily in ArcCatalog and get to work more quickly.

Getting Connected
You know how to make a folder connection. Just click the Connect to Folder button, navigate to the desired folder, and click Okay. However, do you take the time to create a separate connection for the location of currently used files? This will save you minutes every day. Instead of navigating across the network or drilling down through the file structure on your local machine every time you need to add a data layer to a map, you can click on a folder connection and go immediately to the files you need. If you are done with a project and will no longer need to access those files through a data connection, disconnect the folder connection to avoid cluttering the Catalog tree.
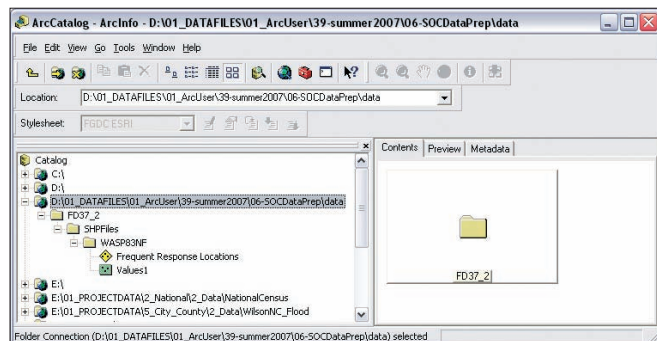

Creating folder connections can save time. However, the default name is the path to the file, which can be long and cumbersome.

Better Connections
Make it easier to identify the contents accessed by a folder connection by giving that connection a useful name. The default folder connection name is the path to that folder. Often the path name is so long you must highlight it to read all of it. For example, instead of a folder connection that reads "E:\ArcGIS\Bin\TemplateData," right-click on the folder connection to access the context menu and choose Rename to change the connection name to "ArcMapTemplateData." Force frequently used folder connections to display at the top of the tree by renaming them with one or more leading underscore characters. To display folder connections in a certain order, use leading numerals in folder connection names.

Picture This
For basemap layers or datasets that won't change much and will be used in many projects, create thumbnails in ArcCatalog. This will let you identify layers without having to wait for them to draw on the Preview tab each time.
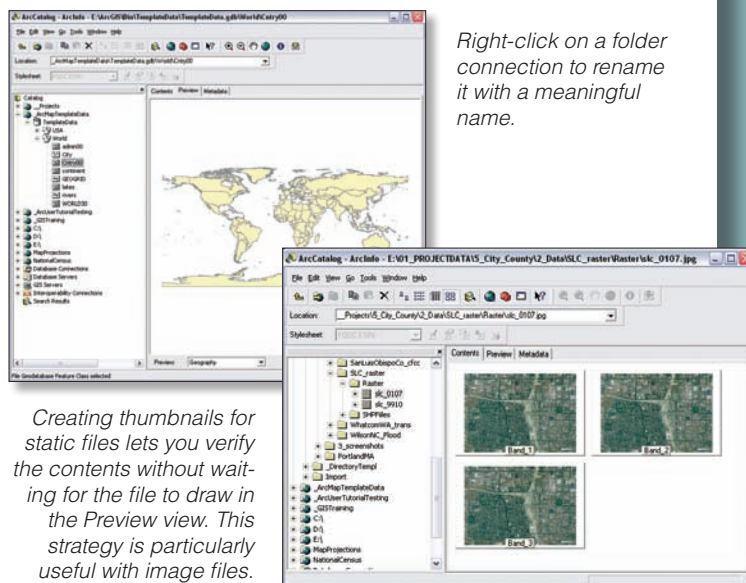
Right-click on a folder connection to rename it with a meaningful name.

Creating thumbnails for static files lets you verify the contents without waiting for the file to draw in the Preview view. This strategy is particularly useful with image files.

1. In the Catalog tree, select the desired layer.
2. Click the Preview tab. Make sure Geography is selected from the drop-down.
3. Adjust the display by zooming to an extent that best represents the layer's contents.
4. Click the Create Thumbnail button on the Standard toolbar.

The thumbnail is a snapshot of the data as it existed when the thumbnail was created. It will be displayed on the Contents and Metadata tabs in ArcCatalog. If the data substantially changes, the thumbnail should probably be re-created. Thumbnails can also be created for map documents by right-clicking on the map document, choosing Properties, and checking the box Save thumbnail image with the map.

Minutes Can Save Hours
Incorporating these habits into your daily routine will help you spend less time looking for files and more time getting tasks accomplished.
- Make folder connections.
- Give folder connections meaningful names.
- Create file thumbnails.

For more productivity tips, see these previously published articles, available in a convenient PDF format from *ArcUser Online:*
- "Manipulate Map Data More Easily—Access ArcMap functionality quickly through the Table of Contents" (www.esri.com/news/arcuser/0507/files/toc.pdf): This article contains a list of some of the most useful mouse and keyboard table of contents shortcuts.
- "Take Advantage of Productivity Features in ArcGIS 9.2" (www.esri.com/news/arcuser/1006/files/cheat.pdf): A selection of time-saving tips and shortcuts for navigation, tables, sketching, and editing are arranged on a handy single page.