

01-19-2020, Beginners/Mac Basics SIG – Custom Folder Icons

Note: This discussion is based on MacOS, 10.14.6 (Mojave). Some illustrations may differ when using other versions of macOS or OS X. Most illustrations are from screenshots on my iMac.

In this Mac Basics presentation, we'll discuss how to create custom icons for folders on your Mac. Why might you want to do this? It gives you another way, other than a folder name, to help you to quickly pick out a specific folder of interest (and also know what's inside) among many that are displayed. For example, this may prove helpful if you have a bunch of folders on your desktop (or a Finder folder that has a lot of sub-folders, like perhaps your Documents folder).

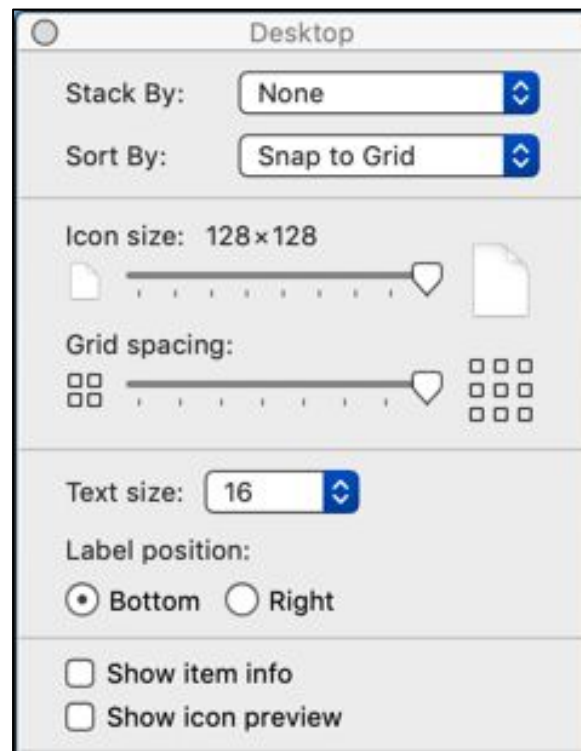
Credit: I borrowed heavily from a recent presentation on macmost.com. See the credits at the end of this presentation for the URL.)

Note: What is discussed here uses the Preview app and graphic features (emojis and apps such as Numbers) already available on your Mac. You can also use an Image Editor like Pixelmator to create custom icons, but that's beyond the scope of this presentation.

“Setting the Stage”

For clarity, I'm using a simplified Mac Desktop and have enlarged the icons.

Want to change icon size on your Mac's **Desktop** for easier viewing? Click on it to make sure it's selected. In the Finder, use **View > Show View Options** (keyboard shortcut: **Command (⌘) + J**) to bring up the View Options window:



Finder: View > Show View Options

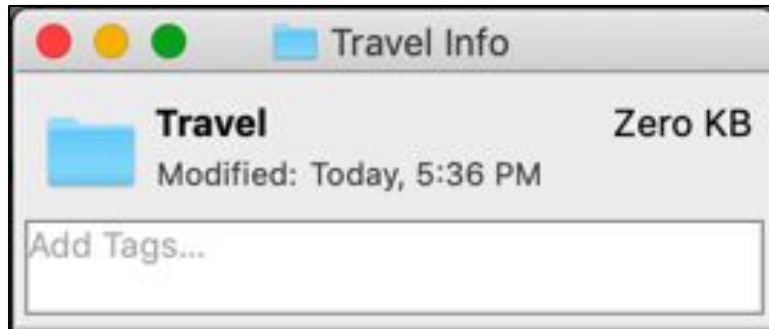
Here I've set both the Icon Size (128 x 128) and the Text Size (16) to their maximum settings. Also, I'm going to work with just three folders (labeled Travel, Budget and Spreadsheets).

The Basics

Choosing the Folder to Change its Icon

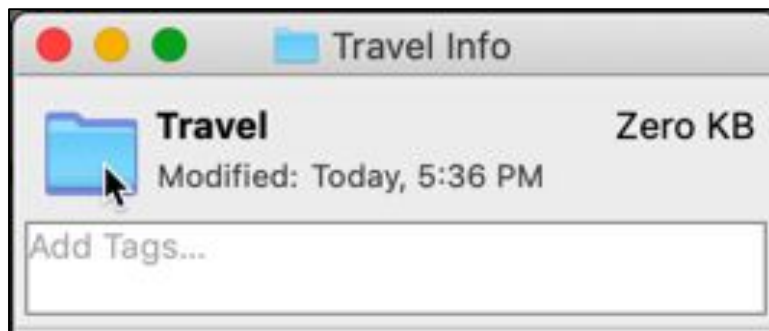
Changing the icon for a folder starts with selecting the folder in the Finder and then choosing **File > Get Info** (keyboard shortcut: **Command (⌘) + I**). See the example below:

- Select the **Travel** folder and do **Get Info** for it:



Finder: File > Get Info (Top of "Get Info" Window)

- Click on the small folder icon to select it:

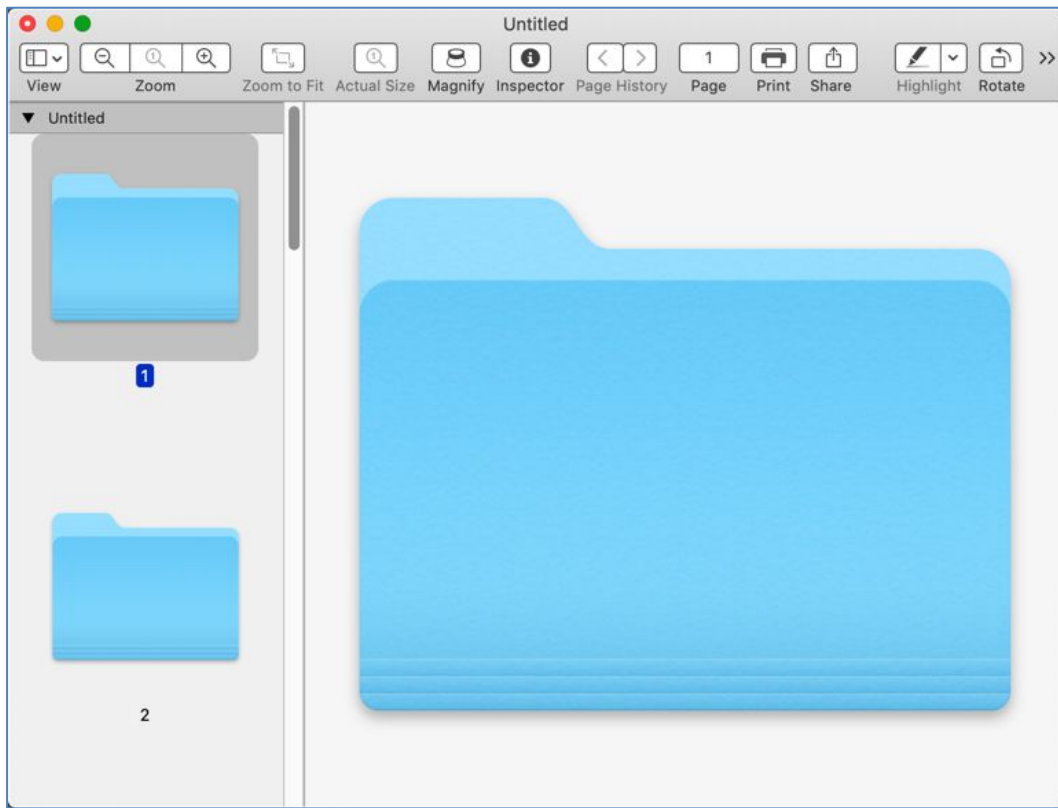


**Finder: File > Get Info (Top of "Get Info" Window)
Select the Folder Icon**

- Use **Edit > Copy** (keyboard shortcut: **Command (⌘) + C**) to copy the folder icon to the Clipboard.
- Use the **Preview** app to edit the folder icon. (It's located in the Applications folder.)

You can also use **Spotlight** (keyboard shortcut: **Command (⌘) + Space**) to open Preview. Type a few letters, and then choose the app from the Spotlight list, should be at the top, and hit **Return** to open it.)

- After Preview is open, use **File > New From Clipboard** (keyboard shortcut: **Command (⌘) + N**) to open the previously-copied folder icon for editing. (See the illustration on the next page.)



Preview: Folder Icon

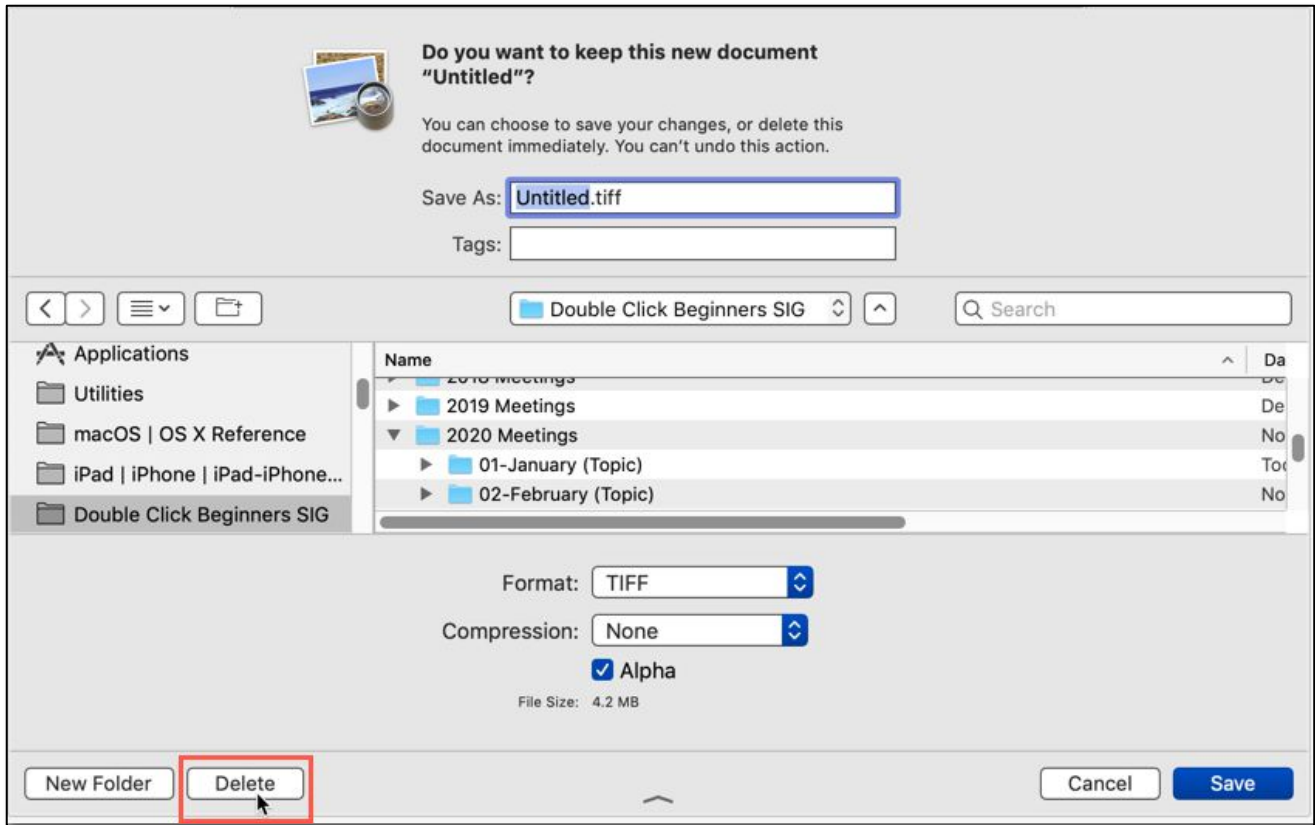
Notice that Preview's window shows all the different sizes for the icon, from highest resolution to lowest, with the highest version at the top. You'll want to work with this one.

- To be sure that you're working with the highest resolution size, make sure that it's selected at the top of the left pane. Then **Copy** it.
- Then **Close** Preview's window with **File > Close Window** (keyboard shortcut: **Command (⌘) + W**) to discard it without saving. It's no longer needed.

When the **Save As** dialog box is displayed, click the **Delete** button.

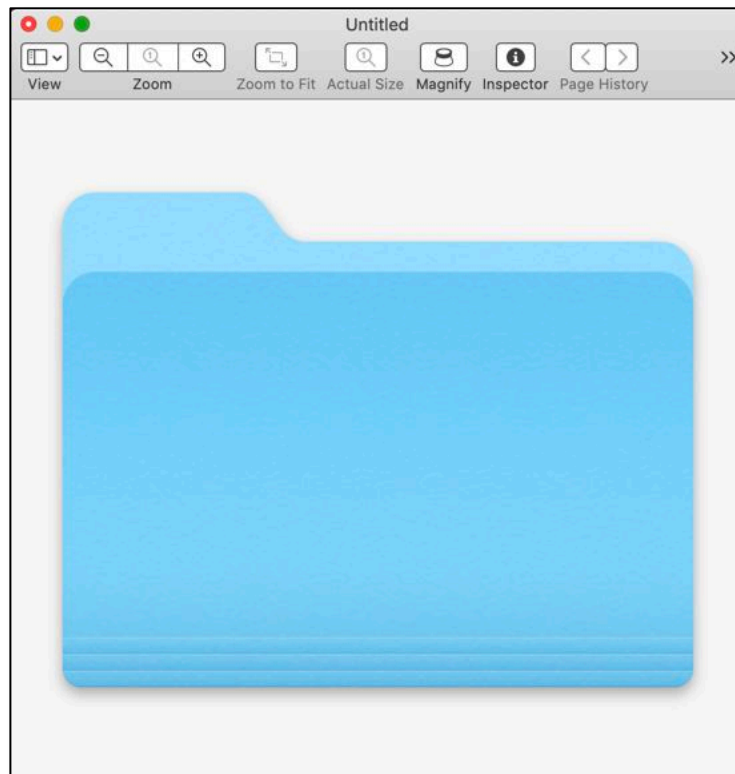
(See the illustration on the next page.)

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Preview: Save As Dialog Box (Choose Delete)

- After Preview is open, use **File > New From Clipboard** (keyboard shortcut: **Command (⌘) + N**) to open the previously-copied folder icon for editing.

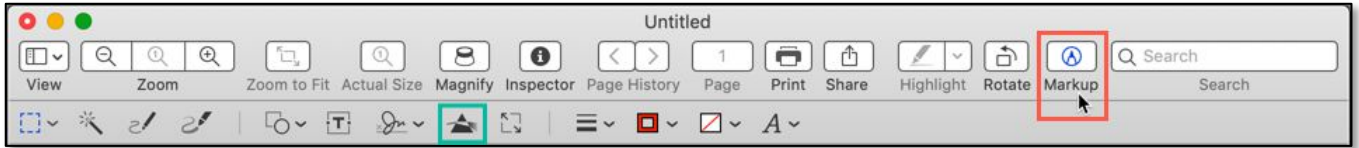


Preview: High-Resolution Folder Icon (Ready for Editing)

Editing the Folder Icon

Change the Color

Click on Preview's **Markup Tool**. After the Markup Toolbar is displayed, click the **Prism Tool** (looks like a pyramid).

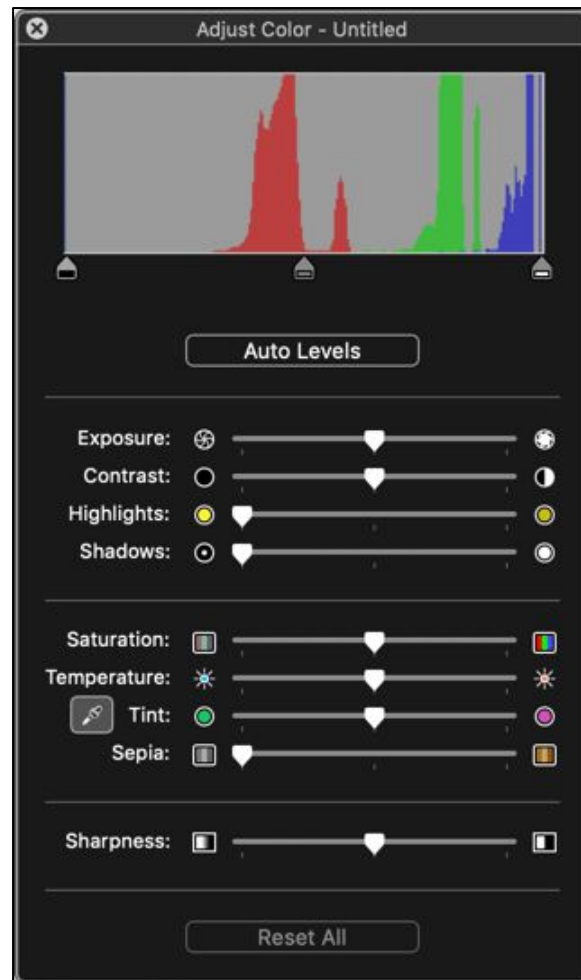


Preview – Markup Tool & Markup Toolbar (Prism Tool Highlighted)



Preview – Prism Tool Icon

Clicking the Prism Tool brings up the Prism Tool window and all its color-adjusting options:



Preview – Prism Tool Controls

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As you can see, there are a lot of controls for adjusting the color of an image being edited. Feel free to experiment with them. I recommend trying those of interest one at a time. That way, you can always choose **Edit > Undo** (keyboard shortcut: **Command (⌘) + Z**) to get back to the original color of the image.

Starting out, it might be best to stick with a simple change or two.

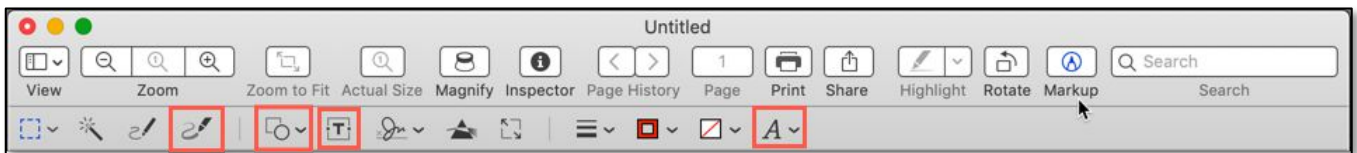
- **Tint** - By moving the slider, you can make the image more purple or green.
- **Sepia** - Moving the slider changes to go a tan/yellowish view.

Add a Label/Graphic

Now that you have the color you want to use, you can include some sort of graphic on the folder icon. This can add some additional visual feature to help identify the folder's function and contents.

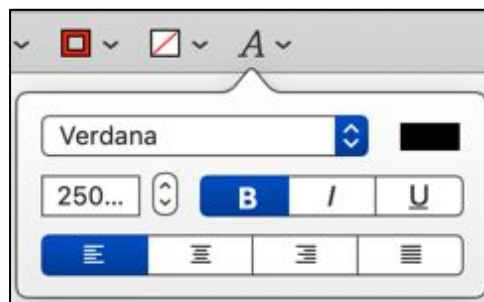
Here are three examples:

1. Add a Text Label Using Preview's Tools. Working again with Preview's Markup Tool, you have a number of options/tools (**Draw**, **Shapes**, **Text** and **Text Style** to name a few) for adding something to the folder icon.



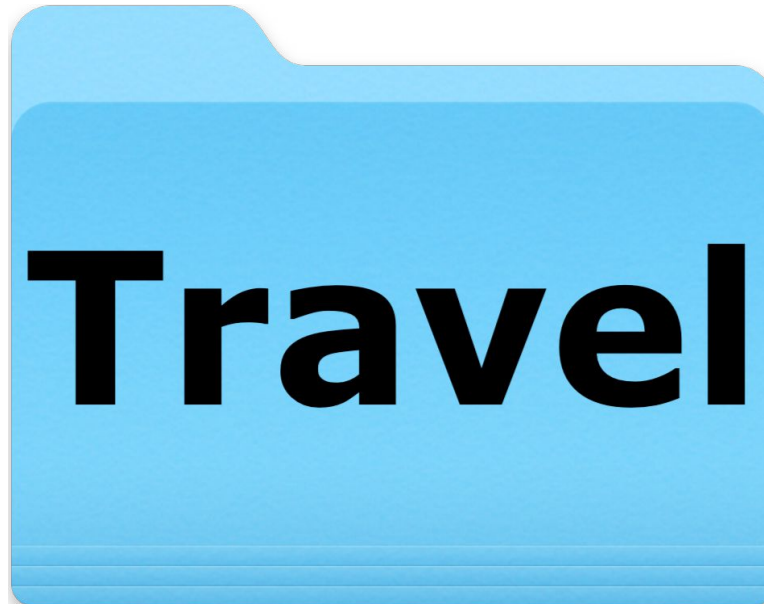
Preview – Markup Tool & Markup Toolbar (Line, Shape & Text Tools Highlighted)

Let's add a simple **Text Label** on the folder. Click the **Text Tool**. A text label is added to the image. Initially, it will probably be quite small, so use the **Text Style** tool to choose the **Font** and **Font Size**. Here I've chosen the Verdana font and increased the font size to 250 points to make the label stand out on the folder icon:



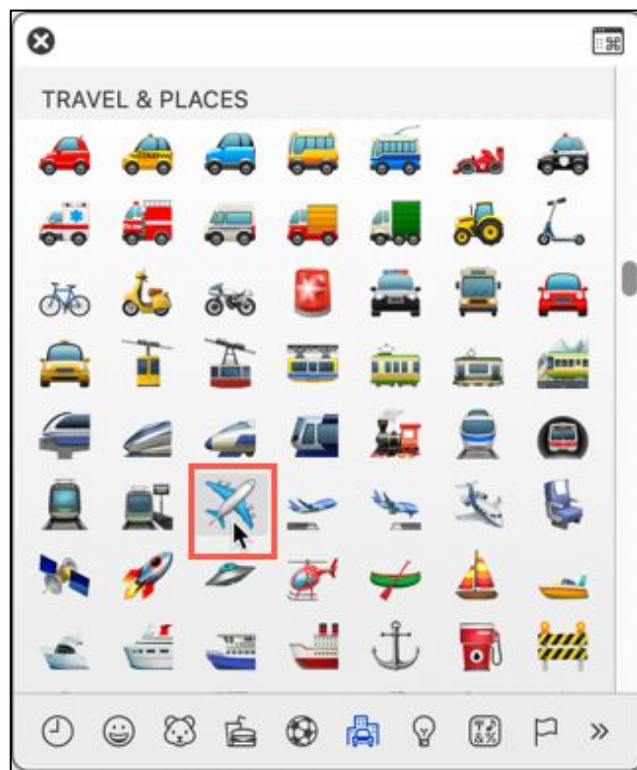
Preview – Text Style Markup Tool

(The result, a label called **Travel**, is shown in the illustration on the next page.)



Text Label Added to the Folder Icon

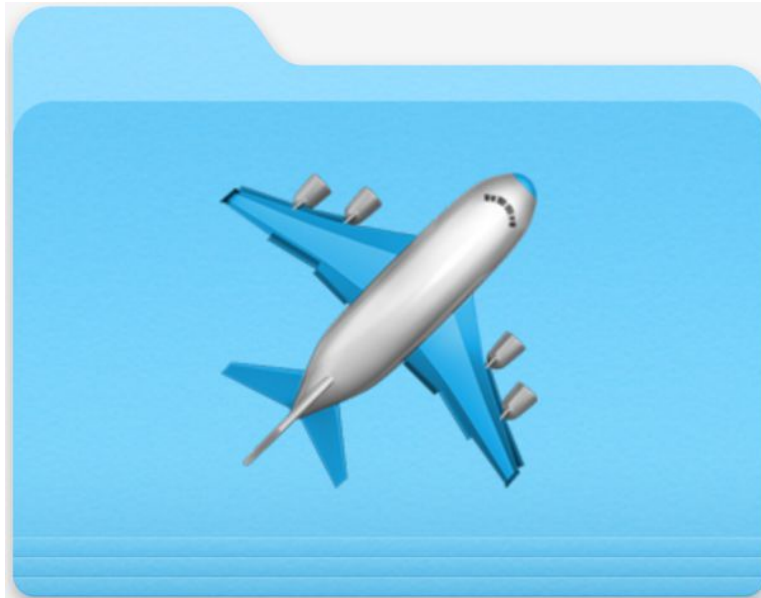
2. Add an Emoji Graphic. Preview's tools are capable but somewhat limited when adding graphics. A better option might be to use an **Emoji**. Emojis are used like text. First, use Preview's Text Tool to add a Text box. Next, bring up the **Emoji Viewer** with the keyboard shortcut **Control (^) + Command (⌘) + Space**. Then you can choose an appropriate graphic to add. In the **Travel & Places** group, let's choose one of the Airplane symbols.



Emoji Viewer - Travel & Places Group (Airplane Symbol Selected)

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Just as with adding plain text, when you first add something, it's likely to be quite small, so you'll need to increase its size. In the illustration below, I changed the size to 400 points:



Emoji Added to the Folder Icon

Note: If you want to **Save** a custom icon file for later use, do **File > Save** (keyboard shortcut: **Command (⌘) + S**). In the **Save As** dialog box, selecting **png** is a good format. Make sure you have Alpha selected so it's semi-transparent for pasting appearance.



Save As – PNG Format & Alpha Selected

3. Add a Graphic From Numbers. The **Numbers** app has a number of graphics that you can use. The same ones are found in the Pages and Keynote apps. Let's work with the **Budget** folder.

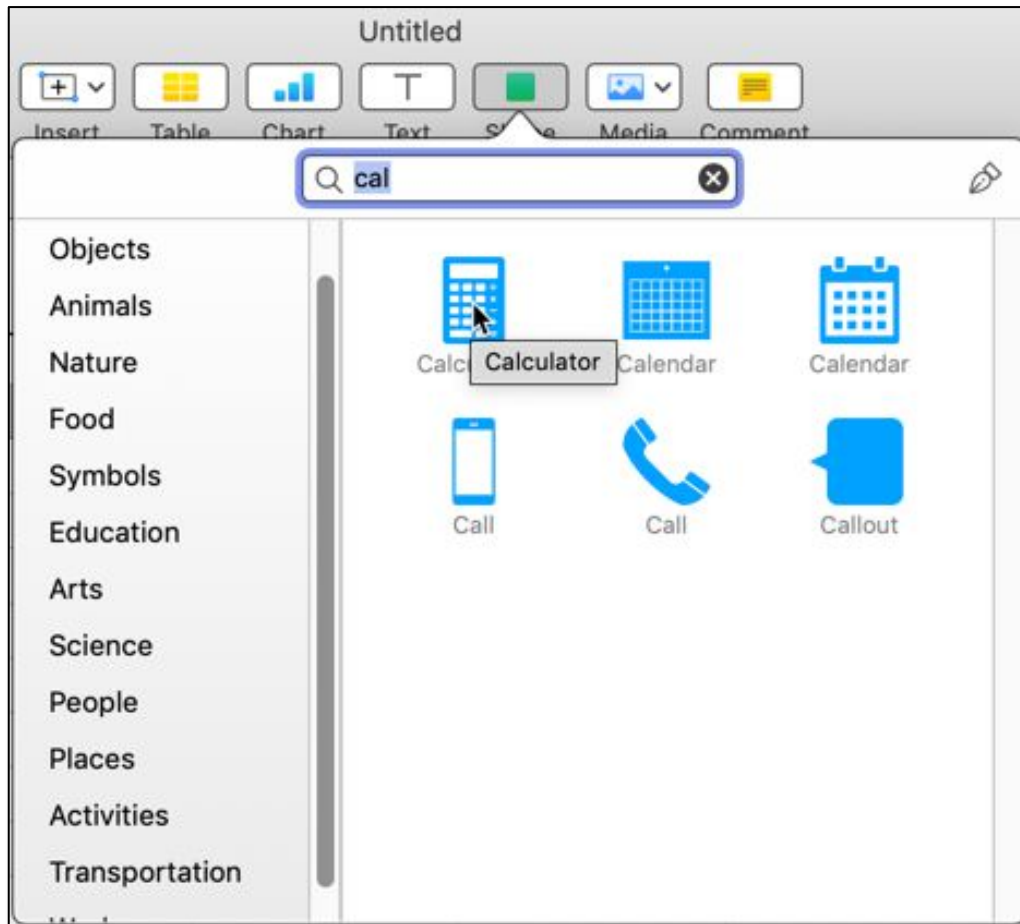
As before:

- Click on the **Budget** folder to select it, do **File > Get Info**, and then click on the folder icon in the Get Info window to select it. Do **Edit > Copy** to copy the folder icon to the Clipboard.
- Open the **Preview** app and do **File > New From Clipboard** to open the folder icon, select the top image (highest resolution) in the list, and do **Edit > Copy** to copy the folder icon to the Clipboard. Now you can close the window and delete the file as it's no longer needed.
- Using the **Preview** app, do **File > New From Clipboard** to open the saved folder icon for editing.

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Open the **Numbers** app and a blank document. Then select the **Shape** icon in the toolbar. Notice that there are a great number of categories and shapes to choose from. These are basic, simple shapes, not the more detailed ones found in Emojis.

Since I'm working with the Budgets folder, let's look for a suitable icon. How about a **Calculator**? Rather than search through all the symbols, it's easier to search by keyword. You only need to type a few letters to display possible choices:



Preview App – Select Symbols Icon & Choose Calculator Icon

- Click on the **Calculator** icon in the **Shapes** list, and it's inserted into the Numbers document.



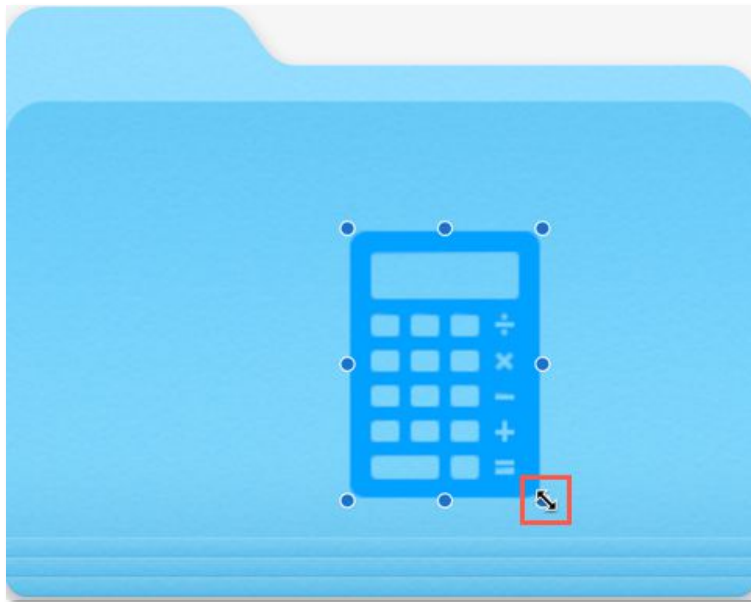
Calculator Icon

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- Then click on the Calculator icon in the document and then choose **Edit > Copy** (keyboard shortcut: **Command (⌘) + C**) to copy it to the Clipboard.
- Go ahead and **Quit** the Numbers app. We've got the Calculator icon.
- Switch back to Preview, and use **Edit > Paste** (keyboard shortcut: **Command (⌘) + V**) to paste the Calculator icon onto the folder image.

Note: You don't need to add a text box to paste the graphic.

- Since the icon's size may be too small, drag on one of its **Corner Handles** to enlarge it. Drag the graphic to position it as desired.



Preview – Paste Calculator Icon & Enlarge by Dragging a Corner

Here's the result:



Graphic Added to the Folder Icon

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Add an Existing Icon to Represent the Folder. You can use an **Existing Icon** to represent a folder. This might be useful if the folder is filled with documents of the same type or created by the same app.

- Choose your source (maybe the Pages app) for the icon. Then using **File > Get Info** select and copy its icon to the Clipboard.
- Choose your target folder (Spreadsheets) icon, and chose **File > Get Info**.
- In the Get Info window, click on the folder icon to select it.
- Paste the source icon from the Clipboard using **File > Paste**.

Here's the result:



Pages Icon Replacing the Folder Icon

Note: Take care in selecting your source icon. Some may not stand out well against your Desktop background.

One Problem?

There's one problem to be aware about: From what I've read, but haven't confirmed, you may not be able to change a folder to which you've added a custom icon with another custom folder icon. This appears to be a bug in macOS including Catalina and earlier versions of macOS. It may be addressed in a future update.

If this is the case, you can delete the custom folder icon by selecting the folder's icon in the Finder, and hitting **Delete** to change it back to a plain folder.

An interim solution would be to create a new folder, customize its icon, and then move your files from the old folder to the new one.

Summary

Changing a folder to a custom icon can help you to quickly pick out a specific folder of interest if you're dealing with one among many. It can also add an interesting effect to plain folder icons.

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Unless you want to use a custom graphics utility, the Preview app has the capability to make simple changes. Just copy the icon from your chosen plain folder to Preview, and edit it by adding a text label or custom icon from another source (such as an Emoji or shapes from another app like Pages). Then copy it and paste it to replace the old folder's icon.

Next Presentation

For the next presentation, we'll take a look another macOS feature.

Have a favorite Mac Tip or utility? Please feel free to pass it along, and I'll see if I can work it into a future presentation.

If you have any suggestions for presentation topics, including macOS utilities, please contact me at slp4668@gmail.com.

-Steve Parker

Credits:

<https://macmost.com/how-to-create-custom-folder-and-drive-icons-for-your-mac.html>