How do I "Add Existing Item" an entire directory structure in Visual Studio?

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I have a free standing set of files not affiliated with any C# project at all that reside in a complicated nested directory structure.

I want to add them in that format to a different directory in an ASP.NET web application I am working on; while retaining the same structure. So, I copied the folder into the target location of my project and I tried to "add existing item" only to lose the previous folder hierarchy.

Usually I have re-created the directories by hand, copied across on a one-to-one basis, and then added existing items. There are simply too many directories/items in this case.

So how do you add existing directories and files in Visual Studio 2008?

visual-studio   ide

edited Dec 12 '18 at 22:19
Peter Mortensen
14.2k   19   88   114

asked Sep 11 '08 at 22:09
Ian Patrick Hughes
5,797   3   25   36

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38   The fact that this isn't obvious for most people (including me) is a sad testament about Visual Studio. – Pete Alvin Apr 29 '16 at 14:41

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22   @Pete Alvin I have many sad testaments about Visual Studio but appreciate it more now that I have spent time with some of the other IDE's out there. – Freek Nortier Jul 14 '16 at 13:48

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4   Visual studio isn't perfect however, I have used just about every IDE available. If is the best. Eclipse isn't even close, Xcode is probably the only one that comes close. – user1127081 Dec 11 '17 at 15:51 🖉

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2   @user1127081: I have to second this. Visual Studio is quite far from perfect, but I have used pretty much every other IDE for pretty much every development and target OS out there and they are all a hell of a lot worse. I also have to agree that Xcode is clearly and by far the best of the rest, but it became so only after it has approved a lot between Xcode 3 and Xcode 4. Eclipse is just a nightmare. – Kaiserludi Apr 24 '18 at 12:44 🖉

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17 Answers

edited Jan 6 '14 at 22:38   answered Sep 11 '08 at 22:10

Kevin Crumley   Darren Kopp
4,409   3   22   31   **61.8k**   9   67   87

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40   This doesn't work for me. It just gives me the icon of an invalid drop target. The show all files below works perfectly though – Cine Oct 26 '10 at 3:25

113 In VS 2010, after draggin got the folder, choose the option to Show All Files in the project. The files exist in "ghosted" form, right click on the folder and Include in Project. They will then be added – John Ptacek Mar 1 '11 at 11:26

8   @JohnPtacek: That works in a project, but not in the solution. – Will Dec 1 '11 at 22:08

8   Kill explorer.exe using the task manager, start it as administrator and then you can drag and drop to Visual Studio even if its running as Administrator. – xander Jan 24 '14 at 12:51

3   95% certain that Hossein Shahdoost's comment isn't the best option... – Kristopher Oct 22 '15 at 16:02

Enable *"Show All Files"* for the specific project (you might need to hit "Refresh" to see them)**.

539

The folders/files that are not part of your project *appear slightly "lighter"* in the project tree.

Right click the folders/files you want to add and click *"Include In Project"*. It will recursively add folders/files to the project.

** These buttons are located on the mini Solution Explorer toolbar.

** Make sure you are NOT in debug mode.

edited Dec 12 '18 at 22:23   answered Sep 11 '08 at 22:15

Peter Mortensen   Brannon
14.2k   19   88   114   **22.7k**   4   34   42

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2   It seems that this only works for files deeper than your project file, if you keep your project file in a folder on its own, this wont work. – Danny Parker Sep 22 '11 at 16:16

9   tip - ensure the project is selected, not the solution - then you can do show all! – niico Dec 29 '13 at 15:56

89

In Solution Explorer:

1. Click *Show All Files* (second icon from the left at the top of Solution Explorer).

2. Locate the folder you want to add.

3. Right-click and select *"Include in Project"*

I use this to install add-ons like HTML editors and third-party file browsers.

edited Dec 12 '18 at 22:24   answered Jul 10 '12 at 20:00
      Peter Mortensen   Tom
      14.2k   19   88   114   **1,015**   8   12

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15   How is this different than Brannon's answer from 4 years earlier? – ToolmakerSteve May 14 '14 at 22:59

7   This does not address the original problem which is for a *Solution* folder. It has also been previously covered. – user2864740 Feb 6 '15 at 17:25 ✏

     @ToolmakerSteve: It is different in that it is the same as Gant's solution from... 7 years earlier. stackoverflow.com/questions/392473/... – Veverke Apr
     13 '15 at 14:21 ✏

     Highly recommend this solution as it also helps when conflicting csproj files have been checked in and tfs ignores the conflicts and overwrites –
      John Demetriou May 28 '15 at 12:20

5   +1. I found this answer more helpful than the others because it makes it (relatively) clear that Show All Files is an *icon*, not an entry on the context
     menu. – user565869 Oct 19 '15 at 18:19

34

I just want to point out that two of the solutions offered previously,

• Drag and drop from Windows Explorer

Show All Files and then include in project

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At least not in my case (C++/CLI project Visual Studio 2013 on Windows 7).

In Visual Studio, once you are back in the normal view (not *Show All Files*), the files you added are all listed at the top level of the project.

Yes, on disk they still reside where they were, but in Solution Explorer they are loose.

I did not find a way around it except recreating the directory structure in Solution Explorer and then doing *Add Existing Items* at the right location.

edited Dec 12 '18 at 22:32   answered Jul 24 '14 at 0:22

Peter Mortensen   ILIA BROUDNO
14.2k   19   88   114   **983**   11   15

I see the same behavior, VS2010, c++. – Radim Cernej Sep 5 '14 at 17:05

True, also in Visual Studio 2010. It doesn't even add the files without a directory structure for me, just the very first file within that folder structure and not any subfolders. – Jonas Jan 23 '15 at 14:33

2   Agreed, it still differs. I wonder how a popular and expensive software such as VS can lack such a feature. I consider it rather confusing to have two different yet similar structures in the solution explorer and windows explorer... – Janis Feb 3 '15 at 12:41

12   Using 2015 here; still doesn't preserve folder structure. Stunned. – Toby Deshane Jan 2 '16 at 14:55

Using 2015 Update 3, just had success with the approach from Bannon and Tom. All nested folders came in as expected. – John Hatton Mar 13 '17 at 21:34

I didn't immediately understand this based upon these descriptions but here is what I finally stumbled on:

22

1. Turn on "Show All Files" - there is an icon on the Solution Explorer toolbar

2. Using Windows Explorer (not solution explorer), move your files into the directory structure where you want them to reside

3. Click "Refresh" also on the Solution Explorer toolbar

4. The files that you've moved should be visible "ghosted" in the Solution Explorer tree structure where you've placed them

2   This is for a solution folder, not a project. – StingyJack Jan 8 '17 at 2:16

16

Below is the icon for the 'Show All Files', just for easy reference.

edited Dec 12 '18 at 22:35   answered Jul 25 '16 at 7:45

Peter Mortensen   Marvin Glenn Lacuna
14.2k   19   88   114   976   1   10   23

11
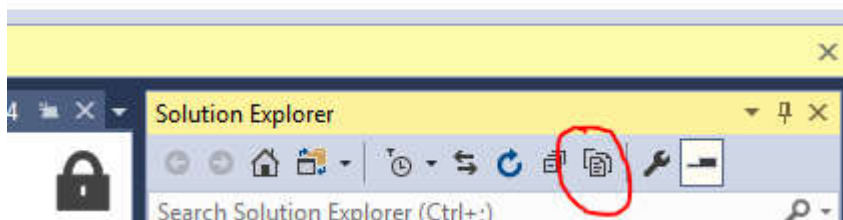
Click above in the red circle. Your folder will appear in Solution Explorer.

Right click on your folder -> *Include in project*.

edited Dec 14 '18 at 18:32   answered May 1 '18 at 20:02

                                     Manoj Kalluri

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NPM.

8

This is for older MSBuild / Visual Studio versions

```
<ItemGroup>
    <Item
Include="$([System.IO.Directory]::GetFiles(&quot;$(MSBuildProjectDirectory)\node_modules&q
</Item>
</ItemGroup>
```

For the current MSBuild / Visual Studio versions:

Just put it in the nodes of the xml:

```
<Project>
</Project>
```

In this case just change $(MSBuildProjectDirectory)\node_modules to your folder name.

edited Dec 12 '18 at 22:33	answered Jun 11 '15 at 6:06
Peter Mortensen	Bjego
14.2k 19 88 114	**360** 2 10

Yep, sometimes hand-editing the *.*proj file will get you where you want to go. – Chris O May 19 '16 at 19:25

1   So you're saying someone could make a plugin to batch-do this? Because I ain't recreating a folder structure with tens of folders by hand in an xml –
Spectraljump Dec 8 '16 at 14:39

Exactly what I was looking for – Vitaliy Kalinin Jun 19 '18 at 10:35

You need to put your directory structure in your project directory. And then click "Show All Files" icon in the top of Solution Explorer toolbox. After that, the added directory will be shown up. You will then need to select this directory, right click, and choose "Include in Project."

1   This is pretty much what the accepted answer suggests and one of the comments under it. — Kev Nov 20 '11 at 15:39

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4   At last, Visual Studio 2017 allows the user to import an entire directory with a single click. Visual Studio 2017 has a new functionality **"Open Folder"** that allows opening the entire folder, even without the need to save it as solution. The source code can be imported using the following methods.

1. Menu *File → Open → *Folder (Ctrl + Shift + O)

2. `devenv.exe  <source folder>`

It even supports building and debugging CMake projects.

Bring your C++ codebase to Visual Studio with "Open Folder"

edited Dec 12 '18 at 22:41   answered Mar 23 '17 at 12:18

Peter Mortensen   Naren
14.2k   19   88   114   **1,827**   1   20   40

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3   This is what I do:

1. Right click on solution -> Add -> Existing Website...
2. Choose the folder where your website is. Just the root folder of the site.

Then everything will be added on your solution from folders to files, and files inside those folders.

answered Apr 28 '17 at 5:43

Willy David Jr
4,386   2   19   29

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Peter Mortensen
14.2k   19   88   114

Yatrix
7,157   11   31   60

1

What worked for me was to drag the folder into Visual Studio, then right click the folder and select "Open Folder in File Explorer". Then select all and drag them into the folder in Visual Studio.

edited Dec 17 '18 at 16:07   answered Aug 2 '16 at 20:43

Nick
1,355   2   16   39

1

There is now an open-source extension in the Marketplace that seems to do what the OP was asking for:

[Folder To Solution Folder](#)

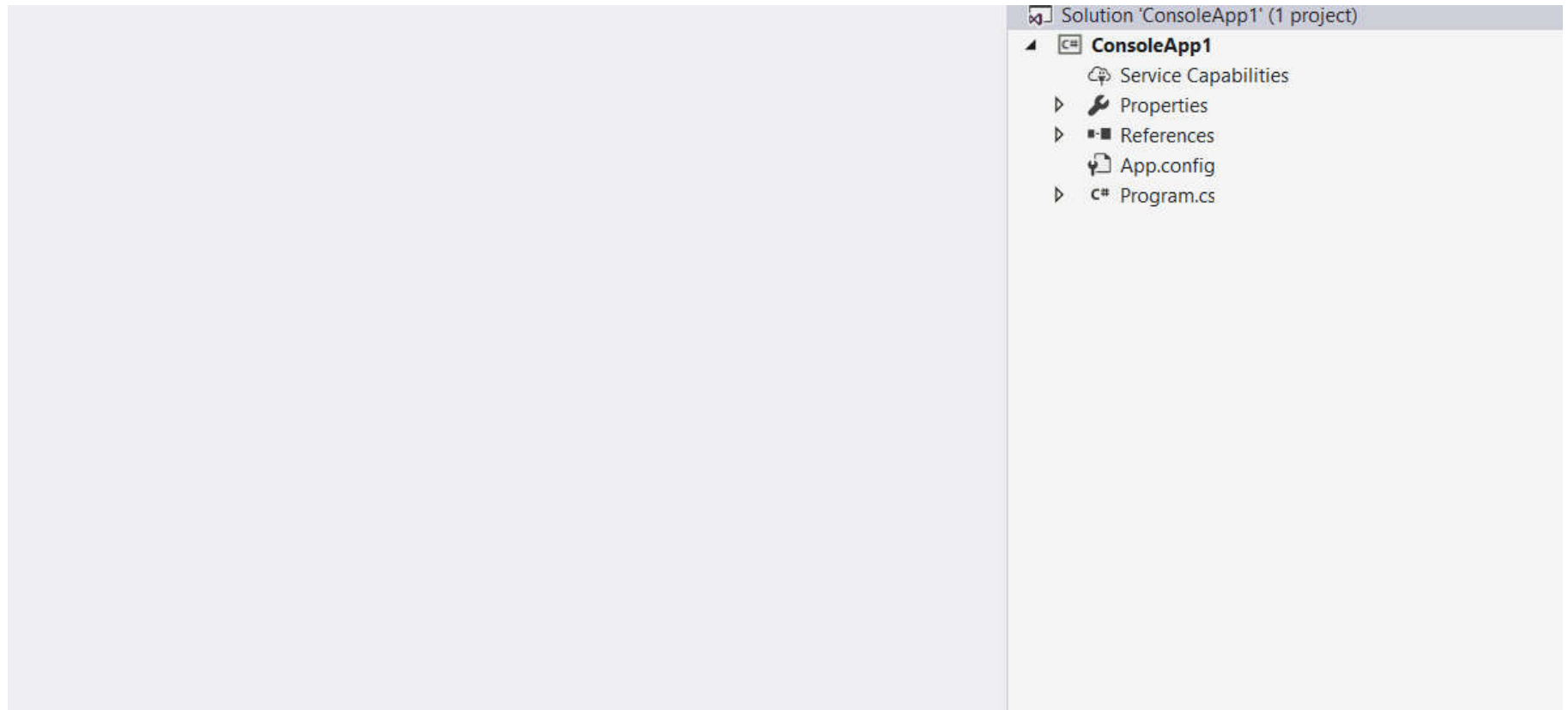**Join Stack Overflow** to learn, share knowledge, and build your career.

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If it doesn't do exactly what you want, the code is available, so you can modify it to suit your scenario.

HTH

answered Apr 4 at 14:03

Yann Duran
3,441   1   18   21

In Windows 7 you could do the following:

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Email Sign Up   OR SIGN IN WITH   G Google   Facebook

edited Nov 29 '12 at 11:23   answered Nov 29 '12 at 11:05

Gijs   user1395598

4,129   1   22   42   **17**   1

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5   This does not maintain directory structure - it just puts everything at the folder where you clicked add. — Marc Feb 26 '14 at 13:14

The cleanest way that I've found to do this is to create a new Class Library project in the target folder, and redirect all of its build output elsewhere. It still leaves a .csproj file sitting in that folder, but it does let you see it in Visual Studio and pick which files to include in your project.

0

answered Oct 7 '16 at 13:31

Jason Kester

3,773   9   30   38

It's annoying that Visual Studio doesn't support this natively, but CMake could generate the Visual Studio project as a work around.

Other than that, just use Qt Creator. It can then export a Visual Studio project.

-4

edited Dec 12 '18 at 22:34   answered Jan 2 '16 at 18:31

Peter Mortensen   lama12345

14.2k   19   88   114   **2,541**   1   21   24

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protected by Travis J Oct 31 '13 at 19:31

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