

How to Show Hidden Files and Folders on a Mac

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Quick answer

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Your Mac has many system files and folders that are hidden by default to prevent users from accidentally modifying or deleting important data. However, there may be times when you need to access these hidden items, such as when troubleshooting issues or cleaning up storage space. Luckily, macOS provides a few easy ways to view hidden files.

Using Finder Keyboard Shortcut

The quickest way to show hidden files is by using a simple keyboard shortcut in Finder

1. Open a Finder window and navigate to the folder where you want to view hidden files (like your Mac's main hard drive).
2. Press 'Shift' + 'Command' + '.' (period) on your keyboard.
3. Any hidden files and folders will instantly appear, but will look slightly faded compared to regular visible items.
4. To hide the files again, simply press 'Shift' + 'Command' + '.' once more.

This shortcut works in any Finder window, so you can use it to peek inside folders like Documents, Applications, or Desktop to see any hidden items there as well.

Accessing the Hidden Library Folder

The Library folder contains important application support files and preferences, but is hidden in macOS by default. To access it:

1. Open a Finder window.
2. While in Finder, hold down the 'Option' (Alt) key and click the "Go" menu in the menu bar.
3. With the Option key still held down, you'll see "Library" appear in the dropdown menu. Click it to open the hidden Library folder.
4. Alternatively, you can open the "Go to Folder" window with 'Shift' + 'Command' + 'G', type '~/Library', and hit Enter to access the Library.

Be very careful when modifying any files inside the Library, as deleting the wrong item could cause problems with your Mac.

Using Terminal Commands

For a more permanent solution, you can use the Terminal to show hidden files across your Mac

1. Open Terminal (found in Applications > Utilities).
2. Paste in the following command and press Enter: `defaults write com.apple.Finder AppleShowAllFiles true`

3. Then paste in this command and press Enter: 'killall Finder'
4. Finder will restart and you'll see all hidden files in Finder windows, on the Desktop, etc.
5. To hide files again, follow the same steps but replace 'true' with 'false' in the first command.

You can also use Terminal to hide or unhide specific files and folders:

- To hide a file/folder, type 'chflags hidden' in Terminal, add a space, then drag and drop the item you want to hide into the Terminal window. Press Enter to hide it.
- To unhide a file/folder, type 'chflags nohidden' instead, then drag and drop the hidden item into Terminal. Press Enter to make it visible again.

Using Third-Party File Managers

Some third-party file manager apps provide an easy interface for viewing hidden files on your Mac without using Terminal:

- Apps like ForkLift , Path Finder, and DCommander have options in their View settings or toolbars to show and hide hidden files.
- Installing these apps from the App Store or official websites is generally safe, but be cautious about downloading little-known file managers, as they could contain malware.

Tips for Working with Hidden Files

- Avoid modifying hidden system files unless absolutely necessary, as changing the wrong thing could damage your macOS installation.
- Hiding files is not a substitute for encryption. Anyone can still access hidden files if they know how to do so. Use FileVault or apps like NordLocker to properly protect sensitive data.
- If you're trying to free up storage space, focus on clearing out large visible files first, like old movies and archives. Deleting hidden cache files usually won't save much space.
- Get in the habit of hiding files again when you're done working with them to avoid accidentally changing things later.

By following this tutorial, you should now be able to view and manage hidden files on your Mac like a pro! Let me know if you have any doubts.