

ABSOLUTE BEGINNER'S GUIDE

TO

Computer Basics 5th Edition

*Who knew how simple
computers could be?*

Covers
Windows 7



Absolute Beginner's Guide to Computer Basics, Fifth Edition

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INTRODUCTION

Because this is the *Absolute Beginner's Guide to Computer Basics*, let's start at the absolute beginning, which is this: Computers aren't supposed to be scary. Intimidating? Sometimes. Difficult to use? Perhaps. Inherently unreliable? Most definitely. (Although they're better than they used to be.)

But scary? Definitely not.

Computers aren't scary because there's nothing they can do to hurt you (unless you drop your notebook PC on your foot, that is). And there's not much you can do to hurt them, either. It's kind of a wary coexistence between man and machine, but the relationship has the potential to be beneficial—to you, anyway.

Many people think that they're scared of computers because they're unfamiliar with them. But that isn't really true.

You see, even if you've never actually used a computer before, you've been exposed to computers and all they can do for the past three decades or so. Whenever you make a deposit at your bank, you're working with computers. Whenever you make a purchase at a retail store, you're working with computers. Whenever you watch a television show or read a newspaper article or look at a picture in a magazine, you're working with computers.

That's because computers are used in all those applications. Somebody, somewhere, is working behind the scenes with a computer to manage your bank account and monitor your credit card purchases.

In fact, it's difficult to imagine, here in the twenty-first century, how we ever got by without all those keyboards, mice, and monitors. (Or, for that matter, the Internet.)

However, just because computers have been around for awhile doesn't mean that everyone knows how to use them. It's not unusual to feel a little trepidation the first time you sit down in front of that intimidating display and keyboard. Which keys should you press? What do people mean by double-clicking the mouse? And what are all those little pictures onscreen?

As foreign as all this might seem at first, computers really aren't that hard to understand—or use. You have to learn a few basic concepts, of course (all the pressing and clicking and whatnot), and it helps to understand exactly what part of the system does what. But once you get the hang of things, computers really are easy to use.

Which, of course, is where this book comes in.

Absolute Beginner's Guide to Computer Basics, Fifth Edition, will help you figure out how to use your new computer system. You'll learn how computers work, how to connect all the pieces and parts, and how to start using them. You'll learn about computer hardware and software, about the Microsoft Windows 7 operating system, and about the Internet. And after you're comfortable with the basic concepts (which won't take too long, trust me), you'll learn how to actually do stuff.

You'll learn how to do useful stuff, such as writing letters, balancing your check-book, and creating presentations; fun stuff, such as listening to music, watching movies, and editing your digital photos; online stuff, such as searching for information, sending email, and keeping up with friends and family via Facebook and MySpace; and essential stuff, such as copying files, troubleshooting problems, and protecting against thieves and hackers.

All you have to do is sit yourself down in front of your computer, try not to be scared (there's nothing to be scared of, really), and work your way through the chapters and activities in this book. And remember that computers aren't difficult to use, they don't break easily, and they let you do all sorts of fun and useful things once you get the hang of them. Really!

How This Book Is Organized

This book is organized into six main parts, as follows:

- **Part I, “Getting Started,”** describes all the pieces and parts of both desktop and notebook PCs and how to connect everything to get your new system up and running.
- **Part II, “Using Windows,”** introduces the backbone of your entire system, the Microsoft Windows operating system. You'll learn how Windows works and how to use it to perform basic tasks, such as copying and deleting files and folders. (You'll also learn fun stuff, such as how to change the picture on your computer desktop.)
- **Part III, “Upgrading and Maintaining Your System,”** contains all the boring (but necessary) information you need to know to keep your new PC in tip-top shape. You'll learn how to add new pieces of hardware to your system, how to set up a wireless home network, how to perform routine maintenance, how to track down and fix common PC problems, and how to protect your system against viruses, spyware, and other forms of computer attack.
- **Part IV, “Using Computer Software,”** tells you everything you need to know about running the most popular computer programs. You'll learn how to use Microsoft Works, Microsoft Office, Microsoft Word, Microsoft Excel, and Microsoft PowerPoint. That's a lot.
- **Part V, “Using the Internet,”** is all about going online. You'll discover how to connect to the Internet and surf the Web with Internet Explorer. You'll also learn how to shop online, buy and sell in eBay auctions and craigslist classifieds, search the Web with Google and research topics with Wikipedia, watch and upload YouTube videos, and create your own personal web page. This is the fun part of the book.

- **Part VI, “Communicating via the Internet,”** is all about keeping in touch. You’ll find out how to send and receive email, chat online via instant messaging, navigate the blogosphere, and network socially with Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter.
- **Part VII, “Exploring the Digital Lifestyle,”** is even more fun. You’ll see how to use your PC with your digital camera to edit and manage your digital photos, how to listen to CDs and download music to your iPod or iPhone, how to watch DVDs on your computer screen, and how to create your own digital home movies on DVD. It’s amazing all the things you can do with your PC!

Taken together, the 38 chapters in this book will help you progress from absolute beginner to experienced computer user. Just read what you need, and before long you’ll be using your computer like a pro!

Which Version of Windows?

This Fifth Edition of the *Absolute Beginner’s Guide to Computer Basics* is written for computers running the latest version of Microsoft’s operating system, Windows 7. If you’re running the previous version, Windows Vista, most of the advice and information will still work. But if you’re running the even older Windows XP, you should read the earlier Third Edition of this book instead; it covers XP exclusively.

Conventions Used in This Book

I hope that this book is easy enough to figure out on its own, without requiring its own instruction manual. As you read through the pages, however, it helps to know precisely how I’ve presented specific types of information.

Menu Commands

Most computer programs operate via a series of pull-down menus. You use your mouse to pull down a menu and then select an option from that menu. This sort of operation is indicated like this throughout the book:

Select File, Save

or

Click the Start button and select All Programs, Accessories, Notepad.

All you have to do is follow the instructions in order, using your mouse to click each item in turn. When submenus are tacked onto the main menu (as in the All Programs, Accessories, Notepad example), just keep clicking the selections until you come to the last one—which should open the program or activate the command you want!

Shortcut Key Combinations

When you're using your computer keyboard, sometimes you have to press two keys at the same time. These two-key combinations are called *shortcut keys* and are shown as the key names joined with a plus sign (+).

For example, Ctrl+W indicates that you should press the W key while holding down the Ctrl key. It's no more complex than that.

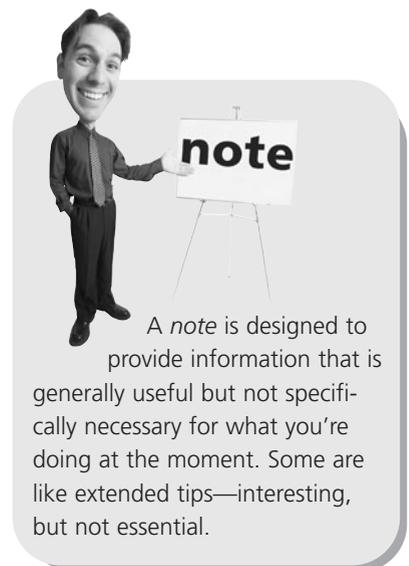
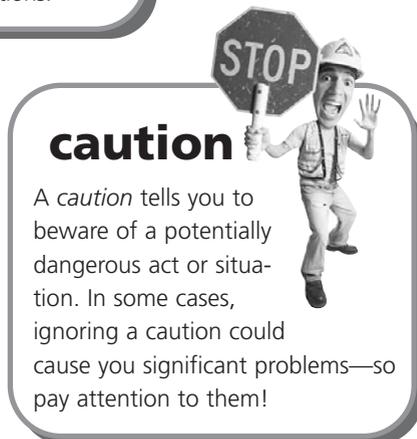
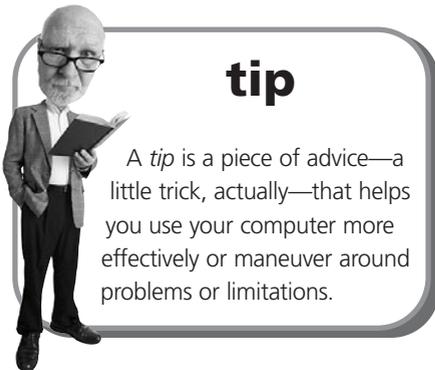
Web Page Addresses

This book contains a lot of web page addresses. (That's because you'll probably be spending a lot of time on the Internet.)

Technically, a web page address is supposed to start with `http://` (as in `http://www.molehillgroup.com`). Because Internet Explorer and other web browsers automatically insert this piece of the address, however, you don't have to type it—and I haven't included it in any of the addresses in this book.

Special Elements

This book also includes a few special elements that provide additional information not included in the basic text. These elements are designed to supplement the text to make your learning faster, easier, and more efficient.



Let Me Know What You Think

I always love to hear from readers. If you want to contact me, feel free to email me at abg@molehillgroup.com. I can't promise that I'll *answer* every message, but I do promise that I'll *read* each one!

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IN THIS CHAPTER

- Introducing Microsoft Windows
- Working Your Way Around the Desktop
- Important Windows Operations
- Using the Start Menu
- Using the Taskbar
- Switching Between Programs
- Using Windows Explorer
- All the Other Things in Windows
- Getting Help in Windows
- Shutting Down Windows—And Your Computer



GETTING TO KNOW WINDOWS 7

As you learned in Chapter 1, “How Personal Computers Work,” the software and operating system make your hardware work. The operating system for most personal computers is Microsoft Windows, and you need to know how to use Windows to use your PC. Windows pretty much runs your computer for you; if you don’t know your way around Windows, you won’t be able to do much of anything on your new PC.

Introducing Microsoft Windows

Microsoft Windows is a type of software called an *operating system*. An operating system does what its name implies—*operates* your computer *system*, working in the background every time you turn on your PC.

Equally important, Windows is what you see when you first turn on your computer, after everything turns on and boots up. The “desktop” that fills your screen is part of Windows, as are the taskbar at the bottom of the screen and the big menu that pops up when you click the Start button.

Welcome to Windows 7

If you've recently purchased a new PC, the version of Windows on your PC is probably Windows 7. Microsoft has released different versions of Windows over the years, and Windows 7 is the latest—which is why it comes preinstalled on most new PCs.

If you've used a previous version of Windows—such as Windows Vista, Windows XP, Windows 2000, or Windows 98—on another PC, Windows 7 no doubt looks and acts somewhat differently from what you're used to. Don't worry; everything that was in the old Windows is still in the new Windows—it's just in a slightly different place.

Different Versions of Windows 7

There are actually several versions of Windows 7, each with a slightly different feature set. Which version you have depends on which was installed by your PC's manufacturer. Table 3.1 details the different versions available in the U.S. market.

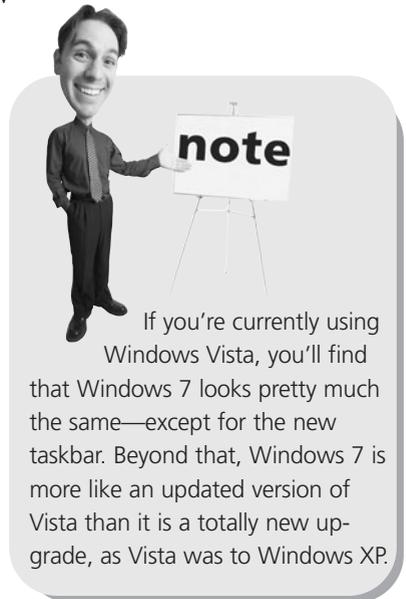
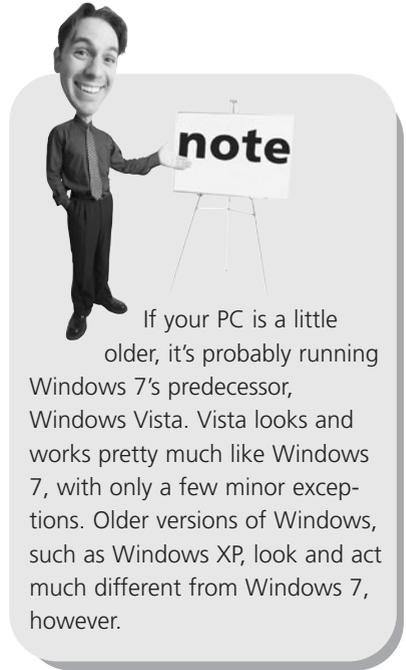
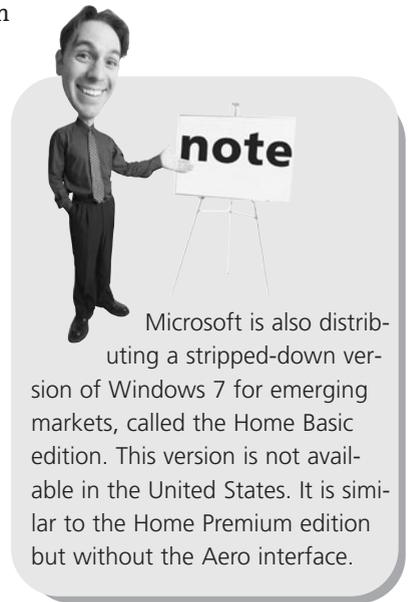


TABLE 3.1 Windows 7 Versions

	Starter	Home Premium	Ultimate	Professional	Enterprise
Target Market					
Home	Yes	Yes	Yes		
Small business			Yes	Yes	
Corporate				Yes	Yes
Sold at retail?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Interface Features					
Basic user interface	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Aero user interface		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Aero Peek and Flip 3D		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Live taskbar previews		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Taskbar Jump Lists	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Included Applications					
Internet Explorer 8	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Windows Gadgets	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Calculator	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Paint	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
WordPad	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Windows Fax and Scan	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Premium games		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Windows Photo Viewer	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Windows Media Player 12	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
DVD playback		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Windows DVD Maker		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Windows Media Center		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Performance Features					
Number of running applications supported	3	Unlimited	Unlimited	Unlimited	Unlimited
Maximum RAM (32-bit)	4GB	4GB	4GB	4GB	4GB
Maximum RAM (64-bit)	NA	16GB	192GB	192GB	192GB
Windows Backup	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
System image-based backup and recovery	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
BitLocker			Yes		Yes
HomeGroup sharing	Join only	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Internet Connection Sharing		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Windows Mobility Center		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Multi-Touch support		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
XP Mode			Yes	Yes	Yes

Most new PCs should come with the Home Premium edition installed; this edition is also best for home users upgrading from a previous version of Windows. Some low-end PCs might come with the Starter edition, although it's pretty limited—and not available in an edition for 64-bit processors. The Professional and Enterprise editions are targeted at small and large businesses, respectively. And the Ultimate edition is for those users who want it all—and are prepared to pay for it.

Whichever version of Windows 7 you have installed on your PC, you can easily upgrade to another version by using the built-in Windows Anytime Upgrade feature, available from the Windows Control Panel. All you have to do is select the version you want, make sure you're connected to the Internet, and then give Microsoft your credit card number. The upgrade process is automatic, using files already installed on your PC's hard drive.



Microsoft is also distributing a stripped-down version of Windows 7 for emerging markets, called the Home Basic edition. This version is not available in the United States. It is similar to the Home Premium edition but without the Aero interface.

Working Your Way Around the Desktop

If you're already familiar with Windows, you can start using Windows 7 without much training. However, if this is your first PC, or if Windows 7 looks a little too different to you, take a few minutes to find your way around the Win7 desktop.

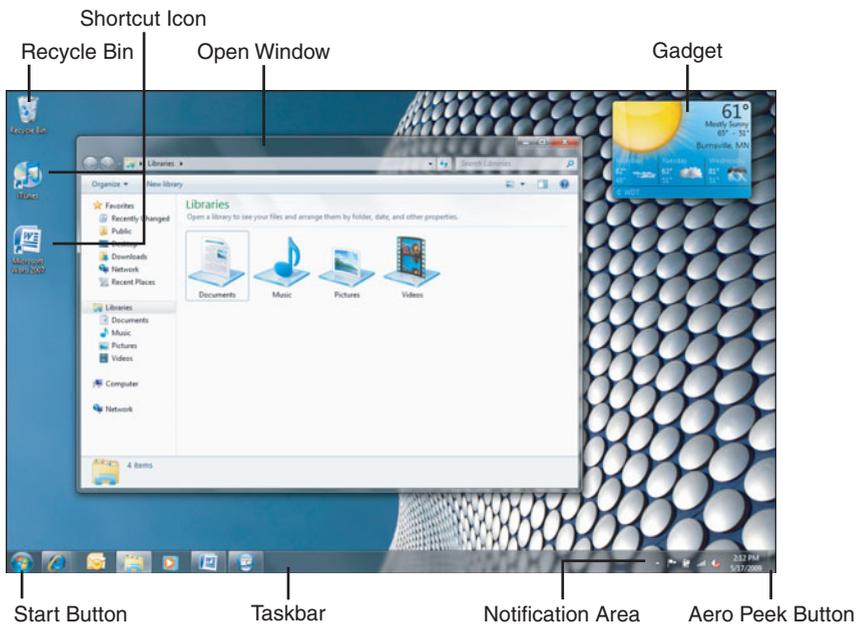
As you can see in Figure 3.1, the Windows 7 desktop includes a number of key elements. Get to know this desktop; you're going to be seeing a lot of it from now on.

The major parts of the Windows desktop include

- **Start button**—Opens the Start menu, which is what you can use to open all your programs and documents.
- **Taskbar**—Displays icons for your favorite applications and documents, as well as for any open window. Right-click an icon to see a Jump List of recent open documents and other operations for that application. (This is the most-changed feature from Windows Vista to Windows 7—which is why we'll discuss it in more depth later in this chapter.)
- **Notification area**—Sometimes known as the system tray, this part of the taskbar displays icons for a handful of key system functions, including the Action Center, power (on notebook PCs), networking/Internet, and audio (volume).

- **Aero Peek button**—Hover over this little rectangle, and all open windows go transparent so you can see what’s on the desktop below. Click the Aero Peek button to immediately minimize all open windows.
- **Gadgets**—These are mini-applications that sit on the desktop and perform specific operations.
- **Shortcut icons**—These are links to software programs you can place on your desktop; a “clean” desktop includes just one icon, for the Windows Recycle Bin.
- **Recycle Bin**—This is where you dump any files you want to delete.

FIGURE 3.1
The Windows 7 desktop—click the Start button to get going.



Important Windows Operations

To use Windows efficiently, you must master a few simple operations, such as pointing and clicking, dragging and dropping, and right-clicking. You perform all these operations with your mouse.

Pointing and Clicking

The most common mouse operation is *pointing and clicking*. Simply move your computer’s mouse or touchpad so that the cursor is pointing to the object you want to select, and then click the left mouse button once. Pointing and clicking is an effective way to select menu items, directories, and files.

Double-Clicking

To launch a program or open a file folder, single-clicking isn't enough. Instead, you need to *double-click* an item to activate an operation. This involves pointing at something onscreen with the cursor and then clicking the left mouse button twice in rapid succession. For example, to open program groups or launch individual programs, simply double-click a specific icon.

Right-Clicking

Here's one of the secret keys to efficient Windows operation. When you select an item and then click the *right* mouse button, you'll often see a pop-up menu. This menu, when available, contains commands that directly relate to the selected object. So for example, if you right-click a file icon, you'll see commands related to that file—copy, move, delete, and so forth.

Right-clicking is also key to Windows 7's new Jump List feature on the taskbar. Right-click any taskbar icon, and you'll see a Jump List that contains recently opened documents and essential application operations. It's kind of an extension of the traditional right-click pop-up menu and is very useful.

Refer to your individual programs to see whether and how they use the right mouse button.

Dragging and Dropping

Dragging is a variation of clicking. To drag an object, point at it with the cursor and then press and hold down the left mouse button. Move the mouse without releasing the mouse button and drag the object to a new location. When you're finished moving the object, release the mouse button to drop it onto the new location.

You can use dragging and dropping to move files from one folder to another or to delete files by dragging them onto the Recycle Bin icon.

Hovering

When you position the cursor over an item without clicking your mouse, you're *hovering* over that item. Many operations require you to hover your cursor and then perform some other action.

Moving and Resizing Windows

Every software program you launch is displayed in a separate onscreen window. When you open more than one program, you get more than one window—and your desktop can quickly become cluttered.

There are many ways to deal with desktop clutter. One way is to move a window to a new position. You do this by positioning your cursor over a blank area at the top of the window frame and then clicking and holding down the left button on your mouse. As long as this button is depressed, you can use your mouse to drag the window around the screen. When you release the mouse button, the window stays where you put it.

With Windows 7, you can quickly move a window to the left or right side of the desktop by using a new feature dubbed *Aero Snap*. Just drag the window to the left side of the screen to dock it there and resize it to the left half of the desktop; drag the window to the right side of the screen to dock it on that side.

You also can change the size of most windows. You do this by positioning the cursor over the edge of the window—any edge. If you position the cursor on either side of the window, you can resize the width. If you position the cursor on the top or bottom edge, you can resize the height. Finally, if you position the cursor on a corner, you can resize the width and height at the same time.

After the cursor is positioned over the window's edge, press and hold down the left mouse button; then drag the window border to its new size. Release the mouse button to lock in the newly sized window.

Peeking at the Desktop

Want to quickly see what's beneath all the open windows on the desktop? Have a gadget you want to look at?

Then you'll appreciate Windows 7's new *Aero Peek* feature. With Aero Peek you can, well, peek at the desktop beneath all that window clutter.

You activate Aero Peek from the little transparent rectangular button at the far right of the Windows taskbar. Hover the cursor over the Aero Peek button and every open window becomes transparent, as shown in Figure 3.2. This lets you see everything that's on the desktop below.

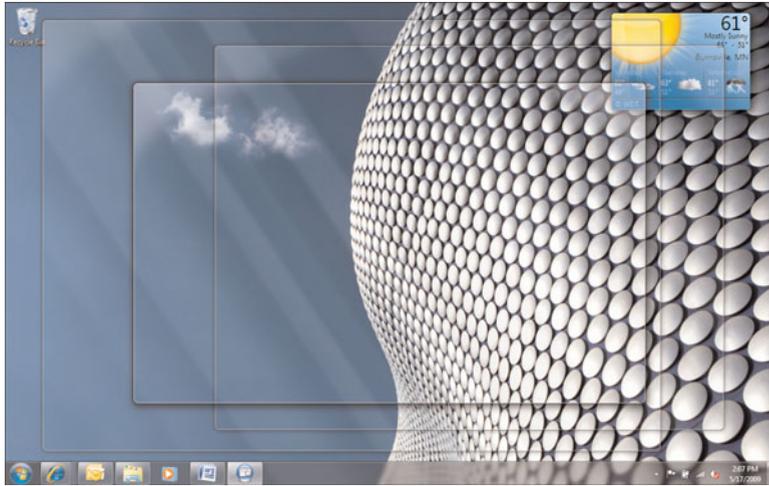


tip

The cursor changes shape—to a double-ended arrow—when it's positioned over the edge of a window.

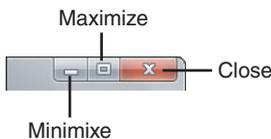
FIGURE 3.2

Aero Peek in action—a great way to view gadgets, shortcut icons, and your Windows desktop wallpaper.



Maximizing, Minimizing, and Closing Windows

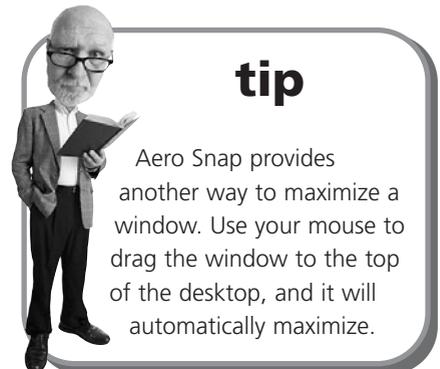
Another way to manage a window in Windows is to make it display full-screen. You do this by maximizing the window. All you have to do is click the Maximize button at the upper-right corner of the window, as shown in Figure 3.3.

**FIGURE 3.3**

Use the Minimize, Maximize, and Close buttons to manage your desktop windows.

If the window is already maximized, the Maximize button changes to a Restore Down button. When you click the Restore Down button, the window resumes its previous (premaximized) dimensions.

If you would rather hide the window so that it doesn't clutter your desktop, click the Minimize button. This shoves the window off the desktop, onto the taskbar. The program in the window is still running, however—it's just not on the desktop. To restore a minimized window, all you have to do is click the window's icon on the Windows taskbar (at the bottom of the screen).



tip

Aero Snap provides another way to maximize a window. Use your mouse to drag the window to the top of the desktop, and it will automatically maximize.

If what you really want to do is close the window (and close any program running within the window), just click the window's Close button.



caution

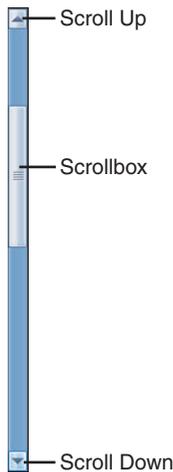
If you try to close a window that contains a document you haven't saved, you'll be prompted to save the changes to the document. Because you probably don't want to lose any of your work, click Yes to save the document and then close the program.

Scrolling Through a Window

Many windows contain more information than can be displayed at once. When you have a long document or web page, only the first part of the document or page is displayed in the window. To view the rest of the document or page, you have to scroll down through the window, using the various parts of the scrollbar (shown in Figure 3.4).

FIGURE 3.4

Use the scrollbar to scroll through long pages.



There are several ways to scroll through a window. To scroll up or down a line at a time, click the up or down arrow on the window's scrollbar. To move to a specific place in a long document, use your mouse to grab the scroll box (between the up and down arrows) and drag it to a new position. You can also click the scrollbar between the scroll box and the end arrow, which scrolls you one screen at a time.

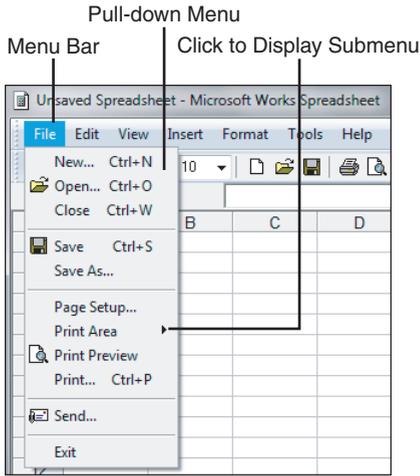
If your mouse has a scroll wheel, you can use it to scroll through a long document. Just roll the wheel back or forward to scroll down or up through a window. Likewise, some notebook touchpads let you drag your finger up or down to scroll through a window.

Using Menus

Many windows in Windows use a set of pull-down *menus* to store all the commands and operations you can perform. The menus are aligned across the top of the window, just below the title bar, in what is called a *menu bar*.

You open (or pull down) a menu by clicking the menu's name. The full menu then appears just below the menu bar, as shown in Figure 3.5. You activate a command or select a menu item by clicking it with your mouse.

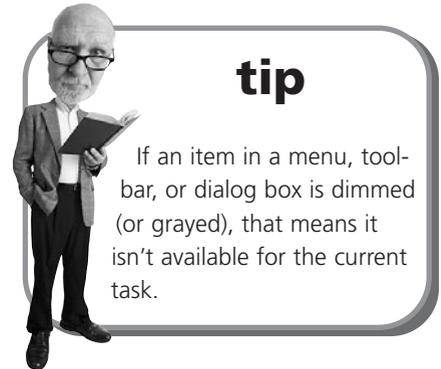
FIGURE 3.5
Navigating
Windows' menu
system.



Some menu items have a little black arrow to the right of the label. This indicates that additional choices are available, displayed on a *sub-menu*. Click the menu item or the arrow to display the submenu.

Other *menu items* have three little dots (called an ellipsis) to the right of the label. This indicates that additional choices are available, displayed in a dialog box. Click the menu item to display the dialog box.

The nice thing is, after you get the hang of this menu thing in one program, the menus should be similar in all the other programs you use. For example, most of the Microsoft Office 2007 programs have an Office button that, when clicked, displays a pull-down menu of common file-oriented operations; older programs have a File menu that contains similar operations. Although each program has menus and menu items specific to its own needs, these common menus make it easy to get up and running when you install new software programs on your system.



tip

If an item in a menu, toolbar, or dialog box is dimmed (or grayed), that means it isn't available for the current task.

Using Toolbars and Ribbons

Some Windows programs put the most frequently used operations on one or more *toolbars*, typically located just below the menu bar. (Figure 3.6 shows a typical Windows toolbar.) A toolbar looks like a row of buttons, each with a small picture (called an *icon*) and maybe a bit of text. You activate the associated command or operation by clicking the button with your mouse.



tip

If the toolbar is too long to display fully on your screen, you'll see a right arrow at the far-right side of the toolbar. Click this arrow to display the buttons that aren't currently visible.

FIGURE 3.6

A typical Windows toolbar.



Other programs substitute a *ribbon* for the toolbar. For example, most of the Microsoft Office 2007 programs have a ribbon that contains buttons for the most-used operations. As you can see in Figure 3.7, each ribbon has different tabs, each containing a unique collection of buttons. Click the tab to see the ribbon buttons for that particular type of operation.

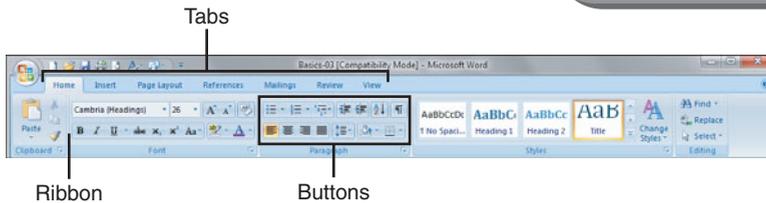


tip

If you're not sure which button does what on a toolbar or ribbon, you can hover the cursor over the button to display a *ToolTip*. A *ToolTip* is a small text box that displays the button's label or other useful information.

FIGURE 3.7

A new-style ribbon, with tabs for different types of operations.

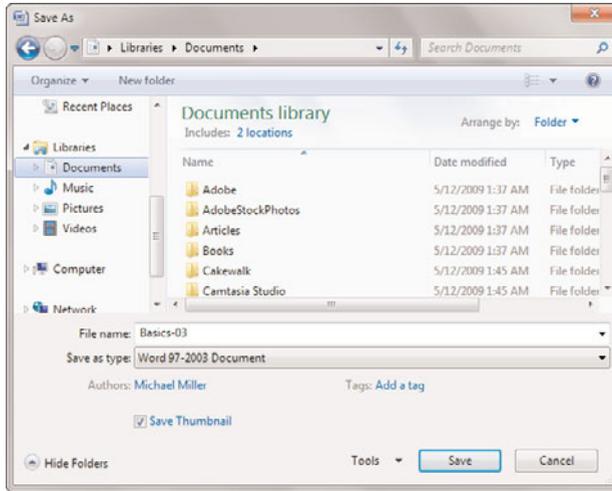


Using Dialog Boxes, Tabs, and Buttons

When Windows or an application requires a complex set of inputs, you are often presented with a *dialog box*. A dialog box is similar to a form in which you can input various parameters and make various choices—and then register those inputs and choices when you click OK. (Figure 3.8 shows the Save As dialog box, found in most Windows applications.)

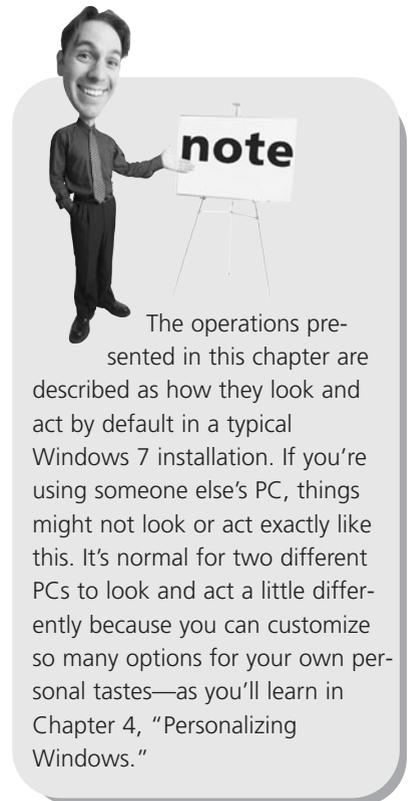
FIGURE 3.8

Use dialog boxes to control various aspects of your Windows applications.



Windows has several types of dialog boxes, each one customized to the task at hand. However, most dialog boxes share a set of common features, which include the following:

- **Buttons**—Most buttons either register your inputs or open an auxiliary dialog box. The most common buttons are OK (to register your inputs and close the dialog box), Cancel (to close the dialog box without registering your inputs), and Apply (to register your inputs without closing the dialog box). Click a button once to activate it.
- **Tabs**—These allow a single dialog box to display multiple “pages” of information. Think of each tab, arranged across the top of the dialog box, as a “thumbtab” to the individual page in the dialog box below it. Click the top of a tab to change to that particular page of information.
- **Text boxes**—These are empty boxes where you type in a response. Position your cursor over the empty input box, click your left mouse button, and begin typing.
- **Lists**—These are lists of available choices; lists can either scroll or drop down from what looks like an input box. Select an item from the list with your mouse; you can



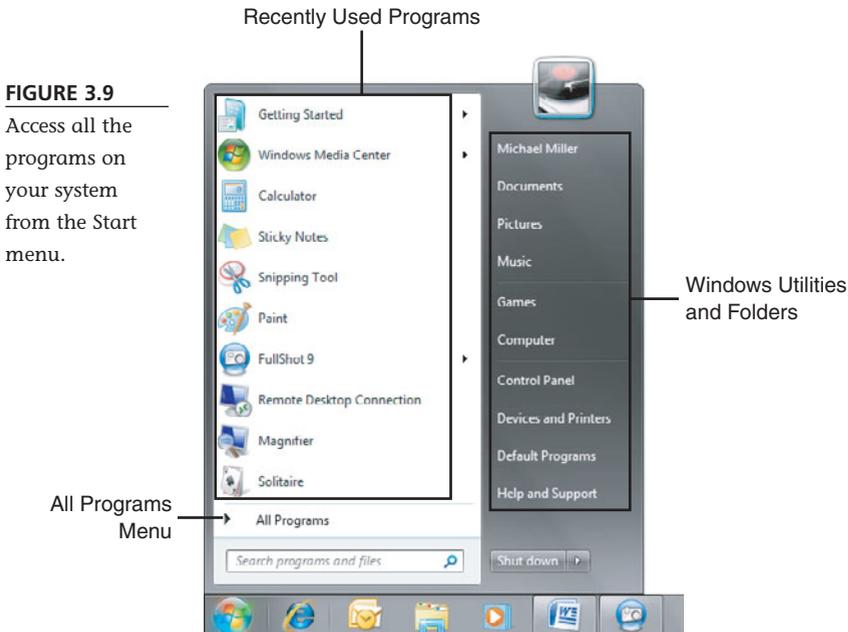
select multiple items in some lists by holding down the Ctrl key while clicking with your mouse.

- **Check boxes**—These are boxes that let you select (or deselect) various stand-alone options.
- **Sliders**—These are sliding bars that let you select increments between two extremes, similar to a sliding volume control on an audio system.

Using the Start Menu

All the software programs and utilities on your computer are accessed via Windows' Start menu. You display the Start menu by using your mouse to click the Start button, located in the lower-left corner of your screen.

As you can see in Figure 3.9, the Windows 7 Start menu consists of two columns of icons. Your most frequently and recently used programs are listed in the left column; basic Windows utilities and folders are listed in the right column. To open a specific program or folder, just click the name of the item.



To view the rest of your programs, click the All Programs arrow. This displays a sub-menu called the Programs menu. From here you can access various programs, sorted by type or manufacturer. (When more programs are contained within a master folder, you'll see an arrow to the right of the title; click this arrow to expand the menu and display additional choices.)

Launching a Program

Now that you know how to work the Start menu, it's easy to start any particular software program. All you have to do is follow these steps:

1. Click the Start button to display the Start menu.
2. If the program is displayed on the Start menu, click the program's icon.
3. If the program isn't visible on the main Start menu, click the All Programs button, find the program's icon, and then click it.

Another way to find a program to launch is to use the Instant Search box on the Start menu. Just start entering the program's name into the search box, and a list of matching programs appears on the Start menu. When the program you want appears, click it to launch it.

Reopening Recent Documents

In Windows 7, you can quickly access the most recent documents opened with an application directly from the Start menu. Look for a right arrow next to an application on the main Start menu (not the All Programs menu); click this arrow, and you'll see a list of that application's most recent documents. Click a document from this menu, and you'll open both the application and that document.

Using the Taskbar

That little strip of real estate at the bottom of the Windows desktop is called the *taskbar*. The Windows 7 taskbar lets you open your favorite applications and documents, as well as switch between open windows.

Introducing the New Windows 7 Taskbar

In previous versions of Windows, up to and including Windows Vista, the taskbar existed to show you which programs or documents were currently open in Windows. Every open application or document had its own button on the taskbar; you could easily switch from one open window to another by clicking the appropriate taskbar button.

That changed a little with Windows XP, when Microsoft added a separate Quick Launch toolbar that you could dock to the taskbar. The Quick Launch toolbar could be configured with buttons for your favorite apps, which could then be quickly launched from the toolbar—which, when docked, appeared to be part of the taskbar. In Windows XP, the Quick Launch toolbar was activated by default; it was still around in Windows Vista, but not automatically displayed.

Well, in Windows 7, the taskbar takes on the attributes of the traditional taskbar plus the old Quick Launch toolbar—and a little more. That is, the Win7 taskbar

includes buttons (actually, just icons—no text) not just for running applications and documents, but also for your favorite applications. Click an icon to launch an app, or click an icon to switch to an open window; taskbar icons exist for both.

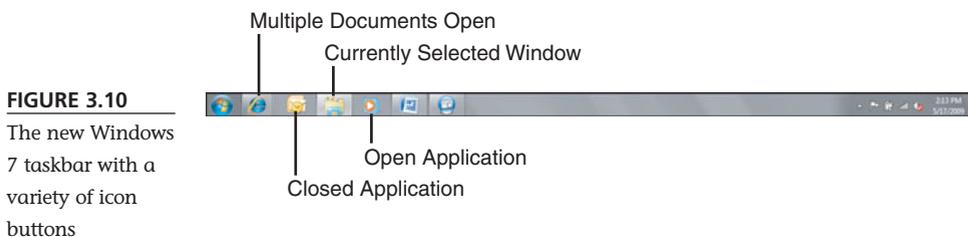
Deciphering Taskbar Icons

If you've used previous versions of Windows, you'll notice immediately that the Windows 7 taskbar looks a bit different. It's more glass-like than older taskbars, a little taller as well, and it displays icons, not buttons. There are no labels on the icons, just the icon graphic.

The advantage to this new design is both visual (a much cleaner look) and practical (the new icons—while larger than the icons on the old text buttons—take up less space on the taskbar). It's easier to see what's what while at the same time displaying more items in the same amount of screen real estate.

Because of the multiple functions of these new taskbar icons, it's difficult to look at an icon in the taskbar and determine whether it represents an open or closed application or document. Difficult, yes, but not impossible. Here's the key.

As you can see in Figure 3.10, an icon for a not-yet-open application or document—essentially a shortcut to that app or doc—appears on the taskbar with no border. An icon for an open window has a slight border, while still appearing translucent. An icon for the currently selected open window also has a border but is less transparent. And if there is more than one document open for a given application (or more than one tab open in a web browser), that app's icon button appears “stacked” to represent multiple instances.



Opening Applications and Switching Between Windows

Using the taskbar is simplicity itself. Click a shortcut icon to open the associated application or document. Click an open window icon to display that window front and center.

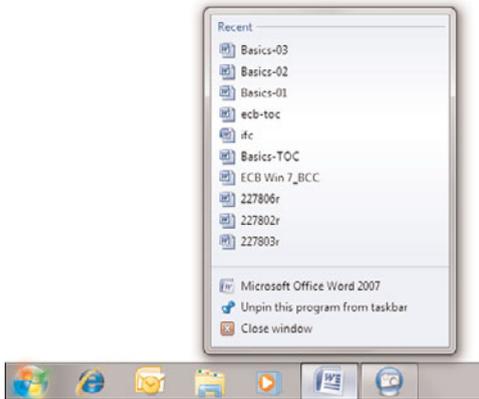
If you click a multiple-window icon, however, something interesting happens: Windows displays thumbnails for each of that application's open windows. (The same thing happens if you hover the cursor over any open-window icon, actually.) Move the cursor over a thumbnail, and that window temporarily displays on top of the stack on your desktop, no matter what its actual position. Click a thumbnail to switch to that window or click the red X on the thumbnail to close the window.

Using Jump Lists

The Windows 7 taskbar becomes even more useful with the addition of Jump Lists—kind of context-sensitive pop-up menus for each icon on the taskbar. To display an icon's Jump List, shown in Figure 3.11, right-click the icon.

FIGURE 3.11

A Windows 7 taskbar Jump List.



What you see in a Jump List depends to some degree on the application associated with the icon. For example, Windows 7–specific apps will display more specific (and useful) Jump Lists than applications developed prior to Windows 7; an app has to be written specifically to take full advantage of this new feature.

Most Jump Lists contain the following items:

- The most recent documents opened in this application
- A link to open a new instance of this application
- An option to unpin this item from the taskbar (for shortcut icons)
- An option to close the current window (for open-window icons)

Win7–specific apps offer more application-appropriate items on their Jump Lists. For example, Windows Media Player 12 has a section for frequent playlists and albums, as well as a Tasks section with the most-recent program operations.

In short, Windows 7 taskbar Jump Lists are a lot like traditional right-click pop-up menus, but with more useful options. They make the new taskbar icons more useful than they would have been otherwise.

Managing Taskbar Buttons

Now that you know what the Windows 7 taskbar does, let's look a little at how to manage the new taskbar.

First, know that you have total control over the order of icons on the taskbar. Just drag and drop a taskbar icon from one position to another, and there it stays.

To add an application or document shortcut to the taskbar, just navigate to that item using the Start menu or Windows Explorer, right-click the item's icon, and select Pin to Taskbar. Alternatively, you can drag an icon from any folder to the taskbar. Either approach is quick and easy.

To remove an item from the taskbar, right-click it and select Unpin This Program from Taskbar from the Jump List.

Switching Between Programs

The taskbar is one way to switch between open programs, but it's not the only way. You can also do either of the following:

- Click any visible part of the application's window, which brings that window to the front.
- Hold down the Alt key and then press the Tab key repeatedly until the application window you want is selected. This is called *Windows Flip* and cycles through thumbnails of all open windows, as shown in Figure 3.12. When you're at the window you want, release the Alt key.

FIGURE 3.12

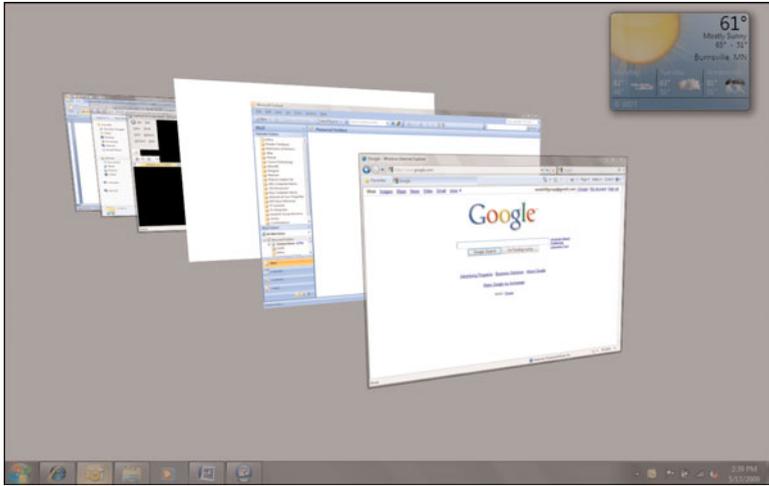
Use Windows Flip to select from thumbnails of all open programs.



- Hold down the Start button and then press the Tab key to activate the *Flip 3D* feature. This displays a three-dimensional stack of all open windows, as shown in Figure 3.13. Continue pressing the Tab key (or rotate the scroll button on your mouse) to cycle through the windows on the stack.

FIGURE 3.13

Flip 3D lets you flip through a three-dimensional stack of open windows.



Using Windows Explorer

In Windows 7, all the items stored on your computer—including programs, documents, and configuration settings—are accessible from *Windows Explorer*. This is a window that displays all the disk drives, folders, subfolders, and files on your computer system. You use Windows Explorer to find, copy, delete, launch, and even configure programs and documents.

You launch Windows Explorer from either the taskbar or the Start menu. Just click the Windows Explorer icon on the taskbar or select Documents from the Start menu.

Windows Explorer is also used to go directly to various types of documents on your hard drive. For example, when you click the Music icon on the Start menu, you open Windows Explorer looking directly at the open Music folder. When you click the Pictures icon on the Start menu, you open Windows Explorer looking directly at the open Pictures folder. And so forth.

Navigating Windows Explorer

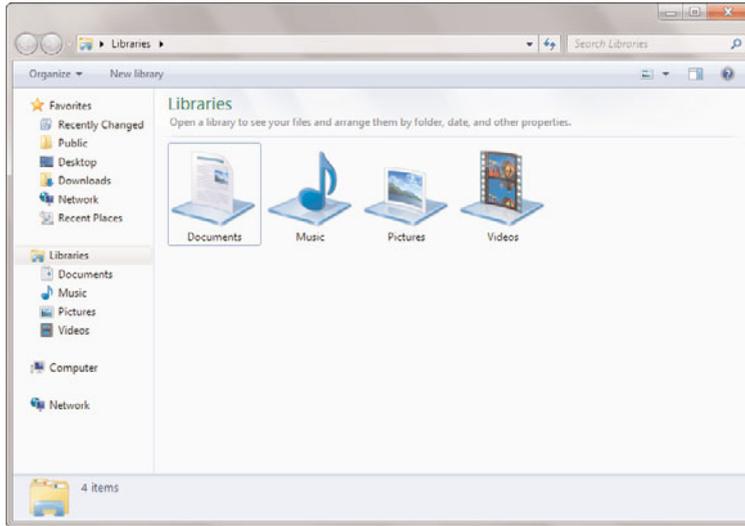
When you open Windows Explorer, you see four icons. These icons let you go directly to all the Documents, Music, Pictures, and Videos stored on your hard drive. Double-click an icon to view the subfolders and files of that type.

On the left side of the Windows Explorer window is a Navigation pane, divided into several sections. The top section, Favorites, lists your most-used folders—Recently Changed, Public, Desktop, Downloads, Network, and Recent Places. Next is the Libraries section, which repeats the four icons in the main window—Documents, Music, Pictures, and Videos. Below that is a Homegroup section, which lets you access other computers on your network HomeGroup. The Computer section lets you access all the disk drives and devices connected to your computer. And the Network

section lets you access all of your networked computers. Click any icon in the Navigation pane to view the contents of that item.

FIGURE 3.14

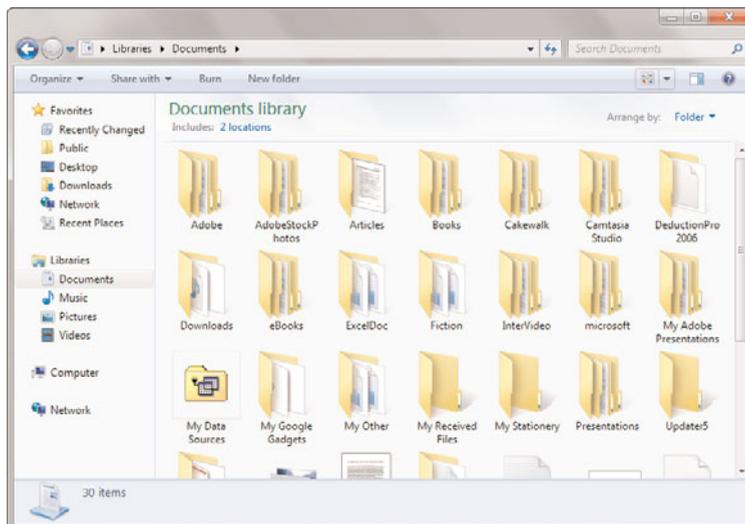
Navigating through your folders and subfolders with Windows Explorer.



Let's examine how Windows Explorer works. Double-click the Documents icon in the main window (or click the Documents item in the Navigation pane), and you see a window full of folders, such as the one shown in Figure 3.15. Double-click a folder icon to view the contents of that folder—which could be individual files or additional folders (sometimes called *subfolders*). To launch a program or open a document, double-click that item's icon. To perform other tasks (copying, deleting, and so forth), right-click the icon and select an option from the pop-up menu.

FIGURE 3.15

Browsing through the folders and files stored on your system with Windows Explorer.



When you want to copy, delete, or otherwise manage files and folders, you use the Organize menu on the Windows Explorer toolbar. This menu includes most of the operations you need to manage your system's files and folders.

Managing PC Resources with Computer Explorer

Windows 7 includes a special version of Windows Explorer, called *Computer Explorer*, that you use to access each major component of your system and perform basic maintenance functions. For example, you can use Computer Explorer to “open” the contents of your hard disk and then copy, move, and delete individual files. To open the Computer Explorer, simply click the Computer icon on the Start menu.

As you can see in Figure 3.16, Computer Explorer contains icons for each of the major components of your system—your hard disk drive, external drives, CD-ROM or DVD drive, and so on. To view the contents of a specific drive, simply double-click the icon for that drive. You'll see a list of folders and files located on that drive; to view the contents of any folder, just double-click the icon for that folder.

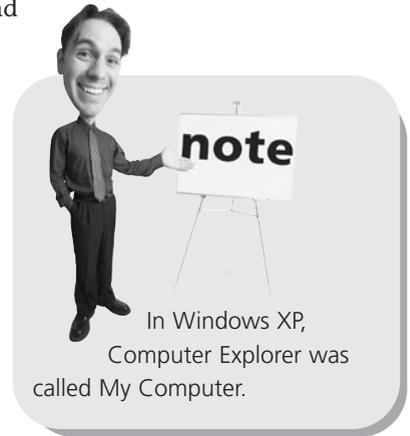
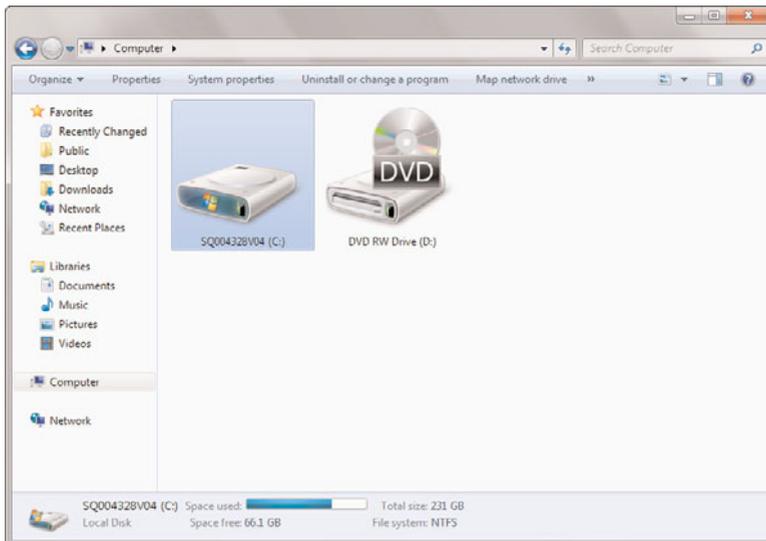


FIGURE 3.16

Use Computer Explorer to manage your hard drive and other key components.



Managing Windows with the Control Panel

There's one more variation of Windows Explorer, similar to Computer Explorer, that you need to know about. This Explorer, called the *Control Panel*, is used to manage most of Windows' configuration settings. To open the Control Panel, click the Control Panel icon on the Start menu.

When the Control Panel opens, as shown in Figure 3.17, you can select a particular category you want to configure. Each item you select opens a window with a different set of options; just keep clicking until you find the specific item you want to configure.

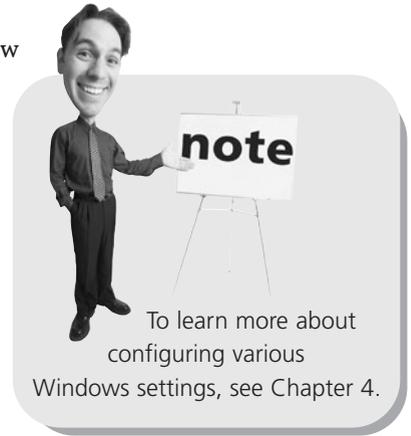
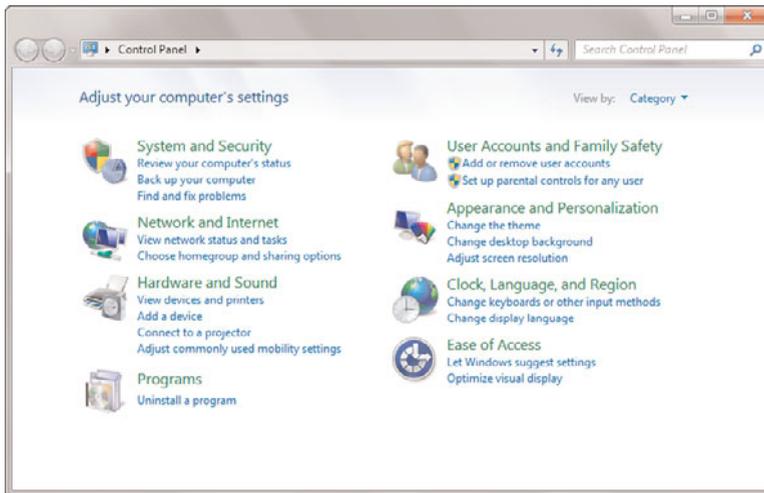


FIGURE 3.17

The Windows 7 Control Panel—configuration tasks are organized by category.



All the Other Things in Windows

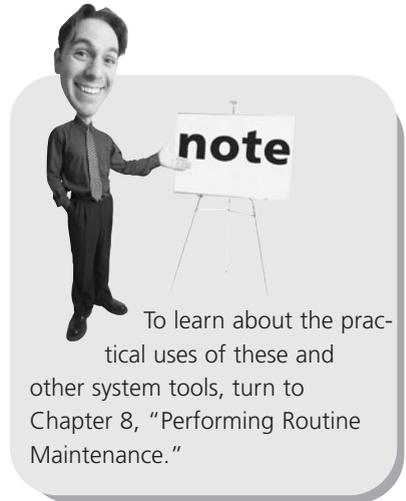
Windows is more than just a pretty desktop and some configuration utilities. Windows also includes many accessory programs and system tools you can use to perform basic system operations.

Built-In Applications and System Tools

Windows includes a number of single-function accessory programs, all accessible from the Start menu. These programs include a calculator, some games, two basic word processors (Notepad and WordPad), a drawing program (Paint), a player for

audio and video files (Windows Media Player), a photo viewing program (Windows Photo Viewer), a DVD burning program (Windows DVD Maker), the Internet Explorer web browser, and more. You access all of these accessories from the Start menu and by selecting All Programs. Some programs are right on the All Programs menu; others are a level down on the Accessories menu.

Windows 7 also includes a handful of technical tools you can use to keep your system running smoothly. You can access all these tools by clicking the Start button and selecting All Programs, Accessories, System Tools.



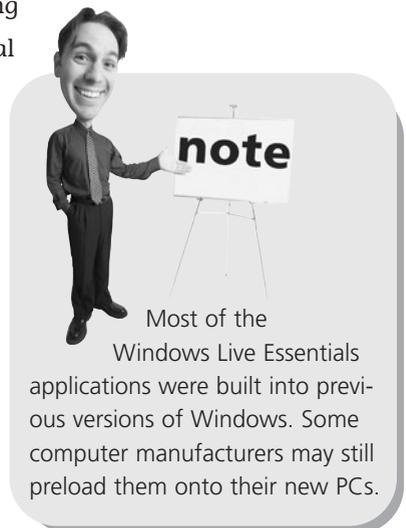
Downloading More Applications

In previous versions of Windows, Microsoft included even more built-in applications. In Windows 7, however, Microsoft decided to streamline the operating system a bit and make some of these applications optional. This is nice if you never use some of the applications, as they don't have to take up space on your hard drive.

Instead of including the applications in the operating system itself, Microsoft makes the applications available for free download as part of the Windows Live Essentials program. The applications you can download include the following:

- Windows Live Family Safety, for monitoring and controlling your children's Internet access
- Windows Live Mail, for sending and receiving email
- Windows Live Messenger, for instant messaging
- Windows Live Movie Maker, for editing digital movies
- Windows Live Photo Gallery, for viewing, organizing, and editing digital photos
- Windows Live Toolbar, for searching the Web (using Windows Live Search) directly from your web browser
- Windows Live Writer, for creating blog posts on Blogger, Wordpress, TypePad, and other blogging services

To download and install any or all of these applications, go to download.live.com and follow the directions there.



Getting Help in Windows

When you can't figure out how to perform a particular task, it's time to ask for help. In Windows 7, this is done through the Help and Support Center.

To launch the Help and Support Center, click the Start button and then select Help and Support. The Help and Support Center lets you search for specific answers to your problems, browse the table of contents, connect to another computer for remote assistance, go online for additional help, and troubleshoot any problems you may be having. Click the type of help you want and follow the onscreen instructions from there.

Shutting Down Windows—and Your Computer

You've probably already noticed that Windows starts automatically every time you turn on your computer. Although you will see lines of text flashing onscreen during the initial startup, Windows loads automatically and goes on to display the Windows desktop.

Powering Down

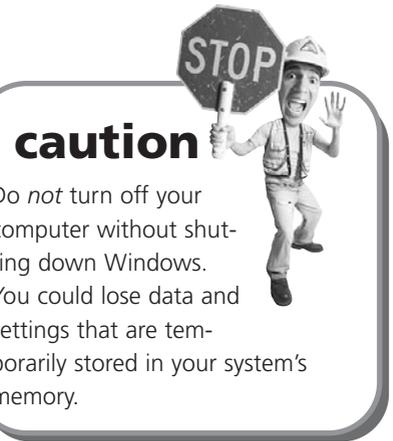
When you want to turn off your computer, you do it through Windows. In fact, you don't want to turn off your computer any other way—you *always* want to turn off things through the official Windows procedure.

To shut down Windows and turn off your PC, click the Start button and then select Shut Down. If you have a desktop PC, you'll then want to manually turn off your monitor, printer, and other peripherals.

Putting Windows to Sleep

While you can totally power down your computer, you can also just put it to sleep, invoking Windows' special Sleep mode. When you enter Sleep mode, Windows saves all your open documents, applications, and data to both your PC's hard drive and memory; shuts down your PC's hard drive and monitor; and then enters a special power-saving mode. It doesn't turn off your computer—it simply puts it to sleep.

The advantage of using Sleep mode is that it makes it faster to turn your computer back on—or, more accurately, to wake it up. When you've put Windows in Sleep mode, pressing your computer's On button powers up your equipment, wakes up Windows from Sleep mode, and quickly retrieves all open documents and applications from system memory. It's a lot faster than rebooting from a power-off condition.



To invoke Sleep mode, click the Start button; then click the right-arrow button next to the Shut Down button and select Sleep from the pop-up menu.

THE ABSOLUTE MINIMUM

This chapter gave you a lot of background about Windows 7—your new PC's operating system. Here are the key points to remember:

- You use Windows to manage your computer system and run your software programs.
- Most functions in Windows are activated by clicking or double-clicking an icon or a button.
- All the programs and accessories on your system are accessed via the Start menu, which you display by clicking the Start button.
- Use Windows Explorer (and Computer Explorer) to view and manage the contents of your computer system.
- Use the Control Panel to manage Windows' configuration settings.
- When you can't figure out how to do something, click the Start button and select Help and Support.

Index

Symbols

- + (addition) operator (Excel), 178
- / (division) operator (Excel), 178
- * (multiplication) operator (Excel), 178
- (subtraction) operator (Excel), 178
- 5.1 surround sound speaker systems, 22
- 30Boxes website, 271
- 802.11b WiFi standard, 105
- 802.11g WiFi standard, 105
- 802.11n WiFi standard, 105

A

- AAA Travel Services website, 286
- AAC audio file format, 366-367
- AAC Lossless audio file format, 367
- AARP website, 290
- ABC News website, 284
- ABC website, 261
- access points (wireless networks), 106
- accessing network computers, 111
- accounts
 - ISP, 197
 - user
 - creating, 77
 - passwords, 76-78
 - pictures, 77
 - setting up, 76
- accuracy, Wikipedia articles, 223-224
- AccuWeather website, 285
- Acronis True Image, 122
- Action Center utility, 121
- ActiveX controls, 153
- Ad-Aware website, 141
- adapters (wireless networks), 97
- Add a Favorite dialog box, 207
- Add a Printer window, 112
- adding
 - external hardware, 99-100
 - gadgets to desktop, 72-73
 - hardware, popular peripherals, 96-97
 - memory, 17
 - pictures, Word documents, 172
 - programs, Start menu, 75
- addition (+) operator, Excel, 178
- addresses (email), 294

- Adobe Buzzword website, 273**
- Adobe Dreamweaver, 281**
- Adobe Photoshop Elements website, 338**
- Adobe Premiere Elements website, 386**
- Aero interface, 69**
- Aero Peek (Windows 7), 47**
- aero peek button (desktop), 45**
- AIM (AOL Instant Messenger), 304**
 - buddies, adding, 305-306
 - downloading, 304
 - launching, 305
 - messages
 - receiving, 307*
 - sending, 306*
- Ain't It Cool News website, 288**
- All Game Guide website, 289**
- All Games Free website, 289**
- all-in-one desktops, 24**
- All-Movie Guide website, 288**
- All-Music Guide website, 288**
- AltaVista—AV Family Filter, 147**
- AltaVista website, 217**
- AMA DoctorFinder website, 286**
- Amazon MP3Downloads website, 370**
- AMD microprocessors, 17**
- analog-to-digital video conversions, 386**
- Angelfire website, 278**
- animations, PowerPoint slides, 191-192**
- ANT 4 MailChecking, 144**
- anti-spam software, 144**
- anti-spyware software, 141**
- antivirus software, 140**
- AnyWho website, 217**
- AOL (America Online)**
 - Calendar, 271
 - CityGuide, 286
 - Instant Messenger. *See* AIM
 - Mail, 295
 - Radio, 375
 - Video, 261
- Apple**
 - Mac OS, 14
 - MobileMe Calendar websites, 271
- applications. *See* programs**
- ArcadeTown website, 289**
- Areo Snap feature (Windows 7), 47**
- arranging desktop icons, 74**
- articles (Wikipedia)**
 - accuracy, 223-224
 - creating, 222
 - discussions, 221
 - editing, 223
 - reading, 220-221
 - searching, 221
- Ask Kids website, 147**
- Ask website, 217**
- Attach Files dialog box, 342**
- attachments**
 - Gmail, 299-300
 - photo, sending, 342, 348
 - sending, 91
- attacks, preventing, 141-142**
- auctions, 235**
- auctions, eBay**
 - bidding process, 238-240
 - Buy It Now (BIN) option, 240-241
 - craigslist, compared, 246
 - fraud protection, 241-242
 - process overview, 236-238
 - registering for, 236-237
 - seller overview, 236
 - selling process, 242-244
- Audacity website, 330**
- audio**
 - CDs
 - bit rate, setting, 357*
 - burning, 358, 362-363*
 - playing, 354-356*
 - ripping, 356-362*
 - digital audio formats, 366-367
 - downloading from online music stores, 368
 - additional music stores, 370*
 - iTunes, 368-369*
 - noncommercial sites, 371*
 - DRM (digital rights management), 367-368
 - Internet radio, 374-375
 - iPods. *See* iPods
 - iTunes. *See* iTunes
 - notebooks, 26

playing, 371
iTunes, 373-374
Windows Media Player,
 371-373
 recording software, 330
 sound cards, 22, 96
 speakers, 22, 34, 96
Windows Media Player, 354
burning CDs, 358
controls, 354-355
launching, 354
playback status area, 355
playing CDs, 355-356
playlists, 372-373
ripping CDs, 356-358
website, 354

automatic backups, 122-123

automatic software installations, 152

AutoSum function (Excel),
 179-180

AVG Anti-Virus, 140

Avira AntiVir, 140

Awesome Library website,
 288

B

Back button (Internet Explorer toolbar), 204

backgrounds

desktops, 67-68
PowerPoint presentations,
 189

backups

files, 91-92
 selecting devices, 122
Windows Backup, 122-123

banking online

bill pay, 257-258
 fees, 254
 overview, 254
 software-based banking,
 254-257
 web-based banking,
 254-255

base stations (wireless networks), 106

batteries

iPods, charging, 379
 notebooks, 27, 126-127

BBC News website, 284

Bible Search, 287

BibleGateway.com, 287

bidding process (eBay),
 238-240

Bing website, 217

bit rate (CDs), 357

BizRate website, 229

Bla-Bla List website, 272

black-and-white printers, 28

blocking

pop-up ads, 209, 212
 spammers, 143
 Twitter followers, 319

Blog Hints website, 326

Blog Search Engine website,
 326

BlogCatalog website, 326

BlogEasy website, 327

Blogger website, 217, 327

Blogging Fusion website,
 326

Bloghub.com, 326

Bloglines website, 326

blogs

creating, 327-328
 directories, 326
 overview, 324-325
 reading and commenting on,
 325-326
 searching, 326
 sidebar columns, 325
 tracking, 326-327

Blogsome website, 327

Blu-ray, 19

BMP images, adding to Word documents, 172

boards. *See* cards

booting systems, 38

booting. *See* turning on PCs

botnets, 138

Boxerjam website, 289

Bravenet website, 278

breaking PCs, 15

BrinkPad website, 275

broadband Internet connections, 21, 196

cable, 196
 DSL, 196
 FiOS, 197
 modems, 97
 satellite, 197-199
 setting up, 198
 sharing, 198

browsers (web), 201

browsing craigslist, 246-247

BuddhaNet website, 287

buddies (AIM), 305-306

built-in programs/tools (Windows), 61**burning**

CDs

iTunes, 362-363*Windows Media Player*, 358

DVDs, 387-389

buttons

dialog boxes, 52

Internet Explorer toolbar, 204

Windows Media Player, 354-355**Buy It Now option (eBay), 240-241****buying process (craigslist), 248****bytes, 17****C****cable Internet connections, 21, 198-199****cable modems, 21, 107****cables, connecting, 33-35****CalendarHub website, 271****calendars (web-based), 270-271****camcorders, connecting to PCs, 386****cameras, digital. See digital cameras****cards, 16**

analog-to-digital video capture cards, 386

network, 97

sound, 22, 96

video, 23, 96

CareerBuilder website, 287**Career.com, 287****categories (craigslist), 247****CBS website, 261**

News, 260, 284

Sports, 284

CD/DVD drives, 18-19, 97**CD-R drives, 18****CD-ROM discs, 19****CD-RW drives, 18****CDs**

bit rate, setting, 357

burning

iTunes, 362-363*Windows Media Player*, 358

playing

iTunes, 359-360*media player programs*, 354*pausing playback*, 356*random order*, 356, 360*Windows Media Player*, 354-356

ripping songs to PCs

iTunes, 360-362*Windows Media Player*, 356-358**cells (spreadsheets), 176**

active, 176

AutoSum function, 179-180

data entry, 177

formatting, 182

formulas, 179-180

sorting, 181

central processing units (CPUs), 16-17**Chart Wizard, 182-183****charts**

PowerPoint presentations, 191

spreadsheets, 182-183

check boxes (dialog boxes), 53**ChildFun Family website, 289****children**

Internet security, 148

content-filtering software, 146*searches*, 147-148

protecting on social networking sites, 320-321

websites, 289

Classroom Clipart website, 286**Clip Art Center website, 286****Clip Art Gallery (Word), 172****Clipart.com, 286****Clock gadget, 72****closing**

programs, 132

windows, 49

cloud computing, 270**CMS Bounceback, 122****CNN Money website, 285****CNN website, 284****color printers, 28****colors, desktops, 69-70****columns (spreadsheets), 176**

alphabetic labels, 176

deleting, 177

- inserting, 177
- width, adjusting, 178
- combination printers, 28**
- Comedy Central website, 261**
- comments**
 - blogs, 325-326
 - MySpace, 316
- components**
 - connecting, 33-34
 - desktop, 44
 - dialog boxes, 52
 - Microsoft Works, 156
 - notebooks, 25-27
 - PCs, 11
 - customizing, 12*
 - hard disks, 13*
 - hardware, 11*
 - joysticks, 13*
 - peripherals, 11*
 - printers, 12*
 - scanners, 12*
 - turning on, 35
- composing Gmail messages, 298**
- compressing files/folders, 88, 366**
- Computer Explorer, 60**
- computers. See PCs**
- Concierge.com, 286**
- configuring. See setup**
- connections**
 - cables, 35
 - camcorders, 386
 - digital cameras, 336
 - FireWire/USB ports, 100
- Internet
 - account setup, 197*
 - broadband, 21, 196-197*
 - configuring Windows, 198*
 - dial-up, 196*
 - FiOS, 197*
 - sharing, 114, 198-199*
 - types, 196-197*
 - WiFi hotspots, 199-200*
- iPods, 379
- networks, 21-22, 107
- notebooks, 35
- peripherals, 100
- portable devices, 100-101
- scanners, 336
- system components, 33-34
- USB ports, 99
- connectors**
 - notebooks, 26
 - system units, 24
- conserving notebook batteries, 126-127**
- contacts (Gmail), 298**
- content-filtering software, 146**
- Control Panel, 61, 66**
- conversations (Gmail), 297**
- copying**
 - files, 85-86
 - email, 91*
 - networks, 89*
 - portable drives, 91*
 - Windows Explorer, 85*
 - Microsoft Word text, 168
 - songs to PCs
 - iTunes, 360-362*
 - Windows Media Player, 356-358*
- Corbis website, 286**
- CPUs (central processing units), 16-17**
- craigslist, 246**
 - browsing listings, 246-247
 - buying items, 248
 - categories, 247
 - check payments, 251
 - eBay, compared, 246
 - selling items, 249-251
- crashes, 133-135**
- crawlers, 214**
- creating. See also formatting**
 - blogs, 327-328
 - charts, 182-183
 - desktop icons, 74
 - documents
 - Microsoft Word, 166*
 - Microsoft Works, 157*
 - DVDs, 387-389
 - Excel formulas, 178
 - folders, 84
 - Gmail messages, 298
 - HomeGroups, 113
 - libraries, 83
 - playlists
 - iTunes, 374*
 - Windows Media Player, 372-373*
 - podcasts, 330-331
 - PowerPoint presentations, 187
 - profile pages
 - MySpace, 316-317*
 - Facebook, 312*
 - user accounts, 77

web pages

home page communities,
278

page-building software,
281

Tripod, 279-281

uploading to hosting ser-
vices, 282

Wikipedia articles, 222

Crosswalk.com, 288

Ctrl+Alt+Del key combina-
tion, 132

cursor, 20

customizing

desktops, 66

Aero interface, 69

backgrounds, 67-68

colors, 69-70

gadgets, 72-73

screen savers, 71

size, 70

slideshows, 69

themes, 67

Internet Explorer cookie/pri-
vacy options, 210-211

PowerPoint backgrounds,
189

screen resolution, 70

spreadsheet column width,
178

user accounts, 77

Word print options, 170

Customizing Start Menu dia-
log box, 75

cutting Microsoft Word text,
168

CyberPatrol, 146

CYBERSitter, 146

D

Dada website, 370

Dark Horizons website, 288

data entry, spreadsheets, 177

date and time, resetting, 76

Date and Time dialog box,
76

Date and Time Settings dia-
log box, 76

decompressing files/folders,
89

defragmenting hard drives,
120

Delete Browsing History dia-
log box, 211

deleting. See removing

Desktop Background win-
dow, 68

desktop replacement note-
books, 28

desktops, 44

components, 44

customizing, 66

Aero interface, 69

backgrounds, 67-68

colors, 69-70

gadgets, 72-73

screen savers, 71

slideshows, 69

themes, 67

peeking, 47

shortcuts, 73-74

sizing, 70

Start menu, 75

time and date, resetting, 76

windows, moving/resizing,
47

device drivers, 100

dial-up Internet connections,
196-198

dial-up modems, 21

dialog boxes, 51-53

Add a Favorite, 207

Attach Files, 342

components, 52

Customizing Start Menu, 75

Date and Time, 76

Date and Time Settings, 76

Delete Browsing History, 211

displaying, 50

Format Background
(PowerPoint), 189

Function Arguments (Excel),
181

grayed items, 50

Include Folder in New
Library, 83

Insert Chart, 191

Insert Picture, 172

Internet Options, 210

Print Word), 170

Screen Saver Settings, 71

Sort (Excel), 181

Taskbar and Start Menu
Properties, 75

digital audio

downloading from online
music stores, 368

additional music stores,
370

iTunes, 368-369

noncommercial sites, 371

DRM (digital rights manage-
ment), 367-368

file formats, 366-367

Internet radio, 374-375

playing, 371
iTunes, 373-374
Windows Media Player, 371-373

digital camcorders, connecting, 101

digital cameras
 connecting to PCs, 101, 336
 memory card readers, 96

digital photos. See pictures

Digital Podcast website, 329

digital rights management (DRM), 367-368

digital video files
 burning to DVD, 387-389
 playing, 383

directories
 blogs, 326
 Web, 217

Discovery Education Classroom Resources website, 288

discussions (Wikipedia articles), 221

Disk Cleanup utility, 118-119

Disk Defragmenter utility, 120

disk drives
 CD/DVD, 18-19, 26, 97
 CD-R, 18
 CD-RW, 18
 hard disk drives, 18
adding, 96
checking for errors, 120-121
defragmenting, 120

deleting unnecessary files, 118-119
formatting, 18

/ (division operator, Excel), 178

DoctorDirectory website, 286

Document workspace (Microsoft Word 2007), 164

documents
 Microsoft Works, 157-158
 recent, reopening, 54
 Word. *See* Word documents

dotPhoto website, 349

double-clicking, 46

Download.com, 139

downloading
 AIM software, 304
 applications, 62
 digital music from online music stores, 368
additional music stores, 370
iTunes, 368-369, 380
noncommercial sites, 371
 online software, 152-153

Draft view (Word), 164

dragging and dropping, 46

drives. See disk drives

DRM (digital rights management), 367-368

DropShots website, 349

DSL Internet connections, 196
 setting up, 198
 sharing, 198-199

DSL modems, 107

dual-core CPUs, 17

DVDs

burning, 387-389
 playing, 354
Windows DVD Maker, 388-389
Windows Media Center, playing, 382-384

E

E! Online website, 288

Easy Media Creator website, 358

eBay auctions, 235

bidding process, 238-240
 Buy It Now (BIN) option, 240-241
 craigslist, compared, 246
 fraud protection, 241-242
 process overview, 236-238
 registering for, 236-237
 seller overview, 236
 selling process, 242-244

eBloggy website, 327

EditGrid website, 274

editing

Microsoft Word documents, 168
 pictures, 338-342
 video, 386-387
 Wikipedia articles, 223

education websites, 288

ellipsis (Windows menus), 50

email (electronic mail), 294

addresses, 294
 Facebook, 313-314

files, copying, 91

Gmail

composing messages,
298

contacts, adding, 298

conversations, viewing,
297

file attachments, 299-300

navigating, 296-297

reading, 297

replying to messages, 297

phishing scams, 144-146

pictures

Photo Gallery, 342

sending, 348

POP, 294-295

spam, 142

anti-spam software, 144

blocking spammers, 143

protecting email addresses,
142-143

web, 295

EmploymentGuide.com, 287

Empressr website, 275

emptying, Recycle Bin, 88

eMusic website, 370

Enterprise edition (Windows 7), 43

entertainment websites, 288

Entertainment Weekly website, 288

ePodcast Creator website, 330

ergonomics, 32

eSpirituality.com, 288

ESPN website, 261, 284

Excel, 175-176

AutoSum function, 179-180

cells

active, 176

defined, 176

formatting, 182

sorting, 181

charts, creating, 182-183

columns

defined, 176

deleting, 177

inserting, 177

width, adjusting, 178

data entry, 177

formulas, 178

algebraic operators,
178-179

entering, 178

including cells in, 179

referencing consecutive cells, 180

functions, 180-181

rows

defined, 176

deleting, 177

inserting, 177

spreadsheets, formatting,
182

Expedia website, 232

eXpresso website, 274

external hardware, adding, 99-100

external ports, 97-98

extracting files, 89

Extraction Wizard, 89

F

Facebook, 311

emailing, 313-314

friending, 311

profiles

creating, 312

viewing, 311

uploading photos, 313

writing on the wall, 313

Fact Monster website, 147, 288

Fair Credit Billing Act, 232

FamilyFun.com, 289

Famundo website, 271

fast saves (Word documents), 167

Favorites (Internet Explorer), 204, 207

feed reader software, 326

Feedback ratings (eBay), 241-242

FeedDemon, 326

FeedReader website, 326

Feeds button (Internet Explorer), 204

Fiber Optic Service (FiOS) Internet connections, 197

files

attaching to Gmail messages, 299-300

backups, 91-92

compressing, 88

copying, 85-86

decompressing, 89

defined, 80

deleting, 86-87, 118-119

- digital audio formats, 366-367
- email, copying, 91
- extensions, 84
 - defined*, 80
 - displaying*, 80
 - ZIP*, 88
- extracting, 89
- grouping, 82
- Microsoft Works, finding, 158
- moving, 86
- naming, 80, 84
- networks, copying, 89
- paths, 80
- portable drives, copying, 91
- renaming, 85
- restoring deleted, 87
- searching, 83
- sharing across networks, 109
 - Windows 7*, 110
 - Windows Vista*, 110
 - Windows XP*, 111
- sorting, 81
- video
 - burning to DVD*, 387-389
 - playing*, 383
 - viewing, 80-81
 - Windows Explorer, 59
- Film.com, 288**
- final value fees (eBay), 243**
- finance-related websites, 285**
- finding. See searching**
- FiOS (Fiber Optic Service) Internet connections, 197**
- Firefox website, 202**
- firewalls, 141-142**
- FireWire ports, connecting peripherals, 99-100**
- first-party cookies, 211**
- Flickr website, 349**
- Flide Crunch website, 274**
- Flip (Windows), 57**
- Fodors website, 286**
- folders**
 - compressing, 88
 - creating, 84
 - decompressing, 89
 - defined, 80
 - grouping, 82
 - naming, 84
 - navigating, 82
 - Picture, 338
 - renaming, 85
 - sharing across networks, 109-111
 - sorting, 81
 - viewing, 80-81
 - Windows Explorer, 59
- following users on Twitter, 319-320**
- Format Background dialog box (PowerPoint), 189**
- formatting**
 - digital audio formats, 366-367
 - hard disks, 18
 - Microsoft Word
 - paragraphs*, 170
 - pictures*, 172-173
 - styles*, 170-171
 - text*, 168
 - playlists, 372
 - PowerPoint presentations
 - backgrounds*, 189
 - inserting slides*, 188
 - layout*, 188
 - outlines*, 188
 - text*, 188-189
 - themes*, 187-188
 - title slides*, 188
 - spreadsheets, 182
- Formatting toolbar (Word), 168**
- formulas (spreadsheets), 178-179**
- FortuneCity website, 278**
- Forward button (Internet Explorer), 204**
- Fotki website, 349**
- FotoTime website, 349**
- Fox websites**
 - on Demand, 261
 - News, 284
 - Sports, 284
- fraud protection**
 - craigslist, 251
 - eBay auctions, 241-242
- Freefoto.com, 286**
- Freeservers website, 278**
- freeze-ups, 131-132**
- friending, 310**
 - Facebook, 311
 - MySpace, 314-315
- Frommer's Travel Guides website, 286**
- Full Screen Reading view (Word), 165**
- Function Arguments dialog box (Excel), 181**

functions (Excel), 179-181**Funology.com, 289**

G

gadgets (desktop), 45, 72-73**Gadgets window, 73****game controllers, 21, 96****game websites, 289****Games.com, 289****Games Kids Play website, 289****GameSpot, 289****GameSpy, 289****Gamesville website, 289****GameZone website, 289****GB (gigabytes), 17****Getty Images website, 286****GHZ (gigahertz), 17****GIF images, adding to Word documents, 172****Glide websites**

Business, 272

Write, 273

Globe of Blogs website, 326**Gmail**

contacts, adding, 298

conversations, viewing, 297

file attachments, 299-300

messages, 297-298

navigating, 296-297

website, 295

Google, 215-217

Blog Search, 326

Calendar, 271

Chrome, 202

Docs, 272-273

Finance, 285

Image Search, 286

Maps, 287

News, 284

Presentations, 275

Product Search, 229

Reader, 326

SafeSearch, 147

Sites, 278

Spreadsheets, 274

Talk, 304

GORP.com Adventure Travel and Outdoor Recreation website, 287**GPUs (graphics processing units), 23****grammar checking, Microsoft Word documents, 169****graphics. See also pictures**

editing software, 13

links, 202

PowerPoint presentations, 190-191

websites, 286

Word documents, 172-173

grayed objects, 50**Grossology website, 290****grouping files/folders, 82**

H

hard drives, 13

adding, 96

checking for errors, 120-121

defragmenting, 120

deleting unnecessary files, 118-119

formatting, 18

hardware, 11

adding, popular peripherals, 96-97

CD-R/CD-RW drives, 18

CD/DVD drives, 18-19

CPUs, 16-17

external, adding, 99-100

game controllers, 21

hard disk drives, 18

*adding, 96**checking for errors, 120-121**defragmenting, 120**deleting unnecessary files, 118-119**formatting, 18*

joysticks, 21

keyboards, 19-20

*adding, 96**connecting, 33**maintenance, 124**wireless, 20*

maintenance

*keyboards, 124**monitors, 125**printers, 125**system units, 124*

memory, 17-18

mice, 20

*adding, 96**connecting, 33*

modems, 21, 196

monitors, 23

*adding, 96**connecting, 33**maintenance, 125**resolution, 23**size, 23*

- motherboards, 15-16
 - networks, 21-22, 106
 - pen pads, 21
 - ports, 97-98
 - sound cards, 22
 - speakers, 22
 - system units, 24
 - connectors, 24
 - maintenance, 124
 - removing cases, 25
 - touchpads, 21
 - trackballs, 21
 - video cards, 23
 - HealthCentral.com website, 286**
 - Help and Support Center, 63**
 - hiding windows, 48**
 - Hindu Universe website, 288**
 - History tab (Internet Explorer), 208**
 - HiTask website, 272**
 - Hiveminder website, 272**
 - Home Basic edition (Windows 7), 44**
 - Home button (Internet Explorer), 204**
 - home movies**
 - burning to DVD, 387-389
 - camcorders, connecting, 386
 - video-editing software, selecting, 386-387
 - home pages**
 - communities, 278
 - defined, 202
 - Internet Explorer, 204
 - Home Premium edition (Windows 7), 43**
 - HomeGroups, 113**
 - Homestead website, 278**
 - Homework Center website, 288**
 - HomeworkSpot website, 288**
 - HostIndex website, 282**
 - hosting services, 282**
 - HostSearch website, 282**
 - hot swappable devices, 99**
 - hotspots, connecting, 199-200**
 - Hotwire website, 232**
 - hovering (mouse), 46**
 - HTML (Hypertext Markup Language), 282**
 - hubs, 105**
 - HughesNet system, 197**
 - Hulu website, 261**
 - Hunt Calendars website, 271**
 - hypertext links, 202**
-
- I**
- icons**
 - shortcuts, 73-74
 - Start menu, 53
 - taskbar, 55-57
 - toolbars, 51
 - ICQ website, 304**
 - IE. See Internet Explorer**
 - iHateSpam website, 144**
 - illegal file/folder characters, 84**
 - IMAP servers, 294**
 - iMesh website, 370**
 - Include Folder in New Library dialog box, 83**
 - Indeed website, 287**
 - iNetWord website, 273**
 - InfoSpace website, 217**
 - inkjet printers, 28**
 - InPrivate Browsing (Internet Explorer), 211**
 - input devices**
 - game controllers, 21, 96
 - joysticks, 21, 96
 - keyboards, 19-20
 - adding, 96
 - connecting, 33
 - maintenance, 124
 - wireless, 20
 - mice, 20
 - adding, 96
 - connecting, 33
 - double-clicking, 46
 - dragging and dropping, 46
 - hovering, 46
 - Microsoft Word operations, 168
 - pointing and clicking, 45
 - right-clicking, 46
 - scroll wheels, 49
 - pen pads, 21
 - touchpads, 21
 - trackballs, 21
 - Insert Chart dialog box, 191**
 - Insert Picture dialog box, 172**
 - insertion fees (eBay), 243**
 - insertion points (Word), 167**

installing

- shared printers, 111
- software, 151
 - automatic installations*, 152
 - from the Internet*, 152-153
 - manual*, 152

instant messaging (AIM), 304

- buddies, adding, 305-306
- downloading, 304
- launching, 305
- messages
 - receiving*, 307
 - sending*, 306

Instant Search box (Start menu), 54**Instant Search feature, 84.**
See also searching**Intel microprocessors, 17****Intellicast.com website, 285****interfaces**

- Microsoft Office 2007, 161
- PowerPoint, 186
- Word, 164-165

internal ports, 97**Internet**

- auctions. *See* eBay auctions
- blogs
 - comments*, 325-326
 - creating*, 327-328
 - directories*, 326
 - overview*, 324-325
 - reading*, 325-326
 - searching*, 326
 - sidebar columns*, 325
 - tracking*, 326-327

- Chess Club website, 289
- connections
 - account setup*, 197
 - broadband*, 21, 196-197
 - configuring Windows*, 198
 - dial-up*, 196
 - FiOS*, 197
 - sharing*, 114, 198-199
 - types*, 196-197
 - WiFi hotspots*, 199-200
- downloading software, 152-153
- email, 294
 - addresses*, 294
 - Gmail*. *See* Gmail
 - POP*, 294-295
 - web*, 295
- Facebook, 311
 - creating profiles*, 312
 - emailing*, 313-314
 - friending*, 311
 - uploading photos*, 313
 - viewing profiles*, 311
 - writing on walls*, 313
- instant messaging. *See* AIM
- music stores, 368
 - additional music stores*, 370
 - iTunes Store*, 368-369
 - noncommercial sites*, 371
- MySpace, 314
 - commenting*, 316
 - creating profiles*, 316-317
 - friending*, 314-315
 - uploading photos*, 317
 - viewing profiles*, 315

- online banking
 - bill pay*, 257-258
 - fees*, 254
 - overview*, 254
 - software-based banking*, 254-257
 - web-based banking*, 254-255
- pictures
 - photo-processing services*, 344-345
 - photo-sharing sites*, 349-350
 - printing*, 351
- podcasts, 328-329
 - creating*, 330-331
 - iPods*, 329-330
 - searching*, 329
- radio, 374-375
- searches
 - children's sites*, 289
 - education*, 288
 - entertainment*, 288
 - financial information*, 285
 - games*, 289
 - graphics*, 286
 - jobs*, 287
 - maps*, 286
 - medical information*, 285-286
 - news*, 284
 - reference*, 288
 - religion websites*, 287
 - senior citizen's sites*, 290
 - sports*, 284
 - travel guides*, 286
 - weather*, 285

- security
 - content-filtering software, 146
 - email spam, 142-144
 - firewalls, 141-142
 - kid-safe searches, 147-148
 - phishing, 144-146
 - spyware, 140-141
 - viruses, 138-140
- shopping, 226, 229
 - checking out, 228
 - comparing prices, 229-231
 - examining products, 227
 - finding products, 226
 - order confirmation, 228-229
 - ordering products, 227
 - overview, 226
 - safety, 231-232
 - shopping carts, 227
- social networking sites, 310
 - friending, 310
 - navigating, 310
 - profile pages, 310
 - protecting adults, 321
 - protecting children, 320-321
- travel reservations, 232-233
- Twitter, 318
 - blocking followers, 319
 - following users, 319-320
 - profiles, 320
 - registering, 318
 - tweeting, 318
- video
 - purchasing from iTunes, 266-267
 - searching, 260-262
 - streaming, 262
 - transferring to iPods, 267
 - uploading to YouTube, 265
 - viewing on YouTube, 262-264
- Internet Explorer (IE), 203**
 - cookies
 - deleting, 211
 - first-party, 211
 - overview, 209
 - privacy levels, adjusting, 210-211
 - third-party, 211
 - home page, changing, 204
 - InPrivate Browsing feature, 211
 - navigating, 203
 - pop-up ads, blocking, 212
 - printing web pages, 208
 - revisiting recently viewed pages, 208
 - saving favorite web pages, 207
 - searching, 206
 - security, 208
 - SmartScreen Filter, 145
 - starting, 203
 - surfing the web, 204
 - tabbed browsing, 205
 - toolbar buttons, 204
 - website, 202
- Internet Movie Database website, 288**
- Internet Options dialog box, 210**
- Internet Park Word Games website, 289**
- Internet Public Library website, 288**
- Internet service providers (ISPs), 196-198**
- iPhones, connecting, 101**
- iPods, 378-379**
 - batteries, charging, 379
 - connecting, 101, 379
 - digital audio formats, 378
 - music
 - downloading from iTunes, 380
 - managing, 379
 - podcasts, 329-330
 - transferring songs from iTunes, 379
 - video, 267
- iPrioritize website, 272**
- Islam 101 website, 288**
- IslamWorld website, 288**
- ISPs (Internet service providers), 196**
 - account setup, 197
 - broadband connections, 196-197
 - configuring Windows, 198
 - dial-up connections, 196
 - FiOS connections, 197
- iTunes, 359, 363**
 - CDs
 - burning, 362-363
 - playing, 360
 - ripping, 360-362
 - downloading songs from Music Store, 380
 - Internet radio, 375
 - Library, 379
 - music management, 379

playing music, 373-374
 playlists, 374
 Store, 368-369
 transferring songs to iPods,
 379
 video, viewing, 266-267

iWin.com, 289

J

Jango website, 375

job hunting websites, 287

JobWeb website, 287

**joining home page commu-
 nities, 278**

Joost website, 261

joysticks, 13, 21, 96

**JPG images, adding to Word
 documents, 172**

Jump Lists, 46, 56

K

Kaboose website, 290

**Kaspersky Anti-Virus
 Personal, 140**

KB (kilobytes), 17

KBdocs website, 273

keyboards, 19-20

adding, 96
 connecting, 33
 maintenance, 124
 wireless, 20

**keywords (Web searches),
 214**

**Kid Info Homework Resource
 website, 289**

kid-safe Internet use, 148

content-filtering software,
 146
 searches, 147-148

KidsClick website, 289

KidsCom websites, 290

KidsHealth website, 286

Kids' Space website, 290

kilobytes (KB), 17

**Kodak EasyShare Gallery
 website, 349**

L

laptops. See notebooks

laser printers, 28

LAUNCHcast website, 376

launching. See starting

**layout (PowerPoint slides),
 188**

libraries, 83

Library (iTunes), 379

**Library of Congress website,
 289**

links, 202

Linux, 14

lists (dialog boxes), 52

Live365 website, 376

Live Essentials, 62

Lonely Planet website, 287

lossless compression, 367

Lycos Mail website, 295

M

Mac OS, 14

**MadSci Network website,
 289**

**Mail button (Internet
 Explorer), 204**

Mail.com, 295

MailWasher website, 144

maintenance

Action Center utility, 121
 backups, 122-123
 hard drives
checking for errors,
120-121
defragmenting, 120
deleting unnecessary files,
118-119
 keyboards, 124
 monitors, 125
 notebooks, 126-127
 printers, 125
 programs, deleting unused,
 119
 system units, 124

MaMaMedia website, 290

**Manage User Accounts win-
 dows, 77**

managing

networks, 113
 pictures, 338-339

manual installations, 152

MapQuest website, 287

map websites, 286-287

Marketwatch website, 285

maximizing windows, 48

MB (megabytes), 17

McAfee

- Total Protection website, 142
- VirusScan Web site, 140

media player programs

- iTunes, 359, 363
 - burning CDs, 362-363
 - playing CDs, 360
 - ripping songs, 360-362
 - downloading songs from Music Store, 380
 - Internet radio, 375
 - Library, 379
 - music management, 379
 - playing music, 373-374
 - playlists, 374
 - Store, 368-369
 - transferring songs to iPods, 379
 - video, viewing, 266-267
- selecting, 354
- Windows Media Player, 354
 - burning CDs, 358
 - playing CDs, 355-356
 - ripping CDs, 356-358
 - controls, 354-355
 - launching, 354
 - playback status area, 355
 - playing music, 371-373
 - playlists, 372-373
 - website, 354

MediaBuilder website, 286**medical-related websites, 285-286****MedicineNet website, 286****megabytes (MB), 17****memory, 17-18**

- adding, 17
- insufficient, 18
- USB memory devices, 96

memory card readers, 96, 336-337**menu bar (Windows), 50****menus**

- grayed items, 50
- pop-up menus, 46
- Start, 53
 - adding programs, 75
 - displaying programs, 75
 - icons, 53
 - Instant Search box, 54
 - launching programs, 54
 - recent documents, reopening, 54
 - removing programs, 75
 - viewing programs, 53
- Windows, 50

messages

- Gmail
 - attachments, 299-300
 - composing, 298
 - reading, 297
 - replying, 297
- instant messaging, 304-307

Metacafe website, 261**mice, 20**

- adding, 96
- connecting, 33
- double-clicking, 46
- dragging and dropping, 46
- hovering, 46
- Microsoft Word operations, 168
- pointing and clicking, 45

- right-clicking, 46
- scroll wheels, 49

micro-blogging. See Twitter
microprocessors (CPUs), 16-17**Microsoft**

- Bing, 217
- Expression Web Designer, 281
- Office Live website, 278
- Office. See Office
- Windows. See Windows operating system
- Works, 156
 - components, 156
 - documents, 157-158
 - launching programs, 157
 - project planner, 158-159
 - Task Launcher, 156-157

midsize notebooks, 27**Mike's Radio World website, 376****mini-tower PCs, 24****minimizing windows, 48****modems, 21, 196**

- broadband, 97
- cable, 21, 107
- dial-up, 21, 196
- DSL modems, 107

monitoring RSS subscriptions, 326-327**monitors, 23**

- adding, 96
- connecting, 33
- maintenance, 125
- resolution, 23
- size, 23

Monster website, 287

motherboards, 15-16

Motley Fool website, 285

mouse devices. See mice

movies

- burning to DVD, 387-389
- camcorders, connecting, 386
- DVDs, playing, 382-383
- playing, Windows Media Center, 384
- video files, playing, 383
- video-editing programs, 386-387
- Windows DVD Maker, 388-389

moving

- files, 85-86
 - email, 91*
 - networks, 89*
 - portable drives, 91*
- windows, 47

Mozilla Firefox website, 202

MP3 audio file format, 366-367

MP3.com, 370

MP3 Players (iPods), 378-379

- batteries, charging, 379
- connecting, 379
- digital audio formats, 378
- music
 - downloading from iTunes, 380*
 - managing, 379*

MSN Games website, 289

MSN Money website, 285

MSNBC website, 284

MTV website, 261

multifunction printers, 28

multiplication (*) operator (Excel), 178

music. See also audio

- CDs. *See* CDs
- digital audio formats, 366-367
- downloading from iTunes, 380
- DRM (digital rights management), 367-368
- Internet radio, 374-375
- iPods
 - batteries, charging, 379*
 - connecting, 101, 379*
 - digital audio formats, 378*
 - music, 379-380*
 - podcasts, 329-330*
 - transferring songs from iTunes, 379*
 - video, 267*
- iTunes, 359, 363
 - burning CDs, 362-363*
 - downloading songs from Music Store, 380*
 - Internet radio, 375*
 - Library, 379*
 - music management, 379*
 - playing CDs, 360*
 - playing music, 373-374*
 - playlists, 374*
 - ripping songs, 360-362*
 - Store, 368-369*
 - transferring songs to iPods, 379*
 - video, viewing, 266-267*
- managing with iTunes, 379
- online stores, 368
 - additional music stores, 370*

- iTunes Store, 368-369*
- noncommercial sites, 371*

playing, 371

- iTunes, 373-374*
- Windows Media Player, 371-373*

playlists

- iTunes, 374*
- Windows Media Player, 372-373*

Windows Media Player

- burning CDs, 358*
- controls, 354-355*
- launching, 354*
- playback status area, 355*
- playing CDs, 355-356*
- playing music, 371-373*
- playlists, creating, 372-373*
- ripping CDs, 356-358*
- website, 354*

Music Store (iTunes), 380

MyCheckFree website, 258

My Documents, 86

MyEZBills website, 258

mySimon website, 229

MySpace, 314

- commenting, 316
- friending, 314-315
- profiles, 315-317
- uploading photos, 317

N

names

- desktop icons, 74
- files, 80, 84-85
- folders, 84-85

Napster website, 370

National Library of Medicine website, 286

NationJob website, 287

navigating

Control Panel, 66

folders, 82

Gmail, 296-297

Internet Explorer, 203

Microsoft Office 2007, 161

Microsoft Word, 164

Photo Gallery, 339

social networking sites, 310

Windows Explorer, 58, 60

Navigation pane (Windows Explorer), 58

NBC Sports website, 284

NBC website, 260

Net Ministries website, 288

Net Nanny, 146

netbooks, 27

Network and Sharing Center

file and printer sharing, 110

HomeGroups, 113

network management, 113

network cards, 97

network interface cards (NICs), 104

Network Setup Wizard, 108

networks, 21, 103

accessing other computers, 111

botnets, 138

connecting, 34

file and printer sharing, 110-111

files, copying, 89

HomeGroups, 113

managing, 113

setup, 105

establishing connections, 107

hardware requirements, 106

routers, 105

wireless, 106

sharing

files/folders, 109

Internet connections, 198-199

websites, 260-262

Windows configurations, 108

wired, 104-105

wireless, 22, 104

adapters, 97

connecting, 105

routers, 106

security, 108-109

setup, 106

WiFi standards, 105

New Document window, 166

New Tab button (Internet Explorer), 204

New York Times blogs, 326

New York Times website, 284

NewsGator website, 326

news searches (Web), 284

NexTag website, 229

NICs (network interface cards), 104

Normal view (PowerPoint), 186-187

Norton websites

AntiVirus, 140

Internet Security, 142

notebooks

batteries, 27, 126-127

CD/DVD drives, 26

components, 25-27

connecting, 35

connectors, 26

security, 127

types, 27-28

Windows Mobility Center, 126

notification area (desktop), 44

Num Sum website, 274

number formats (spreadsheets), 182

O

Office (Microsoft), 159

2007 interface, 161

Excel, 175-176

active cells, 176

algebraic operators, 178-179

alphabetic labels, 176

AutoSum function, 179-180

cells, 176

charts, creating, 182-183

columns, 176-178

data entry, 177

deleting rows/columns, 177

formatting spreadsheets, 182

- formulas*, 178
- functions*, 180-181
- including cells in formulas*, 179
- inserting rows/columns*, 177
- numeric labels*, 176
- referencing consecutive cells in formulas*, 180
- rows*, 176
- sorting cells*, 181
- grammar checking, 169
- PowerPoint, 185-186
 - backgrounds*, 189
 - creating presentations*, 187
 - formatting text*, 189
 - graphics*, 190-191
 - inserting slides*, 188
 - layout*, 188
 - Normal view*, 186
 - outlines*, 188
 - slide transitions*, 191-192
 - slideshows*, 192
 - text, adding*, 188
 - themes*, 187-188
 - title slides*, 188
 - views, changing*, 187
 - workspace*, 186
- ribbons, 161
- Screentips, 164
- versions, 159-160
- Word
 - adding pictures*, 172
 - customizing print jobs*, 170
 - documents*, 166
 - editing text*, 168
 - entering text*, 167
 - formatting paragraphs*, 170
 - formatting pictures*, 172
 - formatting text*, 168
 - opening documents*, 166
 - Outline view*, 171
 - previewing print jobs*, 169
 - printing*, 169-170
 - saving documents*, 167
 - spell checking documents*, 169
 - styles*, 170-171
 - templates*, 166
 - viewing documents*, 164-165
 - workspace*, 164-165
- office suites (web-based), 272**
- On/Off button, 24**
- online**
 - auctions, 235. *See also* eBay auctions
 - banking
 - bill pay*, 257-258
 - fees*, 254
 - overview*, 254
 - software-based banking*, 256-257
 - web-based banking*, 254-255
 - calendars, 270-271
 - classifieds. *See* craigslist
 - downloading software, 152-153
 - music stores, 368
 - additional music stores*, 370
 - iTunes Store*, 368-369
 - noncommercial sites*, 371
 - office suite applications, 272
 - pictures
 - photo-processing services*, 344-345
 - photo printing services*, 351
 - photo-sharing sites*, 349-350
 - presentation applications, 274-275
 - shopping. *See* shopping online
 - spreadsheet applications, 274
 - task management applications, 271-272
 - travel reservations, 232
 - word processing applications, 273
- ONTs (optical network terminals), 197**
- Open Directory website, 217**
- opening**
 - Computer Explorer, 60
 - Control Panel, 61, 66
 - file attachments in Gmail, 300
 - menus, 50
 - Microsoft Word documents, 166
 - Microsoft Works documents, 158
 - programs, taskbar, 55
 - recent documents, 54
- Opera website, 202**
- operating systems, 14, 42**
 - Linux, 14
 - Mac OS, 14
 - Windows. *See* Windows operating system

operators (Excel spreadsheets), 178-179

optical network terminals (ONTs), 197

Orbitz website, 232

organizing pictures (Photo Gallery), 339-340

Outline view (Word), 165, 171

outlines (PowerPoint), 188

P

Page button (Internet Explorer), 204

Paint Shop Pro Photo website, 338

Pandora website, 376

paper, photographic prints, 343

paragraph formatting (Word), 170

parental controls, configuring, 78

passwords, 76-78

pasting text (Word), 168

pausing CDs, 356

paying bills online, 257-258

PayPal, 240

PayPal Buyer Protection, 242

Paytrust website, 258

PCs (personal computers)

- breaking, 15
- components, 11
 - customizing, 12
 - hard disks, 13
 - hardware, 11
 - joysticks, 13
 - peripherals, 11
 - printers, 12
 - scanners, 12
- functions, 10
- notebooks
 - battery usage, 126-127
 - components, 25-27
 - connecting, 35
 - security, 127
 - types, 27-28
 - Windows Mobility Center, 126
- parental controls, configuring, 78
- putting to sleep, 63
- setup
 - connecting cables, 35
 - connecting system components, 33-34
 - ergonomics, 32
 - first-time startup, 36-37
 - placement considerations, 32
 - powering on PCs, 38
 - surge suppressors, 32
 - turning on components, 35, 38
 - turning on normally, 37
- system units, 24-25
- troubleshooting
 - crashes, 133
 - determining cause of problem, 130
 - freeze-ups, 131-132
 - in Safe Mode, 131
- turning off, 63
- zombie, 138

peeking, desktop, 47

Peepel websites

- Online Office, 272
- WebSheet, 274
- WebWriter, 273

pen pads, 21

people searches (Web), 217

peripherals, 11. See also hardware

- connecting, 100
- popular, 96-97
- printers, 28-29, 97
 - connecting, 33
 - maintenance, 125
- scanners, 29, 97
- webcams, 97

personal computers. See PCs

Personalization window, 67

phishing scams, 144-146, 208

Photo Gallery, pictures, 339

- editing, 340-341
- navigating, 339
- organizing, 339-340
- printing, 343-344
- resizing, 342
- tagging, 340

photo-processing services, 344-345

photo-sharing websites, 349-350

Photos.com, 286

PhotoWorks website, 349

Picasa website, 338

pictures. See also graphics

- editing, 338-339
- emailing, 348

- Photo Gallery, 339
 - editing*, 340-341
 - navigating*, 339
 - organizing*, 339-340
 - resizing*, 342
 - tagging*, 340
 - photo-processing services, 344-345
 - printing, 343-344
 - ordering online*, 351
 - photo-processing services*, 344-345
 - selecting paper*, 343
 - saving, 337
 - scanning, 337
 - sharing, 349-350
 - transferring, 336-337
 - uploading
 - Facebook*, 313
 - MySpace*, 317
 - user accounts, 77
- Pictures folder, 338**
- Picturetrail website, 349**
- Pinnacle Studio, 386**
- pixels, 23**
- Play Later website, 289**
- playback status area (Windows Media Player), 355**
- playing**
- CDs
 - burning*, 358, 362-363
 - iTunes*, 359-360
 - media player programs*, 354
 - pausing playback*, 356
 - random order*, 356, 360
 - ripping songs to PCs*, 356-362
 - Windows Media Player*, 354-356
- DVDs
 - media player programs*, 354
 - Windows Media Center*, 382-384
 - Windows Media Player*, 354
- music, 371
 - iTunes*, 359-360, 363, 373-374
 - Windows Media Player*, 371-373
- video files, 383
- playlists, 372**
- iTunes*, 374
 - Windows Media Player*, 372-373
- Podcast Alley website, 329**
- Podcast Bunker website, 329**
- Podcast.com, 329**
- Podcast Directory website, 329**
- Podcasting Station website, 329**
- PodcastPickle website, 329**
- podcasts, 328-329**
- creating*, 330-331
 - iPods*, 329-330
 - searching*, 329
- PodCastZoom website, 329**
- Podfeed.net, 329**
- Pogo.com, 289**
- pointing and clicking mouse devices, 45**
- POP email (Post Office Protocol), 294-295**
- Pop-up Blocker (Internet Explorer), 209, 212**
- pop-up menus, right-clicking, 46**
- POP3 servers, 294**
- portable devices, connecting, 100-101**
- portable drives, 91**
- ports, 24, 97**
- desktop PCs, 24
 - external, 97-98
 - FireWire, 99-100
 - internal, 97
 - notebooks, 26
 - USB, 99-101
- Post Office Protocol (POP) email, 294-295**
- posting blogs, 325-326**
- power surges, 32**
- PowerPoint, 185-186**
- backgrounds, changing*, 189
 - graphics*, 190-191
 - inserting slides*, 188
 - layout*, 188
 - Normal view*, 186
 - outlining*, 188
 - presentations, creating*, 187
 - running slideshows*, 192
 - slide transitions, applying*, 191-192
 - slides, adding*, 188
 - text*, 188-189
 - themes*, 187-188
 - views, changing*, 187
 - workspace*, 186

Preezo website, 275

Presentation Engine website, 275

presentations (web-based), 274-275. See also PowerPoint

previewing Word print jobs, 169

PreZentit website, 275

price comparison websites, 229

PriceGrabber.com website, 229

Priceline website, 232

Print button (Internet Explorer), 204, 208

Print dialog box (Word), 170

Print Layout view (Word), 164, 168

Print Preview (Word), 169

printers, 12, 28-29, 97

- black-and-white, 28
- color, 28
- combination, 28
- connecting, 33
- inkjet, 28
- laser, 28
- maintenance, 125
- sharing, 110-111

printing

- Microsoft Word documents, 169-170
- photos, 343-344
 - ordering online, 351*
 - photo-processing services, 344-345*
 - selecting paper, 343*
- web pages, 208

privacy levels (Internet Explorer), 210-211

Professional edition (Windows 7), 43

profile pages, 310

- Facebook
 - creating, 312*
 - viewing, 311*
- MySpace
 - commenting, 316*
 - creating, 316-317*
 - viewing, 315*
- Twitter, 320

programs

- adding from Start menu, 75
- anti-spam, 144
- anti-spyware, 141
- antivirus, 140
- audio recording, 330
- built-in, 61
- bundles, 155
- closing, 132
- content-filtering, 146
- deleting, 119
- displaying from Start menu, 75
- downloading, 62
- feed readers, 326
- finding, 54
- firewall programs, 142
- freeze-ups, 132
- installing, 151
 - automatic installations, 152*
 - from the Internet, 152-153*
 - manual, 152*
- launching, 157

media player. *See* media player programs

Microsoft Office. *See* Office Microsoft Works, 156

- components, 156*
- creating new documents, 157*
- finding files, 158*
- launching programs, 157*
- opening documents, 158*
- project planner, 158-159*
- Task Launcher, 156-157*

opening from taskbar, 55

photo editing, 338-339

POP email, 295

removing from Start menu, 75

spyware, 140

Start menu, 53-54

switching between, 57

video editing, 386-387

web-based, 270

- calendars, 270-271*

- office suites, 272*

- presentations, 274-275*

- spreadsheets, 274*

- task management, 271-272*

- word processing, 273*

web page-building software, 281

Windows DVD Maker, 388-389

WinZip, 88

project planning, 158-159

Propaganda website, 330

public WiFi hotspots, 199-200

pull-down menus (Windows), 50
purchasing videos, iTunes, 266-267
Puretracks website, 370

Q

quad-core CPUs, 17
queries (Web), 214
Quick Tabs button (Internet Explorer), 204

R

radio, Internet, 374-375
RadioTower.com, 376
Rand McNally website, 287
random access memory. See memory
read/write heads, 18
reading
 blogs, 325-326
 Gmail, 297
 instant messages, 307
Real Simple Syndication (RSS), 326-327
rebooting systems, 37
Recycle Bin, 45
 emptying, 88
 restoring files from, 87
Rediff website, 278
Refdesk.com, 289
reference websites, 288
Refresh button (Internet Explorer toolbar, 204

registering
 eBay, 236-237
 Twitter, 318
religion websites, 287
Religious Tolerance website, 288
Remember the Milk website, 272
removing
 cookies, 211
 desktop icons, 74
 files, 86-87, 118-119
 Microsoft Word text, 168
 programs, 75, 119
 spreadsheet columns/rows, 177
 taskbar items, 57
 system unit cases, 25
renaming files/folders, 85
replying, Gmail, 297
researching the Web. See Wikipedia
resizing pictures, 342
resolution, 23, 70
restore points, 134-135
restoring
 crashed systems, 134-135
 deleted files, 87
 windows, 48
Rhapsody website, 370
ribbons, 51
 Microsoft Word 2007, 164
 Office, 161
 ToolTips, 51
right-clicking, 46

ripping songs to PCs
 iTunes, 360-362
 Windows Media Player, 356-358
Rotten Tomatoes website, 288
Rough Guides website, 287
routers
 network, 105
 wireless, 97, 106
rows (spreadsheets), 176-177
RSS (Real Simple Syndication), 326-327

S

Safari website, 202
Safe mode, 131
Safety button (Internet Explorer), 204, 211
satellite Internet connections, 197-199
saving
 files, 91-92
 Microsoft Word documents, 167
 pictures, 337
 web pages, 207
ScanDisk utility, 120-121
scanners, 12, 29, 97
 connecting to PCs, 336
 scanning pictures, 337
screen resolution, 70
Screen Saver Settings dialog box, 71
screen savers, selecting, 71
ScreenTips, 164

scroll bars, 49, 164

scroll wheels (mice), 49

search box

Internet search sites, 214

Windows Explorer, 84

Search button (Internet search sites), 214

search engines, 214

Google, 215-217

listing of, 217

searching

blogs, 326

files, 83

friends, social networking sites, 310

Internet Explorer, 206

Microsoft Works files, 158

podcasts, 329

programs, 54

videos, 260-262

network websites, 260-262

video-only websites, 261

iTunes, 266-267

YouTube, 262-264

Web, 214

children's websites, 289

entertainment, 288

exact phrases, 214

financial sites, 285

games, 289

Google search engine, 215-217

graphics, 286

job hunting websites, 287

kids-safe searches, 147-148

maps, 286-287

medical sites, 285-286

news searches, 284

people searches, 217

queries, 214

reference websites, 288

religion websites, 287

search engines, 217

senior citizen's websites, 290

sports sites, 284

travel guides, 286

weather sites, 285

Wikipedia, 221

secure servers, 231

security

Action Center utility, 121

craigslist fraud protection, 251

eBay fraud protection, 241-242

email spam, 142

anti-spam software, 144

blocking spammers, 143

protecting email addresses, 142-143

file attachments, 299

firewalls, 141-142

Internet Explorer

blocking pop-up ads, 209

protecting against phishing scams, 208

kid-safe Internet browsing, 146

notebooks, 127

phishing scams, 144-146

shopping online, 231-232

social networking sites, 320-321

spyware, 140-141

viruses

antivirus software, 140

defined, 138

reducing risks, 139

signs of infection, 138

transmission methods, 138-139

wireless networks, 108-109

selecting

backup devices, 122

media player programs, 354

Microsoft Word text, 168

photographic paper, 343

screen savers, 71

video editing programs, 386-387

web browsers, 202

selling process

craigslist, 249-251

eBay, 242-244

sending

email attachments, 91

instant messages, 306

senior citizen's websites, 290

SeniorJournal.com, 290

SeniorNet website, 290

Seniors Site website, 290

SeniorSite.com, 290

Senior Women Web, 290

servers

IMAP, 294

POP3, 294

secure, 231

SMTP, 294

Service Set Identifiers (SSIDs), 109

setup

- connecting
 - cables*, 33-35
 - system components*, 33-34
- ergonomics, 32
- Internet connections, 198
- ISP accounts, 197
- networks, 103-105
 - establishing connections*, 107
 - hardware requirements*, 106
 - routers*, 105
 - Windows 7*, 108
 - Windows Vista*, 108
 - Windows XP*, 108
 - wireless*, 106
- parental controls, 78
- placement considerations, 32
- restore points, 134
- surge suppressors, 32
- system, 37
- time and date, 76
- turning on components, 38
- turning on PCs
 - component order*, 35
 - first-time startup*, 36-37
 - normally*, 37
- user accounts, 76
- Windows, 36
- wireless networks, 108-109

sharing

- files and printers, 109-111
- Internet connections, 114, 198-199

pictures

- email*, 348
- online photo sites*, 349-350
- YouTube videos, 264

shopping carts online, 227**Shopping.com website, 229-231****shopping online, 226**

- checking out, 228
- comparing prices, 229
 - price comparison sites*, 229
 - Shopping.com*, 229-231
- craigslist, 246
 - browsing listings*, 246-247
 - buying items*, 248
 - categories*, 247
 - check payments*, 251
 - eBay, compared*, 246
 - selling items*, 249-251

eBay auctions

- bidding process*, 238-240
- Buy It Now (BIN) option*, 240-241
- craigslist, compared*, 246
- fraud protection*, 241-242
- process overview*, 236-238
- registering for*, 236-237
- seller overview*, 236
- selling process*, 242-244

music. See online, music stores

- order confirmation, 228-229
- process overview, 226

products

- examining*, 227
- finding*, 226
- ordering*, 227
- safety concerns, 231-232
- shopping carts, 227
- travel reservations, 232

shortcuts, 73

- adding, taskbar, 57
- arranging, 74
- creating, 74
- desktop, 45
- naming, 74
- removing, 74

SHOUTcast website, 376**Shutterfly, 349-350****sidebar columns (blogs), 325****size**

- desktops, 70
- documents, Microsoft Word, 165
- monitors, 23
- windows, 47

Sleep mode, 63**Slide Show view (PowerPoint), 187****Slide Sorter view (PowerPoint), 187****SlideRocket website, 275****sliders (dialog boxes), 53****slides (PowerPoint)**

- adding text, 188
- backgrounds, changing, 189
- formatting text, 189
- graphics, 190-191
- inserting, 188
- layout, 188

- running slideshows, 192
- themes, 187-188
- title slides, 188
- transitions, applying, 191-192
- slideshows**
 - desktops, 69
 - PowerPoint, 192
- SmartScreen Filter (Internet Explorer), 145, 209**
- Smithsonian Photographic Services website, 286**
- SMTP servers, 294**
- snagajob.com, 287**
- Snapfish website, 349**
- sniping (eBay), 240**
- social networking sites, 310**
 - Facebook, 311
 - creating profiles, 312
 - emailing, 313-314
 - friending, 311
 - uploading photos, 313
 - viewing profiles, 311
 - writing on the wall, 313
 - friending, 310
 - MySpace, 314
 - commenting, 316
 - creating profiles, 316-317
 - friending, 314-315
 - uploading photos, 317
 - viewing profiles, 315
 - navigating, 310
 - profile pages, 310
 - security, protection, 320-321
- software, 13. See also programs**
 - anti-spam, 144
 - anti-spyware, 141
 - antivirus, 140
 - audio recording, 330
 - bundles, 155
 - content-filtering, 146
 - feed reader, 326
 - finding, 54
 - firewall software, 142
 - graphics editing, 13
 - installing, 151
 - automatic installations, 152*
 - from the Internet, 152-153*
 - manual, 152*
 - Microsoft Office. *See* Office, 159
 - Microsoft Works, 156
 - components, 156*
 - creating new documents, 157*
 - finding files, 158*
 - launching programs, 157*
 - opening documents, 158*
 - project planner, 158-159*
 - Task Launcher, 156-157*
 - POP email, 295
 - spreadsheet programs, 13
 - Start menu, viewing, 53
 - video editing, 386-387
 - web browsers, 13
 - web page-building software, 281
 - Windows DVD Maker, 388-389
 - word processing programs, 13
- software-based banking, 254-257**
- Sony Vegas Movie Studio website, 386**
- Sort dialog box (Excel), 181**
- sorting**
 - files, 81
 - folders, 81
 - spreadsheet cells, 181
- sound cards, 22, 96**
- sound. See audio**
- spam, 142**
 - anti-spam software, 144
 - blocking spammers, 143
 - protecting email addresses, 142-143
- speakers, 22**
 - adding, 96
 - connecting, 34
 - notebooks, 26
- speed**
 - CPUs, 17
 - wired networks, 104
- spell checking, Word documents, 169**
- spiders, 214**
- spoofing, 139**
- SportingNews.com website, 284**
- Sports Illustrated website, 284**
- sports-related websites, 284**
- spreadsheet programs, 13**
- spreadsheets, 175-176**
 - AutoSum function, 179-180
 - cells, 176
 - active, 176*
 - formatting, 182*
 - sorting, 181*

charts, creating, 182-183

columns, 176

alphabetic labels, 176

deleting, 177

inserting, 177

width, adjusting, 178

data entry, 177

formatting, 182

formulas, 178

*algebraic operators,
178-179*

entering, 178

including cells in, 179

*referencing consecutive
cells, 180*

functions, 180-181

rows, 176-177

web-based, 274

Spy Sweeper website, 141

**Spybot Search & Destroy
website, 141**

spyware, 140-141

**SSIDs (Service Set
Identifiers), 109**

Start button (desktop), 44

Start menu, 53

icons, 53

Instant Search box, 54

launching programs, 54

programs, 75

recent documents, reopen-
ing, 54

viewing programs, 53

**Starter edition (Windows 7),
43**

starting

AIM, 305

Help and Support Center, 63

Internet Explorer (IE), 203

PowerPoint slideshows, 192

programs

*Microsoft Works pro-
grams, 157*

Start menu, 54

Start menu, 54

Windows Explorer, 58

Windows Media Player, 354

**Stop button (Internet
Explorer), 204**

storage

CD-R/CD-RW drives, 18

CD/DVD drives, 18-19

hard disk drives, 18

streaming

audio, 374-375

video, 262

**styles (Word documents),
170-171**

**subfolders, 59, 80. See also
folders**

submenus (Windows), 50

**subtraction (-) operator,
Excel, 178**

surfing the web

cookies

deleting, 211

first-party, 211

overview, 209

*privacy levels, adjusting,
210-211*

third-party, 211

Internet Explorer, 203-204

overview, 204

pop-up ads, blocking, 209,
212

printing web pages, 208

in private, 211

revisiting previously visited
sites, 208

saving favorite sites, 207

searches, 206

tabbed browsing, 205

web browsers, selecting, 202

surge suppressors, 32

Switchboard website, 217

switching between

programs, 57

windows, 55

**system components, con-
necting, 33**

system configuration, 37

**System Restore utility,
134-135**

system units, 24

connectors, 24

maintenance, 124

removing cases, 25

T

tabbed browsing, 205

tabs (dialog boxes), 52

Ta-da List website, 272

**tagging pictures (Photo
Gallery), 340**

**Task Launcher (Microsoft
Works)**

creating new documents,
157

finding files, 158

launching programs, 157

linking to pages, 156-157

opening documents, 158

project planner, 158-159

task management applications (web-based), 271-272**Task Manager (Windows), 132****taskbar (desktop), 44, 54**

- adding shortcuts, 57
- deleting items, 57
- icons, 55-57
- Jump Lists, 56
- new features, 54
- opening programs, 55
- switching between windows, 55

Taskbar and Start Menu Properties dialog box, 75**TaskTHIS website, 272****tBlog website, 327****templates**

- PowerPoint, 187-188
- Tripod web pages, 279
- Word, 166

terabytes, 18**text**

- PowerPoint presentations, 188-189
- Word
 - copying*, 168
 - cutting*, 168
 - deleting*, 168
 - editing*, 168
 - entering*, 167
 - formatting*, 168
 - grammar checking*, 169
 - pasting*, 168
 - selecting*, 168
 - spell checking*, 169

text boxes (dialog boxes), 52**themes**

- desktops, 67
- PowerPoint, 187-188

ThinkFree websites

- Calc, 274
- Office, 272
- Show, 275
- Write, 273

third-party cookies, 211**ThirdAge website, 290****TIF images, adding to Word documents, 172****time and date, resetting, 76****title bar (Word), 164****title slides (PowerPoint), 188****toolbars**

- grayed items, 50
- icons, 51
- Internet Explorer, 204
- ScreenTips, 164
- ToolTips, 51

tools, built-in, 61**Tools button (Internet Explorer), 204****ToolTips, 51****TopHosts website, 282****touchpads, 21****tower PCs, 24****trackballs, 21****tracking blogs, 326-327****Trackslife website, 272****transferring**

- pictures
 - memory card readers*, 336-337
 - scanners*, 337
 - USB connections*, 336

- songs to iPods, 379
- videos to iPods, 267

transitions (PowerPoint slides), 191-192**travel guide websites, 286****travel reservations, online, 232****TravelNow.com website, 232****Travelocity website, 232****Trend Micro AntiVirus + AntiSpyware, 140****TripAdvisor website, 287****Tripod**

- web pages, creating, 279-281
- website, 278

troubleshooting

- crashes, 133-135
- determining cause of problem, 130
- freeze-ups, 131-132
- in Safe Mode, 131

Tucows website, 139**Tudu List website, 272****turning off computers, 63****turning on PCs, 35**

- component order, 35
- first time, 36-37
- normally, 37

TV Guide Online website, 288**Twitter, 318**

- blocking followers, 319
- following users, 319-320
- profiles, 320
- registering, 318
- tweeting, 318

TypePad website, 327**types**

- Internet connections, 196-197
- notebooks, 27-28

U

Ulead websites

- PhotoImpact, 338
- VideoStudio Pro, 386

ultraportable notebooks, 27**uncompressed files, 366****Uninstall or Change a Program utility, 119****uploading**

- photos
 - Facebook, 313*
 - MySpace, 317*
- video to YouTube, 265
- web pages, 282

URLs (uniform resource locators), 202**USA Today website, 284****USB memory devices, adding, 96****USB ports**

- connecting peripherals, 99-100
- keychain memory devices, connecting, 101
- pictures, transferring, 336
- portable device connections, 101

user accounts

- creating, 77
- passwords, 76-78

- pictures, 77
- setting up, 76

utilities. See also programs; software

- Action Center, 121
- Disk Cleanup, 118-119
- Disk Defragmenter, 120
- ScanDisk, 120-121
- System Restore, 134-135
- Uninstall or Change a Program, 119
- Windows Backup, 122-123

V

Veoh website, 261**versions**

- Microsoft Office, 159-160
- Windows, 14, 42-44

VH1 website, 261**video**

- camcorders, connecting, 386
- digital files, playing, 383
- DVDs
 - creating from video files, 387-389*
 - playing, 354, 382-384*
- editing software, 386-387
- iTunes, viewing, 266-267
- searching, 260-262
- streaming, 262
- transferring to iPods, 267
- Windows DVD Maker, 388-389
- Windows Media Player, 354
 - controls, 354-355*
 - launching, 354*
 - playback status area, 355*

YouTube

- searching, 262-263*
- sharing, 264*
- uploading video to, 265*
- viewing, 262-264*

video cards, 23, 96**video-only websites, 261****viewing**

- files/folders, 80-81
- Gmail conversations, 297
- Microsoft Word documents, 164-165
- PowerPoint presentations, 187
- profile pages
 - Facebook, 311*
 - MySpace, 315*
- programs, Start menu, 53
- video
 - iTunes, 266-267*
 - Web, 260-262*
 - YouTube, 262-264*
- Wikipedia articles, 220-221

VirtualTourist.com, 287**viruses**

- antivirus software, 140
- defined, 138
- reducing risks, 139
- signs of infection, 138
- transmission methods, 138-139

Vitalist website, 272**Voo2Do website, 272**

W

walls (Facebook), 313

Wal-Mart Music Downloads website, 370

WAV audio file format, 366

Weather.com website, 285

Weather gadget, 72

Weather Underground website, 285

weather websites, 285

Web

cookies

deleting, 211

first-party, 211

overview, 209

privacy levels, adjusting, 210-211

third-party, 211

creating pages

home page communities, 278

page-building software, 281

Tripod, 279-281

uploading to hosting services, 282

email, 294

addresses, 294

Gmail. See *Gmail*

POP, 294-295

web-based, 295

home pages, 202

links, 202

online shopping. See *shopping online*

overview, 201-202

pages, 202

pop-up ads, blocking, 209, 212

printing, 208

revisiting recently viewed pages, 208

saving favorite pages, 207

searching, 214

children's websites, 289

entertainment, 288

exact phrases, 214

financial sites, 285

games, 289

Google search engine, 215-217

graphics, 286

job hunting websites, 287

kids-safe searches, 147-148

maps, 286-287

medical sites, 285-286

news searches, 284

people searches, 217

queries, 214

reference websites, 288

religion websites, 287

search engines, 217

senior citizen's websites, 290

sports sites, 284

travel guides, 286

weather sites, 285

surfing

overview, 204

pop-up ads, blocking, 209

printing web pages, 208

in private, 211

revisiting previously visited sites, 208

saving favorite sites, 207

searches, 206

tabbed browsing, 205

web browsers, selecting, 13, 201202

web-based applications, 270

calendars, 270-271

office suites, 272

presentations, 274-275

spreadsheets, 274

task management, 271-272

word processing, 273

web-based banking, 254-255

webcams, 97

Web Layout view (Word), 165

web mail, Gmail

composing messages, 298

contacts, adding, 298

conversations, viewing, 297

file attachments, 299-300

navigating, 296-297

reading, 297

replying to messages, 297

WebEx Web Office website, 272

Weblogs.com, 326

WebMD website, 286

Webs website, 278

Webshots website, 349

websites, 202

30Boxes, 271

AAA Travel Services, 286

AARP, 290

ABC, 261

ABC News, 284

- AccuWeather, 285
 Acronis True Image, 122
 Ad-Aware, 141
 Adobe
 Buzzword, 273
 Dreamweaver, 281
 Photoshop Elements, 338
 Premiere Elements, 386
 Ain't It Cool News, 288
 All Game Guide, 289
 All Games Free, 289
 All-Movie Guide, 288
 All-Music Guide, 288
 AltaVista, 217
 AltaVista— AV Family Filter, 147
 AMA DoctorFinder, 286
 Amazon MP3 Downloads, 370
 Angelfire, 278
 ANT 4 MailChecking, 144
 anti-spam software, 144
 anti-spyware software, 141
 antivirus programs, 140
 AnyWho, 217
 AOL
 Calendar, 271
 CityGuide, 286
 Instant Messenger, 304
 mail, 295
 Radio, 375
 Video, 261
 Apple MobileMe Calendar, 271
 ArcadeTown, 289
 Ask, 217
 Ask Kids, 147
 Audacity, 330
 AVG Anti-Virus, 140
 Avira AntiVir, 140
 AwesomeLibrary, 288
 BBC News, 284
 Bible Search, 287
 BibleGateway.com, 287
 Bing, 217
 BizRate, 229
 Bla-Bla List, 272
 BlogCatalog, 326
 blog directories, 326
 BlogEasy, 327
 Blogger, 217, 327
 Blogging Fusion, 326
 Blog Hints, 326
 blog hosting communities, 327
 Bloghub.com, 326
 Bloglines, 326
 Blog Search Engine, 326
 Blogsome, 327
 Boxerjam, 289
 Bravenet, 278
 BrinkPad, 275
 BuddhaNet, 287
 CalendarHub, 271
 Career.com, 287
 CareerBuilder, 287
 CBS, 261
 News, 260, 284
 Sports, 284
 ChildFun Family, 289
 children's, 289
 Classroom Clipart, 286
 Clip Art Center, 286
 Clipart.com, 286
 CMS Bounceback, 122
 CNN, 284
 CNN/Money, 285
 Comedy Central, 261
 Concierge.com, 286
 content-filtering programs, 146
 Corbis, 286
 Crosswalk.com, 288
 CyberPatrol, 146
 CYBERSitter, 146
 Dada, 370
 Dark Horizons, 288
 Digital Podcast, 329
 Discovery Education
 Classroom Resources, 288
 DoctorDirectory, 286
 dotPhoto, 349
 Download.com, 139
 DropShots, 349
 E! Online, 288
 Easy Media Creator, 358
 eBloggy, 327
 EditGrid, 274
 educational, 288
 EmploymentGuide, 287
 Empressr, 275
 eMusic, 370
 entertainment, 288
 Entertainment Weekly, 288
 ePodcast Creator, 330
 eSpirituality.com, 288
 ESPN, 261, 284
 Expedia, 232
 eXpresso, 274
 Facebook, 311
 Fact Monster, 147, 288
 FamilyFun.com, 289
 Famundo, 271
 FeedDemon, 326

- Feedreader, 326
- Film.com, 288
- financial, 285
- Firefox, 202
- firewall software, 142
- Flickr, 349
- Fodors, 286
- FortuneCity, 278
- Fotki, 349
- FotoTime, 349
- Fox
 - on Demand*, 261
 - News*, 284
 - Sports*, 284
- Freefoto.com, 286
- Freeservers, 278
- Frommer's Travel Guides, 286
- Funology, 289
- games, 289
- Games.com, 289
- Games Kids Play, 289
- GameSpot, 289
- GameSpy, 289
- Gamesville, 289
- GameZone, 289
- Getty Images, 286
- Glide
 - Business*, 272
 - Crunch*, 274
 - Write*, 273
- Globe of Blogs, 326
- Gmail, 295
- Google, 215-217
 - Blog Search*, 326
 - Calendar*, 271
 - Chrome*, 202
 - Docs*, 272-273
 - Finance*, 285
 - Image Search*, 286
 - Maps*, 287
 - News*, 284
 - Presentations*, 275
 - Product Search*, 229
 - Reader*, 326
 - SafeSearch*, 147
 - Sites*, 278
 - Spreadsheets*, 274
 - Talk*, 304
- GORP.com Adventure Travel and Outdoor Recreation, 287
- graphics, 286
- Grossology, 290
- HealthCentral.com, 286
- Hindu Universe, 288
- HiTask, 272
- Hiveminder, 272
- home page communities, 278
- home pages, 202
- Homestead, 278
- Homework Center, 288
- HomeworkSpot, 288
- host sites, 282
- HostIndex, 282
- HostSearch, 282
- HotWire, 232
- HughesNet, 197
- Hulu, 261
- Hunt Calendars, 271
- ICQ, 304
- iHateSpam, 144
- iMesh, 370
- Indeed, 287
- iNetWord, 273
- InfoSpace, 217
- instant messaging, 304
- Intellicast.com, 285
- Internet Chess Club, 289
- Internet Explorer, 202
- Internet Movie Database, 288
- Internet Park Word Games, 289
- Internet Public Library, 288
- Internet radio, 375
- iPrioritize, 272
- Islam 101, 288
- IslamWorld, 288
- iTunes Store, 368-369
- iWin.com, 289
- Jango, 375
- job hunting, 287
- JobWeb, 287
- Joost, 261
- Kaboose, 290
- Kaspersky, 140
- Kbdocs, 273
- Kid Info Homework Resource, 289
- kid-safe search sites, 147
- KidsClick, 289
- KidsCom, 290
- KidsHealth, 286
- Kids' Space, 290
- Kodak EasyShare Gallery, 349
- LAUNCHcast, 376
- Library of Congress, 289
- Live365, 376
- Lonely Planet, 287
- Lycos Mail, 295
- MadSci Network, 289

- Mail.com, 295
- MailWasher, 144
- MaMaMedia, 290
- MapQuest, 287
- maps, 286
- Marketwatch, 285
- McAfee
 - Total Protection*, 142
 - VirusScan*, 140
- MediaBuilder, 286
- medical, 285-286
- MedicineNet, 286
- Metacafe, 261
- Microsoft Expression Web Designer, 281
- Microsoft Office Live, 278
- Mike's Radio World, 376
- Monster, 287
- Motley Fool, 285
- MP3.com, 370
- MSN Games, 289
- MSN Money, 285
- MSNBC, 284
- MTV, 261
- music stores, 370
- MyCheckFree, 258
- MyEZBills, 258
- mySimon, 229
- Napster, 370
- National Library of Medicine, 286
- NationJob, 287
- NBC, 260
- NBC Sports, 284
- Net Ministries, 288
- Net Nanny, 146
- network, 260-262
- New York Times, 284
- New York Times blogs, 326
- news, 284
- NewsGator, 326
- NexTag, 229
- Norton AntiVirus, 140
- Norton Internet Security, 142
- Num Sum, 274
- online bill payment services, 258
- Open Directory, 217
- Opera, 202
- Orbitz, 232
- Paint Shop Pro Photo, 338
- Pandora, 376
- Paytrust, 258
- Peepel
 - Online Office*, 272
 - WebSheet*, 274
 - WebWriter*, 273
- Photos.com, 286
- photo-sharing, 349
- PhotoWorks, 349
- Picasa, 338
- Picturetrail, 349
- Pinnacle Studio, 386
- Play Later, 289
- Podcast Alley, 329
- Podcast Bunker, 329
- Podcast.com, 329
- podcast directories, 329
- Podcast Directory, 329
- Podcast Pickle, 329
- Podcasting Station, 329
- PodCastZoom, 329
- Podfeed.net, 329
- Pogo.com, 289
- Preezo, 275
- Presentation Engine, 275
- PreZentit, 275
- price comparison, 229
- PriceGrabber, 229
- Priceline, 232
- Propaganda, 330
- Puretracks, 370
- RadioTower.com, 376
- Rand McNally, 287
- Rediff, 278
- Refdesk.com, 289
- reference, 288
- religious, 287
- Religious Tolerance, 288
- Remember the Milk, 272
- Rhapsody, 370
- Rotten Tomatoes, 288
- Rough Guides, 287
- Safari, 202
- search engines, 217
- senior citizen's, 290
- Senior Women Web, 290
- SeniorJournal.com, 290
- SeniorNet, 290
- Seniors Site, 290
- Shopping.com, 229-231
- SHOUTcast, 376
- Shutterfly, 349
- SlideRocket, 275
- Smithsonian Photographic Services, 286
- snagajob.com, 287
- Snapfish, 349
- social networking, 310
- Sony Vegas Movie Studio, 386
- SportingNews.com, 284
- sports, 284
- Sports Illustrated, 284

- Spy Sweeper, 141
 - Spybot Search & Destroy, 141
 - Switchboard, 217
 - Ta-da List, 272
 - TaskTHIS, 272
 - tBlog, 327
 - ThinkFree
 - Calc*, 274
 - Office*, 272
 - Show*, 275
 - Write*, 273
 - ThirdAge, 290
 - TopHosts, 282
 - Trackslife, 272
 - travel guides, 286
 - travel reservations, 232
 - TravelNow.com, 232
 - Travelocity, 232
 - Trend Micro AntiVirus + AntiSpyware, 140
 - TripAdvisor, 287
 - Tripod, 278
 - Tucows, 139
 - Tudu List, 272
 - TV Guide Online, 288
 - TypePad, 327
 - Ulead
 - PhotoImpact*, 338
 - VideoStudio Pro*, 386
 - URLs, 202
 - USA Today, 284
 - Veoh, 261
 - VH1, 261
 - video editing programs, 386
 - video-only, 261
 - VirtualTourist.com, 287
 - Vitalist, 272
 - Voo2Do, 272
 - Wal-Mart Music Downloads, 370
 - weather, 285
 - Weather.com, 285
 - Weather Underground, 285
 - web-based applications
 - calendars*, 271
 - office suites*, 272
 - presentations*, 275
 - spreadsheets*, 274
 - task management*, 272
 - word processing*, 273
 - WebEx Web Office, 272
 - Weblogs.com, 326
 - web mail, 295
 - WebMD, 286
 - Webs, 278
 - web searches, white page directories, 217
 - Webshots, 349
 - WhitePages, 217
 - Wikipedia, 220
 - Windows
 - Defender*, 141
 - Live Calendar*, 271
 - Live Hotmail*, 295
 - Live Maps*, 287
 - Live Messenger*, 304
 - Live Movie Maker*, 386
 - Media Player*, 354
 - Word Central, 289
 - WordPress, 327
 - World of Religions, 288
 - XM Radio Online, 376
 - Xpress Bill Pay, 258
 - Yahoo!, 217
 - Calendar*, 271
 - Finance*, 285
 - Hot Jobs*, 287
 - Kids*, 147, 290
 - Mail*, 295
 - Maps*, 287
 - Messenger*, 304
 - Shopping*, 229
 - Video*, 261
 - YouTube, 217, 261
 - Zoho
 - Office*, 272
 - Planner*, 272
 - Sheet*, 274
 - Show*, 275
 - Writer*, 273
 - ZoneAlarm, 142
- Welcome screen (Windows), 37**
- white page directories (Web), 217**
- WhitePages.com website, 217**
- WiFi (wireless fidelity), 104, 199-200**
- Wikipedia**
- articles
 - creating*, 222
 - discussions*, 221
 - editing*, 223
 - reading*, 220-221
 - content accuracy, 223-224
 - overview, 220
 - searching, 221
 - website, 220
- Window Color and Appearance window, 69**

windows

- Add a Printer, 112
- closing, 49
- Desktop Background, 68
- Gadgets, 73
- HomeGroup, 113
- Manage User Accounts, 77
- maximizing, 48
- menus, grayed items, 50
- minimizing, 48
- moving, 47
- New Document, 166
- Personalization, 67
- restoring, 48
- Screen Resolution, 70
- scroll bars, 49
- sizing, 47
- submenus, 50
- switching between, 55
- System Restore, 134
- Window Color and Appearance, 69

Windows operating system, 14

- Action Center, 121
- Aero Peek, 47
- Aero Snap, 47
- application downloads, 62
- Backup, 122-123
- built-in programs/tools, 61
- Control Panel, 66
- Defender website, 141
- desktop, 44
 - Aero interface*, 69
 - backgrounds*, 67-68
 - colors*, 69-70
 - components*, 44
 - gadgets*, 72-73

- peeking at*, 47
- screen savers*, 71
- shortcuts*, 73-74
- sizing*, 70
- slideshows*, 69
- Start menu*, 75
- themes*, 67
- time and date, resetting*, 76
- windows, moving/resizing*, 47
- dialog boxes, 51-53
- double-clicking, 46
- DVD Maker, 388-389
- Explorer, 58-60
 - Computer Explorer*, 60
 - Control Panel*, 61
 - files/folders*, 59, 85
 - launching*, 58
 - libraries*, 83
 - navigating*, 58-60
 - search box*, 84
- file and printer sharing, enabling, 110
- Firewall, 141-142
- Flip, 57
- help, 63
- Jump Lists, 46, 56
- Live
 - Calendar*, 271
 - Essentials*, 62
 - Hotmail*, 295
 - Maps*, 287
 - Messenger*, 304
 - Movie Maker*, 386
 - Photo Gallery*. *See Photo Gallery*

- Media Center
 - DVDs, playing*, 382-384
 - video files, playing*, 383
- Media Player, 354
 - burning CDs*, 358
 - controls*, 354-355
 - launching*, 354
 - playback status area*, 355
 - playing CDs*, 355-356
 - playing music*, 371-373
 - playlists, creating*, 372-373
 - ripping CDs*, 356-358
 - website*, 354
- menus, 50
- Messenger, 304
- Mobility Center, 126
- mouse operations, 45-46
- network configuration, 108
- product activation, 36
- programs, switching between, 57
- putting to sleep, 63
- ribbons, 51
- right-clicking, 46
- setup, 36
- shutting down, 63
- Start menu, 53
 - icons*, 53
 - Instant Search box*, 54
 - launching programs*, 54
 - recent documents, reopening*, 54
 - viewing programs*, 53
- taskbar, 54
 - adding shortcuts*, 57
 - deleting items*, 57
 - icons*, 55-57

- Jump Lists*, 56
- new features*, 54
- opening programs*, 55
- switching between windows*, 55
- toolbar, 51
- Vista
 - file and printer sharing, enabling*, 110
 - network configuration*, 108
- versions, 14, 42-44
- Welcome screen, 37
- windows
 - closing*, 49
 - hiding*, 48
 - maximizing*, 48
 - menus*, 50
 - moving and resizing*, 47
 - restoring*, 48
 - scrolling*, 49
 - switching between*, 55
- XP
 - file and printer sharing*, 111
 - networks, configuring*, 108
- WinZip program, 88**
- wired networks, 104**
 - connecting, 105-107
 - hardware requirements, 106
 - hubs, 105
 - NICs (network interface cards), 104
 - sharing files/folders/printers, 109
 - Windows 7*, 110
 - Windows Vista*, 110
 - Windows XP*, 111
 - speed, 104
- wireless fidelity (WiFi), 104, 199-200**
- wireless keyboards, 20**
- wireless network adapters, 97**
- Wireless Network Setup Wizard, 109**
- wireless networks, 22, 104**
 - connecting, 105-107
 - hardware requirements, 106
 - security, 108-109
 - setup, 106
 - sharing files/folders/printers, 109
 - Windows 7*, 110
 - Windows Vista*, 110
 - Windows XP*, 111
 - WiFi standards, 105
 - wireless routers, 106
- wireless routers, 97, 106**
- wizards**
 - Chart Wizard, 182-183
 - Extraction, 89
 - Wireless Network Setup, 109
- WMA audio file format, 366-367**
- WMA Lossless audio file format, 367**
- Word (Microsoft) documents**
 - creating, 166
 - defined, 166
 - grammar checking, 169
 - insertion points, 167
 - opening, 166
 - Outline view, 171
 - paragraphs, formatting, 170
 - pictures
 - adding*, 172
 - formatting*, 172-173
 - printing, 169-170
 - resizing, 165
 - saving, 167
 - spell checking, 169
 - styles, 170-171
 - text, 167-168
 - viewing options, 164-165
 - ScreenTips, 164
 - workspace, 164-165
- Word Central website, 289**
- word processing programs, 13, 163. See also Word**
- word processing (web-based), 273**
- WordPress website, 327**
- Works (Microsoft), 156**
 - components, 156
 - documents
 - creating*, 157
 - finding*, 158
 - opening*, 158
 - launching programs, 157
 - project planner, 158-159
 - Task Launcher, 156-157
- World of Religions website, 288**
- World Wide Web. See Web writing on walls (Facebook), 313**

X

XM Radio Online website, 376

Xpress Bill Pay website, 258

Y

Yahoo!, 217

Calendar, 271

Finance, 285

Hot Jobs, 287

Kids, 147, 290

Mail, 295

Maps, 287

Messenger, 304

Shopping, 229

Video, 261

YouTube videos, 217

searching, 262-263

sharing, 264

uploading, 265

viewing, 262-264

website, 261

Z

ZIP file extension, 88

Zoho websites

Office, 272

Planner, 272

Sheet, 274

Show, 275

Writer, 273

zombie computers, 138

ZoneAlarm website, 142

zooming, Word, 165