

LEARNING MADE EASY



9th Edition

# MacBook<sup>®</sup>

for  
**dummies**<sup>®</sup>  
A Wiley Brand



Use the new Control  
Center to simplify macOS<sup>®</sup>

Dive into features offered by  
the newest MacBook models

Create your own travel  
Guides with Maps

**Mark L. Chambers**  
Author of *iMac For Dummies*, 10th Edition





# MacBook<sup>®</sup>

9th Edition

**by Mark L. Chambers**

**for  
dummies<sup>®</sup>**  
A Wiley Brand

## MacBook® For Dummies®, 9th Edition

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# Introduction

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Laptop owners are special people.

You see, a laptop owner demands everything from a computer that a desktop owner does: reliability, performance, expandability, and ease of use. Owners of Mac Pro, Mac mini, iMac, and iMac Pro desktop computers can draw the line right there, because their computers are designed for a stationary existence. But you and I are laptop owners. We also need that same computer to be an inch thick (or less). We demand that it run for hours on a single battery charge. We require that it be light as a feather. We want to conquer the coffee shop, the library, and even a lecture hall or two!

Today's Apple laptops deliver all that and more. If you've bought one of these modern masterpieces — or you're thinking about it — I applaud your good taste, common sense, and discerning eye. Apple laptops have everything: super performance; a top-shelf LED screen; rugged reliability; and a trouble-free, powerful operating system. Heck, your Intel-based Apple laptop can even run — wait for it — Windows 10. (If you absolutely have to, the option is there.)

I wrote this book for myself — and for every other Apple laptop owner who wants to become a laptop technowizard. In these pages, you find a guide to both your laptop's hardware and macOS Big Sur, the latest version of Apple's superb operating system. After I cover the basics that every laptop owner should know, you find out how to accomplish all sorts of cutting-edge audio, visual, and Internet projects. (Oh, and if you already have another of my books, you know that I don't skimp on the power-user tips and tricks that save you time, effort, *and* money.)

## Foolish Assumptions

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So who is the target audience for this book? As in past editions, I make no assumptions about your previous knowledge of computers and software. I figure that you've just bought a MacBook or are considering buying one. Perhaps you've found a bargain on a gently used older MacBook, and you need guidance as you learn the ropes. Those are the *only* assumptions I make. And unlike other books that require a lot of technical expertise to understand, this book's only

requirement is your desire to become a Mac laptop *power user* (someone who produces the best work in the least amount of time and has the most fun doing it)!



TIP

By the way, if your friends and family predicted that you'll spend half your life savings on software — or that no “decent” software is available for Mac computers — just smile quietly to yourself! The MacBook comes complete with more productivity software than any Windows box, and this software is better than anything available on a PC!



REMEMBER

This book was written on one of the latest Intel quad-core MacBook Air models. Because of changing hardware, owners of older Mac laptops may not be able to follow along with every feature I cover. If you've upgraded an older MacBook to macOS Big Sur, however, you should be able to use most of this book with no problem.

## About This Book

In writing about the MacBook, I've kept one precept firmly in mind: macOS Big Sur, the operating system you'll run, is just as important as the laptop itself. Therefore, you'll find that *MacBook For Dummies*, 9th Edition is just as much about familiarizing you with all the software you get as it is with introducing hardware features such as the Touch Bar, the keyboard, and the trackpad. After all, it's relatively easy to connect a power cable and turn on *any* new computer. What comes next is the challenging part!

As in my other *For Dummies* titles, I respect and use the same everyday language you do, avoiding jargon, ridiculous computer acronyms, and confusing technobabble whenever possible.

If you're upgrading from a PC running the Windows operating system, I've got tips, tricks, and entire sections devoted to those hardy pioneers called *Switchers*. You discover both the similarities and differences between your MacBook running Big Sur and a PC running Windows. I also show you how to make the switch as easily and quickly as possible.

A word about the conventions I use: Even with an absolute minimum amount of technospeak, this book needs to cover the keys you have to press or menu commands you have to choose to make things work. Therefore, please keep in mind this short list of conventions as you read:



REMEMBER

» **Stuff you type:** If I ask you to type (or enter) something, such as in a text box or field, that text appears in bold, like this:

- **Type me.**

You usually have to press Return before anything happens.

» **Menu commands:** I list menu paths and commands by using another format. This instruction indicates that you should click the Edit menu and then choose the Copy menu item:

- Edit ⇨ Copy

» **Web addresses:** No up-to-date book on a computer would be complete without a bag full of web addresses for you to check out. When you see these in the text, they look like this: `www.m1cbooks.com`. (By the way, that website does exist. You're always welcome to check out my little acre of Internet space!)

» **For the technically curious:** Your MacBook is an elegant and sophisticated machine, and it's as easy to use as a computer can be. But from time to time, you may be curious about the technical details that surround your hardware and software. (Perhaps you disassembled alarm clocks as a kid, as I did.) Techie stuff is denoted with a margin icon, as discussed in the next section. You don't have to read the technical notes unless you want to know what makes things tick. (Pun by sheer accident.)

## Icons Used in This Book

Like other technology authors, I firmly believe that important nuggets of wisdom should *stand out on the page!* With that in mind, this *For Dummies* book includes margin icons for certain situations:



TIP

This icon is the most popular icon in the book. You find it parked next to suggestions I make to save you time and effort (and even cash!).



TECHNICAL  
STUFF

You don't have to know this information, but the technologically curious love high-tech details. (We're great fun at parties, too.)



WARNING

**Always read this information before you take action!** I'm discussing something that could harm your hardware or throw a plumber's helper into your software.



REMEMBER

Consider these nuggets to be highlighter stuff — not quite as universally accepted (or as important to the author) as a Mark's Maxim (described next), but good reminders nonetheless. I use this icon to reinforce what you should remember.



MARK'S  
MAXIM

These gold-plated, cream-of-the-crop truisms are *MFRs* (short for **My Favorite Recommendations**). In fact, I'll bet that just about any MacBook power user would tell you the same. Follow my Maxims to avoid the quicksand and pitfalls I've encountered with all sorts of Macs for three decades.™

## Beyond the Book

Thanks to my hard-working good friends at Wiley, a ton of extra content accompanies this book. Fire up your Safari browser, go to <https://www.dummies.com> and search for **MacBook For Dummies** to find the following:

- » **Cheat Sheet:** I've created Cheat Sheet pages that cover things like common keystrokes and maintenance procedures that every MacBook owner should follow on a regular basis.
- » **Bonus chapter:** If you're dying to find out how to share data among wireless devices via Bluetooth technology, check out the handy Bluetooth bonus chapter at [www.dummies.com/go/macbookfd9e](http://www.dummies.com/go/macbookfd9e) or on my website ([www.m1cbooks.com](http://www.m1cbooks.com)).
- » **Updates to this book, if any.**

## Where to Go from Here

Each chapter is a reference for a specific hardware or software topic. Thanks to the fruit of the hard work of my editors, you can begin reading anywhere you like because each chapter is self-contained. If you want to get the most out of this tome (and your MacBook experience), however, there's nothing wrong with reading this book from front to back. I will point out, though, that J. K. Rowling and Stephen King have nothing to fear from my no-frills prose!

Time for the first Mark's Maxim in this book:



MARK'S  
MAXIM

**Take your time. After all, learning how to use your MacBook isn't a race. And don't worry if you're not a graphic artist, professional photographer, or video editor. With your Mac laptop and its software, you don't have to be!™**

**1**  
**Tie Myself Down  
with a Desktop?  
Preposterous!**

#### IN THIS PART . . .

Tour the features of your MacBook and macOS Big Sur.

Compare the different MacBook models.

Unpack and set up your MacBook.

Maintain your laptop's battery *the right way*.

Familiarize yourself with the basics of macOS.

- » Identifying the important parts of your Mac laptop
- » Comparing MacBook models and getting set up
- » Handling your MacBook with care
- » Buying additional stuff you might need

## Chapter 1

# Hey, It Really Does Have Everything I Need

**M**ost action films have one scene in common: I call it “gearing up,” because the good guys strap on their equipment in preparation for battle. (The era doesn’t matter: You see “gearing up” scenes in movies like *Gladiator*, *Predator*, and *Aliens*.) You’re sure to see lots of clicking straps and equipping of offensive weapons (and sometimes even a dash of war paint). The process usually takes a minute or so all told, with whiplash camera work and stirring martial music in the background.

Well, fellow Mac road warrior, it takes only *two seconds* and *one move* — closing the lid — for you to gear up. Your MacBook is a self-contained world, providing virtually all the essentials you’ll find on a desktop iMac, Mac Pro, or Mac mini. This is indeed the second “decade of the laptop,” meshing nicely with your smartphone and that wireless connection at your local coffee shop. You’ve selected the right companion for the open road.

Unlike Apple’s other designs — such as the Mac mini, the Mac Pro, and the iMac — your MacBook’s exterior looks much like a PC laptop. (In fact, an Intel-based Mac laptop *can* run Windows if it absolutely must.)

But your laptop holds several pleasant surprises that no PC laptop or tablet can offer — and, with the MacBook Air and MacBook Pro, you’ll lose pounds and inches from your chassis!

In this chapter, I introduce you to the hardware and all the major parts of the machine. You even find out how to unpack and connect your computer. And as frosting on the cake, I preview the software of which Apple is so proud, as well as the accessories you should buy now rather than later.

Welcome to your Mac laptop, good reader. Gear up!

## An Overview of Your Mac Laptop

Sure, your MacBook Pro may be about half an inch thin (a MacBook Air is even more svelte; I get to that later in the chapter), but a lot of superb design lives inside. You encounter the same parts you'd find in a desktop machine. In the following sections, I discuss those important parts — both the stuff you can see and the stuff that's shoehorned within.

### FEELING OUTDATED? NEVER!

Are you using an older MacBook? It seems that Apple's product line changes every time you tear a page off your 12-month calendar. In addition, every new generation of laptops includes new whiz-bang features. Sometimes, you can add those features separately to your older machine, such as an external video camera, but you can't update some things, such as your MacBook's motherboard. Sigh.

Here's my take on this situation: If your older laptop does what you need at a pace you can accept, *there's no need to upgrade it*.

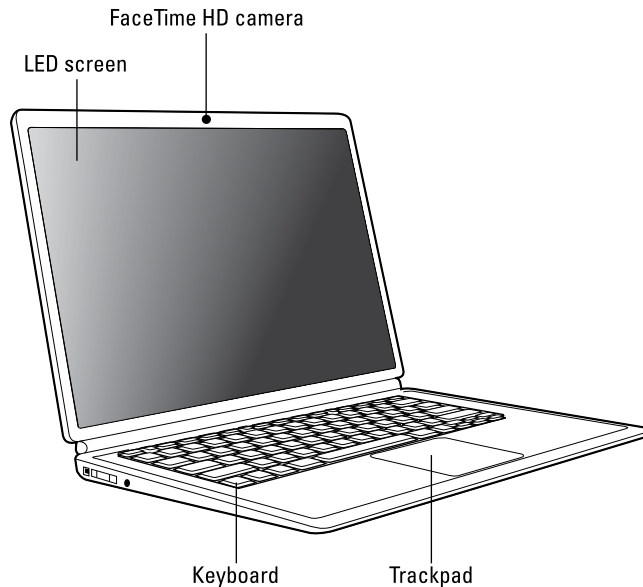
Skeptical? Here's the proof: Before my upgrade to a MacBook Air, yours truly was lugging around a pristine iBook G3, which booted macOS Tiger and did absolutely everything I demanded. (A little more patience was required, certainly, but technology authors are simply *brimming* with patience.) The moral: Avoid upgrade fever unless you really *need* a new companion.

If you're the proud owner of an older MacBook, as long as it can run macOS Big Sur, you can still enjoy this book and discover new tips and tricks from it. Unless the current breed of M1-based Mac laptops has a feature you absolutely can't use on your mature MacBook (such as Thunderbolt 3 support), you can sail on with your current computer, fiercely proud of The Bitten Apple that appears on the cover. Although this book was written with the current M1-based MacBook Pro and MacBook Air models in mind, virtually everything you read here still applies to your older laptop. Unless it's steam-powered, of course.



# The parts you probably recognize

Every laptop requires some of the same gizmos. Figure 1-1 helps you track them down. Of course, as you'd expect, a computer has a body of sorts in which all the innards and brains are stored, a display screen, a keyboard, a trackpad or other pointing device, and ports for powering and exchanging data with outside toys.



**FIGURE 1-1:**  
The charismatic  
form of a typical  
Mac laptop.

## That magnificent screen

What a view you have! Today's Mac laptops feature a 13- or 16-inch LED display. LED screens use far less electricity than their antique CRT ancestors, and they emit practically no radiation.

Apple's laptop screens offer a *widescreen* aspect ratio (the screen is considerably wider than it is tall), which augurs well for those who enjoy watching movies. (A favorite editor of mine loves it when I use the antique word *augur*, meaning to *predict or foretell*.)

## The keyboard and trackpad

Hey, here's something novel for your laptop. Unlike the external input devices on a standard desktop computer, your MacBook has a built-in keyboard and trackpad (which does the job of a mouse). The illuminated keyboard is a particular favorite of mine, offering special keys for activating all sorts of features within macOS (as well as keys for adjusting brightness and volume).

The latest crop of Mac laptops feature a great trackpad design as well. The Force Touch trackpad can sense the amount of pressure you apply with your fingers, activating features in macOS Big Sur that used to require a right-click (such as displaying the definition of a word in a Pages document or displaying a map of an address in Contacts). The Force Touch trackpad can even provide tactile feedback to your fingertips while you're using some applications!



REMEMBER

The MacBook Air and MacBook Pro don't have an internal optical drive. (More on both models later in this chapter.) You can use the CD & DVD Sharing feature in Big Sur to read discs remotely (from another Mac or PC on your network), or you can pick up an external optical drive from Apple for about \$80. (Such is the price you pay for super-thin and super-light.) Many third-party manufacturers also produce external optical drives for the MacBook.

## Food for your ears

A machine this nice had better have great sound, and the Mac doesn't disappoint. You have a couple of options for Mac laptop audio:

- » All Mac laptops sport a minimum of built-in stereo speakers and two microphones (heck, the 16-inch MacBook Pro has *six* speakers and three microphones).
- » Use the built-in headphone jack to connect your Mac's audio to a pair of headphones, a more powerful (and expensive) external speaker system, or a home stereo system. (Of course, portable USB and Bluetooth speaker systems can provide better-quality audio.)

## The power cable

Sorry, you can't get a wireless power system — yet. (Apple's working hard on this one.) All current MacBook models use a USB-C port for charging the battery. The USB-C cable also does double-duty as a port for Thunderbolt 3 and USB-C-compatible devices. (If you're familiar with the MagSafe power cord used on older MacBooks, take note: This USB-C cable connection does not detach easily if pulled, so it's time to resume being careful navigating around your MacBook while it's charging!)



REMEMBER

Many MacBook owners ask me whether they should disconnect the power after the battery is fully charged or leave it connected. I leave the cable connected. It won't cause any damage to your MacBook, and you can continue to use your laptop while it's charging. (Oh, and road warriors prefer a laptop battery that's always topped off when it's time to go mobile!)

## The power button

The MacBook Air with Touch ID and the MacBook Pro with Touch Bar actually turn on whenever you open them. To turn these models off, you press and hold the Touch ID button on the far-right side of the keyboard.

Owners of the older MacBooks still have a power button. It's in the top-right corner of the keyboard, bearing the familiar “circle with a vertical line” logo.

## The FaceTime HD camera

Check out that tiny square lens above your screen. That's a built-in FaceTime HD camera, which allows you to chat with others in a videoconferencing environment by using the Messages and FaceTime applications that come with Big Sur. You can even take photos with the camera, using the Photo Booth software that comes with your laptop, or set up a travelin' webcam. (If you need a higher-resolution camera — or one that can be easily turned or tilted — check out the discussion later in this chapter.)



TIP

Note that a green light appears next to the lens when the camera is on — handy information that could prevent visual embarrassment! As my technical editor points out, you can also cover the lens for guaranteed privacy. (Some companies even offer plastic clips especially designed for covering the lens.)

## The battery

Apple's current laptop computers don't include user-replaceable batteries. The battery is sealed inside the case and can be replaced only by an Apple technician. But you should get several years of trouble-free operation from your MacBook's battery, especially if you maintain it properly (as I show you in Chapter 2).

## The holes called ports

The next stop on your tour of Planet Laptop is Port Central — those holes on the sides of your computer. Each port connects a different type of cable or device, allowing you to easily add all sorts of functionality to your computer.

Each of these stellar holes has an icon to help you identify it. Here's a list of what you'll find and a quick rundown of what these ports do. Although the latest MacBook models carry only USB-C/Thunderbolt 3 ports, I've included additional port types that may appear on older MacBooks running macOS Big Sur.



TIP

If you need a number of these older ports for different legacy hardware, consider buying a laptop dock that provides multiple ports for your MacBook through a single USB-C or Thunderbolt port. I discuss the laptop dock device in more detail at the end of this chapter.

The following connections are used for external devices and networking:



TIP

- » **Thunderbolt 2/Thunderbolt 3 port:** The Thunderbolt 2 port (and its faster descendent, Thunderbolt 3) is the expansion racehorse of today's MacBooks. It offers the fastest data-transfer rates and the ability to add all sorts of peripherals, from external drives to monitors to wired Ethernet connections. (A *peripheral* is another silly techno-nerd term that means a separate device you connect to your computer.) Thunderbolt 3 devices are somewhat more expensive than their Thunderbolt 2 and USB cousins, but prices are dropping as more Thunderbolt 3 peripherals arrive on the market.

Although Thunderbolt-compatible monitors are available, they're significantly more expensive than standard displays. Luckily, you can also buy an adapter for this port that allows you to send the video signal from your laptop to another VGA, DVI, or HDMI monitor.

- » **USB port(s):** Short for *universal serial bus*, the familiar USB port is the jack-of-all-trades in today's world of computer add-ons. Most external devices you want to connect to your laptop (such as portable drives, scanners, and digital cameras) use a USB port, including the iPod touch. (Today's PCs also include USB ports, allowing you to share external USB peripherals such as optical drives and scanners between your MacBook and your desktop PC.) USB 3.0 connections are much faster than the old USB 2.0 standard, but they still accept USB 2.0 devices running at the slower speed.

Get the lowdown on Thunderbolt 2 and 3 and USB ports in Chapter 20.



TIP



REMEMBER

All current MacBook models use the cutting-edge USB-C port that allows you to charge the laptop, connect a Thunderbolt 3 or USB-C device, or connect an external monitor or projector — all from one port! To make the USB 3.0 connection, you'll need a USB-C-to-USB adapter (about \$20) and a USB-C AV Multiport adapter (about \$70) to connect an external display.

- » **Ethernet port:** Older MacBook Pro laptops used to include a standard Gigabit (10/100/1000) Ethernet port, so the laptop was immediately ready to join your existing wired Ethernet network. But because today's MacBook Air and MacBook Pro are designed to be completely wireless — as I explain in Chapter 11 — they don't have a built-in wired Ethernet port. If a wired connection is a necessity, you can add a Thunderbolt-to-Gigabit Ethernet (or USB-to-Gigabit Ethernet) adapter to add a wired network port to your laptop. (Apple sells one for about \$35.) Or you can invest in a laptop dock with a wired Ethernet port (which I discuss at the end of this chapter).

- » **SD/SDXC card slot:** Your older MacBook Air may include an SD (Secure Digital) or SDXC (Secure Digital Extended Capacity) card slot, allowing you to plug SD or SDXC memory cards from digital cameras, cellphones, and portable devices directly into your laptop.
- » **Headphone/optical output port:** Last (but certainly not least), you can send the high-quality audio from your rectangular beast to a set of standard headphones or an optical digital audio device such as a high-end home theater system.

## Don't forget the parts you can't see

When you bought your new digital pride and joy, you probably noticed a number of subtle differences between the MacBook Air and the pricier MacBook Pro models. I call these differences the *Important Hidden Stuff* (or IHS, if you're addicted to acronyms). They're just as important as the parts and ports you can see.

Internal devices are as follows:

- » **CPU:** Today's Mac laptops feature the either the new Apple M1 CPU or the Intel Core i3, i5, i7, and i9 processors. The faster the processor, of course, the better. (This is definitely *not* rocket science.)
- » **Storage:** Today's MacBook models are equipped with solid-state drives that use memory chips. The drive capacities are different across the entire MacBook product line.

Solid-state drives have several advantages over traditional magnetic hard drives: You'll find no moving parts in a solid-state drive, and it offers better performance than a standard hard drive. Think of the solid-state drive as an internal USB flash drive that uses RAM chips rather than magnetic platters to hold your data.

Wireless communications devices include the following:

- » **Wireless Ethernet:** "Look, Ma, no wires!" As mentioned earlier, you can connect your laptop to an existing wireless Ethernet network. All current Mac laptops have built-in AirPort Extreme hardware. With wireless connectivity, you can share documents with another computer in another room, share a single high-speed Internet connection between computers, or enjoy wireless printing. Truly *sassy*!



TIP

Apple no longer sells the Apple AirPort Extreme Base Station or the AirPort Time Capsule unit, which were great devices for building a wireless network. But you can use your Mac with any standard 802.11b/g/n/ac wireless network. And yes, PCs and Macs can interming on the same wireless network without a hitch. (Scandalous, ain't it?)

» **Bluetooth:** Let's get the old "digital pirate" joke out of the way: "Arrgh, matey, I needs me a wireless parrot." (Engineers again . . . sheesh.) Although strangely named, Bluetooth is another form of wireless connectivity. This time, however, the standard was designed for accessories such as your keyboard and mouse and devices like wireless headphones and your smartphone. (The latest Macs support version 5 Bluetooth hardware.)

Here's the hidden display device:

» **Video card:** The standard Intel video hardware that's built into MacBooks is fine for typical home and business laptop applications. If your applications rely heavily on high-speed 3D graphics or digital video, however, you'll be pleased as punch to discover that today's 16-inch MacBook Pro model can be ordered with the muscle-bound AMD Radeon Pro 5600M. This card is well suited to high-end mobile 3D modeling, video editing on the road, and . . . well, honestly, blasting the latest video game enemies into small smoking pieces with aplomb. If you're buying a new MacBook with an Apple M1 processor, the video hardware is actually built in to the same chip.

## Meet the MacBooks

So far in this chapter, I've discussed the common hardware shared by today's MacBook models. Now it's time to compare the MacBook Air and MacBook Pro with an eye toward selecting the right one for you. (Unless you decide to pick up one of each. Certainly an elegant choice, but not everyone has that option!)

Consider the least expensive MacBook: the MacBook Air (shown in Figure 1-2), which is unique for both its size and weight. Yet the Air is just like the MacBook Pro. Well, mostly.



**FIGURE 1-2:**  
Behold the  
MacBook Air.