

Getting Started

On the cover of this book, we promise that even beginners will be able to understand it. As a beginner, you need to know some basic things right off the bat. For example, to understand what Windows XP is, you first have to understand what software is. And to understand what software is, you have to first know what hardware is. Let's start with first things first.

Getting to Know Your Computer's Hardware

Your PC (Personal Computer) is a system consisting of many individual components. Not everybody has exactly the same PC or exactly the same components. But regardless of whether you're using a desktop computer or a notebook, your PC will probably have most of the components shown in Figure 1-1.

Your computer probably has at least one floppy disk drive, into which you can insert a floppy disk. You probably have a CD drive or DVD drive as well, into which you can insert CDs and DVDs. Floppy disks, CDs, and DVDs are often referred to as removable media, because you can stick a disk into these drives, use the disks, and remove them from the drives when you don't need to use the disks anymore.

Inside your computer is another disk drive called the *hard drive*. This disk drive also goes by several other names, including *hard disk*, *fixed disk*, *primary drive*, or just C:. Your hard disk is an example of *nonremovable media*, so-named because you can't take the hard disk out of its drive. In fact, you can't even see the hard drive, because it's inside the system unit, as illustrated in Figure 1-2.

CHAPTER 1



In This Chapter

Getting to know your computer's hardware

Getting to know your computer's software

Using icons

Working common controls

The right way to turn off your computer



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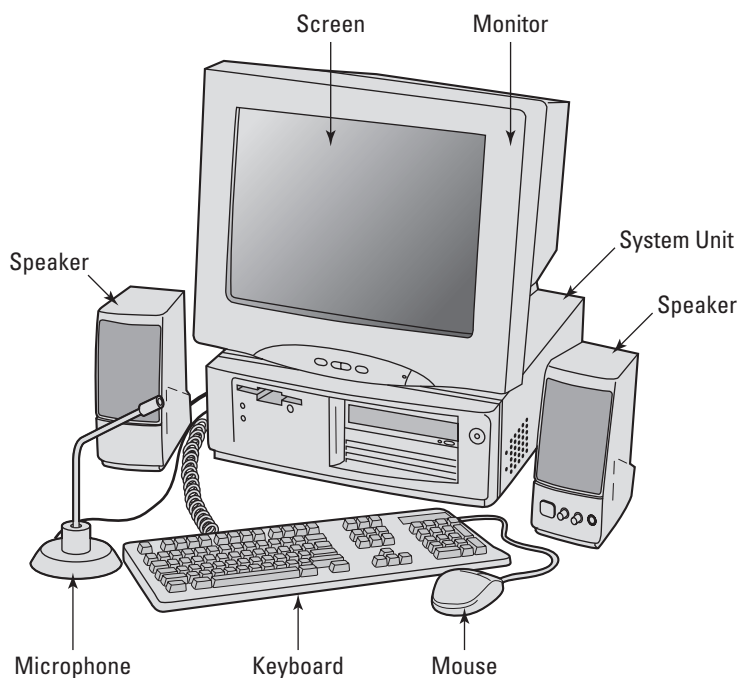


Figure 1-1: Major hardware components of a typical PC

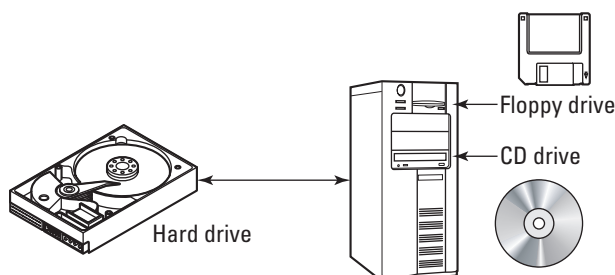


Figure 1-2: Disk drives on a typical PC

Using Your Mouse

The easiest way to operate your computer (especially if you can't type worth beans) is with your mouse. Most mice have two buttons; some mice have a wheel between the buttons. The mouse button on the left is called the *primary mouse button*. The mouse button on the right is called the *secondary mouse button*, as shown in Figure 1-3. In a nutshell, you use the primary (left) mouse button when you want the computer to do something. You use the secondary (right) mouse button when you want to see your options before you do anything.

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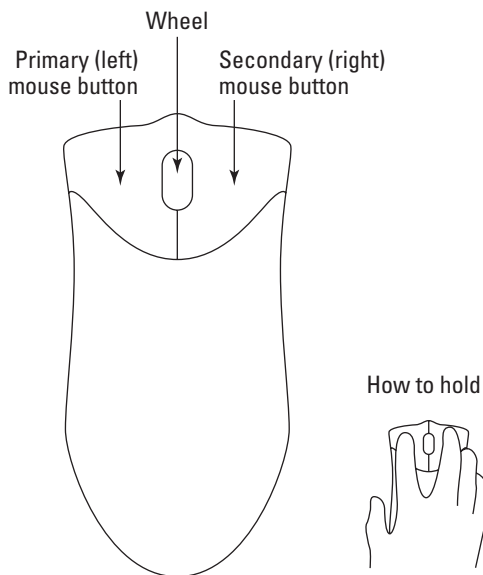


Figure 1-3: A typical mouse and how to hold it

The idea is to rest your hand comfortably on the mouse with your index finger lightly on (or near) the left mouse button, as is also shown in Figure 1-3. As you move the mouse around (without holding down either of the mouse buttons), the mouse pointer on the screen moves in the same direction that you move the mouse.



When moving the mouse, keep the front of the mouse aimed toward the screen. Don't twist or turn the mouse. If the mouse gets out of reach, just pick it up off the table, and set it down in a more comfortable position.

A mouse is an example of a *pointing device*, a gadget that lets you point to and click things on the screen. If you're using a notebook computer, your pointing device might not be a mouse. It might be a touchpad or trackball. But it will still have a primary (left) and secondary (right) mouse button. If you have difficulty using your notebook's pointing device, the best place to look for information is the documentation that comes with your computer.

Some standard terminology describes things you can do with the mouse. You'll see these terms used in all sorts of instructions — not just in this book. Boring as the terms may be, you might want to spend a little time getting to know them, so you can understand any written instructions you come across.

- ♦ **Mouse pointer:** The little arrow on the screen that moves in whatever direction you move the mouse.
- ♦ **Point:** To move the mouse pointer so that it's touching some item. For example, the phrase "point to the Start button" means move the mouse pointer so that it's resting on the Start button in the lower-left corner of the screen, as shown in Figure 1-4.

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Figure 1-4: Pointing to the Start button



Tip

Pointing to an item often displays its screen tip (also called a tooltip), like the words “Click here to begin” in Figure 1-4. Whenever you’re clueless about what some little symbol on your screen represents, point to it to see whether it has a screen tip.

- ♦ **Click:** Point to the item and then tap (don’t hold down) the primary (left) mouse button.
- ♦ **Double-click:** Point to the item; tap the primary (left) mouse button twice, as quickly as you can.
- ♦ **Right-click:** Point to the item; tap the secondary (left) mouse button.
- ♦ **Drag:** Point to the item and then hold down the primary (left) mouse button while moving the mouse.
- ♦ **Right-drag:** Point to the item and then hold down the secondary (right) mouse button while moving the mouse.
- ♦ **Drop:** Release the mouse button after dragging or right-dragging.

Using Your Keyboard

Like the mouse, the keyboard is a means of interacting with your computer. Most of it is laid out like a typewriter. If you already know how to type, you’re in luck. If you don’t know how to type, I can’t help you there. But you can at least take solace in that you need the keyboard only to type text. You can use the mouse for everything else.

Aside from the regular typewriter keys, you need to recognize some additional keys and areas on the keyboard. Figure 1-5 shows an example, although your keyboard probably won’t look exactly like the one in the figure. But you should be able to find all the keys pointed out, even if your keyboard is arranged a little differently from the example in Figure 1-5.

Navigation Keys and Numeric Keypad

The arrow keys and keys labeled Home, End, and so forth are the *navigation keys*. As you’ll discover throughout the book, you can use those keys to move around in certain types of programs. The *numeric keypad* contains a set of numbers and math symbols laid out exactly as they would be on a standard adding machine. For people who are already quick with a standard adding machine, the numeric keypad offers a familiar way to type lots of numeric information into the computer.

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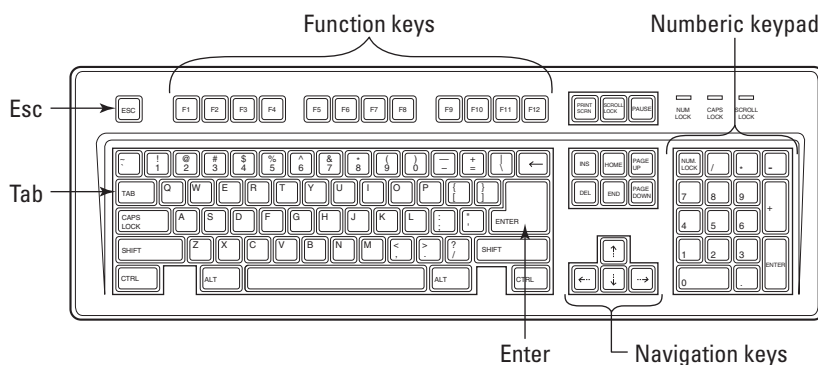


Figure 1-5: A sample computer keyboard

On some keyboards, the navigation keys aren't separate; they are combined with the keys on the numeric keypad. In that case, use the Num Lock key on the keyboard to decide which keys you want to use. When the Num Lock key is On, the numeric keypad acts just like an adding machine's keypad. When the Num Lock key is Off, the navigation keys take over, and the numeric keypad no longer types numbers.

Function Keys

The keys labeled F1, F2, F3, and so forth on your keyboard are called *function keys*. The F1 key is the Help key — you can press that key at any time for help. The exact purposes of the remaining function keys depend on what program you happen to be using.

The Windows and Application Keys

Some computer keyboards have a couple of extra keys specifically designed for Windows. One, named the *Windows key*, shows the flying window logo as shown at top left. If your keyboard has that key, you'll most likely find it between the Alt and Ctrl keys on your keyboard. If your keyboard has an *Application key*, shown at bottom left, that one will likely be near one of the Windows keys on your keyboard.

The Windows and Application keys are entirely optional, so don't fret if your keyboard doesn't have them. Anything you can do with one of those keys, you can also do with the mouse or even some other keys. For example, if you have a Windows key on your keyboard, you can tap it to make the Start menu appear. Whether you have a Windows key or not, you can also make the Start menu appear by clicking the Start button or by pressing Ctrl+Esc. Which brings us to that little plus sign. . .

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Typing Those *key1 + key2* Things

Often when working with computers, you'll see an instruction to press some *combination keystroke*, in the format *key1+key2*. When you see a combination keystroke like that, it means "hold down *key1*, tap *key2*, and release *key1*." Here are some examples:

- ♦ **Ctrl+Esc** means "Hold down the Ctrl key, tap the Esc key, and release the Ctrl key."
- ♦ **Alt+Tab** means "Hold down the Alt key, tap the Tab key, and release the Alt key."
- ♦ **Shift+Enter** means "Hold down the Shift key, tap the Enter key, and release the Shift key."
- ♦ **@winKey+D** means "Hold down the Windows key, tap the D key, and release the Windows key."

You'll learn about useful combination keystrokes as we go through the book. For now, it's sufficient to know that any time you see a plus sign (+) between two key names, *key1+key2*, that means "hold down *key1*, tap *key2*, and release *key1*."

That's about all the hardware you need to know to get started. Let's talk about the software next.

Getting to Know Your Computer's Software

Let's say someone hands you two identical-looking video cassette tapes. You put one tape into the VCR, press Play, and the movie *Ben Hur* starts playing. You take that tape out, put in the second tape, and press Play, and the movie *Pippi Longstocking* starts playing. The two cassette tapes look exactly alike. So why does one show Ben and the other Pippi? The cassette tapes are only the *medium* (hardware) on which information is stored. The movie itself is in the *software* that's recorded onto that medium.

Like a movie on a video tape, or songs on a CD, computer software is invisible. You can't see it or touch it, because it's just information recorded onto some medium. In the case of programs that are already installed on your computer, that medium is your computer's hard disk.

What Is Windows XP?

Windows XP is a type of software known as an *operating system* (abbreviated *OS*). One thing that's unique about an operating system is that it's the only software that a computer is required to have. If you try to start a computer

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that has no operating system installed on it, you get nothing. If the computer has only an operating system and nothing else, that's fine. But it has to have an operating system to do anything at all, even start.

The operating system is also your computer's *platform*, the foundation upon which all other programs run. To illustrate what I mean by that, you can't go to the store, buy any old graphics program off the shelf, and expect it to work on your computer. It has to be a graphics program for Windows XP. A graphics program for some other operating system, like the Mac OS, Linux, or UNIX, just won't work on a Windows computer. The reverse is also true. For example, to get a graphics program for a Macintosh computer, you have to get one that runs on the Mac OS.

Why Learn Windows XP?

Besides all that technical stuff, the operating system also determines how you operate the computer. When you first start your computer, everything you see on your screen is Windows XP. To use your computer, you really need to learn how to use Windows XP.

It doesn't matter if your long-term goal is to e-mail pictures to friends, make your own music CDs, browse the Internet, or write the great American novel. In order to do anything at all with your PC, you first need to learn to use Windows XP (assuming, of course, that your computer's operating system is Windows XP).

Starting Windows XP

Because Windows XP is your computer's operating system, you don't have to do anything special to start Windows XP. All you have to do is start the computer (also known as *booting up*). I imagine you already know how to do that. But, since there is a right way, and lots of wrong ways, to start a computer, let's go through the steps:

STEPS: Start Windows XP

1. Turn on any device that's connected to the computer first (printer, modem, monitor, scanner, whatever you have).
2. Push the eject button on the floppy disk drive, just to see whether there's a disk in there. If a floppy disk pops out, remove it.
3. Turn on the main power switch on the computer, and wait.
4. If you see a Welcome Screen similar to the one shown in Figure 1-6, click whichever name or picture represents your user account. If you don't see the Welcome screen, don't worry about it. Just ignore this step.

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Figure 1-6: The Windows XP Welcome screen

When the computer is fully *booted up*, you should see the Windows desktop and taskbar. I can't say exactly what those will look like on your computer. The desktop is basically the entire screen and may appear as a photo, a solid color, a pattern, or your computer manufacturer's logo. The taskbar is the colored strip along the bottom of the screen, as in the example shown in Figure 1-7.

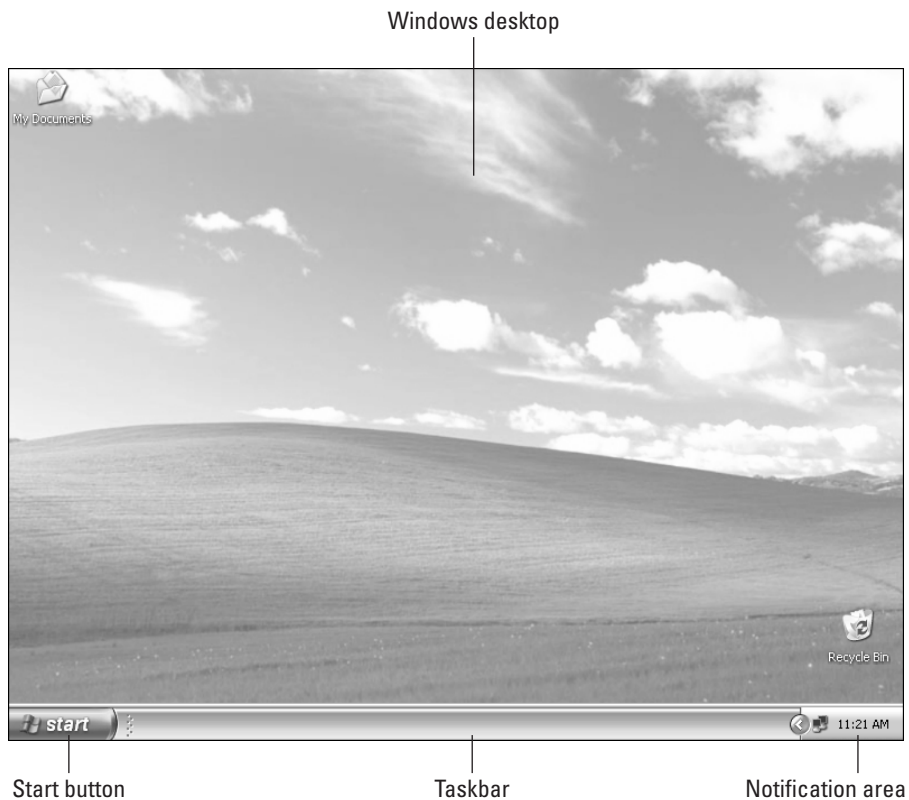


Figure 1-7: The Windows XP desktop

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If you see a message about an abnormal termination when you first start your computer, make sure you learn the right way to shut down your computer as described near the end of this chapter. If you see a message about an “invalid system disk,” remove any floppy disks or CDs from their drives and then press the Enter key.

The next section briefly describes all those things pointed out in Figure 1-7.

The Start Button

Windows XP may be the only program that starts automatically when you first turn on your computer. But it’s certainly not the only program on your system. To start any other program, use the Start button. When you first click the Start button, the *Start menu* opens. The left side of the Start menu provides access to a few of the programs on your computer. The right side lists places (mostly *folders*) you’re likely to visit often. Figure 1-8 shows an example, though yours might not look exactly like the one in the figure.

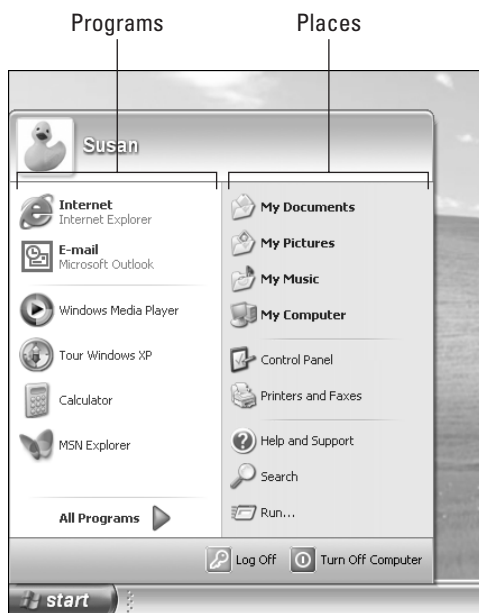


Figure 1-8: The Start menu



Note A *menu*, in the computer sense, is like a menu from a restaurant, in that it provides a list of items for you to choose from.

The left side of the Start menu actually shows icons for only a few of the programs installed on your computer: mostly programs that you use a lot or, if your computer is brand new, just some useful programs for beginners. As you’ll see in a moment, you’ll use the All Programs menu to start any program that isn’t listed down the left side of the Start menu.

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The Windows Desktop

The Windows desktop gets its name from the fact that it's roughly equivalent to the desktop of a real desk. Your real desktop is where you do your noncomputer work. The Windows desktop is where you do your computer work. Doing work on a computer usually means opening, and using, some program. Each program you open sits on the desktop, like a piece of paper on a real desktop.

If you're sitting at your computer now and want to see an example, perform the following steps to open the Calculator program that comes with Windows XP:

STEPS: Starting Calculator

1. Click the Start button (in the lower-left corner of the screen).
2. Click the All Programs option. The All Programs menu appears.
3. In the All Programs menu, click Accessories.
4. In the Accessories menu that opens, click Calculator (Figure 1-9).

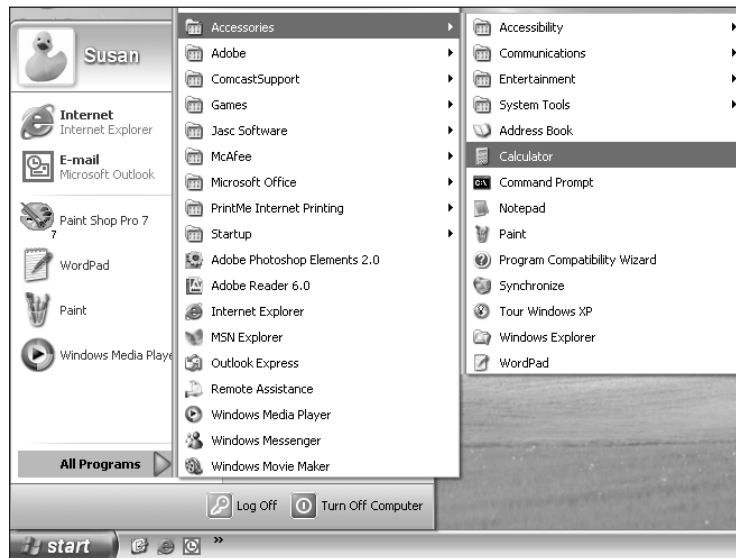


Figure 1-9: Click Start; choose All Programs ⇨ Accessories ⇨ Calculator

A calculator opens up on the desktop, in a window. The calculator hasn't replaced the desktop. It's just sitting on top of the desktop, as a real calculator would sit atop a real desktop.

The Taskbar

Usually, you open a program to perform a task. For example, you open Calculator to perform a math task. If you think of each open program as a

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task, the taskbar is the tool that lets you manage those tasks. Each program you open has a title bar at the top, which shows the program's *icon* (symbol) and usually the name of the program as well. For each open program, you'll find a corresponding button on the taskbar that shows the same icon and name, as in Figure 1-10.

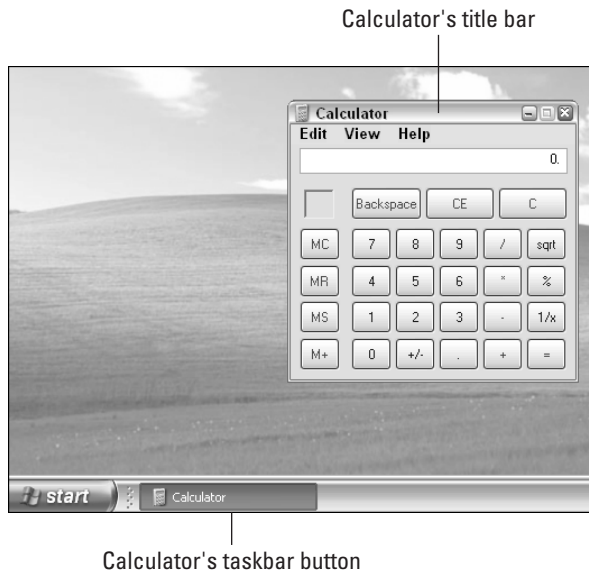


Figure 1-10: Calculator on the desktop and its taskbar button

The taskbar is especially handy when you have several open programs piled up on the desktop at once. To bring any of those open programs to the top of the pile, you just have to click the program's taskbar button. You'll learn more about managing open program windows in Chapter 4.

Tip You can also make an open program window disappear, and reappear, by clicking its taskbar button.



To close an open program, click the Close (X) button (shown at left) in its upper-right corner.

The Notification Area

The Notification Area is to the right of the taskbar. It has some weird little icons that represent services currently running on your computer. Its name comes from the fact that, when Windows or some other program has a suggestion for you, a little message pops up from that area, as in the example shown in Figure 1-11.

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Figure 1-11: A sample notification message

When you see one of those notifications, you have two choices.

- ♦ Read the message, and, if you want to pursue what it's offering, click the text of the message.
- ♦ If you want to ignore the message, or reject what it's offering, click the X button inside the message.

If you don't understand what a notification means, your best bet would be to close it. The message will come back from time to time. You can try out whatever it's offering after you've learned more. For now, that's the gist of how some of the items on the desktop work. You'll be seeing, and using, all of those things in upcoming chapters, as well as each time you use your computer.

Using Icons

The little pictures you see all over the place in Windows are called *icons*. Every icon is a little emblem, or symbol, for something larger. That something larger could be anything — a program, a folder, a video, a song, a typed document — things you'll learn about in upcoming chapters. Using small icons to represent larger things helps keep the clutter on your desktop to a minimum. Figure 1-12 shows some examples of icons, in no particular order.




Figure 1-12: Some sample icons in no particular order

Opening Icons

You can open some icons by clicking them once. But most of the time, you'll need to double-click an icon to open it. Remember that *double-click* means to point to the icon and then tap the left mouse button twice, as quickly as you can. If you pause too long between the clicks, the icon won't open.

Shrinking a Big Thing Back to Its Icon

 Exactly what does open depends on what the icon represents. If you open an icon by accident, or don't know what to do with the thing that opens, just close it. Closing an item shrinks it to its original icon. To close, click the Close button (shown at left) in the upper-right corner of whatever it is you want to close. Or, if your hands happen to be on the keyboard, you can press Alt+F4.

Organizing Icons

If you've already been using icons for a long time, and in fact they're getting pretty messy, you can easily whip them into alphabetical order. Just right-click some empty space between any icons (but not *on* any icon). From the shortcut menu that appears (shown at left), choose Arrange Icons By ⇨ Name (see Figure 1-13). The icons will be neatly arranged into (roughly) alphabetical order.

Right-click some empty space between icons;
then choose Arrange Icons By > Name

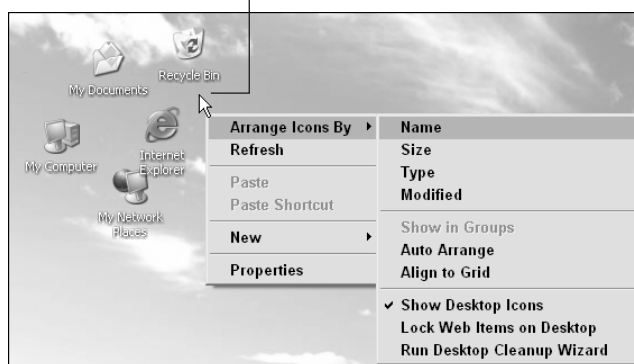


Figure 1-13: Right-click an empty spot and choose Arrange Icons By ⇨ Name.

For example, certain built-in Windows XP icons stick to the upper-left corner of your screen, so that they're always in the same place. The built-in icons have names such as My Computer, Recycle Bin, My Network Places, and Internet Explorer. Any icons other than built-in ones will be alphabetized starting after the last built-in icon.

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Working Common Controls

Throughout your work in Windows, you'll be presented with various *controls* on the screen. A control on the screen is like a control in a car. For example, in a car, the brake is a control you work with your foot. The steering wheel is a control you work with your hands, as are the controls for the radio, windshield wipers, and headlights. In Windows, the controls on your screen are things you work with your mouse or keyboard. In this section we'll look at some examples of controls you're likely to come across in Windows quite often.

Using Scroll Bars

Scroll bars appear on your screen whenever there's more text, or more information, than will fit in the space available. The scroll bar allows you to scroll around and see any text that's not currently visible. There are vertical scroll bars that let you move up and down and horizontal scroll bars for moving left and right. The scroll bar has buttons at either end, and a scroll box within it, as shown in Figure 1-14.

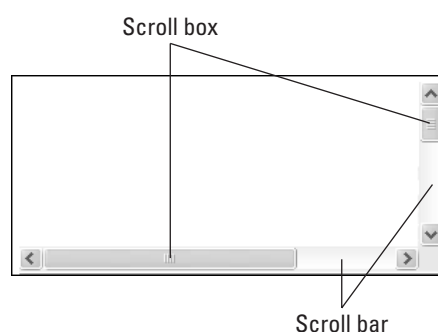


Figure 1-14: Horizontal and vertical scroll bars

The size of the scroll box relative to the size of the scroll bar tells you roughly how much information is currently out of view. For example, looking at the vertical scroll bar in Figure 1-14, you can see that the scroll box occupies about the top 25 percent of the scroll bar. That means that currently you're viewing only the top 25 percent of whatever text is shown to the left of the scroll bar. To scroll through text that's out of view, use the scroll bar to scroll down. To operate the scroll bar using your mouse:

- ♦ Click the button at the bottom to scroll down one line.
- ♦ Click the button at the top to scroll up one line.
- ♦ Click an empty area on the scroll bar, beneath the scroll box, to move down a page.

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- ♦ Click an empty area on the scroll bar above the scroll box to scroll up a page.
- ♦ If your mouse has a wheel, you can click on the scroll bar; then spin the mouse wheel to scroll up or down.
- ♦ Drag the scroll box to any place on the bar to go to that part of the list.

**Tip**

Drag means “hold down the mouse button while moving the mouse.” In a scroll bar you want to 1) Put the mouse pointer on the scroll box, 2) Hold down the left mouse button while dragging the scroll box along the scroll bar; and then 3) Release the mouse button when you get to wherever you want to go.

Working scroll bars with the mouse can be a bit more challenging, because there might be several scroll bars on the screen at the same time. The keyboard will work only one of them. For example, to use the scroll bar in a list box control, you first have to move the focus to that control. Anyway, here are the keys you use to scroll around using the keyboard.

- ♦ ↑: Scroll down a line
- ♦ ↓: Scroll up a line
- ♦ →: Scroll right a little
- ♦ ←: Scroll left a little
- ♦ **Page Down (PgDn)**: Scroll down a page
- ♦ **Page Up (PgUp)**: Scroll up a page
- ♦ **Home**: Go to the top
- ♦ **End**: Go to the end

Hiding and Showing Details

To keep your screen from getting too cluttered, Windows often hides some information on the screen. There are plenty of examples sprinkled throughout Windows, and I'll point them out as they arise. But those of you who like to explore on your own should be aware of how these buttons work, so you can recognize them and use them as they appear on your screen.

The button you use to show or hide information usually has some sort of arrow on it, or < and > symbols, sometimes pointing up and down. Figure 1-15 shows some general examples of Show/Hide buttons.

The Show/Hide buttons are simple to use — just click the button. If items are currently hidden, clicking the button will take them out of hiding. If items are currently displayed, clicking the button will put them back into hiding.

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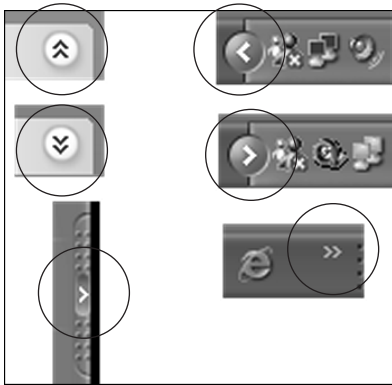


Figure 1-15: Examples of show/hide buttons

A similar capability exists in certain types of lists, where you can hide or show details (list items) under a heading. Again, I'll point out examples as they arise. But you intrepid explorers out there should keep an eye out for these things. If you don't notice them, or don't know how to use them, you're not seeing all the information that's available to you. Using the + and – buttons in a list is easy:

- ♦ If items are currently hidden, click the + sign to expand the list.
- ♦ If items are currently displayed, click the – sign hide the list.

Figure 1-16 shows a general example.

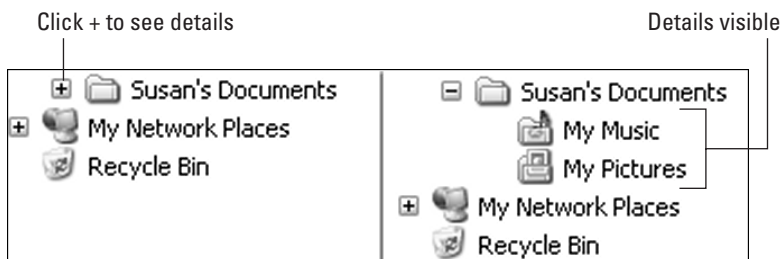


Figure 1-16: Use + and – buttons in lists to show and hide details.

Using Dragging Handles

A *dragging handle* (sometimes called a *sizing handle*, or even just a *handle*) is a control that allows you to move or size an item by dragging. Dragging handles come in various shapes and sizes, but as a rule they tend to look like little nonskid areas, as in the examples shown in Figure 1-17. We'll point out specific examples as we go through the book. For now, when you see a little nonskid area like one of the examples shown in the figure, know that it's not just there for decoration. Like everything you see on your screen, it's a control that serves some purpose.

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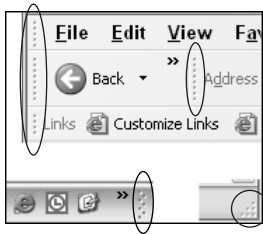


Figure 1-17: Examples of dragging handles

About Disabled (Dimmed) Controls

As you explore your computer and start noticing controls all over the place, you'll probably notice that some of them appear to be dimmed, as in the examples shown in the right side of Figure 1-18. If you click one of those dimmed controls, nothing happens. Why? Because the control is currently *disabled*. In other words *dimmed* stands for *disabled*. It's important to understand this, especially for beginners, because they often click away madly at disabled controls, thinking the control will somehow wake up and start working. That's not the way it works.

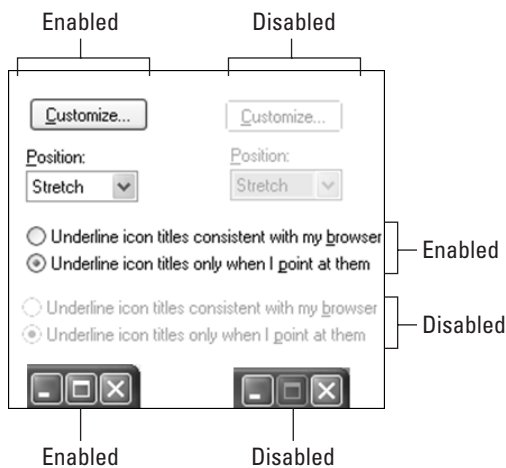


Figure 1-18: Examples of enabled and disabled controls

A disabled control is not indicative of something that's broken or needs fixing. It's simply a control that's not relevant at the moment. When circumstances change such that the control becomes useful, the control will automatically become enabled. You'll see many examples of enabled and disabled controls throughout this book. For now, it's enough to know that when you see a dimmed control, don't bother clicking it. If it's dimmed, it's simply not relevant at the moment. And no amount of clicking the disabled control will wake it up.

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The Right Way to Turn Off Your Computer

Before you get any deeper into learning about your computer, now is a good time to learn the right way to shut down your computer when you're ready to call it a day. There are lots of ways to turn off a computer. But there's really only one right way and plenty of wrong ways. The right way is to shut down Windows first. Here's how:

STEPS: Shutting Down Windows

1. Click the Start button and choose Turn Off Computer (Figure 1-19).
2. In the box that appears (Figure 1-19), click the Turn Off button.
3. Watch the screen and wait.

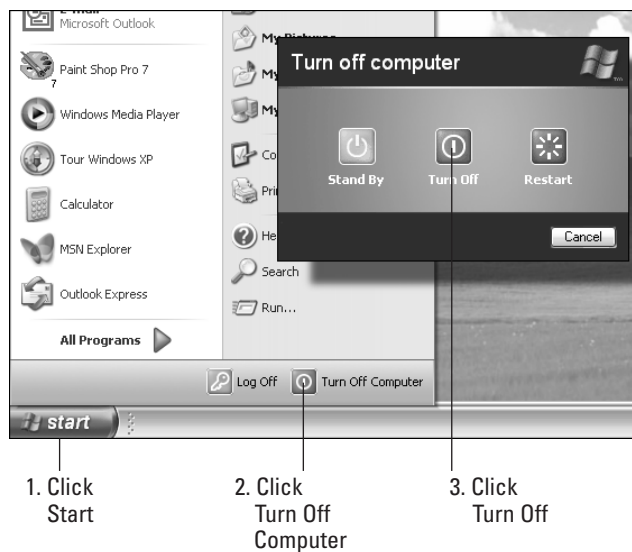


Figure 1-19: Shutting down your computer

**Note**

Your own screen might show different options from those shown in Figure 1-19. Don't worry about that. For now, it's sufficient to know the right way to turn off your computer.

Don't expect the computer to shut down immediately. Windows has some housekeeping to do first, and that will take a few seconds. If you see any messages asking a question, as in the example shown in Figure 1-20, waiting won't work. You'll need to respond to the message before the shut down will complete.

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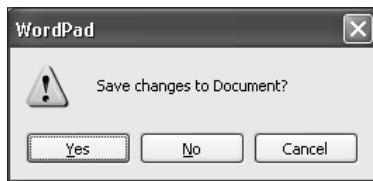


Figure 1-20: Message that's asking a question



The sample message shown in Figure 1-20 is asking whether you want to save the document you've recently created or changed. For more information on saving documents, see Chapter 6.

After you've responded to any questions that might have appeared on the screen, and Windows has finished its housekeeping, one of two things will happen. If you have the type of computer that Windows can shut down by itself, the monitor will go blank, any fan noise you normally hear will stop, and the computer will shut down. You don't have to push any buttons to turn off the computer.

If you have the type of computer that Windows can't turn off by itself, you'll see the message *It is now safe to turn off your computer* on the screen. In that case, you'll need to turn off the computer yourself, using its main power switch.



On a computer that doesn't shut down automatically, you might have to hold the main power button in for three or four seconds before the computer shuts down. That's to prevent the computer from being shut down accidentally when someone just brushes up against the button.

Summary

That about wraps it up for the basic skills you need to start your computer, use your mouse and keyboard, start programs, close programs, and turn off your computer. The part about starting and using programs in this chapter is, admittedly, a bit thin. There's a lot more you can do with program windows, as you'll learn in Part 2. But for now, you're off to a great start and are ready to move to Chapter 2, where you'll learn some more critical basic skills.

- ♦ Your computer hardware is the stuff that you can see and feel.
- ♦ The main hardware devices you use to operate the computer are the mouse and keyboard.
- ♦ Your computer software is the invisible instructions that tell the computer how to behave and what to do.
- ♦ All of the software in your computer is stored on your computer's hard disk.
- ♦ Windows XP is a special type of software known as an operating system (OS).

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- ♦ When you first start your computer, the Windows desktop will appear on the screen, along with the Start button, taskbar, and notification along the bottom of the screen.
- ♦ To start any program that's installed on your computer, click the Start button; then click All Programs.
- ♦ To close any large open object on your screen, click the Close (X) button in its upper-right corner.
- ♦ To shut down Windows properly before turning off your computer, click the Start button, and choose Turn Off Computer ⇨ Turn Off.