



Absolute Beginners Guide to Computing

Wallace Wang

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Wallace Wang
San Diego, California
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This book is dedicated to everyone who has suffered through the complexity, confusion, and chaos of trying to use a computer. The problem is rarely due to the user not knowing how to use a computer. The problem most often lies with the horrible, confusing, and unnecessarily complicated way most computers have been designed. So this book is dedicated to everyone who has longed for a better way to learn how to use and actually enjoy their computer. Welcome to the future where computers actually work to make the lives of people easier and more enjoyable.

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About the Author

Wallace Wang has written dozens of computer books over the years beginning with ancient MS-DOS programs like WordPerfect and Turbo Pascal, and graduating up to writing books on Windows programs like Visual Basic and Microsoft Office.

When he's not helping people discover the joys of personal computing with a computer that's actually fun to use, he performs stand-up comedy and appears on two radio shows on KNSJ in San Diego (<http://knsj.org>) called "Notes From the Underground" and "Laugh In Your Face Radio" (<http://www.laughinyourfaceradio.com>).

He also writes a screenwriting blog called "The 15 Minute Movie Method" (<http://15minutemoviemethod.com>), a blog about the latest cat news on the Internet called "Cat Daily News" (<http://catdailynews.com>), and a blog about the latest trends in technology called "Top Bananas" (<http://www.topbananas.com>).

About the Technical Reviewer

Fabio Claudio Ferracchiati is a senior consultant and a senior analyst/developer using Microsoft technologies. He works at BluArancio S.p.A (www.bluarancio.com) as Senior Analyst/Developer and Microsoft Dynamics CRM Specialist. He is a Microsoft Certified Solution Developer for .NET, a Microsoft Certified Application Developer for .NET, a Microsoft Certified Professional, and a prolific author and technical reviewer. Over the past ten years, he's written articles for Italian and international magazines and co-authored more than ten books on a variety of computer topics.

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A special mention goes to Michael Montijo and his indomitable spirit that has him driving from Phoenix to Los Angeles at least once a month for the past 15 years to meet with Hollywood executives. One day when you hear about his cartoon series “Life of Mikey” and “Pachuko Boy,” you’ll know how they finally appeared on television because he never gave up on his dream despite all the obstacles in his way.

Thanks also go to my wife, Cassandra, and my son, Jordan, for putting up with a house filled with more gadgets than actual living people. Final thanks go to my cats, Oscar and Mayer, for walking over the keyboard, stepping on the trackpad and mouse, and chewing on power cords at the most inconvenient times of the day.

Introduction

Most people don't buy a computer because they want to learn how to decipher file name extensions or understand how the hierarchy of folders works on a hard drive. Instead, most people buy a computer because they want to accomplish a specific task that's important to their own lives such as saving and viewing photographs, playing music, or typing and printing a letter. That's why thick books explaining how to use the Windows 10 operating system can be so intimidating. These thick books assume readers want to become computer experts by learning how Windows 10 works.

That's why far too many computer books exhaustively explain every possible feature of Windows 10 without telling you why you might want to use that particular feature. That's like forcing you to learn how a six-cylinder internal combustion engine works before you can learn how to drive to the supermarket.

This book is different because it teaches you the most common tasks you'll need to be productive on a computer. You won't learn every possible feature of Windows 10. Instead, you'll just learn enough so you can feel comfortable using your computer.

A computer is nothing more than a tool. What you do with that tool is entirely up to you.

A paintbrush is also a tool, but if you give a paintbrush to the average person, they might be able to scribble some blobs of pretty colors on a canvas. Yet if you give a paintbrush to an artist like Michelangelo, you'll get a work of art painted on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel.

So this book won't waste your time teaching you what different tools can do. Instead, this book focuses on teaching you how to use different tools so you can create useful results on your computer.

Whether you need to write a letter, jot down some notes, edit a picture, or play music, this book will show you the fastest, simplest, and easiest way to achieve a given task so your computer gets the job done.

Understanding How Windows 10 Works

Whether you have a PC that sits on a desk or a laptop that you can take with you, every computer is nothing more than a chunk of hardware. What makes that chunk of hardware work is a special program called an operating system.

Windows 10 is the operating system that controls a PC. Don't worry. You don't have to become an expert on Windows 10 to use a computer. All you need to know is how to find and use the right program to accomplish a specific task such as:

- Play music
- Write letters
- Edit video
- Browse web pages on the Internet
- Send and receive e-mail
- And many other tasks

While Windows 10 makes a PC work, individual programs stored on your PC let you perform specific tasks. For example, your PC might have a word processor so you can type and print letters, an e-book viewer so you can read e-books, and a game program so you can play Solitaire.

Each time you install a new program, you make your PC more versatile and capable of performing different tasks. With the right program, your PC can do almost anything. However, this book focuses solely on using the various features of Windows 10.

So whether you've used a computer before or you're a complete novice to computers, don't worry. This book won't bog you down with technical details. Instead, you'll learn what to do, how to do it, and more importantly, why to do it.

When you want to work or play, you want to find the quickest way to get what you want without the nuisance of technical jargon or complicated procedures getting in your way. So get ready to learn shortcuts, tips, and basic instructions for getting the most out of your PC today.

What to Expect From This Book

Don't expect to learn every possible feature available about Windows 10. Also don't expect dense explanations that show how to do something without telling you why you might want to do it in the first place.

What you can expect from this book is a chance to learn how to use Windows 10 on your PC as quickly, easily, and painlessly as possible.

This book won't have all the answers to using Windows 10, but it will have lots of tips and tricks for helping you work faster and more efficiently than ever before.

Once you learn just enough to get started, you'll feel more comfortable until you'll be able to figure out how to use your PC all by yourself. Fair enough? If so, then turn the page and let's get started.

PART I



Basic Training

One of the biggest problems with learning anything new is knowing where to get started. In this part of the book, you'll learn the most common commands for using Windows 10 no matter what program you might need to use.

You'll learn how to give commands using a mouse, trackpad, and keyboard, how to start and stop programs, how to write and edit text, and how to save your data in files that you can organize in different ways.

By the time you've read this part of the book, you should feel confident that you can use your computer all by yourself.

CHAPTER 1



Understanding Computers

Most computers tend to work in similar ways. A monitor displays information, a processor calculates new results, and input devices such as a keyboard, mouse, or trackpad (sometimes called the touchpad) allow someone to control the computer.

The monitor can show useful information such as stock quotes or news stories displayed on a web page.

The keyboard, mouse, or trackpad lets you control the computer by typing text or manipulating items on the screen, such as editing a photograph or choosing commands.

Once you give commands to the computer, the processor calculates a new result and displays those changed results on the screen.

Using a computer is essentially a back-and-forth conversation where the computer shows information on the monitor and then waits for you to do something about it. You can use the keyboard, mouse, or trackpad to manipulate data on the screen, such as editing text, viewing a different web page, or modifying a picture. Once you've given a command to the computer, it changes the data on the screen and shows the results so you can do something else.

The software is what makes every computer do something useful. By installing different programs, you can literally make the computer do practically anything you want.

Some people use a computer to write letters, play games, draw cartoons, plot stock market prices, or edit movies. Software turns your computer into a versatile tool customized for your particular needs.

However, the most important software every computer needs is called an operating system because it literally controls how the entire computer works. On a PC, the most recent operating system is called Windows 10.

Windows 10 controls the physical parts of a PC such as sending data to a printer or accepting characters typed from the keyboard. To use a PC, you need to learn the basics for using Windows 10.

Don't worry. You don't need to learn every possible technical detail about Windows 10. All you really need to know are the basics for using Windows 10 so you can do something useful with your computer.

■ **Note** The whole purpose of an operating system is to act as an intermediary between the hardware of a computer and a program such as a word processor or game. Programs don't communicate directly with hardware so they communicate with the operating system, which takes care of making the hardware work. Every computer needs an operating system. PCs use Microsoft Windows or Linux, a Macintosh uses macOS, an iPhone uses iOS, and most other smartphones and tablets use Android. That's why when you buy software, it can only run on a specific operating system.

Why Computers Are So Difficult to Understand

In the early days of computers, you had to be a computer expert just to turn on a computer, let alone use it. Fortunately, computers have gotten much easier to use, but in case you still feel computers are too hard to use, the reason is because computer programmers and engineers created and designed computers for themselves.

Think about how every field has its own jargon and way of thinking. Accountants know the meaning of terms like balance sheets, cash flow, and equity, while plumbers can easily understand terms like auger, closet bend, and dip tube. If you're not an accountant, you won't understand common accounting terms. Likewise, if you're not a plumber, you won't understand common plumbing terms.

If you're not a computer expert, you won't understand common computer terms, and that's why computers have always seemed so confusing and difficult to use. Most computer manuals are written by programmers for other programmers, using terms that they already understand. If you don't understand common computer terms, you probably won't understand most computer manuals, help files, or other types of documentation that are supposed to help you but often tend to confuse and frustrate you even more.

Even worse, programmers already know how to use a computer, so they readily skip over steps, assume too much, and gloss over explanations. The actual steps for using a computer are often based on earlier, more primitive ways of using a computer. If you aren't familiar with these, you probably won't completely understand why today's computers work the way they do.

For example, the first IBM PC came with a keyboard that combined a numeric keypad with cursor keys, as shown in Figure 1-1. If you wanted to use the numeric keypad, you had to press a special Num Lock key. If you wanted to move the cursor on the screen, you had to press the Num Lock key a second time to turn off the numeric keypad so you could use the cursor keys.



Figure 1-1. The keyboard of the original IBM PC combined cursor keys with a numeric keypad

How could you tell if the Num Lock key was on or off on the original IBM PC keyboard? You couldn't. You had to press a key on the numeric keypad and if it typed a number, then you knew the Num Lock key was turned on. If it moved the cursor, then you knew the Num Lock key was turned off.

IBM later redesigned the keyboard to offer separate cursor keys and numeric keys. Inexplicably, the separate numeric keypad still retained the Num Lock key so it could double up as a cursor keypad. This meant you now had one dedicated cursor keypad and a second cursor/numeric keypad, as shown in Figure 1-2.



Figure 1-2. IBM modified the keyboard to include a separate cursor keypad along with a second cursor/numeric keypad

Why would anyone ever turn off the Num Lock key so they could have two separate cursor keypads? They wouldn't, yet you can still see this horrible design in many PC keyboards even today.

Computer manufacturers often retain old features out of inertia and familiarity. Rather than question why certain features exist and eliminate outdated ones, computer people tend to keep old features and pile on new ones to create a confusing mess that only they can understand.

Just as computer people have retained obsolete hardware designs, so too have they retained obsolete software designs.

In the old days, people used floppy disks, which were circular disks coated with magnetic material. These early floppy disks were 8 inches in size but later shrank down to 5.25 inches and eventually to 3.5 inches in size, as shown in Figure 1-3. They were called floppy disks because they were plastic disks that would flop up and down if they weren't enclosed in a protective plastic case.

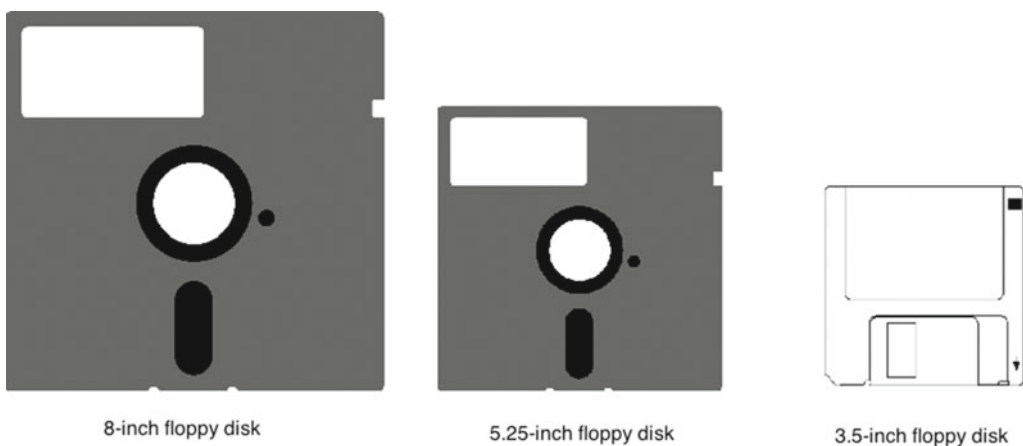


Figure 1-3. Early computers stored data on 8-, 5.25-, and 3.5-inch floppy disks

A 3.5-inch floppy disk could only hold a maximum of 1.44 megabytes of data. Today, a single audio file of a popular song takes up more than 3 megabytes. Since floppy disks weren't able to store today's larger files, they quickly fell out of popularity. That's why you never see floppy disk drives on any modern computer today.

Yet if you look at the user interface of many programs such as Microsoft WordPad, you can still see that Microsoft uses a floppy disk icon to represent the Save command, as shown in Figure 1-4.

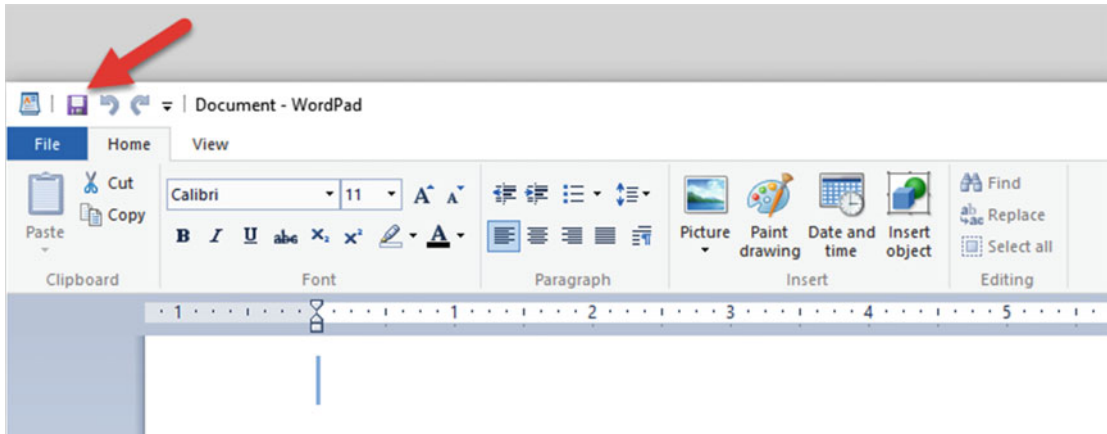


Figure 1-4. Microsoft WordPad uses a floppy disk icon to represent the Save command

Even though people haven't used a floppy disk in over a decade and many newer computer users have never seen a floppy disk in their life, Microsoft and many other companies still use the floppy disk icon to represent the Save command.

None of this makes sense unless you understand the historical origins. Even when you do understand the historical origins, it still doesn't make any sense to cling to antiquated features and icons that no longer have any meaning today.

Another curious relic from the past involves naming disk drives. When computers first appeared, they had only one floppy disk drive that was called the A: drive. To make it easy to copy files from one floppy disk to another, newer computers offered two floppy disk drives where the second floppy disk drive was called the B: drive.

When hard disks became popular, they were called the C: drive. Soon computers started dropping the second floppy disk drive (the B: drive) so computers only had an A: drive (a floppy disk drive) and a C: drive (the hard disk). Eventually people stopped using floppy disks altogether so computers eliminated all floppy disk drives. That left the hard drive, which is still referred to as the C: drive.

Once you understand that computers once had two floppy disk drives labeled the A: drive and B: drive, you can understand why the hard drive had to be called the C: drive. Without this knowledge, you may wonder why the hard drive is called the C: drive and no other drives are called the A: or B: drive.

Despite the fact that many computer users have never seen a floppy disk or floppy disk drive, the File Explorer program on Windows 10 still refers to the hard disk as the C: drive, as shown in Figure 1-5.

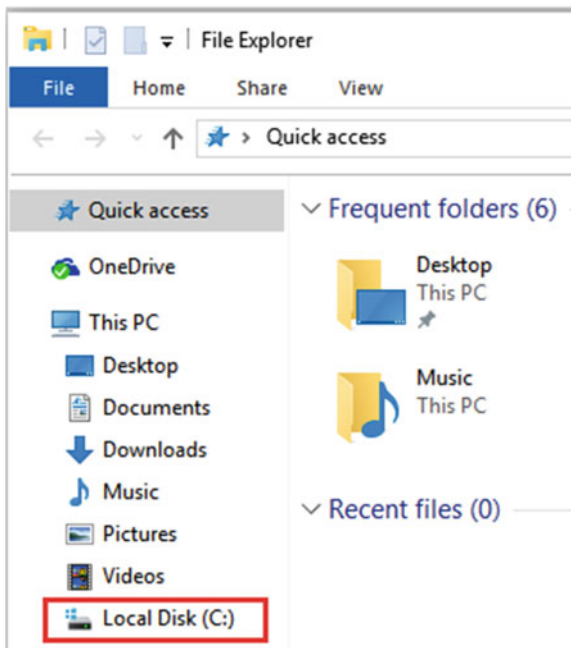


Figure 1-5. The Windows File Explorer program still identifies the hard disk of every computer as the C: drive

Labeling the hard drive as the C: drive no longer makes sense, yet computers continue using letter designations to identify different drives such as the CD/DVD drive, external hard disks, or USB flash drives connected to a computer.

Computers are so hard to understand because they force people to decipher obsolete ideas based on the past that few people know about any more.

The next time you have trouble using a computer, don't blame yourself. Chances are good you're simply being confused by antiquated and obsolete ideas that are no longer necessary but still exist.

Computers Are Designed for Experts, Not Beginners

Programmers create and design computers, so to better understand how any computer works, you need to understand how programmers think. Programmers tend to create multiple ways to perform the exact same command because they like having different ways to do the exact same task.

For example, to save a file in almost any program, you typically have three ways to choose the exact same Save command:

- Click the File menu and choose Save
- Click the Save icon
- Press Control + S (abbreviated as Ctrl+S)

Why do computers offer so many ways to perform the exact same command? It's because programmers like shortcuts. Clicking the File menu and choosing Save takes two steps, but clicking the Save icon only takes one and pressing Ctrl+S can be even faster.

The drawback of so many options is that they tend to confuse beginners. Car manufacturers never give you three different ways to signal a left turn because that would just confuse drivers. Instead, car manufacturers give you one simple way to signal a left turn. Once you learn this one, simple way, you never again have to relearn anything different or new to signal left turns.