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1 Introducing Your PC

Computers aren't just for your children's work or for your grandchildren's games, they are equally meant for you. They are there to help with those must-do jobs and also with fun-to-do things. We identify and explain the hardware and software you need to do them.

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The Age of the Computer

Computers today have become part of everyday life and are no longer the territory of the mathematical or technical guru. We find them in mobile phones, cars, television sets, games machines and a multitude of electronic devices, as well as the dedicated machines that we call personal computers.

Personal computers or PCs have changed dramatically over the last several years – in physical size, functionality and requirements. The progression has been from simple number crunchers, to basic office word processors and data handlers, through to today's multi-tasking and communication devices.

The things we now want to do with computers, and our expectations of what we can do with them, are vastly different from when the home computer first became available. We find that we need to be able to use computers and to work with the technology in today's world. It is expected that we use the Internet to check timetables, bank and utility statements and buy tickets etc. People seldom print photos of events, but share them online. We use email instead of regular postal services – it's quicker, cheaper and more efficient.

This book is designed to introduce you to the new world of computers and help you get involved. It covers the hardware available, explains technical jargon and leads you step-by-step to achieve those things that you are most likely to want to do with the computer, such as find information on the Internet, write a letter or contact friends.

By the time you have worked through the examples and suggestions in the book, you'll be completely at home with the system and ready to start your own tasks and activities.

Don't forget

Anyone can learn to use a computer – it just takes time and practice.

Setting the Scene

The Operating System

This book is based on the latest version of Windows from Microsoft – Windows 8.

Windows 8 introduces the latest 'Touch' technology to personal computers that has been available for many years in places like restaurants, shops and cinemas. From punched card systems through to mouse clicks, data input has changed dramatically. The Touch technology is simpler, faster and promoted as more intuitive, than any previous interaction method.

However, all of the tasks illustrated in this book can be carried out using either the keypad or a mouse, and these alternative methods will be regularly described.

Office 2013

This is the latest version of Microsoft Office. Programs include:

- Word – for word processing tasks
- Excel – for spreadsheet, charts and data management
- PowerPoint for presentations
- Outlook – for email
- OneNote for making notes

See page 26 for full details of the Microsoft Office suite.

Windows 8 Apps

Most apps used, for example the Photos app, are already installed on your computer, along with Windows 8. Some of the other Apps illustrated, for example Games, will be downloaded from the Windows Store and installed as part of the process.

Don't forget

There are several different editions of Windows 8 for home and business use. Windows RT is a special version designed for Tablet PCs (see page 14).

The service upgrade, Windows 8.1 (from late 2013) may change the appearance, but otherwise most activities should stay the same.

Hot tip

For details of mouse buttons and pointers, see page 203.

Hot tip

There are few differences between Office 2010 and Office 2013. You will find that the activities described are usually the same in both versions.

The Desktop Computer

Don't forget

A major advantage of the desktop model is that individual components can be replaced if they fail.

Although called a desktop computer, the main component which is the systems unit, is often a tower unit of varying dimensions, which can sit on top or underneath the desk. Alternative systems units may be flatter and sit on the desk underneath the screen, or even be built into the screen.

The systems unit houses all the hardware – the processor, the hard disk drive, the memory, video cards and connections for the screen and keyboard. It usually offers one or two CD or DVD drives as well as USB connections for peripheral equipment and a modem connection for broadband.

The desktop computer allows you to attach different sizes of monitor, according to your requirements and budget. The monitor and keyboard may come as part of a package with the systems unit, or can be individually selected.

Don't forget

While it is possible to attach another keyboard or monitor etc. to a laptop PC, it does remove its portability.

With the Windows 8 operating system, you would be advised to buy a monitor with Touch capability. Although the keyboard and mouse are still the main means of data input, Touch allows much faster navigation between the various applications and also greater ease in selecting some of the menu options. Touch-enabled monitors come with two-, five- or ten-point touch.

With a desktop computer you can attach external disk drives, multiple monitors and other peripheral hardware to extend its functions and capabilities.

The Laptop Computer

Laptop PCs

With a laptop PC all the components will be combined into the single system, keyboard and display unit, and the mouse may be replaced by a touch pad or a pressure-sensitive toggle button. The laptop PC will usually have a CD or DVD player.

Laptop PCs are designed to be portable and therefore weight is very important. To decrease the weight, some of the features of a desktop computer may be absent.

Screen size is also an issue. If you intend to spend a lot of time browsing the Internet or working on photos, then a larger screen size would be ideal. This will, however, make the unit heavier and less portable.

Hot tip

If you are thinking of buying a laptop PC, pick up the computer and check the weight to make sure it's not too heavy. You will need some kind of case for it which will also add to the weight and bulk.

Netbooks

Netbooks are even lighter and smaller in size than laptops, being on average only 1.5 inches or 4 cm thick. They do not have a CD or DVD player and will need to be connected to an external drive, by cable or wireless, for program updates. The average weight is approximately 3.5 lb or 1.5 kilo, about half of that for a laptop.

Netbooks are ideal for traveling, for checking mail, staying in touch and keeping up-to-date. However, they may prove to be tedious to use for long periods.

Beware

When checking the weight of a portable PC, look to see if the weight includes the battery installed or separate.

Battery Life

Large laptop PCs will usually only run for about two hours on the battery. The smaller netbooks may last up to 10 or more hours, depending on how many programs you are running and whether you have items such as Wi-Fi turned on. Windows 8 has new features for power management.

The Tablet Computer

The Tablet PC has taken miniaturization and portability to another level. The Tablet uses Touch technology, which means that it can be used without any external means of interaction, such as an external keyboard or mouse. The keyboard is a virtual keyboard, available on the screen when required for text input.

Tablet PCs usually come with one or two cameras, forward and back facing. Most will have an orientation sensor (gyroscope) that allows you to change portrait to landscape as suitable. Some include a GPS chip to allow route maps and show information such as location and weather.

The Tablet might be supplied with a detachable keyboard, sometimes to be purchased separately. The keyboard usually acts as a protective cover, and frequently also as a stand. With a keyboard, the Tablet can be used as a Laptop computer.

Manufacturers have created a variety of designs for Tablets. Lenovo, for example, offers a basic Tablet that has no keyboard, but includes a digitized pen so that you can use it just like a pen and notepad. It has an 8 MP camera and a microphone for video communication. It runs Windows 8, so gives you access to full multitasking and office functions such as presentations.

Sometimes the manufacturer incorporates a rotating mechanism so the computer can be used as a Tablet with the keyboard hidden, or as a laptop. This type of design is known as a 'Convertible', illustrated here by the Dell Convertible PC.

Don't forget

All these various designs of PC may run either Windows 8 or Windows RT, depending on the type of processor. Tablets based on Intel or AMD processors run Windows 8 and Tablets based on the ARM processor with its extended battery life, run Windows RT.

Beware

Windows RT cannot run older Windows applications and has its own version of Office 2013.

The Microsoft Surface

The computer used in this book for illustration and the activities described, is the Microsoft Surface. This is a Tablet computer designed and manufactured under the Microsoft label. It comes in two versions – the Surface RT and the Surface Pro.

Both machines use Touch technology and have a built-in compass and a gyroscope for adjusting orientation. There is a choice of detachable keyboards which act as a protective cover. The Touch cover is the thinner of the two with keys that register by a click 'sound', operated through the speaker. The thicker Type cover has keys that actually depress when struck.

The Surface RT, illustrated here with the Touch cover, is based on the ARM chip and has a special version of Windows. It is pre-loaded with Office 2013 Home and Student edition, a version specifically designed for it. The longer battery life of the Surface RT (up to 8 hours) and lighter weight are its advantages.

The Surface Pro is Intel-based and so is able to run the full version of Windows 8. It is supplied with a digital pen to help with precise input and is illustrated here with the Type cover. Office 2013 has to be purchased and installed separately. The Surface Pro will run older Windows programs and software from other manufacturers such as Adobe Photoshop.

The computers will have either 32GB or 64GB of memory, with the Surface Pro able to have 128GB. Both have Wi-Fi and Bluetooth technology.

Don't forget

You may need to turn the volume control up to hear the keys on the Touch cover, in a noisy environment.

Hot tip

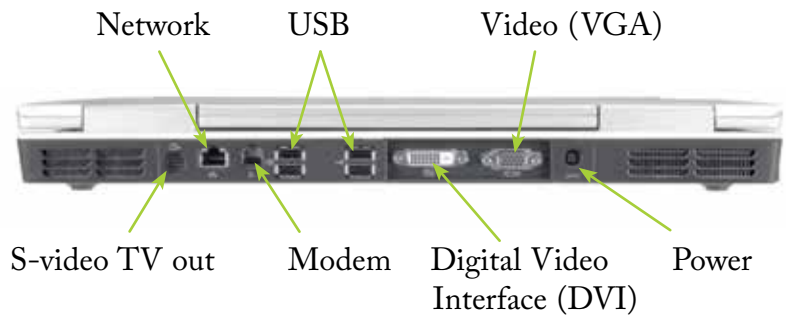
If you intend to use the Tablet PC just for email, travel, news and entertainment, then the Surface RT would probably be sufficient for your needs. It also has the most-used Office functions in Word, Excel and Powerpoint.

Connections

All types of computers come with facilities that will allow you to connect other hardware. There are three main types of connections:

- **Device-specific**, such as for the monitor or network
- **Generic USB connections**, used for multiple device types (see below)
- **Wireless (radio) connections**, e.g. for broadband or printer

The picture below illustrates the connection points on the back of a standard laptop computer. There are more connection points on the sides.



USB Ports

These connection points are used by a multiplicity of devices including cameras, flash drives (memory sticks), external disk drives, projectors, navigation systems and iPods.

Wireless Connections

The laptop illustrated above has a built-in wireless transmitter/receiver, evidenced only by an indicator light on the keyboard when the machine is operating. Wireless, or Wi-Fi broadcasting is used for larger items such as broadband routers, Internet connections and printers.

Bluetooth wireless (see page 18) is used for smaller equipment such as mobile phones and PDAs.

Don't forget

Desktop and laptop computers will come with several USB and other connection points. These are minimal on Tablet PCs. Network and Internet access is achieved through Wi-Fi.

Hot tip

Using wireless connections means few or no trailing cables. It allows for greater flexibility when positioning equipment. Wi-Fi broadband also has the great advantage of allowing visitors to share your Internet connection.

Computer Peripherals

Printer

There are two main types of printers – the laser printer, which uses toner cartridges (like a photocopier) and the inkjet printer, which uses ink cartridges.

Laser printers are ideal for higher volumes of printing. They may be monochrome (with black toner only) or color and produce excellent results for text, but they are not generally suitable for printing photographs.

If you choose an inkjet printer, make sure to select one that has a separate black ink cartridge. For the colored inks, there may be a single tricolor cartridge, which is suitable for occasional color printing.

For serious color printing, such as digital photographs, it is better to choose a printer with individual color cartridges. This allows you to change just the one cartridge when a single color gets depleted – a much more economical proposition. Many mid-priced ink-jet printers come with a feature such as PictBridge which allows you to print directly from your digital camera memory card.

You could consider a dedicated photo printer. These are easy to use and come with photo-sized paper. However, many are limited to 6" x 4" prints, with a few offering 7" x 5".

Scanner

This allows you to copy letters, documents and pictures, so you can store their images on your hard disk. The scanner can also be used in conjunction with your printer, to give you photocopier capabilities. You can buy combined printer and scanner units, which are known as all-in-one printers, as pictured above.

Beware

Some inkjet printers use a mixture of colored inks to produce a rather muddy greenish-black.

Don't forget

Many printers come with wireless capability.

Hot tip

The card reader on a printer can usually handle several different types of data card, but make sure that the type used by your camera is supported.

...cont'd

Digital Camera

You can transfer the pictures from your digital camera to your PC. From there, you can use editing software to enhance or make corrections. You can upload them to the Internet to share with friends, or copy them to DVD to play back on your TV.

You may be able to connect your digital camera directly to your PC, or you may have a card reader that allows you to take the storage card from your digital camera and read the contents on your PC. Both methods involve using a USB connection.

Some cameras have Bluetooth capability. If your printer was similarly equipped, you would be able to transfer images for printing without any cable connection.

Hot tip

When one Bluetooth-enabled device comes within the range of another similarly equipped, they will try to automatically connect.

Flash Drive

This is also referred to as a memory stick, pen drive or external drive and is attached through the USB port. Its purpose is to enable you to transfer or store data – pictures, films, music or just document files. A 1 GB drive will hold up to 540 standard-size photos, 12 hours of MP3 music files, or 6 hours of video files. They can be up to 256 GB capacity.

Don't forget

Blackberry and Windows Phone are examples of Smart phones. A PDA such as the HP iPaq is a Personal Digital Assistant.

iPod or MP3 Player

At the base level, these systems simply play music and sometimes radio. They use the computer to manage, store and provide backup of the music files. The more sophisticated of these systems take photos, provide satellite navigation, access to email and the Internet and also act as a mobile phone.

Smart Phone or PDA

You can synchronize and manage the emails, contacts and calendar information on these devices using Windows 8.

Technical Jargon Explained

Wi-Fi

Wi-Fi is used to create a wireless network, allowing you to connect a number of computers and devices and share access to the Internet, without having to string cables. Wi-Fi is enabled through the broadband or ADSL connection and router which sends a radio signal to the computers. Wi-Fi is also found in public places such as airports and coffee shops.

Bluetooth

Bluetooth is a way of exchanging data wirelessly over short distances, and does away with any need for wiring. It uses a special radio frequency to transmit data and is very secure. It allows high-speed communication between PCs and other computing devices including mobile phones. You can use a Dongle if required, plugged into your computer, to connect via Bluetooth.

The SIM Card

SIM cards are used in mobile phones, and are network specific, but can also be used in Tablet and laptop computers. You would then use your phone network to connect to the Internet or for email. This can prove to be an expensive option, especially if traveling abroad.

Screen Resolution

The screen resolution is measured in picture elements or pixels. To use the full Windows 8 functions, including SnapApps (see page 43) you need 1366 by 768 pixels as the minimum. To run an individual Windows 8 app, you need a minimum of 1024 by 768 pixels.

Touch

Touch-enabled monitors are not just for Tablet PCs, they may be added to a desktop computer. They can be two-point, five-point or 10-point. The minimum required for Windows 8 is five point touch. This supports the full range of touch gestures including stretching, pinching and swiping.

Capacitive or inductive pens are often included to enable more precision when using touch operations.

Don't forget

You can also connect PCs and devices, and share your Internet connection, using Ethernet adapters and network cables.

Hot tip

Bluetooth is particularly convenient for transferring files from one mobile phone to another or sending music and photos between a PC and a mobile phone.

The Operating System

Just as important as the equipment that makes up your PC, are the items of software that have been included with it. The primary element is the operating system, to provide the working environment. This will normally be Microsoft Windows.

The Windows operating system runs all the hardware and software on your PC. It allows you to access programs, save files to internal and external hard drives, and personalize and change computer settings to your own requirements. It enables you to communicate with the printer and other peripheral devices.

Don't forget

There are several versions of Windows, including Windows Vista and Windows XP, but in this book, we will assume for illustration purposes that you have Windows 8 installed.

Hot tip

The Windows Desktop is accessed from the tile at the bottom left of the Start screen.

The image above shows the Windows Start screen, with tiles for the programs installed. Several tiles will change automatically to display updated information. The image shown below is of the Windows Desktop, with a layout more familiar to users of previous versions of Windows.

Windows 8 Editions

There are four editions of Windows 8. The Base edition contains the main features including touch capability, Internet Explorer 10, Windows 8 apps and Windows Store.

Windows 8 Pro is for more advanced users and technical professionals. The Enterprise edition is purely for business and is not supplied as a retail pack.

Features	Base	Pro / Enterprise	RT
Processor support	x32/64	x32/64	x32
Multi-touch capability	Yes	Yes	Yes
Support for Desktop programs	Yes	Yes	Restricted
Upgradable from Windows 7	Yes	Yes	No
Home Group	Create/join	Create/join	Join only
Windows Media Player	Yes	Yes	No
Windows Media Center	No	Available as an add-in	No
File History	Yes	Yes	Yes
Microsoft Office	No	No	Yes

Windows RT is only available pre-installed on Tablets with the ARM processor. It does not support conventional Windows programs, though more significantly, it does include a version of Microsoft Office 2013 designed specifically for it.

Don't forget

The Intel and AMD processors used for Windows 8 PCs operate in both 32 bit and 64 bit modes. There are versions of Windows 8 and Office 2013 for each mode. For most users, there's no significant difference between the modes, although 64 bit is preferred if you are going to be working with really large Excel spreadsheets.

Hot tip

The ARM processor of Windows RT is a Reduced Instruction Set Computer (RISC) processor with enhanced power-saving features used for mobile phones and media players.

Windows 8 Apps

In addition to the operational software, you'll find that various applications (apps) are included with Windows 8 and will be displayed as a series of tiles when you start.

Hot tip

This initial or Start screen with the tiles is known as the Start screen and is a completely new approach by Microsoft to the Windows operating system.

Mail

When you start your computer and sign in to your account you will automatically get the associated email account set up. The Mail App shows a count of arriving email and gives direct access to the account.

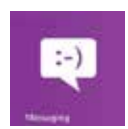
People

Your contacts will be displayed here, together with quick links to the most popular social networking sites, such as Facebook or Twitter. Contacts can be synchronised between your PC and phone.

Calendar

This app displays your planned activities on a daily, weekly or monthly basis. It can be synced with your phone or permitted contacts.

Messaging



Use this app to chat with friends and contacts. Interaction is effectively live and by means of the keyboard, rather than face-to-face, and can also be through Facebook.

Photos

Once you begin to take or upload photos to your PC, they will be displayed with the Photos app. Photos can be obtained from another computer, mobile phone or from online sources such as Flickr.

Weather

This shows the current weather situation in various cities throughout the world, but can be customized to show the weather in your chosen location.

Don't forget

If Windows 8 was the only software on your PC, you'd still be able to carry out most functions. However, special purpose software such as Microsoft Office would make things easier and provide more options.

Camera

The Tablet has built-in lenses, forward and back facing, to allow photography or video messaging, and includes a built-in microphone. You can specify the resolution and aspect ratio.

Other Installed Apps

- **News** – provided by Bing (Microsoft's search engine)
- **Internet Explorer** – for surfing the Web
- **Maps** – will show your current position, show an aerial or road view and let you search for directions
- **Games** – none are initially installed; this is a link to the Windows Store to get started
- **Music** – a link to the Windows Store. Again, no music is installed but you can visit the Windows Store or copy music from another source
- **Sports** – news reports from newspapers, sports channels and links to follow favorite teams, provided by Bing
- **Travel** – photographs and information about worldwide destinations, including local weather conditions and currency exchange rates
- **Financial news** – including current stock market prices, articles and stock trading prices

The Desktop App

This app gives you access to the Desktop interface, where, if you have used a previous version of Windows, you will find familiar features and layout.

The Desktop interface is where you can install and run software from other companies or older applications.

Hot tip

The Office 2013 applications can be accessed through both the Metro interface and the Desktop interface.

Don't forget

If you are running Windows RT, you will be unable to run older applications.

Desktop Apps

The Desktop, accessed through the Desktop icon, has a series of its own applications. These are inherited from previous versions of Windows, and provide a number of useful and necessary functions.

File Explorer

This program, with a shortcut icon on the taskbar, lets you view the contents of your disk drives. You can use it to navigate the drives and folders and to organize and view your files.

Internet Explorer

Windows 8 comes with Internet Explorer 10. Use it to browse and surf the World Wide Web. You can choose your own Home page, create favorite sites and use it to travel and shop from the comfort of your home.

Ease of Access

Programs in the Ease of Access category include Magnifier, Narrator and Speech Recognition, all utilities to customize your computer for personal requirements.

Control Panel

This gives you access to system and security settings, lets you create or join a network, manage hardware and other devices, uninstall a program and adjust screen resolution. Here, you can set up Family Safety and create accounts for family members, personalize your system and change the language, region and clock settings.

Notepad

Text files created with Notepad are plain text documents, with no formatting. These files are generic and can be read by almost any application.

Calculator

Calculator has advanced functions as well as standard mathematical calculations. It offers Scientific, Programmer and Statistic functions along with Date calculation and Unit conversion.

Don't forget

The Apps listed here can be found in All Apps, on either the Start screen or the Desktop environments, but will run in the Desktop window.

Hot tip

There are two versions of Internet Explorer supplied with Windows 8, one for the Start screen and one for the Desktop. The Desktop version runs in a window on the Desktop and would be more familiar to users with previous experience of Internet Explorer.

Hot tip

All these programs can be pinned to the Start menu or the Desktop for easy access.

Windows 8 Only Apps

The apps described on the previous pages will operate in either Windows 8 or Windows RT. The following apps and programs are Windows 8 only and will not run on Windows RT. They include:

WordPad

This is a word processor with limited function, but would fulfill most word processing requirements. It has the usual features of document layout, text justification, find/replace and can handle inserted pictures.

Windows Media Player

This program handles your computer's libraries of music, video, pictures and other recorded material, enabling you to play or view the media. With it, you can manage media files, create playlists or add tags of date, genre, etc. to files.

Programs from Other Suppliers

Adobe Photoshop is a popular program, offering full image management. It handles all image types and allows simple photo editing (cropping, red-eye reduction, air-brushing, etc.), as well as more complex activities used by professional photo studios.

Other image management programs that require Windows 8 are Paintshop Pro and Irfanview, both free to download from the Internet.

Programs from independent software writers, such as music programs/editors, games – Chess, Bridge, etc. will also require the full version of Window 8. This category would also include software for peripherals, such as that specifically written for cameras and other devices.

Don't forget

More Windows 8-only apps can be found in the Windows Store (see page 48).

Hot tip

Most programs written for Windows 7 will run under Windows 8. To check a particular program, go to the Microsoft website at www.microsoft.com and search for the Windows Compatibility Center, where you will find a list of compatible programs.

Microsoft Office

Hot tip

The Surface RT Tablet computer comes with Office 2013 already installed. For other computers, it has to be bought and installed separately.

Microsoft Office is an integrated suite of applications. Office 2013 comes in several editions, each edition offering a different combination of programs. Below is a table showing the programs included in the various versions.

Programs	Home and Student	Home and Business	Standard	Professional	Professional Plus
Word	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Excel	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
PowerPoint	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
OneNote	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Outlook	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Publisher	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Access	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
InfoPath	No	No	No	No	Yes
Lync	No	No	No	No	Yes

Hot tip

In integrated applications, the individual programs work together. So, for example, a table created in the spreadsheet can be copied and pasted into the word processor.

The version of Office 2013 that comes with the Surface RT is the Home and Student edition, which has been specially written to work with the ARM processor. Functionally, it offers the same features.

Start Your PC

When you start Windows 8 for the very first time, you will have the opportunity to choose a number of settings that will apply to your new computer.

1. Switch on the computer. The first step is to choose one of the 25 color schemes offered or you could just accept the default Blue scheme if preferred

2. Provide a name for your computer. This name will be used to identify your computer, if at some point later, you connect to a home network. Click Next

3. Select Use Express Settings. These settings are for security and other personalization. They include Windows Firewall, Windows Defender and Windows Update

4. At this point, Windows 8 will turn on sharing and search for any local network

Hot tip

These same steps are required if you are upgrading from Windows 7.

Don't forget

You will be able to customize your settings at any time, once you have decided which changes you would like.

Microsoft Account

When you have applied the settings, you will now need to supply an email address to sign in to Windows 8.

If you already have an email account you can use that, but the preferred option is to create or use a Microsoft account. Microsoft make it easy by offering a choice on the initial Sign in screen.

Hot tip

A Microsoft account could be @Hotmail.com or @Live.com or @Outlook.com. All of these are managed by Microsoft at the Outlook.com website.

1. Supply your Microsoft email address if you have one and click or tap Next. All you need to do then is supply the password and you will be presented with the Start screen

Don't forget

Without a Microsoft account you won't be able to access the Windows Store. You will also be unable to synchronize your phone, contacts and calendar, photos etc.

2. To create a Microsoft account select Sign up for a new email address. You'll be prompted to suggest a name and offered options if it is already in use. You also will need to supply a password

3. You could use a different email such as Gmail. You would then need to supply some personal details to have the email address associated with a Microsoft account

4. If you'd prefer at this point not to supply any email address you could just create a simple sign in and password for security purposes. You could then create a Microsoft account later