LEARNING MADE EASY

macOS Big Sur™

for dummies®

A Wiley Brand

Navigate the Big Sur™ interface and apps

Discover time-saving tips and tricks

Interact with your other Apple mobile devices

Bob "Dr. Mac" LeVitus

"Dr. Mac" columnist for the *Houston Chronicle*

macOS Big Sur™

by Bob LeVitus

Houston Chronicle **"Dr. Mac" columnist**

for dummies®

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Introduction

You made the right choice twice: macOS Big Sur (version 11.0) and this book. Take a deep breath and get ready to have a rollicking good time. That's right. This is a computer book, but it's fun. What a concept! Whether you're brand spanking new to the Mac or a grizzled Mac vet, I guarantee that reading this book to discover the ins and outs of macOS Big Sur will make learning easy. If it weren't true, I couldn't say it right on the cover!

About This Book

This book's roots lie with my international best seller *Macintosh System 7.5 For Dummies,* an award-winning book so good that long-deceased Mac clone-maker Power Computing gave away a copy with every Mac clone it sold (back in the '90s before Steve came back and killed off all Mac clones).

macOS Big Sur For Dummies is the latest revision and has been, once again, completely and thoroughly updated to include all the tasty goodness in macOS Big Sur. In other words, this edition combines all the old, familiar features of literally dozens of previous editions — but, as always, I've lovingly updated every page to reflect the latest and greatest offering from Apple as well as feedback from readers. If you have comments — good or bad — email me. (My email address appears in the last section.)

Why write a *For Dummies* book about Big Sur? Well, Big Sur is a big, somewhat complicated personal-computer operating system. So, I made *macOS Big Sur For Dummies* a not-so-big, not-too-complicated book that shows you what Big Sur is all about without boring you to tears, confusing you, or poking you with sharp objects.

In fact, I think you'll be so darned comfortable that I wanted the title to be *macOS Big Sur Made Easy,* but the publishers wouldn't let me. Apparently, my publisher has rules, and using *Dummies* in this book's title is one of them.

And speaking of dummies — remember, that's just a word. I don't think you're a dummy at all — quite the opposite! My second choice for this book's title was

macOS Big Sur For People Smart Enough to Know They Need This Book, but you can just imagine what Wiley thought of that.

The book is chock-full of information and advice, explaining everything you need to know about macOS Big Sur in language you can understand — along with time-saving tips, tricks, techniques, and step-by-step instructions, all served up in generous quantities.

Another rule we *Dummies* authors must follow is that our books cannot exceed a certain number of pages. (Brevity is the soul of wit, and all that.) So, while I wish I could have included some things that didn't fit, I feel confident you'll find what you need to know about using macOS Big Sur in this book.

Still, a few things bear further looking into, such as these:

- **Information about many of the applications (programs) that come with macOS Big Sur:** An installation of macOS Big Sur includes more than 50 applications, mostly located in the Applications and Utilities folders. I'd love to walk you through each one of them, but that would have required a book a whole lot bigger, heavier, and more expensive than this one.

  I brief you on the handful of bundled applications essential to using macOS Big Sur — namely, Calendar, Contacts, Messages, Mail, Safari, Siri, TextEdit, and the like — as well as several important utilities you may need to know how to use someday.

- **Information about Microsoft Office, Apple lifestyle and productivity apps (iMovie, Numbers, Pages, GarageBand, and so on), Adobe Photoshop, Quicken, and other third-party applications:** Okay, if all the gory details of all the bundled (read: *free)* macOS Big Sur applications don't fit here, I think you'll understand why digging into third-party applications that cost extra was out of the question.

- **Information about programming for the Mac:** This book is about *using* macOS Big Sur, not writing code for it. Dozens of books — most of which are two or three times the size of this book — cover programming on the Mac; this one does not.

Within this book, you may note that some web addresses break across two lines of text. If you're reading this book in print and want to visit one of these web pages, simply key in the web address exactly as it's noted in the text, pretending as though the line break doesn't exist. If you're reading this as an e-book, you've got it easy — just click the web address to be taken directly to the web page.

Foolish Assumptions

Although I know what happens when you make assumptions, I've made a few anyway.

First, I assume that you, gentle reader, know nothing about using macOS — beyond knowing what a Mac is, that you want to use macOS, that you want to understand macOS without having to digest an incomprehensible technical manual, and that you made the right choice by selecting this particular book. And so I do my best to explain each new concept in full and loving detail. Maybe that's foolish, but . . . that's how I roll.

Oh, and I also assume that you can read. If you can't, ignore this paragraph.

Icons Used in This Book

Little pictures (icons) appear off to the left side of the text throughout this book. Consider these icons miniature road signs, telling you a little something extra about the topic at hand. Here's what the different icons look like and what they all mean.

TIP

Look for Tip icons to find the juiciest morsels: shortcuts, tips, and undocumented secrets about Big Sur. Try them all; impress your friends!

REMEMBER

When you see this icon, it means that this particular morsel is something that I think you should memorize (or at least write on your shirt cuff).

TECHNICAL STUFF

Put on your propeller-beanie hat and pocket protector; these parts include the truly geeky stuff. It's certainly not required reading, but it must be interesting or informative, or I wouldn't have wasted your time with it.

WARNING

Read these notes very, very, very carefully. (Did I say *very*?) Warning icons flag important cautionary information. The author and publisher won't be responsible if your Mac explodes or spews flaming parts because you ignored a Warning icon. Just kidding. Macs don't explode or spew these days. But I got your attention, didn't I?

NEW

Well, now, what could this icon possibly be about? Named by famous editorial consultant Mr. Obvious, this icon highlights things new and different in macOS Big Sur.

Beyond the Book

In addition to what you're reading right now, this product also comes with a free access-anywhere Cheat Sheet that provides handy shortcuts for use with macOS Big Sur, offers my backup recommendations, and more. To get this Cheat Sheet, simply go to www.dummies.com and type **macOS Big Sur For Dummies Cheat Sheet** in the Search box.

Where to Go from Here

The first few chapters of this book are where I describe the basic things that you need to understand to operate your Mac effectively. If you're new to Macs and macOS Big Sur, start there.

Although macOS Big Sur looks different from previous Mac operating systems, it works the same as always (for the most part). So, the first part of the book presents concepts so basic that if you've been using a Mac for long, you might think you know it all — and okay, you might know some (or most) of it. But remember that not-so-old-timers need a solid foundation, too. So here's my advice: Skim through stuff you already know and you'll get to the better stuff sooner.

I would love to hear how this book worked for you. As mentioned, sending me your thoughts, platitudes, likes, dislikes, and comments will make me a happy author. Did this book work for you? What did you like? What didn't you like? What questions were unanswered? Did you want to know more (or less) about something?

I have received more than 100 suggestions about previous editions, many of which are incorporated here. So please (please!) keep the tradition alive and email me at BigSur4Dummies@boblevitus.com.

I appreciate your feedback, and I *try* to respond to all reasonably polite email within a few days.

So what are you waiting for? Go on and enjoy the book!

1 macOS Basics

IN THIS PART . . .

Find the most basic of basics, including how to turn on your Mac.

Make the dock work harder for you.

Get a gentle introduction to Finder and its desktop.

Find everything you need to know about Big Sur's windows, icons, and menus (oh my)!

Get all the bad puns and wisecracks you've come to expect.

Discover a plethora of Finder tips and tricks to make life with Big Sur even easier (and more fulfilling).

IN THIS CHAPTER

- Understanding what an operating system is and is not
- Turning on your Mac
- Getting to know the start-up process
- Turning off your Mac
- Avoiding major Mac mistakes
- Pointing, clicking, dragging, and other uses for your mouse
- Getting help from your Mac

Chapter 1

macOS Big Sur 101 (Prerequisites: None)

Congratulate yourself on choosing macOS Big Sur version 11.0, the 17th release of the venerable operating system (OS) formerly known as OS X (pronounced "oh-ess-ten"). Congratulate yourself for scoring more than just an OS upgrade. See, macOS Big Sur includes a few new features that make using your Mac even easier, hundreds of tweaks to help you do more work in less time, plus a user interface overhaul that affects almost every pixel on the screen.

In this chapter, I start at the very beginning and talk about macOS in mostly abstract terms; then I move on to explain what you need to know to use macOS Big Sur successfully. A number of features I describe haven't changed in years (other than adopting updated Big Sur graphics), so if you've been using macOS (the operating system formerly known as Mac OS X) for a while, most of the information in this chapter may seem hauntingly familiar.

But if you decide to skip this chapter because you think you have all the new stuff figured out, I assure you that you'll miss at least a couple of things that Apple

didn't bother to tell you (as if you read every word in macOS Help — the only user manual Apple provides in the box — anyway!).

Tantalized? Let's rock.

Gnawing to the Core of macOS

The operating system (that is, the *OS* part of *macOS*) is what makes your Mac a Mac. Without it, your Mac is nothing but a pile of silicon and circuits — no smarter than a toaster.

"So what does an operating system do?" you ask. Good question. The short answer is that an OS controls the basic and most important functions of your computer. In the case of macOS and your Mac, the operating system

- Manages memory
- Controls how windows, icons, and menus work
- Keeps track of files
- Manages networking and security
- Does housekeeping (No kidding!)

Other forms of software, such as word processors and web browsers, rely on the OS to create and maintain the environment in which they work their magic. When you create a memo, for example, the word processor provides the tools for you to type and format the information and save it in a file. In the background, the OS is the muscle for the word processor, performing the following crucial functions:

- Providing the mechanism for drawing and moving the onscreen window in which you write the memo
- Keeping track of the file when you save it
- Helping the word processor create drop-down menus and dialogs for you to interact with
- Communicating with other programs
- And much, much more (stuff that only geeks could care about)

So, armed with a little background in operating systems, take a gander at the next section before you do anything else with your Mac.

One last thing: As I mention in this book's Introduction (I'm repeating it here in case you normally don't read introductions), macOS Big Sur comes with more than 50 applications in its Applications and Utilities folders. Although I'd love to tell you all about each and every one, I have only so many pages at my disposal.

THE MAC ADVANTAGE

Most of the world's personal computers use Microsoft Windows (although more and more people are switching to the Mac). But you're among the lucky ones who have a computer with an OS that's intuitive, easy to use, and (dare I say?) fun. If you don't believe me, try using Windows for a day or two. Go ahead. You probably won't suffer any permanent damage. In fact, you'll really begin to appreciate how good you have it. Feel free to hug your Mac. Or give it a peck on the mouse or trackpad.

As someone once told me, "Claiming that macOS is inferior to Windows because more people use Windows is like saying that all other restaurants serve food that's inferior to McDonald's."

We might be a minority, but Mac users have the best, most stable, most modern all-purpose operating system in the world, and here's why: Unix, on which macOS is based, is widely regarded as the best industrial-strength operating system on the planet. For now, just know that being based on Unix means that a Mac running macOS benefits from more than three decades of UNIX development, which means less downtime. Being Unix-based also means getting far fewer viruses and encounters with malicious software. But perhaps the biggest advantage macOS has is that when an application crashes, it doesn't crash your entire computer, and you don't usually have to restart the computer to continue working.

By the way, since the advent of Intel-powered Macs more than a decade ago, you can run Windows natively also on any Mac powered by an Intel processor, as I describe in Chapter 23. Note that the opposite isn't true: You can run Windows on your Mac if you care to, but you *cannot* run macOS on a Dell or HP or any other computer not made by Apple (at least not without serious hacking, which is probably illegal anyway).

And don't let that Unix or Windows stuff scare you. It's there if you want it, but if you don't want it or don't care (like most users), you'll rarely even know it's there. In fact, you'll rarely (if ever) see the word *Unix* or *Windows* again in this book. As far as you're concerned, Unix under the hood means your Mac will just run and run and run without crashing and crashing and crashing. As for Windows, your Mac can run it if you need it; otherwise, it's just another checklist item on the list of reasons Macs are better than PCs.

WARNING

In June 2020, Apple announced that the Mac will transition from Intel processors to Apple's custom silicon "to deliver industry-leading performance and powerful new technologies." Since the first Apple-processor-equipped Macs won't be available until long after this book is printed, all I can do is guess. And my guess is that Macs with Apple processors won't support Boot Camp but should allow you to run Windows (and other operating systems) through virtualization.

A Safety Net for the Absolute Beginner (or Any User)

In the following sections, I deal with the stuff that macOS Help doesn't cover — or doesn't cover in nearly enough detail. If you're a first-time Mac user, please, *please* read this section of the book carefully; it could save your life. Okay, okay, perhaps I'm being overly dramatic. What I mean to say is that reading this section could save your Mac or your sanity. Even if you're an experienced Mac user, you may want to read this section. Chances are you'll see at least a few things you've forgotten that will come in handy now that you've been reminded of them.

Turning the dang thing on

Okay. This is the big moment — turning on your Mac! Gaze at it longingly first, and say something cheesy, such as, "You're the most awesome computer I've ever known." If that doesn't turn on your Mac (and it probably won't), keep reading.

Apple, in its infinite wisdom, has manufactured Macs with power buttons on every conceivable surface: on the front, side, and back of the computer itself, and even on the keyboard and monitor.

So if you don't know how to turn on your Mac, don't feel bad; just look in the manual or booklet that came with your Mac. It's at least one thing that the documentation *always* covers.

You don't have that little booklet? Most Macs have the power button in the upper-right corner of the keyboard (notebooks), the back of the screen (iMacs), or the back of the enclosure (Mac Mini); it usually looks like the little circle thingy you see in the margin.

Don't bother choosing Help ➪ macOS Help, which opens the Help Viewer program. It can't tell you where the switch is. Although the Help program is good for finding out a lot of things, the location of the power button isn't among them. If

you haven't found the switch and turned on the Mac, of course, you can't access Help anyway. (D'oh!)

TIP

Launch the Books (formerly iBooks) app and click the Book Store icon (top left) to search its built-in store for the name of your Mac plus the word *Essentials* (for example, "MacBook Essentials," "iMac Essentials," or "MacBook Pro Essentials"). Click the Only Show Free Titles check box near the upper-right corner of the Books window, and grab the free Essentials e-book with your Mac's name, by Apple. At around 150 pages each, these booklets aren't in any way comprehensive, but they do include information you won't find elsewhere, including where to find the power button on your particular Mac.

What you should see on startup

When you finally do turn on your Mac, you set in motion a sophisticated and complex series of events that culminates in the loading of macOS and the appearance of the macOS desktop. After a small bit of whirring, buzzing, and flashing (meaning that the OS is loading), macOS first tests all your hardware — slots, ports, disks, random access memory (RAM), and so on. If everything passes, you'll see a tasteful whitish Apple logo in the middle of your screen, as shown in Figure 1-1.

FIGURE 1-1: This is what you'll see if everything is fine and dandy when you turn on your Mac.

Here are the things that you might see when you power-up your Mac:

- **Login screen:** You might or might not see the macOS login screen. Here, you choose your user account, enter your name and password, and press Return or Enter (or click the little right-arrow-in-a-circle in the password field), and away you go.

  If you don't want to type your name and password every time you start or restart your Mac (or even if you do), check out Chapter 23 for the scoop on how to turn the login screen on or off.

TIP

WARNING

You should turn off the login screen only if you're confident you'll be the only one touching the machine. With the login screen disabled, your Mac and everything in it is completely available to anyone who turns it on, which is usually *not* a good thing. So I don't recommend turning off the login screen if your Mac is a laptop. And even desktop Mac users should think twice before turning it off.

Either way, the desktop soon materializes before your eyes. If you haven't customized, configured, or tinkered with your desktop, it should look pretty much like Figure 1-2. Now is a good time to take a moment for positive thoughts about the person who convinced you that you wanted a Mac. That person was right!

FIGURE 1-2: The desktop after a brand-spanking-new installation of macOS Big Sur.

REMEMBER

- **Blue/black/gray screen of death:** If any of your hardware fails when it's tested, you may see a blue, black, or gray screen.

  Some older Macs played the sound of a horrible car wreck instead of the chimes, complete with crying tires and busting glass. It was exceptionally unnerving, which might be why Apple doesn't use it anymore.

  The fact that something went wrong is no reflection on your prowess as a Mac user. Something is broken, and your Mac may need repairs. If this is happening to you right now, check out Chapter 26 to try to get your Mac well again.

TIP

If your computer is under warranty, set up a Genius Bar appointment at your nearest Apple Store or dial 1-800-SOS-APPL, and a customer service person can tell you what to do. Before you do anything, though, skip ahead to Chapter 26. It's entirely possible that one of the suggestions there will get you back on track without your having to spend even a moment on hold.

- **Prohibitory sign or flashing question mark in a folder:** Most users eventually encounter the prohibitory sign or flashing question mark in a folder (as shown in the margin). These icons mean that your Mac can't find a startup disk, hard drive, network server, or DVD-ROM containing a valid Mac operating system. See Chapter 26 for ways to ease your Mac's ills.
- **Kernel panic:** You may occasionally see a block of text in several languages, including English, as shown in Figure 1-3. This means that your Mac has experienced a *kernel panic,* the most severe type of system crash. If you restart your Mac and see either message again, look in Chapter 26 for a myriad of possible cures for all kinds of ailments, including this one.

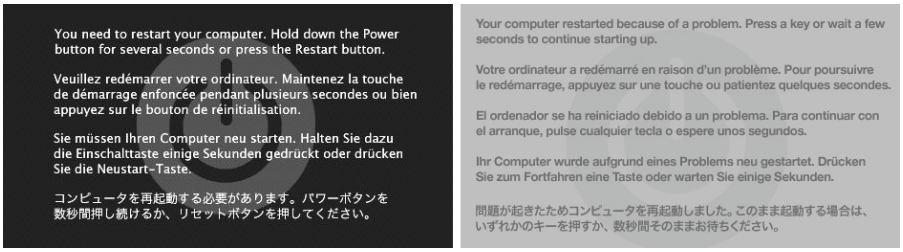

FIGURE 1-3: If you're seeing this, things are definitely not fine and dandy.

How do you know which version of the macOS your computer has? Simple:

1. **Choose About This Mac from the menu (the menu with the symbol in the top-left corner of the menu bar).**

   A window pops up on your screen, as shown in Figure 1-4. The version you're running appears just below *macOS* near the top of the window. Version 11.0 is the release we know as *Big Sur.*

TECHNICAL STUFF

If you're curious or just want to impress your friends, you'll might want to know that OS X version 10.15 was called Catalina; 10.14 was called Mojave; 10.13 was known as High Sierra; 10.12 was Sierra; 10.11 was El Capitan; 10.10 was Yosemite; 10.9 was Mavericks; 10.8 was Mountain Lion; 10.7 was Lion; 10.6 was Snow Leopard; 10.5 was Leopard; 10.4 was Tiger; 10.3 was Panther; 10.2 was Jaguar; 10.1 was Puma; and 10.0 was Cheetah.

FIGURE 1-4: See which version of macOS you're running.

2. **(Optional) Click the Displays, Storage, Support, or Service tabs to see additional details about your Mac.**

3. **Click the System Report button to launch the System Information application and see even more details.**

   The System Information app shows you even more about your Mac, including bus speed, number of processors, caches, installed memory, networking, storage devices, and much more. You can find more about this useful program in Chapter 25.

ETERNALLY YOURS . . . *NOW*

macOS is designed so that you never have to shut it down. You can configure it to sleep after a specified period of inactivity. (See Chapter 23 for more info on Energy Saver.) If you do so, your Mac will consume very little electricity when it's sleeping and will usually be ready to use (when you press any key or click the mouse) in a few seconds. On the other hand, if you're not going to be using your Mac for a few days, you might want to shut it down anyway.

Note: If you leave your Mac on constantly, and you're gone when a lightning storm or rolling blackout hits, your Mac might get hit by a power surge or worse. So be sure you have adequate protection — say, a decent surge protector designed for computers — if you decide to leave your Mac on and unattended for long periods. See the section "A few things you should definitely not do with your Mac," elsewhere in this chapter, for more info on lightning and your Mac.

One last thing: If your Mac is a laptop and will be enclosed in a bag or briefcase for more than a few hours, turn it off. Otherwise, it could overheat — even in Sleep mode.