Windows 11 22H2: Which new features stand out?

By Lance Whitney, AskWoody Plus – 19.46.0 – 2022-11-14

Microsoft has beefed up Windows 11 with its first major update. Among all the changes, which ones are worth the upgrade?

Since its debut in October 2021, Windows 11 has proven to be a controversial addition to Microsoft's lineup. Though it boasts several improvements over its predecessor, the new operating system has turned off many people with its strict hardware requirements, its dumbing-down of the Start menu, and its lack of flexibility and customization.

With Windows 11 finally sneaking past the one-year mark, Microsoft has released its first major update for the OS. Known as Windows 11 22H2, the annual update offers a bevy of incremental changes and enhancements. Though no single change is earth-shattering by itself, collectively the improvements beef up the new version in subtle but useful ways.

As usual, figuring out which features have been changed or added can be challenging. To help, Microsoft provides the support page What's new in recent Windows updates, with a list of all the modifications. Among them, there are certain ones I'd consider the most helpful and effective.

First, let's cover how to grab the latest update if you haven't already done so. Head to **Settings** and then **Windows Update.** If the 22H2 update appears, just click the button to download and install it.

However, the update is still being deployed in a staggered manner, so it may not yet present itself to your PC. In that case, you can perform a manual update. Browse to the Download Windows 11 website. In the **Windows 11 Installation Assistant** section, click the **Download Now** button. Run the downloaded **Windows11InstallationAssistant.exe** file and follow the steps to install it. Afterward, go to **Settings | System | About.** Under **Windows Specifications,** the version should say 22H2.

Now let's look at the changes and enhancements in Windows 11 22H2 that I think are worth the upgrade.

Create Start menu folders

In Windows 10, you can create Start menu folders to house and organize related apps. The purpose is to help you free up space in the menu and reduce the number of icons just floating about randomly. The initial version of Windows 11 lacked this capability, but the 22H2 update has revived it.

To set this up, find two apps that you'd like to place into the same folder. Drag and drop one icon on top of the other (Figure 1).
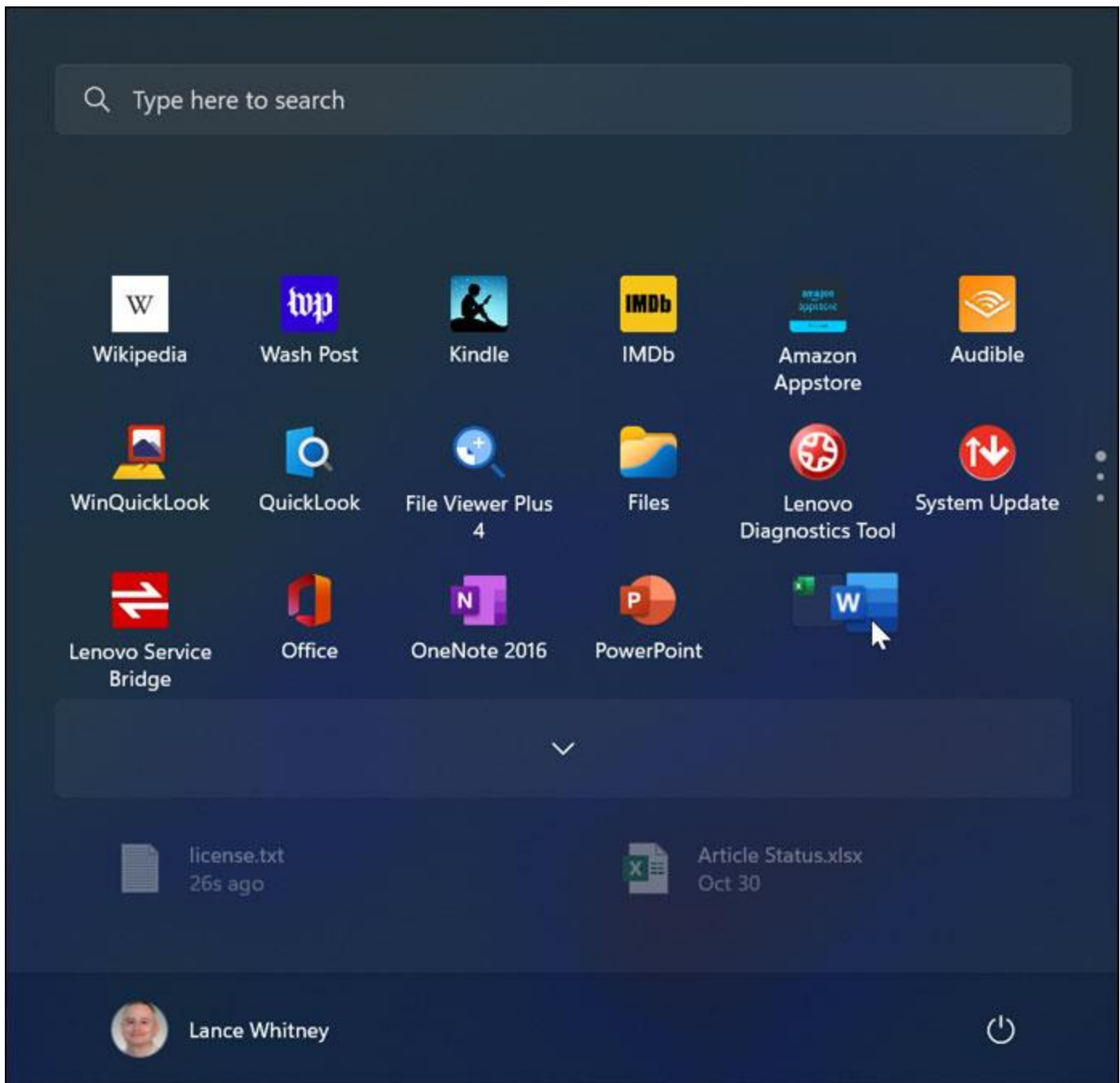
Figure 1. To set up a folder, drag one icon on top of another.

The two apps are placed into a folder with the generic name "Folder." Click the folder to open it. Click in the **Edit name** field and type a new name for the folder. Click anywhere outside the folder to close it and confirm the new name (Figure 2).
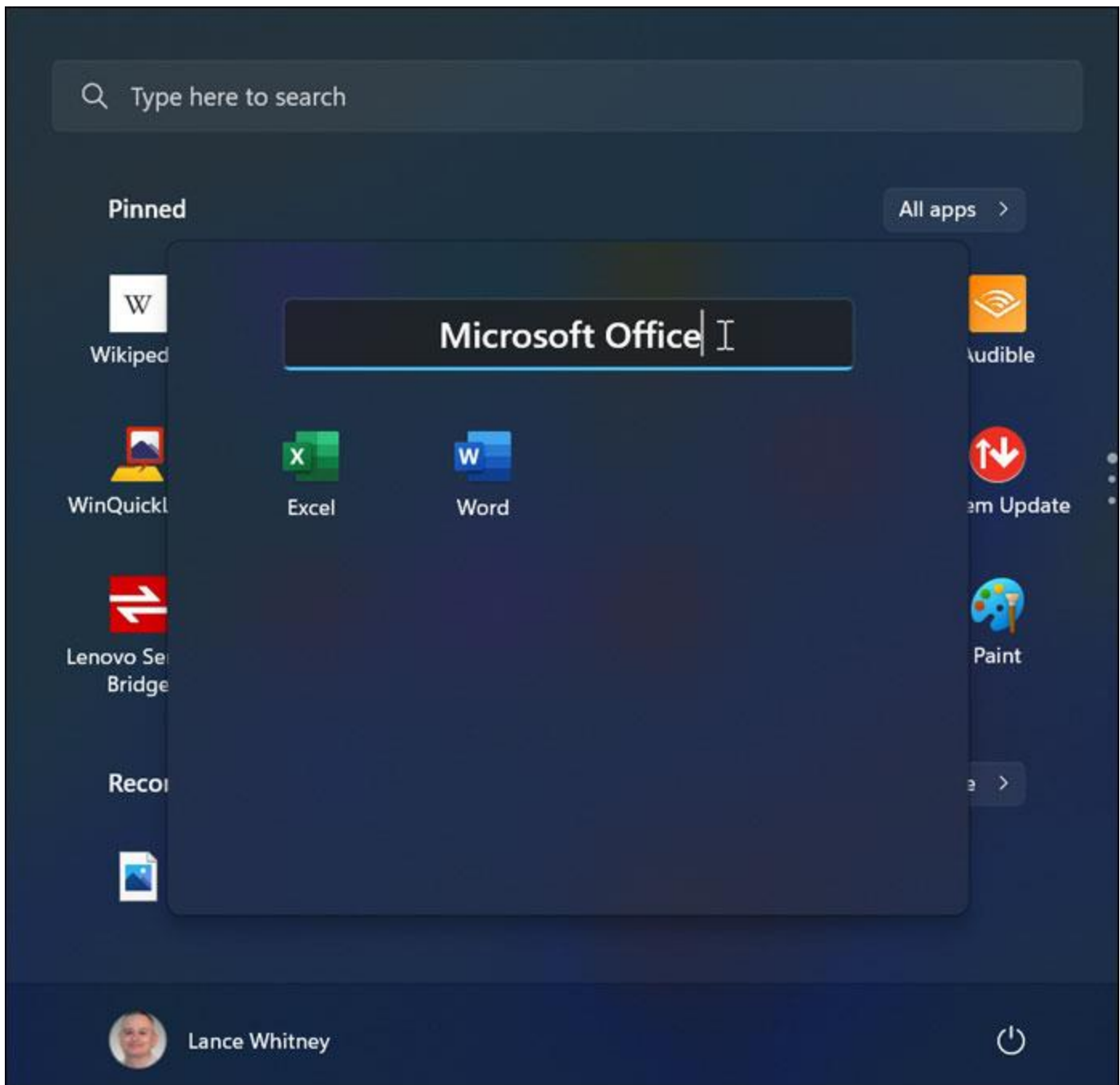
Figure 2. Click in the *Edit name* field to enter a more descriptive name for the folder.

Add more apps by dragging and dropping them on top of the folder. Open a folder, and you can drag and drop its icons to sort them the way you want. Set up more folders by using the same process. After you're done, you're able to move your new folders around the Start menu, just as you can an individual icon (Figure 3).
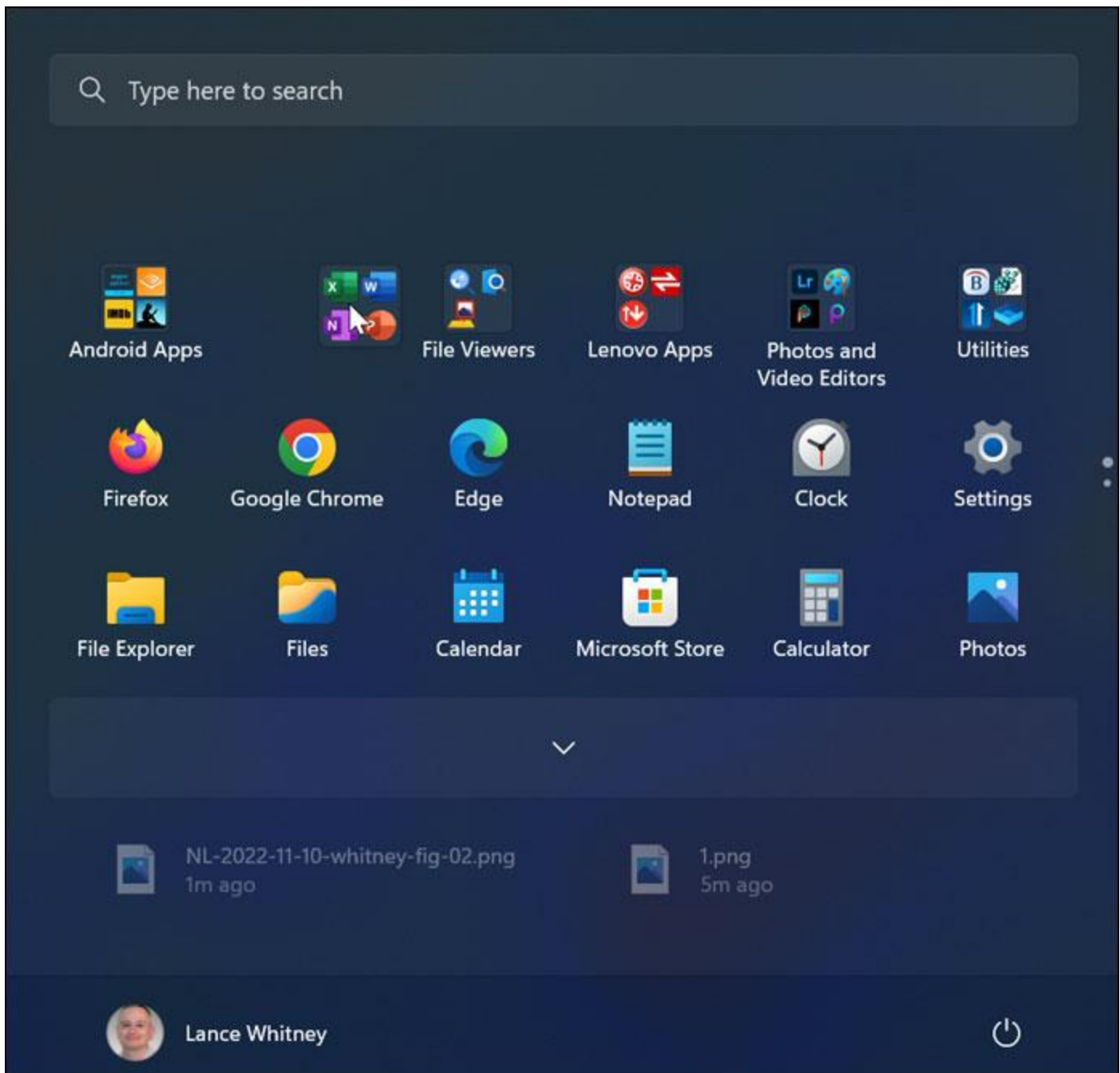
Figure 3. Move your folders around the Start menu to arrange them in your preferred order.

Customize your Start menu space

By default, the Start menu shows both pinned apps and recommended apps. With the initial version of Windows 11, there was no way to customize how much space to devote to each of these two categories. The 22H2 update lets you tweak the real estate on the Start menu to better control how it's allocated.

Go to **Settings | Personalization | Start.** The Layout section at the top displays three types of configurations. The first one devotes more space to pinned apps and less to recommended ones. The second one is the default that tries to maintain a balance between the two types. And the third one grants more space to recommended apps and less to pinned ones. Choose the layout that works best for you (Figure 4).
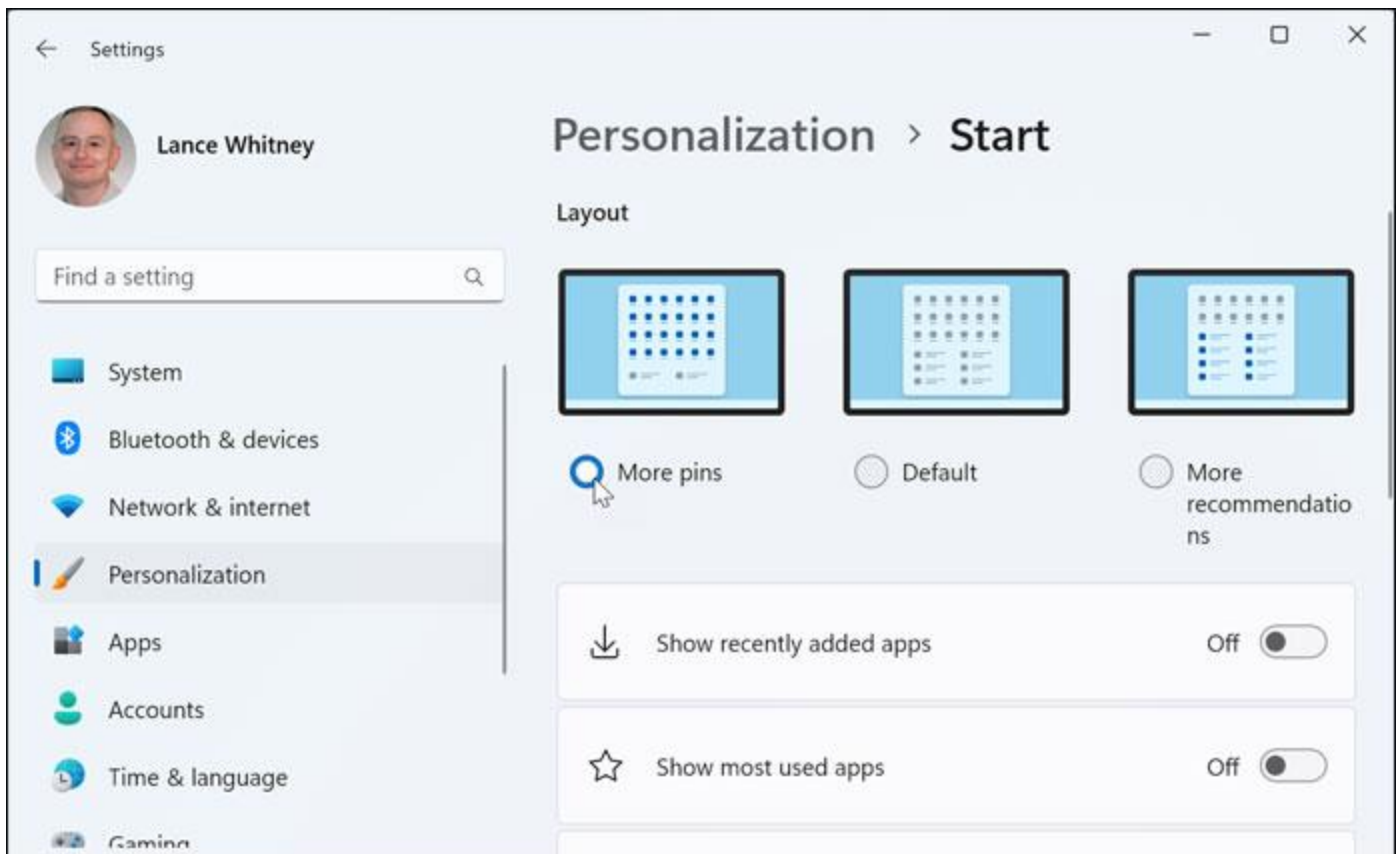
Figure 4. Select your preferred layout to allocate Start menu space between pinned apps and recommended apps.

Open windows using File Explorer tab

Opening and juggling multiple folders in File Explorer is a clumsy process. You have to either retrace your steps to access a previous folder or launch multiple windows, each one pointing to a different folder. With the 22H2 update, Microsoft has finally added tabs to File Explorer.

To try this out, open File Explorer. By default, the current tab points to your **This PC** location, with your hard drive and network locations visible. To open another tab, click the **plus sign** (+) to the right of the last tab and then, within that tab, navigate to a different location. Click **+** again to jump to a third location. You may also use the **Ctrl+T** keyboard shortcut to open a new tab.

To close a tab, you can click its **X** icon, right-click the tab and select **Close tab** from the context menu — or use the keyboard shortcut **Ctrl+W.** To close all the tabs except your current one, right-click it and select **Close other tabs.** To close all the tabs to the right of your current tab, right-click it and select **Close tabs to the right.** Beyond switching from one tab to another, you can drag and drop folders and files from one to another (Figure 5).
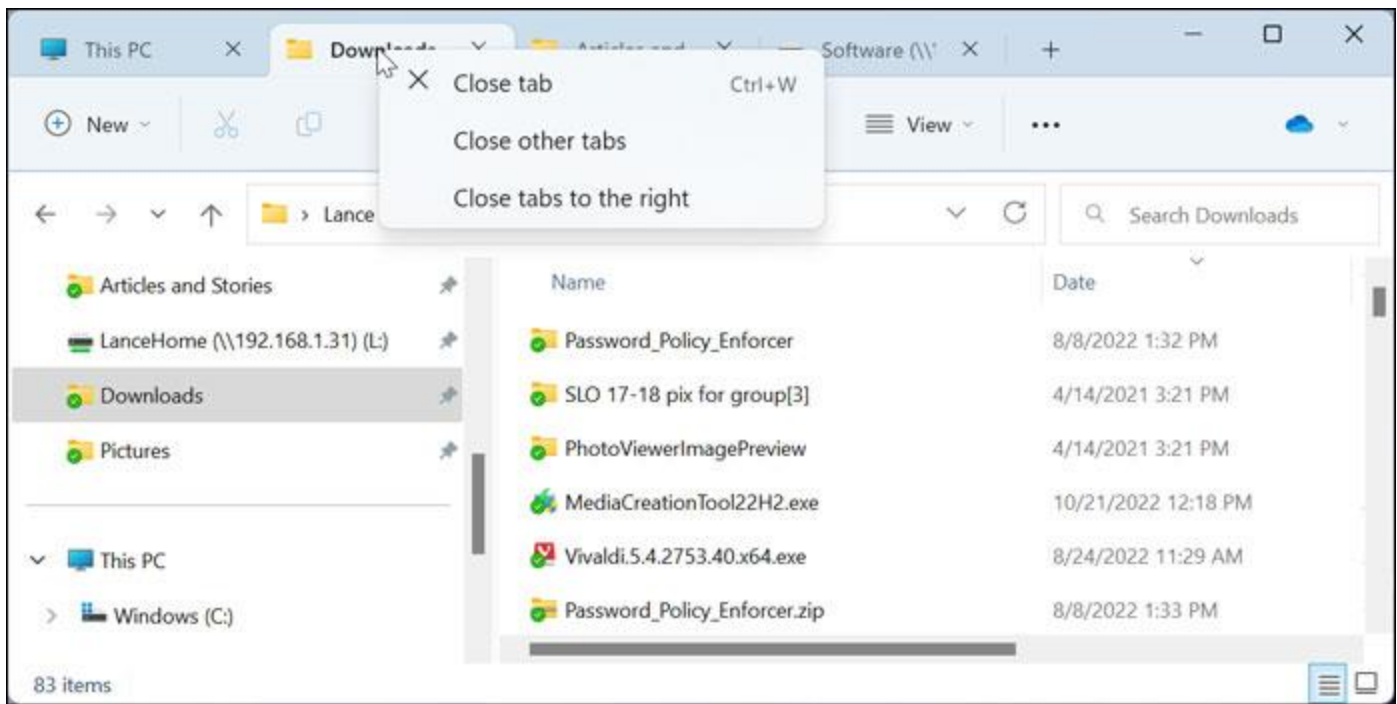
Figure 5. Using tabs in File Explorer helps you view and switch among multiple windows and folders.

As with Windows 10, the shortcut **Ctrl+N** opens a new File Explorer *window,* not a new *tab.* And, also like Windows 10, the tab in the new window opens to the same location displayed in the active tab. However, the shortcut **Ctrl+T** in the window *does not* open the new tab to the same location but rather to one of the locations specified by folder options (see next section).
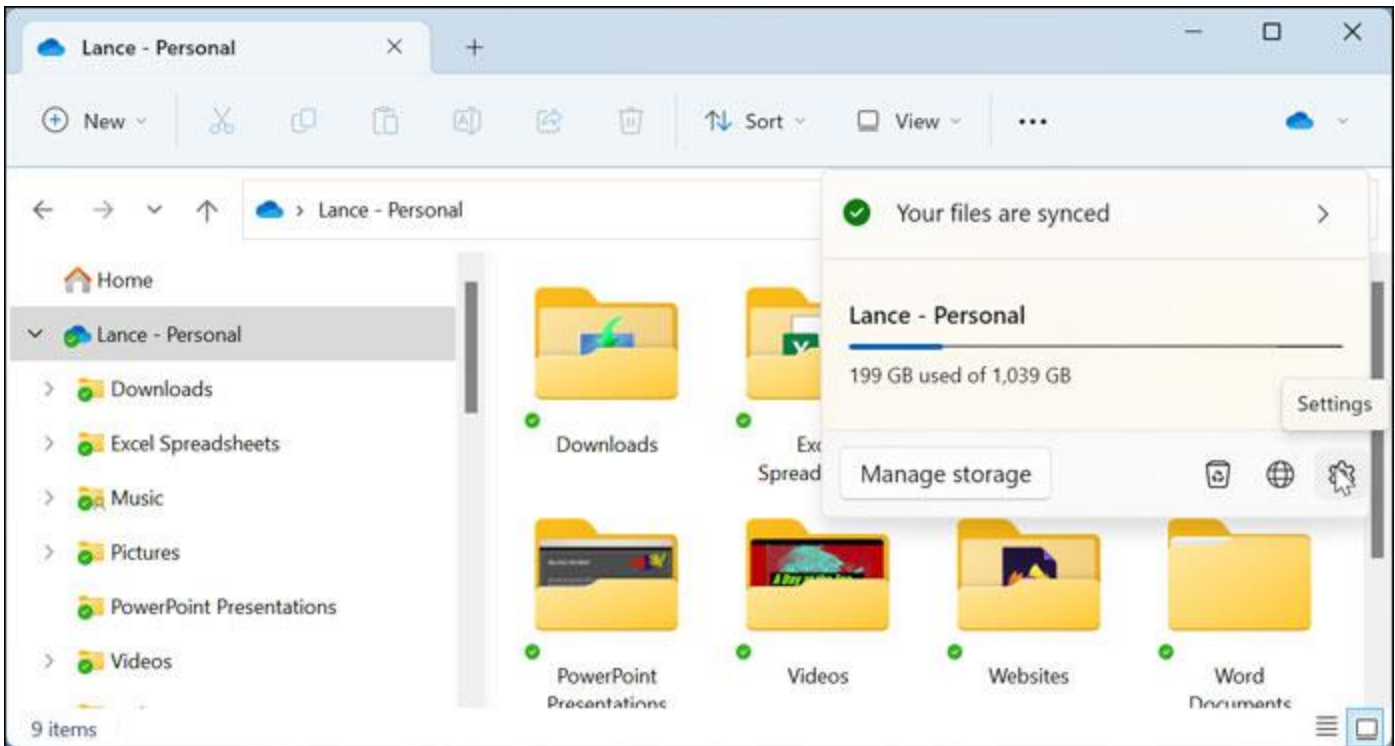
View and manage OneDrive in File Explorer

Those of you who use Microsoft OneDrive will find a couple of helpful changes in the new File Explorer. First, you're able to modify the default startup location in File Explorer so that your OneDrive folder appears first. To do this, open File Explorer. Click the **ellipsis** icon on the toolbar and select **Options.** Click the dropdown menu for **Open File Explorer to** and change it to your OneDrive folder. The next time you open File Explorer, your OneDrive folder will be the first thing you see (Figure 6).
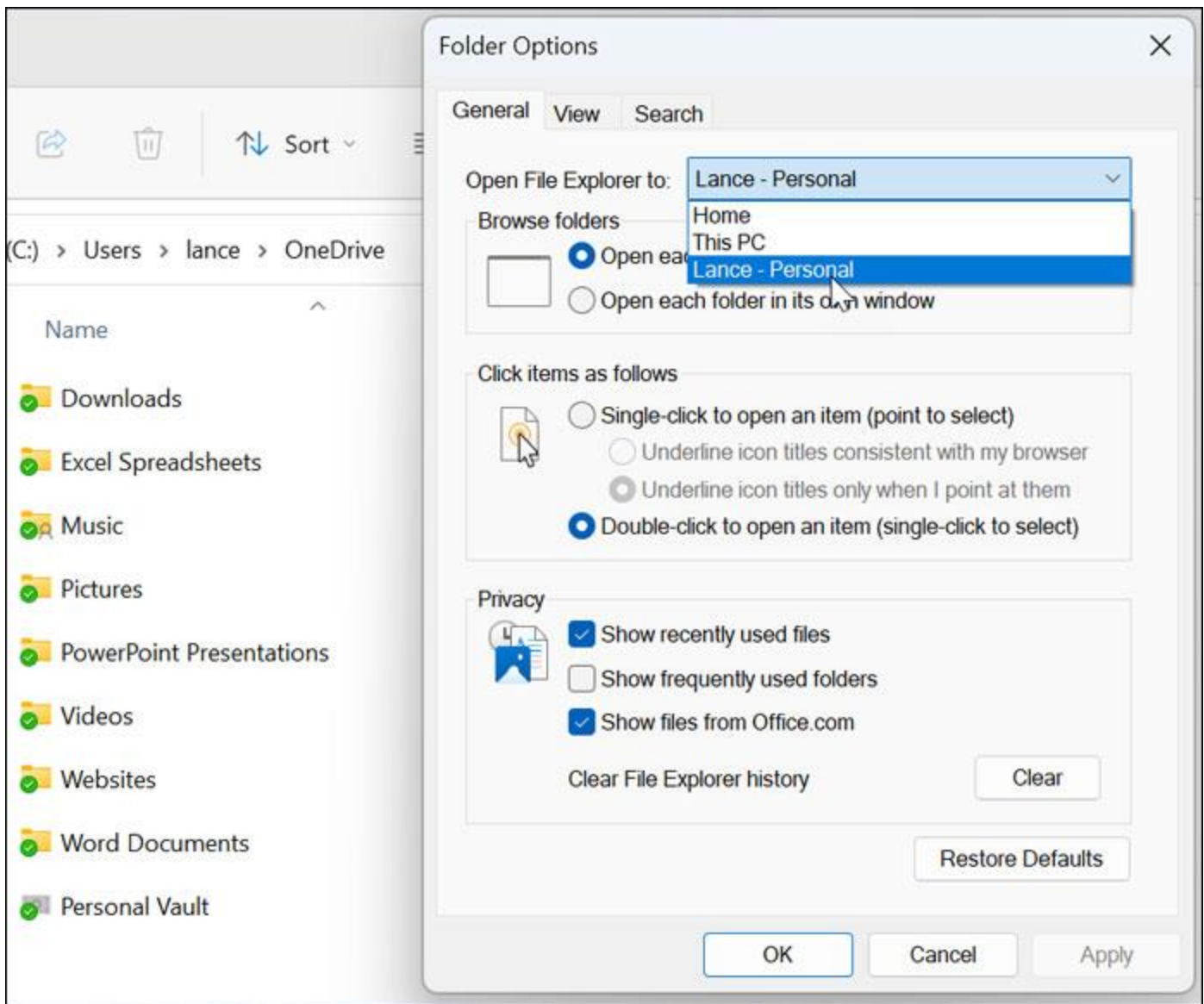
**Figure 6. Change the startup location in File Explorer to point to your OneDrive folder.**

Next, you can view and manage your OneDrive storage options directly from File Explorer. Click the parent folder for your OneDrive storage. On the right end of the toolbar, click the down arrow next to the cloud icon. The dropdown dialog shows you the status of your synced files and how much space you're using on OneDrive. Several other icons are available to let you manage your storage, access your OneDrive Recycle Bin, view your OneDrive files online, and configure your OneDrive settings (Figure 7).

Figure 7. With the new integration in File Explorer, you're able to view and access key settings for OneDrive.

View your Microsoft 365 subscription

Subscribers to Microsoft 365 can now view and access details about their plan directly within Windows. For this, go to **Settings | Accounts.** The right pane displays the name of your plan, the annual price tag, the initials of anyone sharing your subscription, and the amount of storage used by OneDrive. From this section, you can click on various icons and links to see details on your subscription, manage how it's shared, control your OneDrive storage, and view the benefits of your Microsoft 365 subscription (Figure 8).
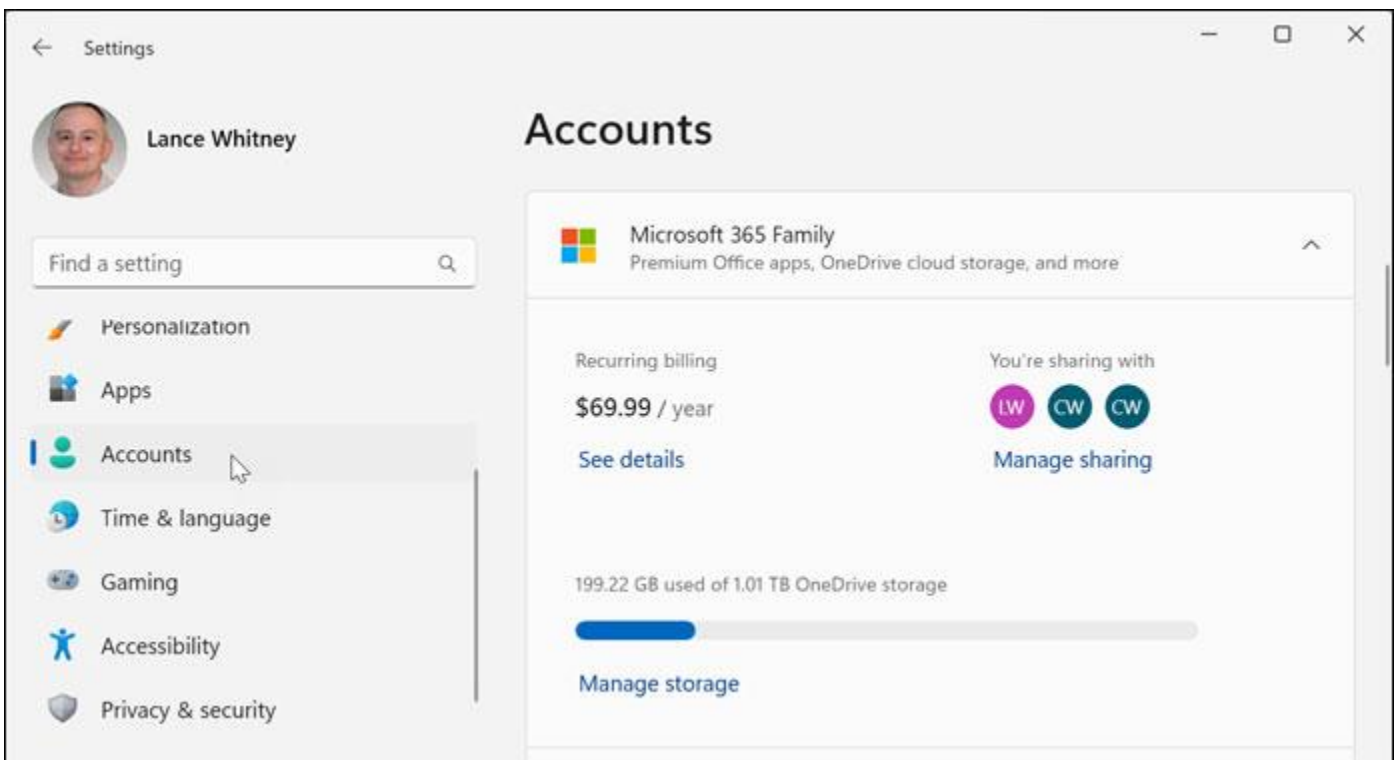
Figure 8. Settings now offers you a peek into your Microsoft 365 subscription.

Start a Focus session from the clock

Windows 10 and 11 both offer you the ability to trigger a Focus session, which puts your PC into Do Not Disturb mode to shield you from notifications and other interruptions and distractions. With the 22H2 update, you can more easily kick off a Focus session directly from the clock. Click the clock in the lower-right corner of the System Tray, and you'll see a Focus button at the bottom of the calendar. Use the plus and minus signs surrounding the number of minutes to set the amount of time you want Focus mode to be in effect. Then just click the **Focus** button. A timer appears on your desktop, showing you the countdown (Figure 9).
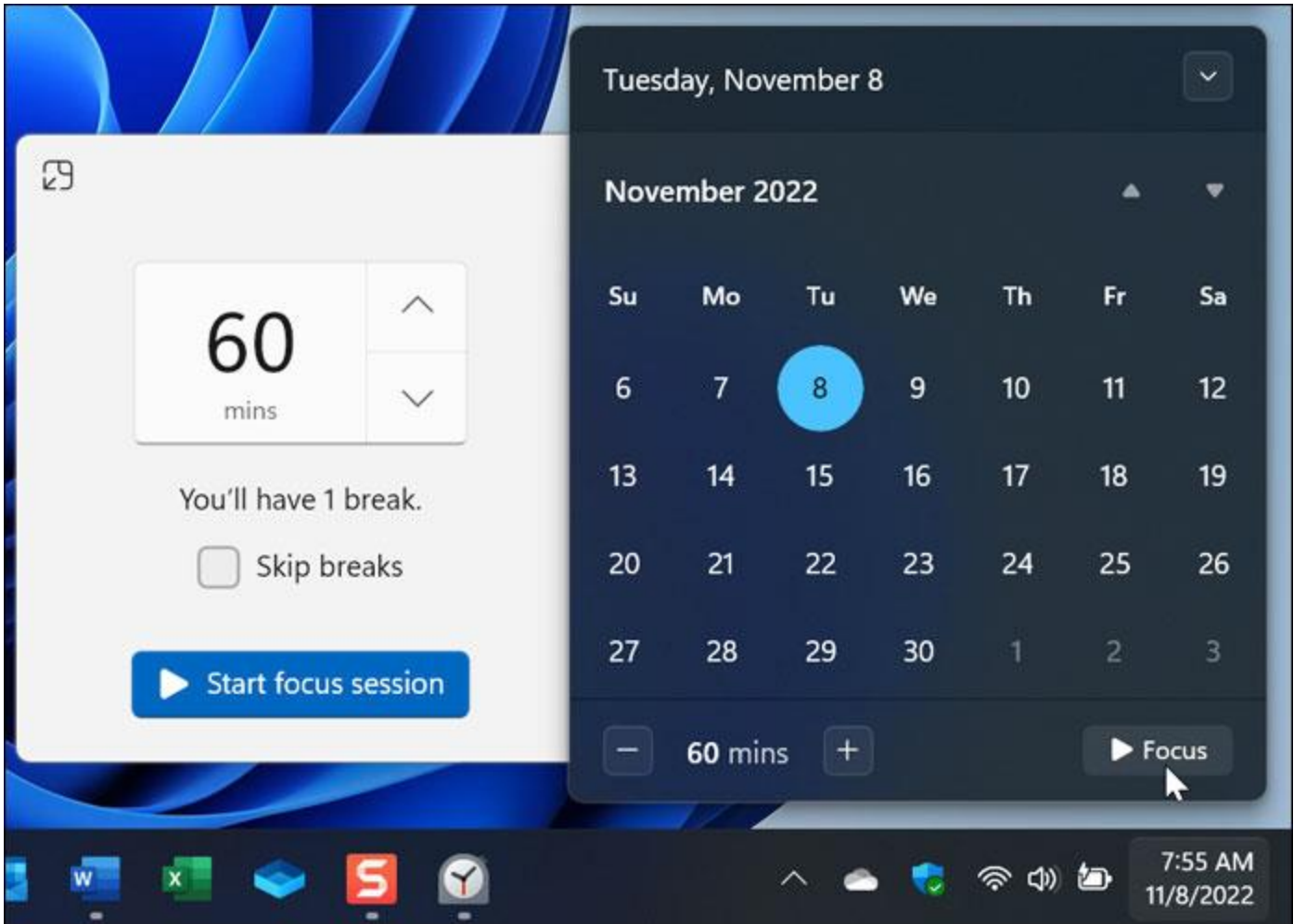

Figure 9. Put your PC into Focus mode, aka Do Not Disturb, directly from the clock.

Dictate text and commands using Voice access

In both Windows 10 and 11, you're able to dictate text and commands using different voice recognition features. New with Windows 11 22H2 is an option called Voice access, which lets you control your PC and dictate text via your voice without an Internet connection. To set this up, go to **Settings | Accessibility | Speech** (Figure 10). Turn on the switch for **Voice access.** The Voice access toolbar appears at the top of the screen. If you want Voice access to automatically launch when Windows loads, check the box for **Start voice access** after you sign in to your PC.
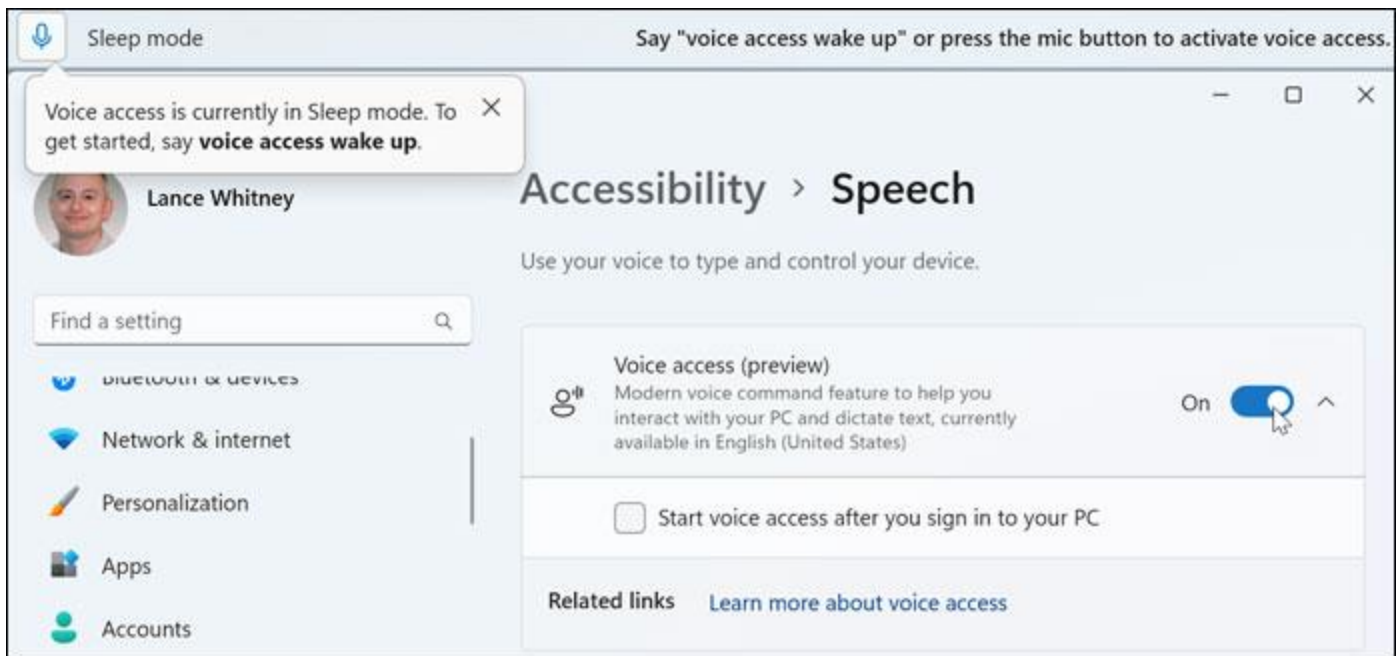
Figure 10. Turn on *Voice access* to dictate text and commands in Windows 11.

To control Windows with your voice, click the Sleep mode icon on the toolbar so that it tells you that it's listening. To see which commands you can issue by voice, say: "What can I say?" A voice access guide pops up to show you the different commands (Figure 11).
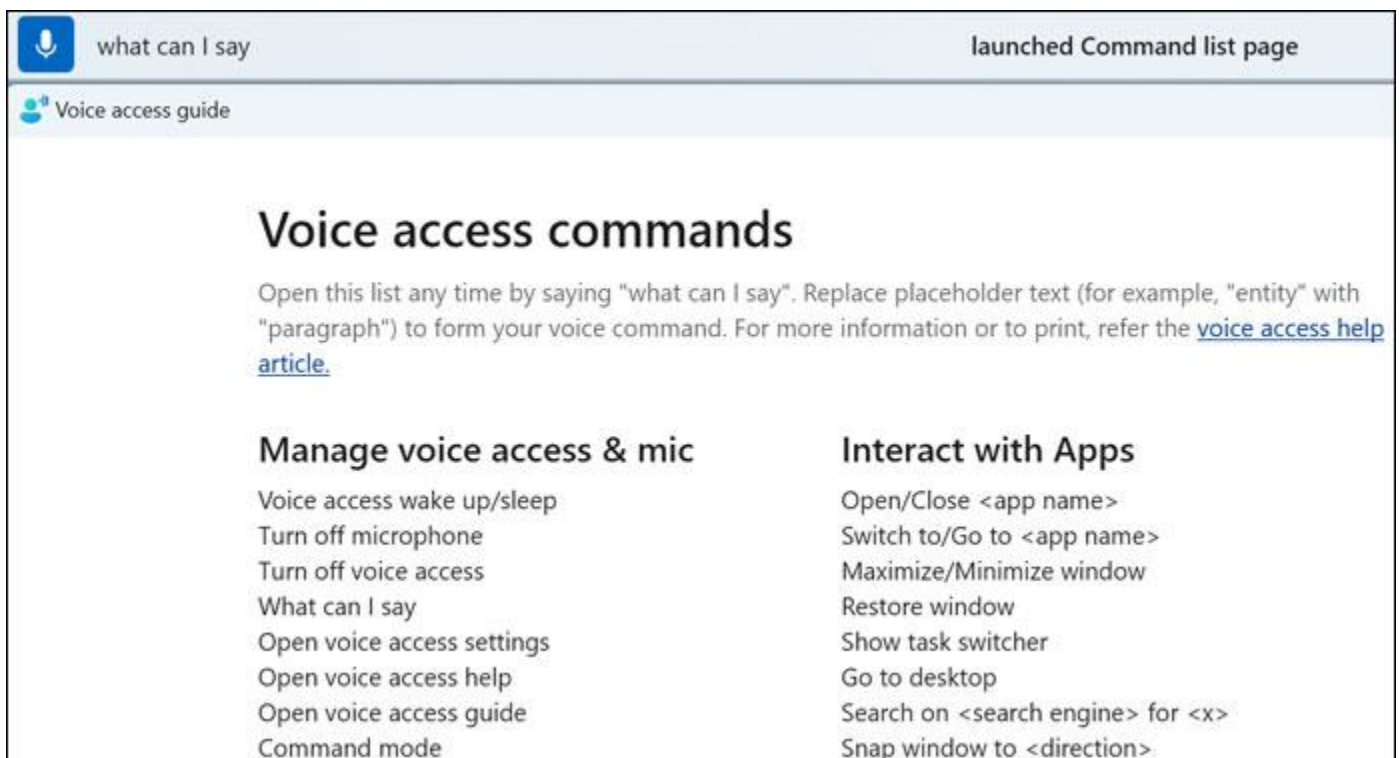
Figure 11. Not sure what to say when voice access is enabled? Just say: "What can I say?"

To dictate text, open any app that allows text. Then just start dictating (Figure 12).
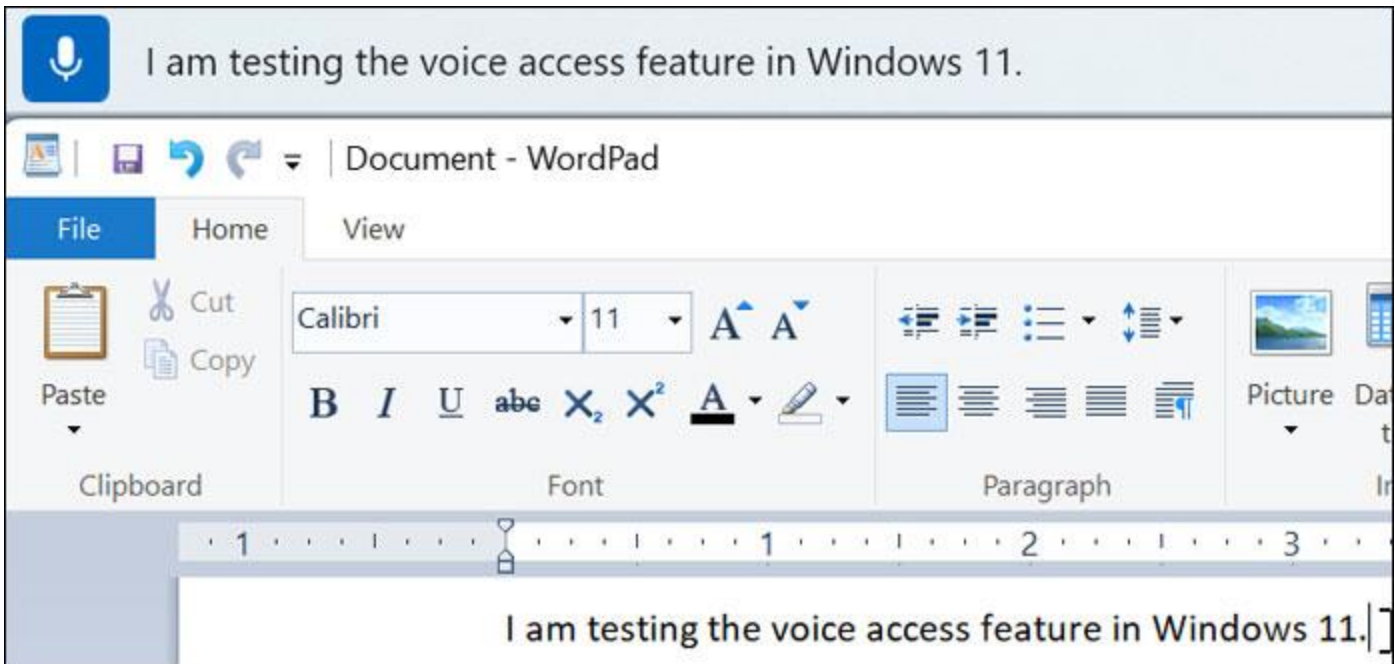
Figure 12. *Voice access* lets you easily dictate text in emails, messages, and documents.

Use Clipchamp to edit a video

Finally, those of you who want to edit videos without spending money on a pricey editing program may want to try Microsoft's Clipchamp. Available in both free and paid editions, the free version is a bare-bones program, compared with dedicated third-party video editors. But it should suffice if you simply want to spruce up a video taken with your smartphone. Clipchamp has been available for Windows 10 and 11 for a while, but it required you to manually download and install it from the Microsoft Store. With the 22H2 update, the app is built into Windows 11.

Open Clipchamp from the Start menu or All Apps screen. You can create a video from scratch, record a video using your webcam or Windows screen, or import an existing video (Figure 13).
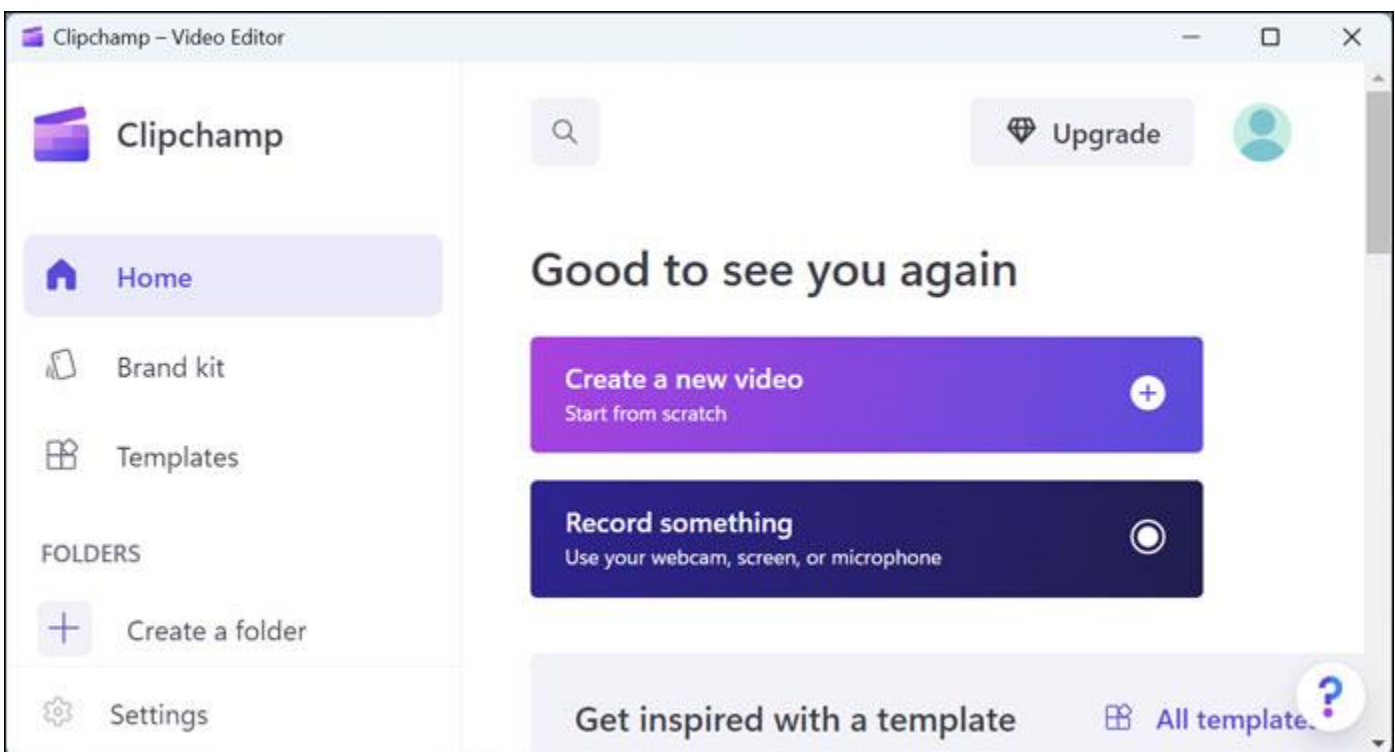
Figure 13. With Clipchamp, you can create or record a new video or import an existing video for editing.

From there, you're able to perform most of the basic video-editing commands. You can trim and split your clip, adjust the colors, add filters, lay on an audio track, and apply certain effects. When you're done, just export the video and choose the resolution. Your video is then saved as an MP4 file (Figure 14).
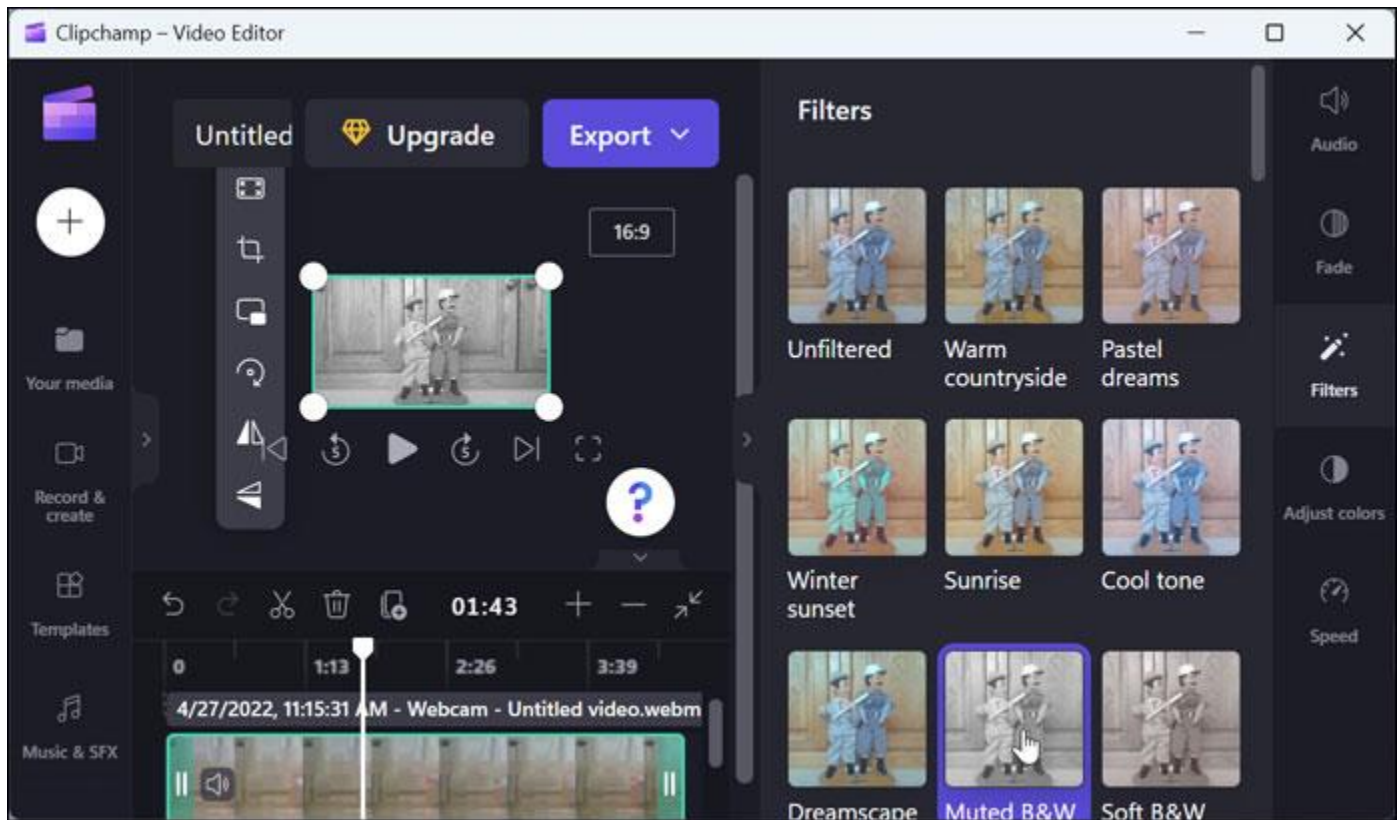
Figure 14. After sprucing up your video with filters and effects, save it as an MP4 file.

Microsoft could have used the 22H2 update to radically enhance Windows 11 and make it more palatable for the average user. But many of the improvements we did get are useful and helpful in their own small ways. If you're running Windows 11 and are intrigued by some of these new features, then the update is certainly worth installing.