

# ABSOLUTE BEGINNER'S GUIDE

TO

## Computer Basics 5th Edition

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computers could be?*



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Windows 7

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Michael Miller

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# ABSOLUTE BEGINNER'S GUIDE

TO

# Computer Basics

**Fifth Edition**

Michael Miller

**que**<sup>®</sup>

800 East 96th Street,  
Indianapolis, Indiana 46240

# Absolute Beginner's Guide to Computer Basics, Fifth Edition

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ISBN-13: 978-0-789-74253-7

ISBN-10: 0-7897-4253-5

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data:

Miller, Michael, 1958-

Absolute beginner's guide to computer basics / Michael Miller. — 5th ed.  
p. cm.

Includes index.

ISBN 978-0-7897-4253-7

1. Computers. I. Title.

QA76.5.M531412 2009

004—dc22

2009026988

Printed in the United States of America

Second Printing: February 2010

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## About the Author

**Michael Miller** is a successful and prolific author with a reputation for practical advice, technical accuracy, and an unerring empathy for the needs of his readers.

Mr. Miller has written more than 90 best-selling books over the past two decades. His books for Que include *Absolute Beginner's Guide to eBay*, *How Microsoft Windows Vista Works*, *Speed It Up! A Non-Technical Guide for Speeding Up Slow Computers*, and *Googlepedia: The Ultimate Google Resource*. He is known for his casual, easy-to-read writing style and his practical, real-world advice—as well as his ability to explain a wide variety of complex topics to an everyday audience.

You can email Mr. Miller directly at [abg@molehillgroup.com](mailto:abg@molehillgroup.com). His website is located at [www.molehillgroup.com](http://www.molehillgroup.com).

## Dedication

*To Sherry—finally and forever.*

## Acknowledgments

Thanks to the usual suspects at Que Publishing, including but not limited to Greg Wiegand, Michelle Newcomb, Charlotte Kughen, Bethany Wall, Karen Gill, and technical editor Vince Averello.

## We Want to Hear from You!

As the reader of this book, *you* are our most important critic and commentator. We value your opinion and want to know what we're doing right, what we could do better, what areas you'd like to see us publish in, and any other words of wisdom you're willing to pass our way.

As an associate publisher for Que Publishing, I welcome your comments. You can email or write me directly to let me know what you did or didn't like about this book—as well as what we can do to make our books better.

*Please note that I cannot help you with technical problems related to the topic of this book. We do have a User Services group, however, where I will forward specific technical questions related to the book.*

When you write, please be sure to include this book's title and author as well as your name, email address, and phone number. I will carefully review your comments and share them with the author and editors who worked on the book.

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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.

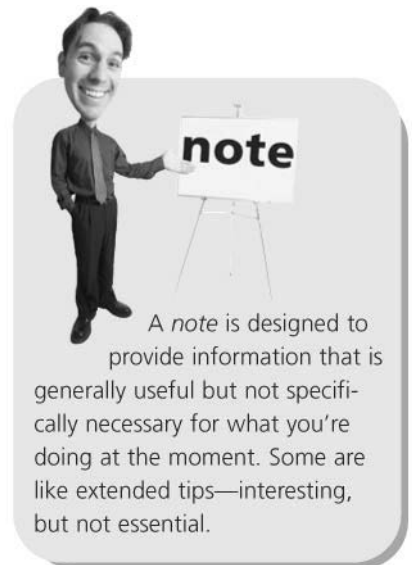
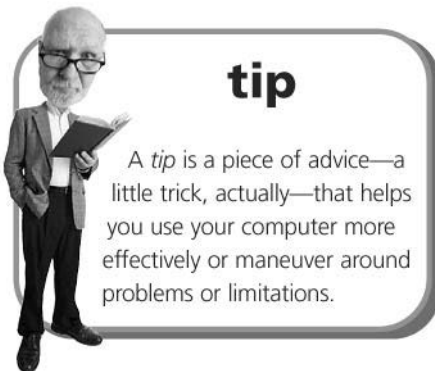
## Web Page Addresses

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](mailto:abg@molehillgroup.com). I can't promise that I'll *answer* every message, but I do promise that I'll *read* each one!

If you want to learn more about me and any new books I have cooking, check out my Molehill Group website at [www.molehillgroup.com](http://www.molehillgroup.com). Who knows, you might find some other books there that you would like to read.

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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.

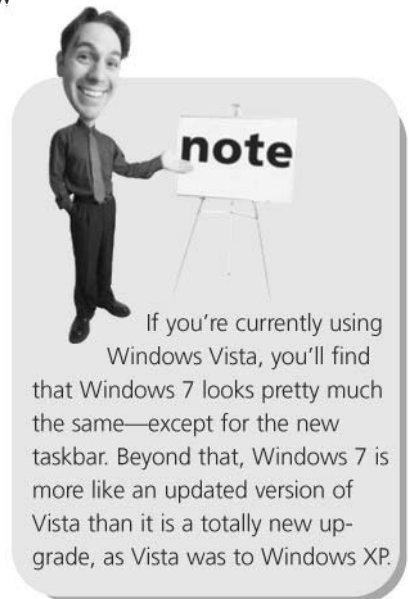
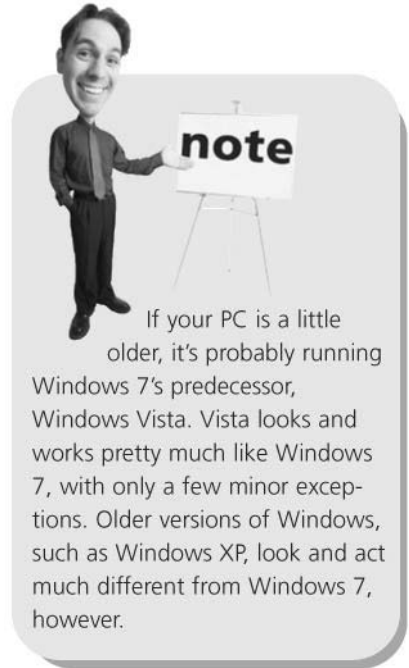
### Welcome to Windows 7

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.



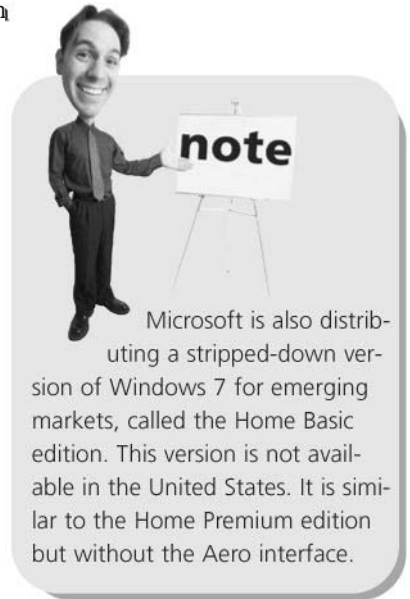


**TABLE 3.1** Windows 7 Versions

	<b>Starter</b>	<b>Home Premium</b>	<b>Ultimate</b>	<b>Professional</b>	<b>Enterprise</b>
<b>Target Market</b>					
Home	Yes	Yes	Yes		
Small business			Yes	Yes	
Corporate				Yes	Yes
Sold at retail?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
<b>Interface Features</b>					
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
<b>Included Applications</b>					
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
<b>Performance Features</b>					
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.



## 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.

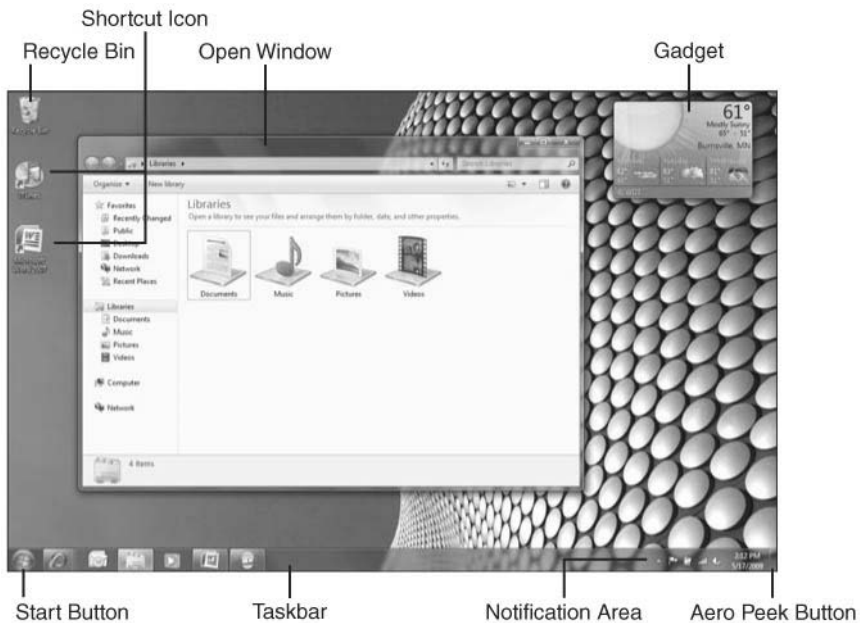
The major parts of the Windows desktop include

- **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.

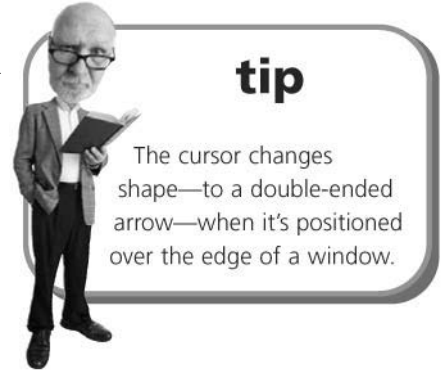
After the cursor is positioned over the window's edge, press and hold down the left mouse button; then drag the window border to its new size. Release the mouse button to lock in the newly sized window.

## 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.

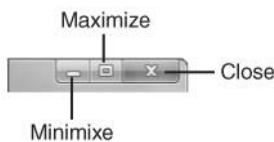
**FIGURE 3.2**

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).



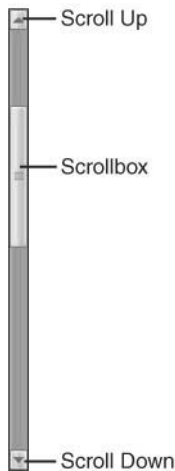
If what you really want to do is close the window (and close any program running within the window), just click the window's Close button.

## 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.

### 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.

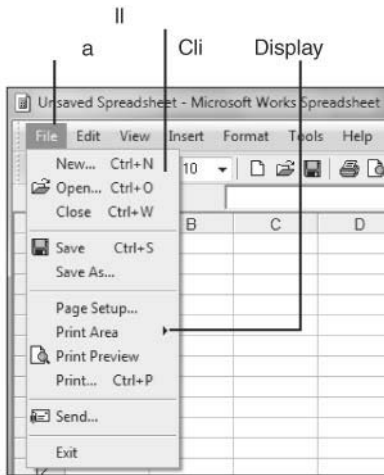


## Using Menus

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.

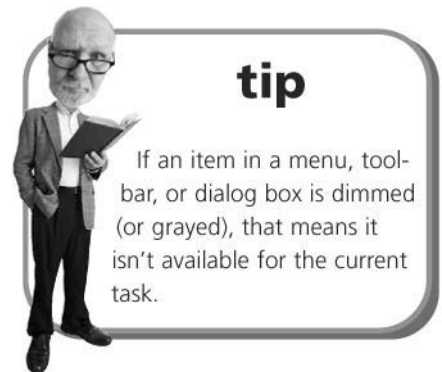
**FIGURE 3.5**  
Navigating  
Windows' menu  
system.



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 sub-menu.

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.

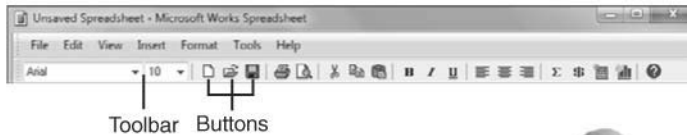


**tip**


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.

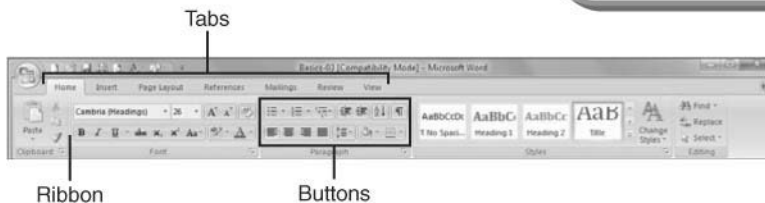


**tip**

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.

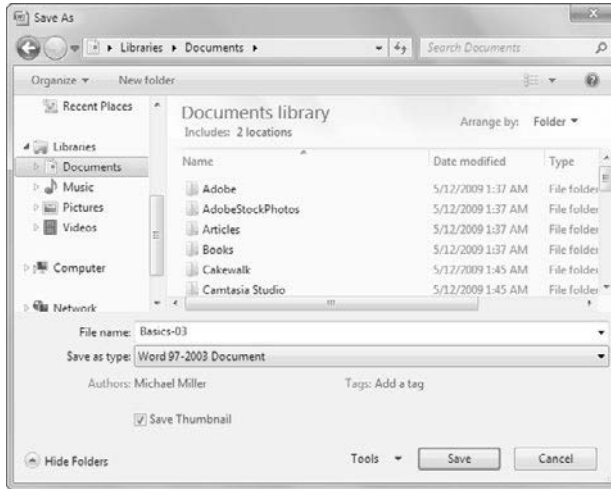


## Using Dialog Boxes, Tabs, and Buttons

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.)

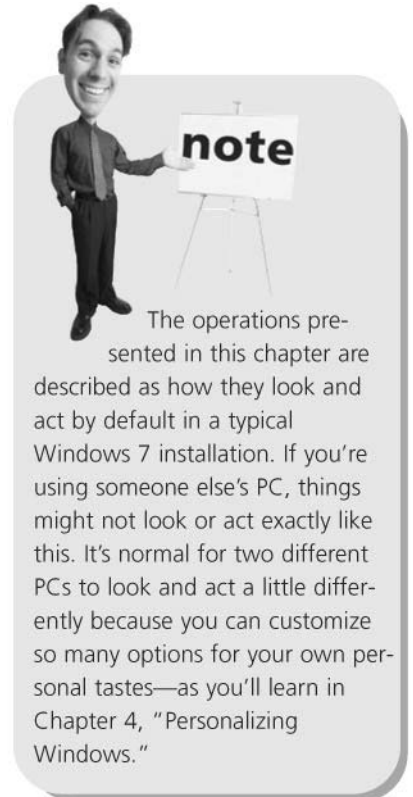
**FIGURE 3.8**

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



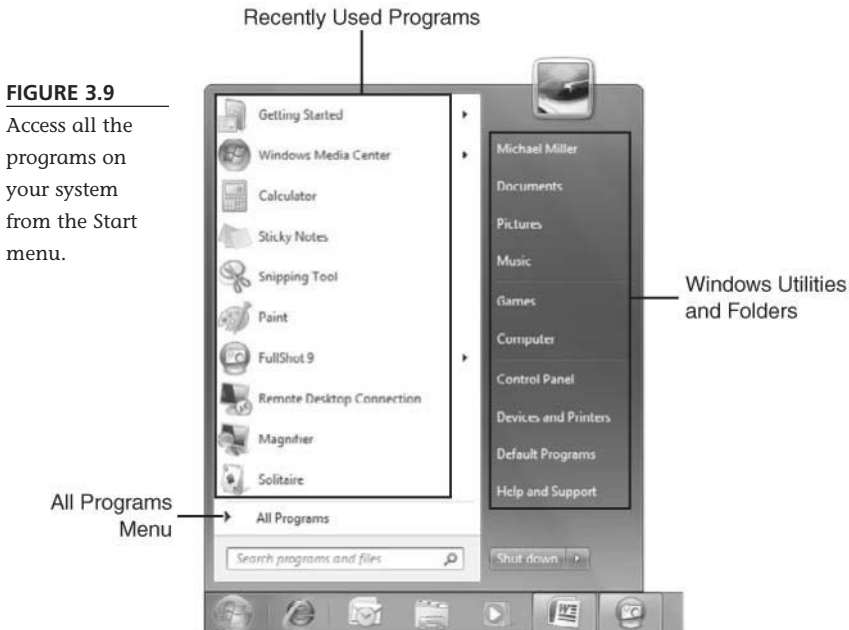
select multiple items in some lists by holding down the Ctrl key while clicking with your mouse.

- **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

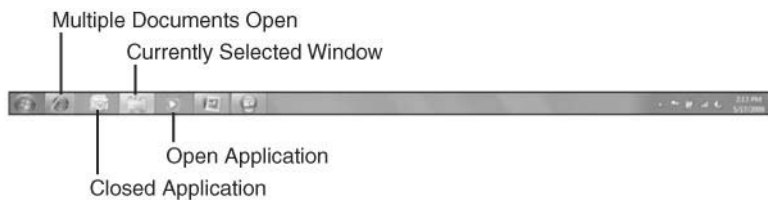
If you've used previous versions of Windows, you'll notice immediately that the Windows 7 taskbar looks a bit different. It's more glass-like than older taskbars, a little taller as well, and it displays icons, not buttons. There are no labels on the icons, just the icon graphic.

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.

**FIGURE 3.10**  
The new Windows 7 taskbar with a variety of icon buttons



## 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.

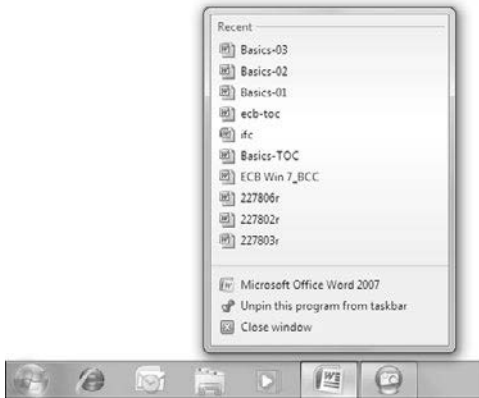
If you click a multiple-window icon, however, something interesting happens: Windows displays thumbnails for each of that application's open windows. (The same thing happens if you hover the cursor over any open-window icon, actually.) Move the cursor over a thumbnail, and that window temporarily displays 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**

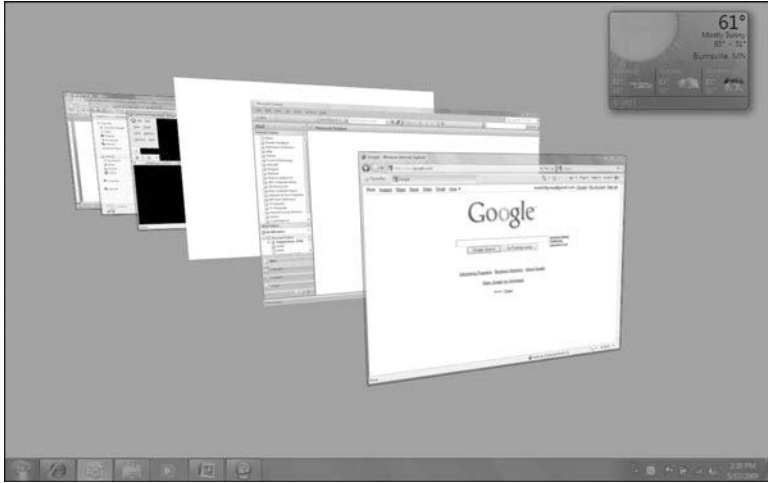
Use Windows Flip to select from thumbnails of all open programs.



- 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.

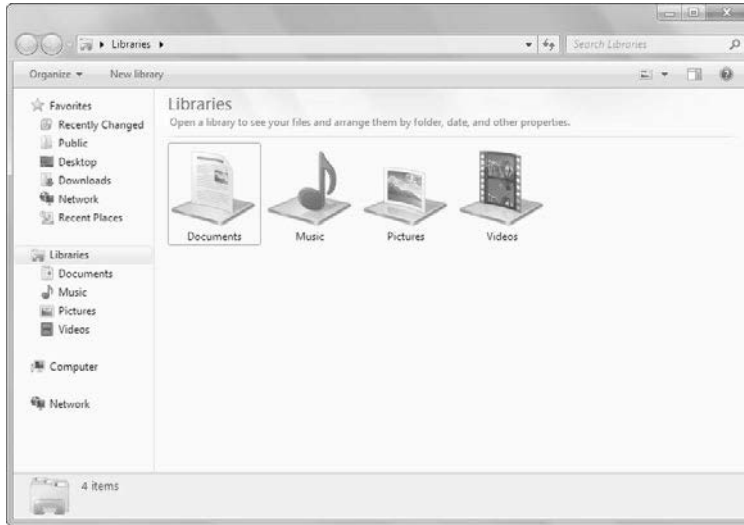
On the left side of the Windows Explorer window is a Navigation pane, divided into several sections. The top section, Favorites, lists your most-used folders—Recently Changed, Public, Desktop, Downloads, Network, and Recent Places. Next is the Libraries section, which repeats the four icons in the main 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**

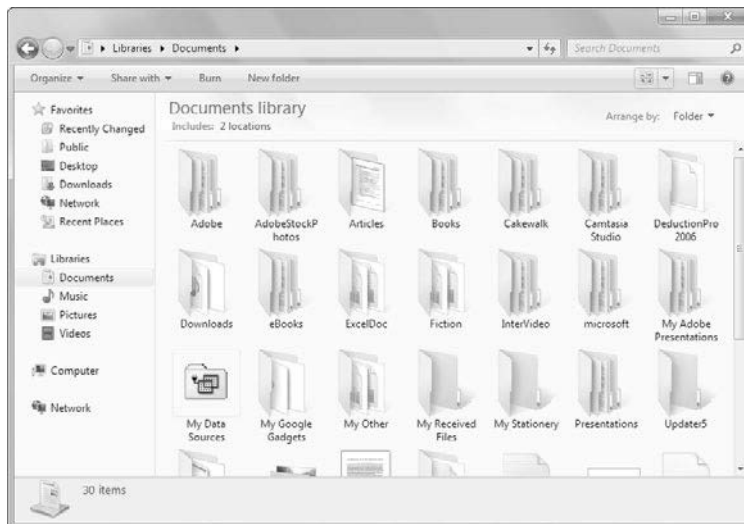
Navigating through your folders and sub-folders with Windows Explorer.



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.

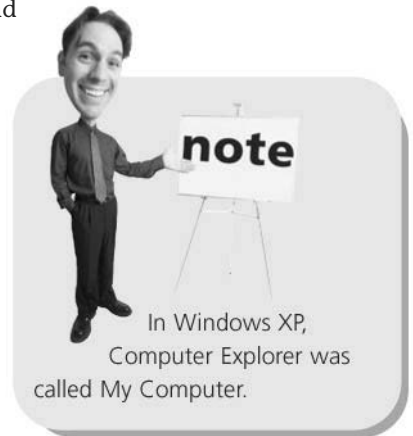


When you want to copy, delete, or otherwise manage files and folders, you use the Organize menu on the Windows Explorer toolbar. This menu includes most of the operations you need to manage your system's files and folders.

## Managing PC Resources with Computer Explorer

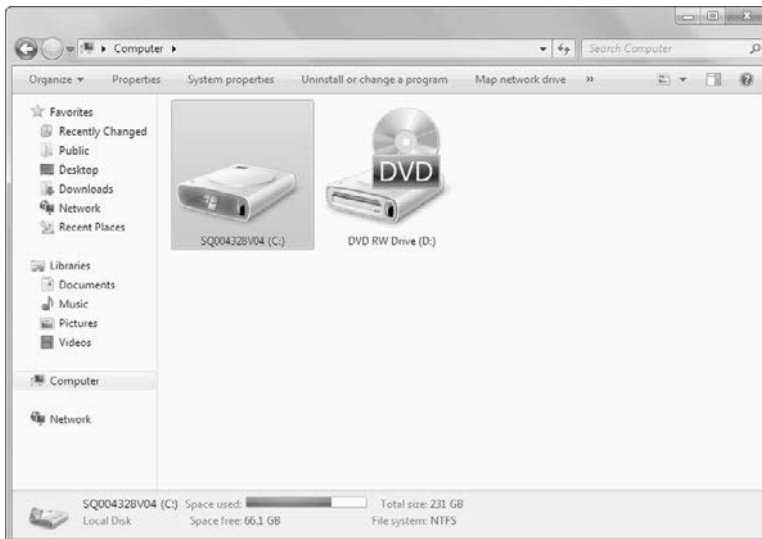
Windows 7 includes a special version of Windows Explorer, called *Computer Explorer*, that you use to access each major component of your system and perform basic maintenance functions. For example, you can use Computer Explorer to “open” the contents of your hard disk and then copy, move, and delete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

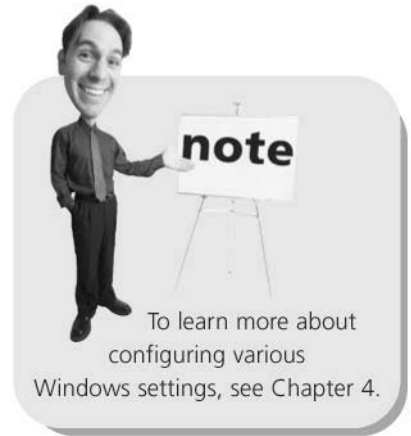
Use Computer Explorer to manage your hard drive and other key components.



## 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

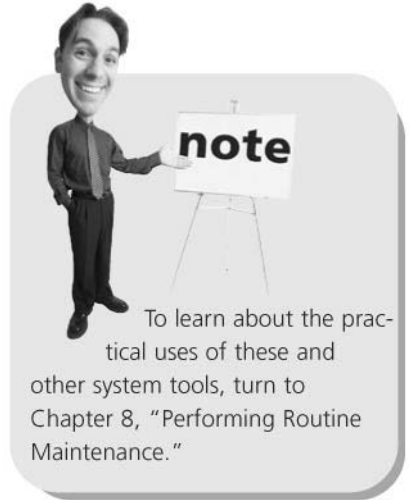
Windows is more than just a pretty desktop and some configuration utilities. Windows also includes many accessory programs and system tools you can use to perform basic system operations.

### 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](http://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.

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