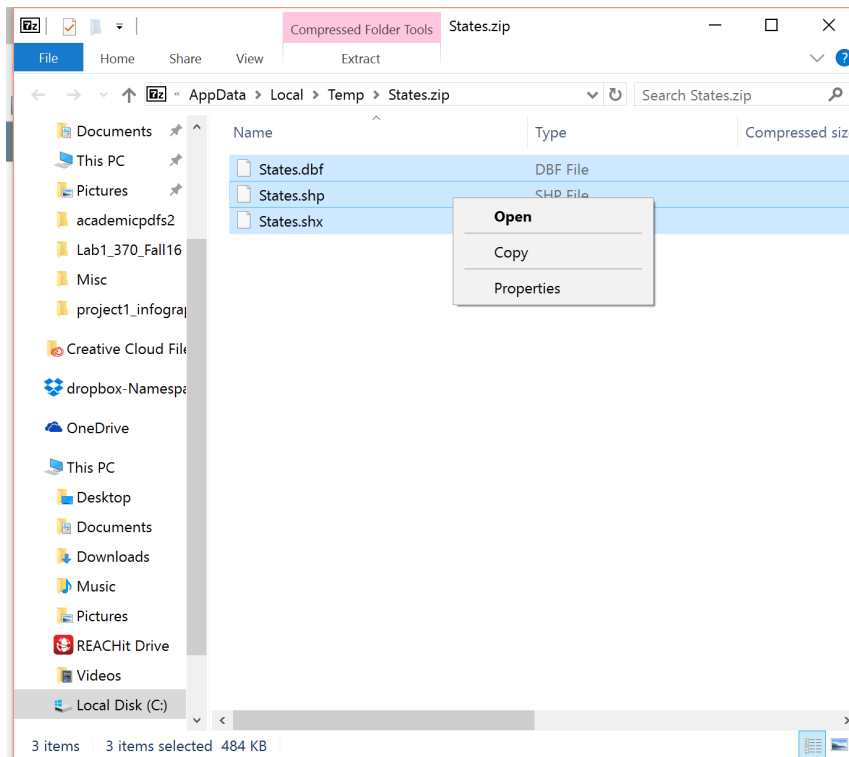How to get a Mapshaper simplified file to display in ArcMap
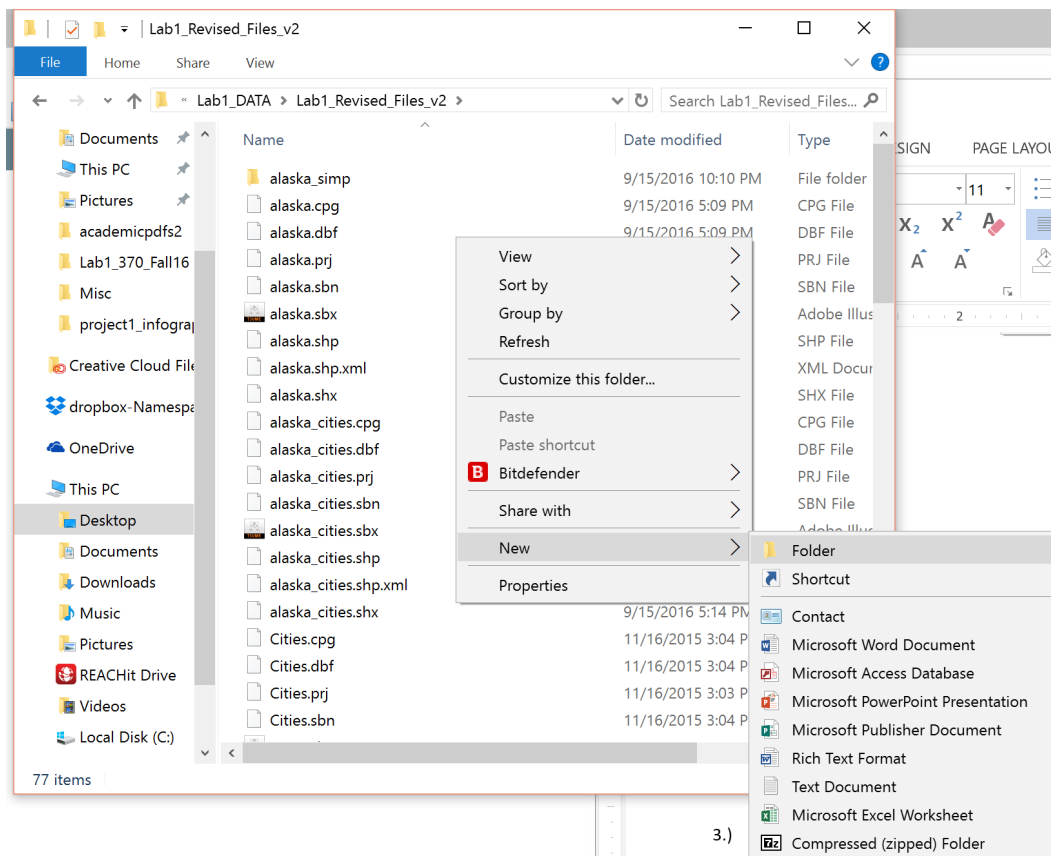
1.) download generalized file (export -> Shapefile)

> Note: the instructions below assume that you are using Windows explorer. If you are using Windows explorer, stop here and go to step 2. If you are using another file manager like 7zip, you want to put the unzipped files into a new folder with a descriptive name. Do not unzip the files into your lab folder: they have the same name as the original files and you will not be able to tell the difference between them. After you do this, skip to step 5.

2.) Open the zipped folder containing the files and copy the files (right click -> copy). DO NOT UNZIP THE FILES INTO YOUR LAB FOLDER. See below for the reason you should not do this!
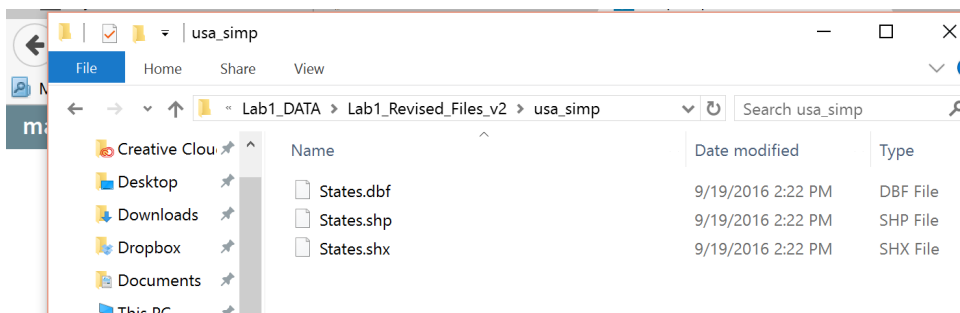

3.) create a folder in your lab folder for the generalized files to go into (right click -> new -> folder) This is very important because Mapshaper will give the same name to the generalized files as the old files. If the generalized files go into the same folder as the other files, you will have a hard time telling the difference between the generalized shapefile and the original shapefile. Give the file a descriptive name (e.g. usa_simp). Remember never to include any spaces in any file / folder associated with ArcMap.

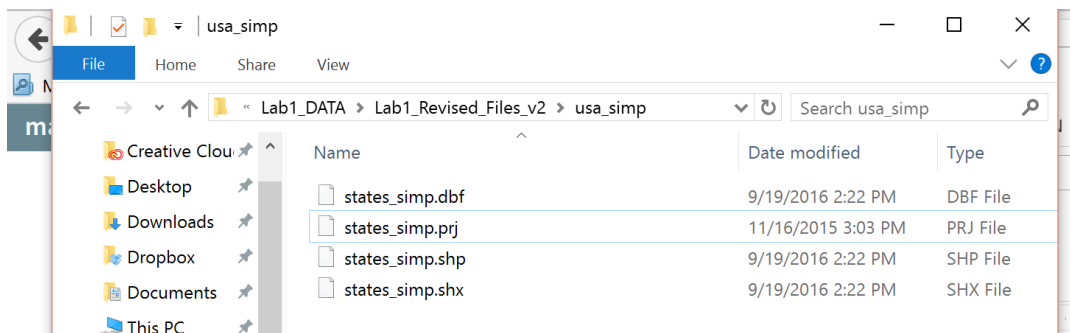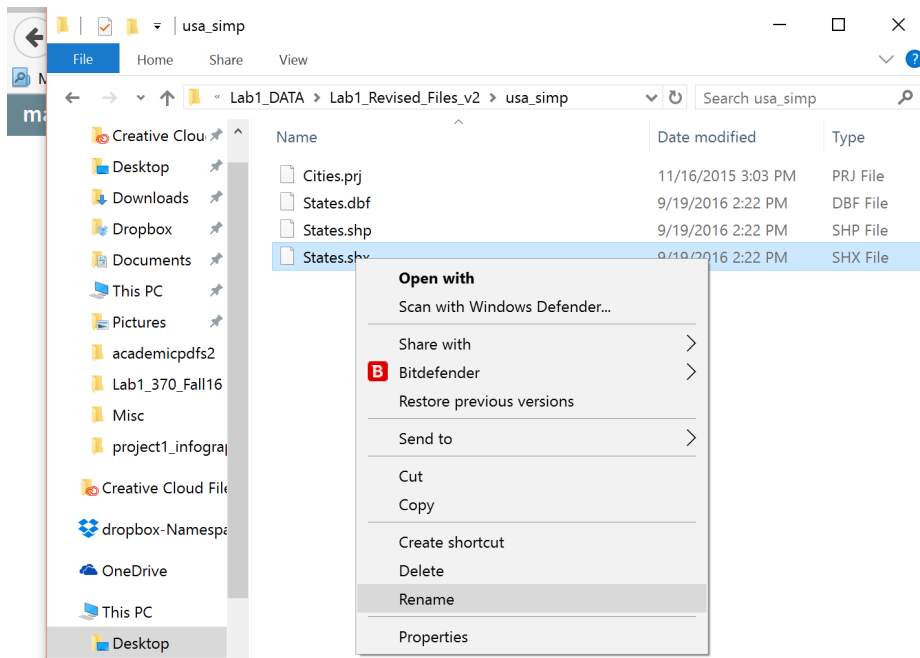4.) Enter the new folder. Right click and paste in the new files.

5.) Your new folder should look like this:

Notice that you have 3 files – a .dbf, a .shp and a .shx. But, mapshaper did NOT give you a .prj, which is needed to project your shapefile. But! You have plenty of .prj files in your lab folder. Copy / paste any .prj file from your lab folder into the folder with your generalized files.

6. Once the .prj is in your folder with your generalized files, you are almost done! Your last step is the most important step: change the name of all of your generalized files & your copied .prj to the same name. ArcMap needs these files to have the same name so that it can combine them into a shapefile! It is very important that you change the name to reflect the fact that these files are generalized.

Otherwise, ArcMap (&you!) may not be able to tell the files apart. Right click & select 'rename.' Remember not to include any spaces in the file name.

When this is complete, you have successfully prepared your generalized files for use in ArcMap!