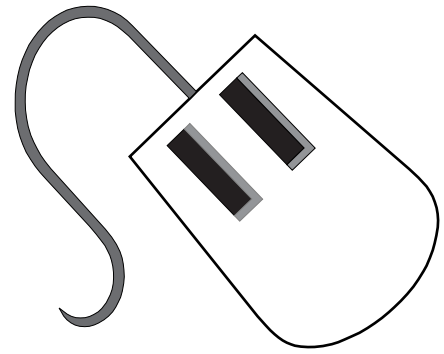


APPENDIX A

Computer Basics



When you first turn your computer on, the operating system is the first thing the computer loads. This operating system contains all of the instructions for how the computer will look and work. Once the main screen appears you are viewing your computer's desktop. This is true if you are on a machine running a Microsoft Windows operating system (e.g., XP) or an Apple Macintosh operating system (e.g., OS X). Much of this appendix will give you instructions for using a Windows XP operating system, but many of the concepts will apply to a Mac OS as well. If you are using a Macintosh computer for the first time, you should start it up and click on the Help menu item at the top of the screen. Here you can choose, "New to Mac OS X" and learn all about using Macintosh computers. The help is even broken down into "new computer users," "for Windows switchers," and "for Mac OS 9 users." If you are new to computers in general then you should choose the "new to computers" link.

For those of you trying to learn Windows XP, there are many nice tutorials on the Internet and the computer you are using might have some built in. You should ask your instructor, but the rest of this appendix will provide you with some background and foundational information for using Windows XP. You are highly encouraged to sit down at a computer and explore along with the tips in this appendix. The best way to learn is to go through the motions and to see the cause and effect of your actions.

Desktop

The desktop is the backdrop that is designed to work similar to your real life desk. This means that any files or software application you work on using your computer will appear on "top" of the computer desktop. Some people will store files right on the desktop and other people will place shortcuts or aliases to files located elsewhere on the computer. The shortcuts or alias icons on the desktop are typically not the real file, but opening these shortcuts will actually open the real file that is located elsewhere on your machine. The very bottom rows of the screen contain the **taskbar**.

Taskbar

The taskbar on the bottom of the desktop is typically accessible from most applications you may use. This taskbar will display the Start Menu and the clock. The taskbar also allows you to open and close programs and change your computer settings. When you have active windows that contain files you are working on, these files get stored on the taskbar so that you can quickly see what files are open and so that you can easily switch from one document to the next. There is also a Quick Launch toolbar just to the right of the Start Menu. This Quick Launch toolbar contains shortcuts to commonly used software applications. Clicking on an icon here circumvents the need to go into the Start Menu and find the original application. It really is a shortcut. You may or may not have items located here. To examine the properties of any items listed in this toolbar, you should right-click (click the right mouse button) on the item and choose properties (move your cursor to the properties name and then release your right mouse button). The window that appears provides you with just one example of how you can customize your computer and how it reacts to your actions. If you find that you are using a particular program fairly often, you might want to create a shortcut in this toolbar so that you can quickly open the application each time you use it. The taskbar can also be used to close open programs and files. If you see items in the middle of the taskbar then you can close them by right-clicking on the item in the taskbar and selecting close.

Start Menu

The Start button you see on the bottom-left side of your screen is the entry point for doing many functions that your computer can do. If you click on the Start Menu the menu will open up and reveal some contents (e.g., All Programs, My Documents, Control Panel, Search, Internet, etc.). Each item in the Start menu performs a different function and the name of the file will typically clue you in to the function the item accomplishes. For example, the Control Panel will take you to the operation commands for your computer. You can then change many things about your computer in the control panel environment. This includes the background color/pattern/picture for your desktop. This includes changing settings for your screen resolution and settings for how you connect to the Internet (e.g., dial-up or wireless) among other things. When you choose some menu items, a submenu may appear with more options (e.g., choose All Programs and you will see a list of the applications on your computer). If you see items with a triangle on the right-hand side of the column then this is alerting you to the fact that there are more contents available to view under that title. When you mouse over an item with a triangle, you will see yet another submenu of items.

If you would like to view the hierarchy of your computer, you can quickly accomplish this task by right clicking on the Start Menu and choosing Explore. This window will show you the various listing of folders and the levels on which they reside. If you click on a folder on the left side of this window, you will then see the contents or details of the folder in the window on the right.

Windows

Windows appear when you open a file, folder, or application. This rectangle appears over the top of your desktop. You can tell a window is open because the top-right portion of

the window should have a red and white box with a X in it. This X closes the window. You can also close the window by right-clicking on the window's name in the taskbar. The other two boxes on the top-right allow you to minimize and maximize. The middle button is the maximize button and this will cause your window to fill more of your desktop, if it does not fill it all currently. If the window already fills the desktop, then the maximize button will now have a different look called restore down. Restore down is a button to make the window fill less of the desktop—back to its original size. The minimize button (1st button on the left of the other two) will shrink (minimize) your window so that it goes into the taskbar below. Feel free to keep windows in the taskbar as long as you'd like while you are working on your computer. To get the window back, you merely need to click on the item in the taskbar. You can move windows by clicking and holding your mouse button on the title bar of the window. When finished dragging, you should let off of the left-mouse button.

The window's name should appear on the top-left portion of the window itself (the title bar). Below the title bar are the menu bar and the tool bar (depending on the application you are in). For example, if you open WordPad (a very minimal word processor on your computer), the menu bar will contain a File menu, an Edit menu, a View menu, an Insert menu, a Format menu, and a Help menu. The File menu is pretty common among many applications and this is the menu where you can save a file you are working on. You can also print files using this menu and open new files or create new files, etc.

Help

Probably the most important tool available to beginning users is called Help and Support. You can access Help and Support in your Start Menu. This Help and Support center provides you with quick shortcuts to items that are commonly helpful to many users. If you do not see the help you need right away, you can search for your help topic by typing in keywords or a phrase into the white Search box and then clicking on the green arrow to see results. While you are working in many windows, you should see a Help option in the menu bar. This help will be more specific to the application or file you are working in at that moment. Many questions that the average user needs answered can be found by using the help features built into the operating system and the various application programs.

File Management

Your Windows XP computer will contain folders that are designed to help you manage your files. One folder is called My Documents and another is called My Computer. To access these two folders, you need to click on the Start Menu and choose the folder by name. For example, the My Computer folder shows you the various folders on your computer. The My Documents folder is your own personal folder. This is where you can store files that you work on and files you want to save. Keeping files in this one folder makes it easy to know where to look when you use your computer. The My Document window is divided into 2 windowpanes. The right pane shows files and subfolders contained in the My Documents folder. The left pane provides easy access to commonly accessed options, just like shortcuts. By default, your My Documents folder is only accessible by the current user and not other people who log on to that particular computer. When you save files in other applications (e.g., Microsoft Word) it will automatically be saved into your My

Documents folder unless you have instructed it otherwise. You can create subfolders in the My Documents folder to help organize your files more effectively.

You can create folders in a few different ways. When you are in your My Documents folder, you can right-click on the right windowpane and choose New and the Folder from the submenu that appears. You should then type the name you want for the folder. This creates the folder and provides it with a unique name. You can then double-click on the folder you created, which takes you into that folder. You can store files in this folder or create folders inside of this folder. You can also create new folders by using the File menu. Choose File, then New, then Folder. This causes a new folder to appear in the right-hand windowpane and you can then give the folder a new name. To rename any folder that is already created you should right-click on the folder's name and choose Rename from the contextual menu that appears. You can also just click on the name next to the folder itself. This should cause the name to become highlighted and you can then just start typing the new name. This new name will replace the old name.