

Laptops
ALL-IN-ONE DESK REFERENCE
FOR
DUMMIES®

by Corey Sandler



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About the Author

Okay, I'll admit it: I've got a strange biography. I've been a writer all my life. My first semi-pro job was sports editor of my high school newspaper. (Go Commodores!) After college I was a political reporter for daily newspapers in Ohio and New York (I covered four national nominating conventions and two Presidential campaigns) and a correspondent for The Associated Press. And then, in 1983, I gave in to my inner geek and became the first Executive Editor of *PC Magazine*, back in the days when most people asked, "What is a PC?"

These days I keep my feet planted in four arenas; that's not an easy thing to do if you think about it. I write books about computers, history, sports, and travel. All told, I've written nearly 150 books and they've been translated into more than a dozen languages.

For all of my professional life I've been a road warrior. I started out with a notebook and a roll of dimes in my pocket. But by the early 1980s, I was one of the first users of a portable computer. That first machine was the size of a suitcase and each owner required an extension cord, an AC outlet, and a chiropractor. A few years later, though, I had one of the first battery-powered laptops, and in more than two decades I've almost never strayed more than an hour from home without one.

In fact, it's the laptop and the ability to connect to the world with or without wires that allow me to live far away from the real world: My wife Janice and I live at the end of a lane up from the beach on Nantucket Island, 30 miles out to sea from Cape Cod in Massachusetts.

Dedication

To our one-time laptops William and Tessa, out of college (hooray!) and ready to strut their stuff.

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We're proud of this book; please send us your comments through our online registration form located at www.dummies.com/register/.

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Introduction

Your basic, truly wondrous laptop computer — a device that can take your dictation of the Great American Novel, balance your checkbook, sing you a song, show you a movie, and allow you to communicate with practically anyone in the world similarly equipped — weighs about six pounds.

Most wondrous of all, most new laptop computers don't come with a full instruction manual. (Not that those delivered with older machines were all that good.) From the very moment of the first personal computer's birth, it's always been a fact that the hardware was great, the software was amazing, and the manuals were awful. (The fact that they called the impenetrable prose "documentation" should have been a hint.)

It was for that very reason that the entire computer book-publishing industry, including the *For Dummies* series, was born. We professional writers thank the engineers every time we produce another book that translates Geekspeak to terms the rest of us can understand.

In *Laptops All-In-One Desk Reference For Dummies* you find news you can use. It's not my goal to teach you how to make your own laptop computer from a pile of sand and iron filings, and you're not going to learn how to write a software program to manage the countdown sequence of the space shuttle.

This easy-to-use, truly impressive all-in-one book weighs a shade under three pounds. It contains just about everything you need to know to select, set up, start up, and fix up a laptop computer.

About This Book

Each of the ten mini-books deals with a particular subject. One more thing you do not need, then: A week's worth of uninterrupted time to plow through several hundred pages in sequence, from start to end — this book is a reference tool which can be read front to back, back to front, middle to the outsides, or with a direct dive into the page that matters most to you. Check out our handy and quite dandy index.

How to Use This Book

If you've read one *For Dummies* book . . . well, you've not used them all, but you have some idea of how each author tries to present particular types of

information and instructions in a particular way. You can call them conventions, or styles or things-that-are-always-shown-in-the-same-way. Here are a few of them.

Technical terms

The first time that a new technical term is used in a particular mini-book or an extended section of the book, you'll see it marked in *italics* just like this. This should help you quickly scan a page if you're looking for laptop features and thingies like *USB port* or *webcams*.

Web sites

Whenever I can, I'll refer you to Internet web sites that have information or utilities of other nifty things. You'll recognize them by either of two sets of letters: www.dummies.com is the most common form, indicating it is located on the World Wide Web.

<http://microsoft.com> may be a company that does its own thing, without regard to convention, or it may actually be a location on the Internet but not officially on the Web. I know this sounds like a distinction without a difference . . . and it probably is. Just recognize that the <http://> part indicates that this is an Internet address.

Oh, and one more thing: I've tried as best I could to avoid ending a sentence with a Web address but sometimes it will happen. Ignore the period that may have been appended by the typesetter; it is not part of the address. The same thing goes for addresses that span two lines of the book; enter the whole address and ignore any hyphenations that may have snuck into the name.

What You Absolutely Need

One of the beauties of a laptop is that all the basics are in one box: the computer, its memory, the microprocessor, a screen, and a built-in mouse or other pointing devices.

So, you need one of those.

You need an operating system, which manages the hardware and interprets the demands of the software. This book concentrates on the two most popular modern versions: Windows XP and Windows Vista.

And you need to have some nifty software. Again, I concentrate on the most common options here: Microsoft Word for word processing, Microsoft Excel for spreadsheets, Outlook Express for e-mail, and Microsoft PowerPoint for presentations.



At one time it seemed to make a difference to the marketing department to call basic machines *laptop computers* and the smallest devices *notebooks*. Even further back, a class of machines called *portable computers* was just barely moveable from one place to another. Today, at least for your purposes in this book, I make no distinction between laptops and slightly smaller notebooks.

If you use a different brand or type of office program, fear not. The basic concepts are the same, and this book helps you get a handle on them all.

What You'll Probably Also Want

It's not essential that you have an Internet connection for your laptop, but I'm not going to lie to you, either: You'll want one. Here's why:

- ◆ An Internet link allows you to easily register, update, and fix problems with your operating system and its software.
- ◆ Having access to the Internet allows you to *download* (that means bring from somewhere else to your machine) today's newspaper, tomorrow's airline reservations, and all the music and video and *stuff* that's out there on the World Wide Web. You can't Google or perform any other kind of nifty search for information you never knew you needed without a connection to the Internet.
- ◆ A link to the Internet is required to send and receive e-mail, instant messages (IMs), and (did you know you could do this?) use your laptop as your own personal telephone system.

What You May Want

Many laptop users have everything they need in the box as delivered from the manufacturer. They learn to use the slightly cramped keyboard and the downsized pointing device and can keep their files and programs within the available space on the built-in hard drive.

That's a worthy goal — especially for those who travel a great deal with a laptop. Simplicity is a virtue, and it also helps prevent backaches, shoulder strains, and lost objects.

But other users might need or want to replicate their desktop wherever they are. Here are some of the things you may want to add:

- ◆ An external mouse or other pointing device that offers more control or comfort than the built-in unit on a laptop
- ◆ An external hard drive to add a huge extra block of storage space

- ◆ An external CD or DVD drive or writer to upgrade your laptop's facilities
- ◆ A video camera (often called a *webcam*) that can send an image of your face along with your words
- ◆ A media reader to allow direct upload (or download) of images or music to or from a digital camera or digital music device
- ◆ A set of more-robust speakers to give some oomph to the movie or music you play
- ◆ An external monitor for use as a second display or an LCD projector to put a presentation up on a silver screen
- ◆ An extra battery that sits beneath or alongside the laptop to solve the problem of a very, very long airplane flight or travel in places where electrical outlets are few and far between

What You Don't Need

You don't need these things to be qualified to read this book:

- ◆ Prior experience on the job
- ◆ Parental guidance
- ◆ An advanced degree in computer science (or an unadvanced degree, for that matter)

Icons Used in This Book

Special icons in this book draw your attention to diamonds mixed in amongst the pearls of wisdom. One icon even rings your chimes to warn you of danger.



Stop! Here there be dragons. Well, not really dragons, but dangers and pitfalls and problems that you don't want to run into.



This icon suggests that you fail to forget, decline to overlook, and do not lose recall of something important. Okay, these are things you should remember.



This good stuff will save you time, make it easier to do your work, and otherwise improve your quality of life.