

Chapter 1

Introducing Money

In This Chapter

- ▶ Understanding how Money tracks your finances
- ▶ Getting the program started
- ▶ Getting acquainted with the Money windows
- ▶ Deciding what goes on the Home page
- ▶ Turning Money off
- ▶ Running Money Express

Chapter 1 is where you get your feet wet. Don't be shy. Walk right to the shore and sink your toes in the water. Don't worry; I won't push you from behind. Not so bad, is it?

In this chapter, you discover the various ways that Money 2004 can help you stay on top of your finances. You also discover how to start the program, find your way around the Money windows, and run Money Express, Money's sleek companion program for people who are in a hurry.

Finding Out How Money Tracks Your Finances

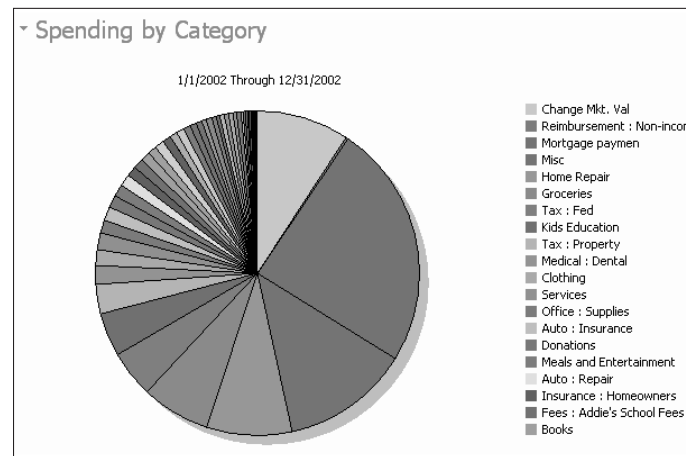
All the personal finance advisors agree that keeping good, accurate records is the first step toward financial security. Before you can start saving for a down payment on a house, you have to know how much you are capable of saving. Before you can tell whether your investments are doing well, you have to track them carefully. If you want to make sound financial decisions, you need to know what your spending habits are and how much income you really have.

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Microsoft Money 2004 makes keeping accurate financial records very, very easy. After you use the program for a while, you will know precisely what your account balances are, what your net worth is, and how much your investments — if you have investments — are worth. To find out precisely how much you spend in different areas, all you have to do is generate a chart like the one in Figure 1-1 (Chapter 14 explains how). At tax time, you can run a report that lists and totals all your tax-deductible expenses. With Money, you can print checks, do your banking over the Internet, find out exactly what your spending habits are, compare loans and mortgages, plan for retirement, and track and analyze different kinds of investments. Money 2004, in fact, offers many more techniques for handling and analyzing investments than did its predecessors.

Figure 1-1:
By carefully
entering
your
financial
data, you
can create
meaningful
charts like
this one.



Entering data correctly in Money is essential. Money can't do its job well unless you carefully and conscientiously enter financial data. If all you want to do is balance your savings and checking accounts, you've got it made, because Money offers lots of opportunities for double-checking the accuracy of transactions in savings and checking accounts. However, to track investments and loans, draw up a budget, or do a handful of other sophisticated things, you need to take care when you enter the data.

Starting the Program

Starting Money is as easy as falling off a log. You can start the program from the menus or by means of the Microsoft Money shortcut icon on the desktop:

If you have never used Money before . . .

The first time you run Money, the Setup Assistant comes on-screen and offers to help you get going. The Setup Assistant does the following:

- ✓ Creates a file for storing your financial transactions. The file is called My Money.
- ✓ Offers to Interview you about your financial plans and interests. Money will do a bit of setup work in the background on the basis of the answers you give.

- ✓ Offers to help you set up accounts in Money.

Rather than let yourself be grilled by the Setup Assistant, I recommend clicking the Skip the Setup Assistant and Start Using Money Now hyperlink. You can create bank accounts and set up categories later. Personally, I think you need to know more about Money before you get down to the nitty-gritty.

- ✓ **From the menus:** Click the Start button, choose Programs (or All Programs), and choose Microsoft Money 2004.

- ✓ **Microsoft Money shortcut icon:** Double-click the Microsoft Money 2004 shortcut icon on the desktop.



When you installed Money (after the first time), the installation program should have put a Money shortcut icon on the desktop, but if you didn't, you can still create a shortcut icon for starting Money. To do so, follow the standard Windows procedure for creating shortcut icons:

1. **Click the Start button and choose Programs (or All Programs).**
2. **Locate the Microsoft Money 2004 menu command and right-click it.**
A shortcut menu appears.
3. **Choose Send To→Desktop (Create Shortcut).**

The shortcut icon appears on the Windows desktop.

A Fast Trip around the Money Windows

When arriving in a foreign city, the first thing most people do, after finding a hotel room and taking a shower, is go for a stroll. In the following pages, you can stroll very gingerly across the Money screens. Enjoy yourself and take your sweet time. And don't forget to put film in the camera before leaving the hotel.

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The Home page

When you start Money, the first thing you see is the *Home page*, shown in Figure 1-2. The Home page is the starting point for all your excursions in Money. Don't worry — the Home page is not as complicated as it looks. It offers a peek at different aspects of your finances, buttons that you can click to go to different Money windows, and links to sites on the Internet. If you roll the mouse carefully just about anywhere on the Home page, you find *hyperlinks* — links that you can click to visit a new Money window. Sometimes a little butterfly appears beside the mouse pointer when you move it over a button or hyperlink. That butterfly means that clicking the button or link takes you to a Web site on the Internet.



Notice the Home button in the upper-left corner of the screen. No matter how far you stray from the Home page, you can always click the Home button (or press Alt+Home) to return to it. The button is always there. Click it if you get homesick.

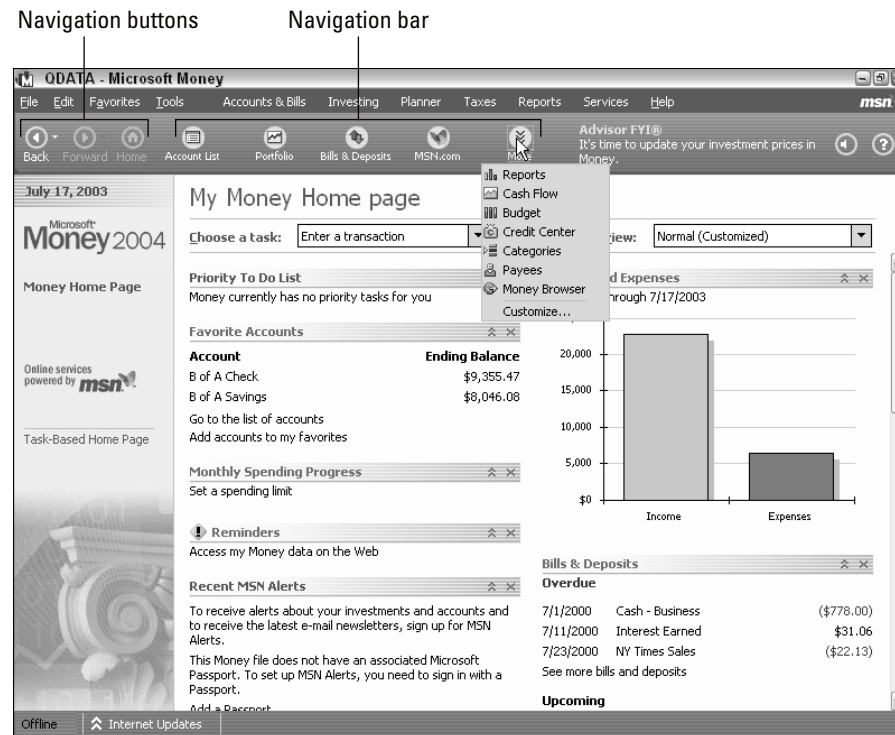


Figure 1-2: The Home page is the starting point for all activity in Money.

You can decide for yourself what appears on the Home page. Later in this chapter, the section “Personalizing the Home page” explains how to put what matters most to you on the Home page.

Going from window to window: The Navigation bar and Navigation buttons

Besides clicking the Home button to return to the Home page, you can also go from window to window by clicking buttons on the Navigation bar, by making a selection in the Choose a Task drop-down list, or by clicking the Back or Forward button. The Navigation bar and Navigation buttons, as with the Home button, are always available and ready to be clicked. The Choose a Task drop-down list is found on the Home page.

The Navigation bar

The *Navigation bar* is the strip along the top of the screen below the menu bar. (I don’t know why Microsoft chose the name Navigation bar. On most ships, the navigator sits in the wheelhouse, not in the bar.) Account List is the leftmost button on the Navigation bar; the More button is the rightmost button. By clicking a button, you can visit other windows in Money. By clicking the More button, you make more button choices available on the Navigation bar (refer to Figure 1-2).

Table 1-1 explains where the buttons on the Navigation bar take you. The table is here to show you what happens when you click a button and to give you a glimpse of the different tasks you can do with Money. Try clicking a button to start your own adventures in Money.

Table 1-1 Navigation Bar Buttons and Where They Take You	
<i>Clicking This Button</i>	<i>Takes You to . . .</i>
Account List	The Bank Accounts window, which lists the name of each account you set up. You can click an account name to go to its account register. Open the Bank Account window when you want to set up an account, enter account transactions, balance an account, or bank online. (See Chapters 2 and 3.)
Portfolio	The Portfolio window, where you can track stocks, bonds, mutual funds, and other investment holdings. Start here when you want to download security prices from the Internet. (See Chapter 17.)

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Table 1-1 (continued)

<i>Clicking This Button</i>	<i>Takes You to . . .</i>
Bills & Deposits	The Bills & Deposits window, where you can record the bills you pay regularly and enlist the Money program's help in paying those bills on time. You can also record automatic deposits in this window. (See Chapter 12.)
MSN.com	MSN.com, a Web portal operated by the Microsoft Corporation, where you can get the latest news, search the Internet, or read articles. You can also personalize this Web page and get financial information that pertains to securities you own. Notice that the Web page appears in the Money window, not in your Web browser window. Click the Money button (you will find it next to the Forward navigation button) to return to Money. (See Chapter 17.)
Reports	The Reports window, where you can generate reports and charts that show right away where you stand financially. (See Chapter 14.)
Cash Flow	The Cash Flow window, where you can forecast what your future income and account balances will be. (See Chapter 12.)
Budget	The Budget window, where you can formulate a budget and find out whether you're meeting your budget goals. (See Chapter 11.)
Credit Center	The Credit window, where you can generate a credit report and formulate a plan to get out of debt. (See Chapter 12.)
Categories	The Set Up Your Categories window, where you create and manage categories, as well as list information about the businesses and people to whom you make payments. (See Chapter 4.)
Payees	The Payees window, where you can track the people and businesses to whom you made payments. (See Chapter 10.)
Money Browser	The MSN Web portal, where you can check your e-mail (if you have a Hotmail account), read the latest news, or investigate investment opportunities.

Navigation buttons: Back and Forward



The Back and Forward buttons work exactly like the Back and Forward buttons in a Web browser such as Netscape Navigator or Internet Explorer. Click the Back button to return to a window you visited; click the Forward button to revisit a window you retreated from.



Next to both the Back and Forward buttons is a little downward-pointing arrow. Click the little arrow and you see a shortcut menu that lists the windows you visited. I recommend clicking the little arrows beside the Back and Forward buttons early and often. Clicking the arrows and choosing window names is the fastest way to get from place to place in Money.

Personalizing the Home Page

When you start Money 2004, you see the Home page (refer to Figure 1-2). The Home page is supposed to give you a quick look at your finances, and if you play your cards right, it can do that. As shown in Figure 1-3, you can change views on the Home page and peek into a different aspect of your finances by choosing an option from the Choose a View drop-down list. You can, for example, see which bills are due, check account balances, and find out roughly how much in taxes you owe.

Your finances, however, are yours and yours alone, so sooner or later — when you get better acquainted with Money — you need to strip the Home page of all the stuff that Money has put on it and decide for yourself what goes there.

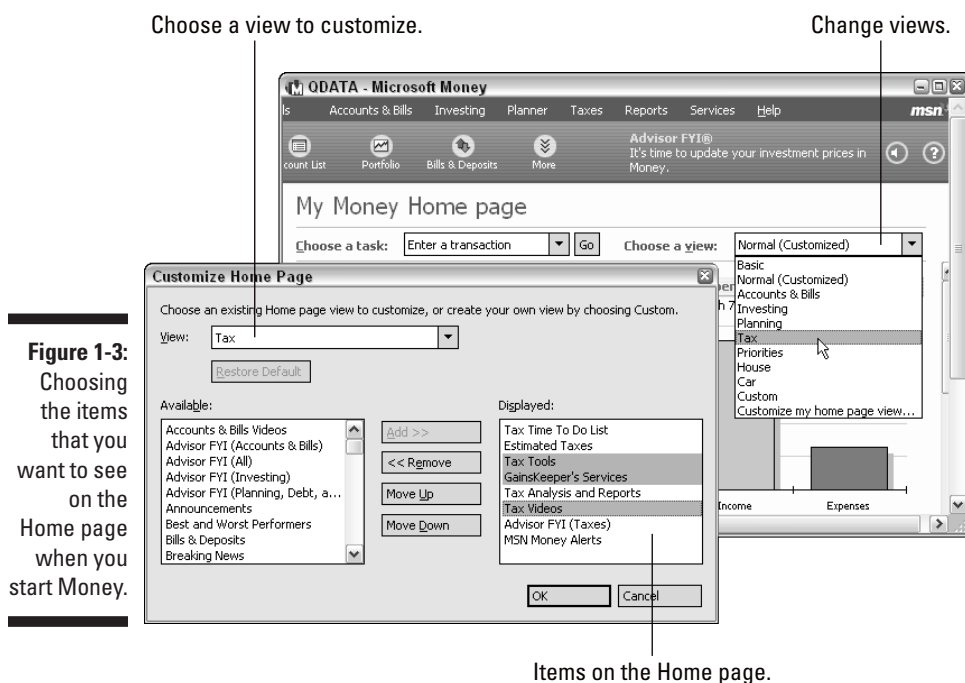


Figure 1-3: Choosing the items that you want to see on the Home page when you start Money.

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To personalize your Home page, start by following these steps:

1. Open the Customize Home page dialog box, shown in Figure 1-3.

Do one of the following to open this dialog box:

- Open the Choose a View drop-down list and choose the last option, Customize My Home page View.
- Choose **T**ools⇨**O**ptions, select the Feedback tab in the Options dialog box, and click the **C**ustomize button under Home page Customization.

2. Choose which view you want to customize from the View drop-down list.

Do the view names look familiar? They are the same views you can choose from on the Choose a View list on the Home page (refer to Figure 1-3). Choose Custom if you want to create a Home page from scratch.

3. To select which items will be on view, select them one at a time in the Available box and click the Add button.

4. To remove an item, select it and click the Remove button.

5. To decide the order in which items appear on the Home page, click the Move Up or Move Down button.

6. Click OK when your customized Home page is just right.



The fastest way to remove an item from the Home page is to click the X on the bar to the right of its name. I suggest doing that right away to all the advertisements for credit cards and stock-trading companies on the Home page. Who needs another advertisement? To get rid of all the advertisements on Money screens, choose Tools⇨Options, click the General tab in the Options dialog box, and select the Turn Off Sponsorships and Shopping Links check box.

Some people prefer a task-based Home page. To see what that is, click the [Task-Based Home page](#) link on the Home page (you can find it on the left side of the Home page window). As shown in Figure 1-4, the task-based Home page is for people who want to complete tasks in a hurry. If you don't care for the task-based Home page, click the [Return to Main Home page](#) link to dispense with it.

Shutting Down Money

When the time comes to close the Money program and get on with your real life, do one of the following:

- ✓ Click the Close button (the X in the upper-right corner of the program window).
- ✓ Choose **F**ile⇨**E**xit.
- ✓ Press Alt+F4.

Choosing which window appears at startup

Suppose that you don't care to see the Home page when you start Money. Maybe you prefer another window, an account register, or the window you were looking at when you closed the program last time around. Follow these steps to choose which window you see when you start the program:

1. Choose **Tools**→**Options** to open the Options dialog box.
2. Click the **General** tab.
3. Under **Display**, open the **Start Money with This Page Open** drop-down list and choose the window you would like to see. The **Last Place Used** option opens Money to whichever window was showing when you last closed the program.
4. Click **OK**.



Figure 1-4:
A task-based Home page.



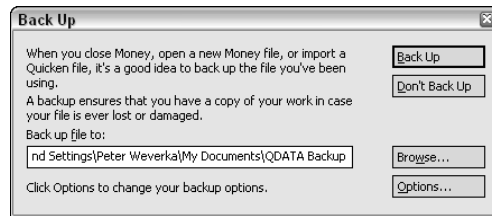
Veteran computer users are accustomed to saving files before exiting a program, but that isn't necessary with Money because the program saves data as soon as you enter it. If you look for a Save command or button in Money, you will look in vain — there isn't one.

When you shut down Money, the last thing you see is the Back Up dialog box, as shown in Figure 1-5. This dialog box makes backing up the data you just

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entered in Money very easy, and I strongly recommend taking advantage of it. Chapter 10 explains everything you need to know about backing up a data file, including how to tell Money where to back up a data file. For now, click the Back Up button to be done with it.

Figure 1-5:
The Back Up dialog box is your cue to make a backup copy of the Money file.



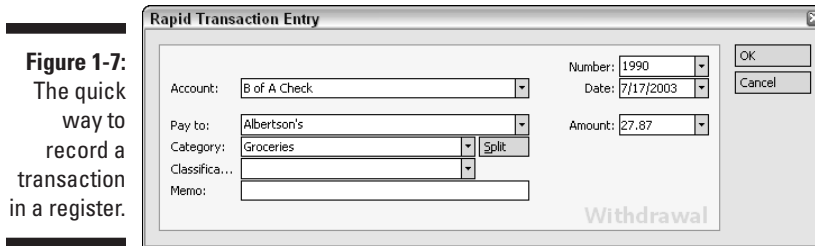
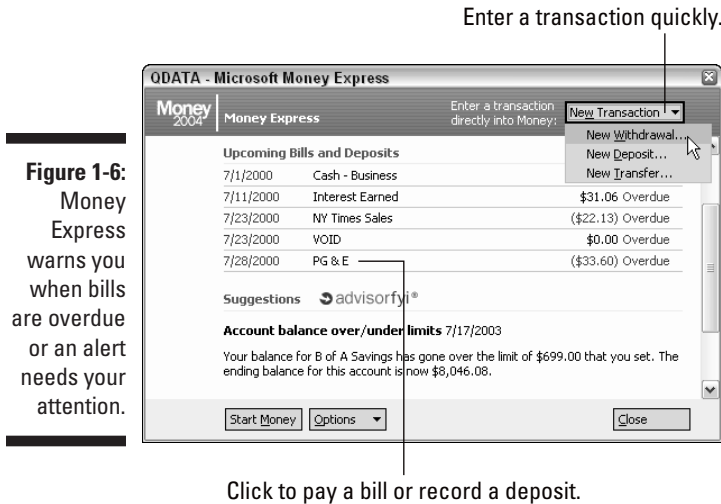
Money Express: The Fast Way to Enter Transactions



You probably didn't know it when you purchased Money 2004, but you got a second program as well. You got Money's little brother, Money Express, a program whose purpose is to keep you on your toes and help you enter transactions quickly. When an FYI Advisor alert needs your attention (see Chapter 12) or a bill is overdue or needs to be paid soon (see Chapter 11), the Money Express program icon appears in the notification area (also called the *system tray*) in the lower-right corner of the screen next to the clock. At any time, you can double-click the Money Express icon to open the Money Express window, as shown in Figure 1-6.

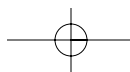
You can handle overdue bills and deposits, handle FYI alerts, and even enter transactions on the fly in Money Express:

- ✓ **An upcoming or overdue bill or deposit:** Click the bill's name or the deposit's name in the Money Express window to open Money to the Bills & Deposits window, and pay the bill or record the deposit there.
- ✓ **FYI Alert:** Read all about 'em in the Money Express window and try not to wring your hands or sweat profusely while you are being alerted.
- ✓ **New transaction:** Click the **New Transaction** button in the Money Express window and choose an option from the drop-down list that appears to quickly enter a withdrawal, deposit, or money transfer in the Rapid Transaction Entry dialog box, as Figure 1-7 shows. Whether or not you open the Money program, the transaction you enter in the dialog box is recorded in a Money register. You'll see it the next time you open Money.



Some people don't like Money Express. They object to the Money Express icon crowding the notification area of their computer screen. Do one of the following to turn off Money Express and prevent its icon from appearing:

- ✓ In Money Express, click the Options button and choose Configure Money Express from the pop-up menu. In the Money Express Configuration dialog box, deselect the Run Money Express on Startup check box.
- ✓ In Money choose Tools⇨Options, click the Bills and Deposits tab in the Options dialog box, and deselect the Use Money Express option.



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