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7th Edition

# Computers

FOR SENIORS

for  
**dummies**<sup>®</sup>

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computer and email

Connect with friends  
and family online

Stay safe  
on the internet

**Faithe Wempen**

Computer Technology Instructor



# Computers For Seniors

for  
**dummies**<sup>®</sup>  
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# Computers For Seniors

7th Edition

**by Faithe Wempen**

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

## Computers For Seniors For Dummies®, 7th Edition

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# Introduction

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Computers for consumers have come a long way in just 40 years or so. They're now at the heart of the way many people communicate, shop, and learn. They provide useful tools for tracking information, organizing finances, and being creative.

During the rapid growth of the personal computer, you may have been too busy to jump in and learn the ropes, but you now realize how useful and fun working with a computer can be. In fact, for seniors, the computer opens up a world of activities and contacts they never had before.

This book can help you get going with computers quickly and painlessly.

## About This Book

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This book is specifically written for mature people like you — folks who are relatively new to using a computer and want to discover the basics of buying a computer, working with software, and getting on the Internet. In writing this book, I've tried to take into account the types of activities that may interest a 55-plus-year-old who's discovering the full potential of computers for the first time.

## Foolish Assumptions

---

This book is organized by sets of tasks. These tasks start from the very beginning, assuming you know little about computers, and guiding you through the most basic steps in easy-to-understand language. Because I assume you're new to computers, the book provides explanations or definitions of technical terms to help you out.

All computers are run by software called an *operating system*, such as Windows, macOS, Linux, or ChromeOS. Because Microsoft

Windows-based personal computers (PCs) are the most common type of computer, I am assuming that you have a desktop or laptop PC running Windows. Windows 11 is the latest version, and that's what I cover in this book. There are also various types of mobile computers available, such as tablets and smartphones, but this book doesn't cover them.

Windows is updated periodically, and each time there are minor feature changes. This book is based on the mid-2024 version of Windows 11. You may encounter minor differences between what you see onscreen and what you read about in this book, but they should not prevent you from getting things done.

## Icons Used in This Book

Sometimes, the fastest way to go through a book is to look at the pictures — in this case, icons that draw your attention to specific types of useful information. I use these icons in this book:



WARNING

The Warning icon points to something that can prevent or cause problems.



REMEMBER

The Remember icon points out helpful information. (Everything in this book is helpful, but this stuff is even *more* helpful.)



TIP

The Tip icon points out a hint or trick for saving time and effort or something that makes a topic easier to understand.



TECHNICAL  
STUFF

The Technical Stuff icon marks background information you can skip, although it may make good conversation at a really dull party.



## Beyond the Book

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In addition to the material in the print or ebook you're reading right now, this product also comes with some access-anywhere goodies on the web. Check out the free Cheat Sheet for a checklist for buying a computer, computer care and maintenance tips, and Windows key-stroke shortcuts. To get this Cheat Sheet, simply go to [www.dummies.com](http://www.dummies.com) and type **Computers For Seniors For Dummies Cheat Sheet** in the Search box.

## Where to Go from Here

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Whether you need to start from square one and buy yourself a computer or you're ready to just start enjoying the tools and toys your current computer makes available, it's time to get going, get online, and get computer savvy.



**1**  
**Get Going!**

## **IN THIS PART . . .**

Buying a computer

Setting up your computer

Buying and setting up a printer

## IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Seeing what you can do with computers
- » Getting an overview of hardware
- » Understanding the roles of input and output devices
- » Appreciating operating systems and applications
- » Deciding on a personal computer type
- » Identifying the ports you want
- » Comparing display types
- » Evaluating your storage options
- » Considering your Internet options
- » Shopping for your ideal PC

# Chapter **1**

# Buying a Computer

If you've never owned a computer and now face purchasing one for the first time, deciding what to get can be a somewhat daunting experience. You have lots of technical terms to figure out and various pieces of *hardware* (the physical pieces of your computer such as the monitor and keyboard) and *software* (the brains of the computer that help you create documents and play games, for example) that you need to understand.

In this chapter, I introduce you to the world of activities your new computer makes available to you, and I provide the information you need to choose just the right computer for you.

Remember as you read through this chapter that figuring out what you want to do with your computer is an important step in determining which computer you should buy. You have to consider how much money you want to spend, how you to connect your computer to the Internet, and how much power and performance you need from your computer.

## What Can You Do with a Computer?

Perhaps your friends and family have been telling you that you need a computer, but have they explained why? Today's computers can do some pretty amazing feats. Not only can they connect you to the wide world of the Internet, but they can run applications that let you store and organize photos, write your memoirs, make your own greeting cards, play all kinds of games, track your investments, and so much more.

The following list walks you through some of the activities a computer enables you to do. Depending on what activities are important to you, you can make a more-informed purchasing choice.

» **Keep in touch with friends and family.** The Internet makes it possible to communicate with other people via email; share video images by using built-in video recorders or webcams (tiny video cameras that capture and send your image to another computer); and make phone and video calls by using your computer and Internet connection to place calls with services such as Zoom, Skype, and FaceTime. You can also chat with others by typing messages and sending them through your computer by using a technology called *instant messaging* (IM). These messages are exchanged in real time, so that you and your grandchild, for example, can see and reply to text or share images immediately. Part 3 of this book explains these topics in more detail.

- » **Research any topic from the comfort of your home.** Online, you can find many reputable websites that help you get information on anything from expert medical advice to the best travel deals. You can read news from around the corner or around the world. You can visit government websites to get information about your taxes and Social Security benefits, and go to entertainment sites to look up your local television listings or movie reviews.
- » **Explore the possibilities that artificial intelligence offers.** In Chapter 13, you find out about how artificial intelligence (AI) is transforming the personal computing experience, helping with everything from improving web search results to providing on-demand reports about almost any topic you may be curious about.
- » **Create greeting cards, letters, or home inventories.** Whether you're organizing your holiday card list, tracking sales for your home business, or figuring out a monthly budget, computer programs can help.
- » **Pursue hobbies such as genealogy or sports.** You can research your favorite team online or connect with people who have the same interests. The online world is full of special-interest discussion groups where you can talk about a wide variety of topics with others.
- » **Play interactive games with others over the Internet.** You can play everything from shuffleboard to poker and even participate in action games in virtual worlds. Love backgammon? Got you covered. Online bridge league? There are hundreds. Any game that you love offline, you can play online. You can play games with the computer, with total strangers, or (my favorite) with family and friends.
- » **Share and create photos, drawings, and videos.** If you have a digital camera or smartphone, you can transfer photos to your computer (called *uploading*) or copy photos off the Internet (if their copyright permits it) and share them in emails or use them to create your own greeting cards. If you're artistically inclined, you can create digital drawings. Many popular websites make sharing your homemade videos easy, too. If you have a digital video camera or smartphone and editing software, you can use

editing tools to make a movie and share it with others via video-sharing sites such as YouTube or through social media. Steven Spielberg, look out!

- » **Shop online and compare products easily, day or night.** You can shop for anything from a garden shed to travel deals or a new camera. Using handy shopping site features, you can easily compare prices from several stores or read customer product reviews. Many websites, such as [pricegrabber.com](http://pricegrabber.com), list product prices from a variety of vendors on one web page, so you can find the best deals. Beyond the convenience, all this information can help you save money.
- » **Manage your financial life.** You can do your banking or investing online and get up-to-the-minute data about your bank account, credit card balances, and investments.

## Get Up to Speed on Hardware

Your computing experience consists of interactions with hardware and software. I can explain both of those details, but I start with hardware. The *hardware* is all the tangible computer equipment — the parts you can see and touch.



REMEMBER

You should know a little something about computer hardware before you buy your first computer because the various components are available in a variety of quality and performance levels, and the component choices affect both a computer's price and its suitability for certain tasks.



WARNING

Buying a top-of-the-line computer is not always a good value. In fact, unless you want to do something really specific and high-end, like professional graphic arts or movie production, high-end computers aren't usually worth the price. If all you want to do is write letters, share photos, and surf the Internet, don't waste your money. Get a moderately priced model that has the components you need.



In this and the next few sections, I break down the major hardware components you need to be aware of and explain how they affect your computing experience. When shopping for a computer, you'll see many different models with different amounts, speeds, and quality levels of the essential internal parts. The best internal parts cost more money, but offer better performance and perhaps will become obsolete less quickly.

All computers consist of some type of metal-framed case. Within the case is a collection of parts that make the computer work its magic for you. All those internal parts are connected together by a large circuit board inside the case named a *motherboard*. These internal components have three main functions:

» **Processing:** The computer's ability to receive input, perform an operation on it, and deliver output. The component in charge of processing is the *central processing unit (CPU)*. It's a small, very high-tech semiconductor chip mounted on the motherboard. Some people call the entire computer case the CPU, but that's not accurate.



TIP

CPU speed is rated in billions of hertz (*gigahertz*). The higher the GHz, the faster the processor. Generally speaking, the faster your CPU, the faster most applications run. That's not always true, though, because other components can cause bottlenecks, such as slow Internet speeds, that can make a computer seem slow when its processor is just fine. The speed and features of the CPU make a big difference in the price of the computer.

Lots of highly technical features distinguish one CPU from another, but you don't need to worry about those for the most part; they're mostly of interest to people who are a lot geekier than you. For a basic home computer, any of the CPUs available in new PCs today are fine.

» **Memory:** The computer's ability to juggle the digital data that is active while the computer is running. Another name for memory is *random access memory (RAM)*. Its capacity is measured in billions of bytes (*gigabytes*). A *byte* is a group of eight binary digits (*bits*).

For the average home PC user, a far greater performance enhancer is the amount of RAM (memory) in the computer. The more RAM, the better. So, if your budget allows you to have a fabulous CPU or a greater amount of RAM, definitely go with the RAM. The absolute minimum amount of RAM I would consider in a new PC is 16 gigabytes (GB). By the time you read this, though, the minimum may be higher — perhaps 32 GB.



REMEMBER

The more RAM a computer has, the more actions it can perform simultaneously. For example, a computer with a lot of RAM can run several complicated applications at once without bogging down.

- » **Storage:** The computer's ability to keep a lot of data and many applications permanently on hand, ready to be copied into memory and used at a moment's notice. Every computer has at least one permanent storage component inside its case, known generically as a *hard drive* (or hard disk drive).



REMEMBER

A hard drive's capacity is measured in gigabytes (billions of bytes) or terabytes (trillions of bytes). More capacity costs more. The more storage you have, the more applications can be installed on your computer, and the more data you can save (photos, documents, videos, and so on).

Hard drives can also use different technologies, which offer different data access speeds. Traditional hard drives (often referred to as *hard disk drives*, or HDDs) use a mechanical and magnetic storage system; they are slower and cost less for the same amount of capacity. *Solid-state drives* (SSDs) use storage media that is technologically similar to RAM, and they are faster, quieter, more reliable, cooler, and more expensive.



REMEMBER

There's a PC for every budget and every set of needs — with prices to match. Before making your PC purchase, you need to think about how you'll use the computer and what specs it should have in order to enable you to do all the things you want to do with it.

# Input Devices: Putting Stuff In

Any computer system must provide at least one way for you to convey your wishes — in other words, to provide *input*. Almost all computers today offer at least two methods of accepting input: a keyboard and some type of pointing device.



REMEMBER

» A *keyboard* is similar to a typewriter keyboard. In addition to typing text, you can press certain key combinations to quickly issue commands for common activities such as selecting, copying, and pasting text.

All personal computers come with a keyboard. A desktop computer may have a detachable keyboard that you can replace with a different model if you want. Nowadays, you can get some spiffy third-party keyboards that have extra features and are designed to be more comfortable to use. A laptop keyboard is built-in, and you can't swap it out for a different one. (You can, however, connect a second, external keyboard to a laptop and use it instead of the built-in one.)

» A *pointing device* is a device that moves an on-screen pointer (usually shaped like an arrow). A pointer enables you to point at what you want and then select it by pressing a button on the pointing device. The three most popular types of pointing devices are:

- **Mouse:** A mouse (Figure 1-1) is a little device about the size and shape of a bar of bath soap, with an LED and optical sensor on its underside. You slide the mouse across a flat surface with your hand, and that moves the pointer around onscreen. A mouse can be either wired (that is, have a cord that attaches to the computer) or wireless, operating via radio frequency (RF) signals or via Bluetooth.
- **Trackball:** A trackball (Figure 1-2) is like an upside-down mouse. It has a stationary base with a ball on top, and you roll the ball with your fingers to move the onscreen pointer.



*BillionPhotos.com/Adobe Stock Photos*

**FIGURE 1-1**



*Popova Olga/Adobe Stock Photos*

**FIGURE 1-2**

- **Touchpad:** On a laptop PC, a touch-sensitive rectangular pad in front of the keyboard serves as a pointing device. You move your finger across the touchpad to move the onscreen pointer, and tap the touchpad to select items on the screen. Figure 1-3 shows a touchpad.



**REMEMBER**

All computers come with either a mouse (on a desktop PC) or a touchpad (on a laptop). You can buy third-party pointing devices that you may like better than the default ones you get with your computer.



chapay/Pixabay

**FIGURE 1-3**

Many specialty pointing devices are available. Some monitors have touchscreen capabilities; if you have one of these, you can move your finger across the monitor screen to move the pointer or select things, like you do on a touchpad.

Multimedia input devices enable you to input sound or video, which is important if you want to participate in a video chat, record voice narration for a slide show, or take a photo of yourself to send to a friend. Most laptops have a built-in camera named a *webcam* built into the edge of the display screen; most desktop PCs do not. You can buy an external webcam separately and plug it into one of the ports on a desktop PC to add this capability. A *microphone* enables you to input sound. You can also use a microphone to dictate text rather than typing it. Most laptops have a microphone built-in, and most desktops do not.

With the right hardware and software, you may be able to use *biometrics* (that is, unique features of your body) to enable you to access your computer securely. For example, one of the uses for a webcam is facial recognition (with the appropriate software). Some computers also have a fingerprint sensor that enables you to authenticate your identity by scanning a finger.

# Output Devices: Getting Stuff Out

It would be a pretty one-sided and unsatisfying experience if you never got anything back from your computer, right? The most common way a computer provides feedback is through the display screen. The *display* is the graphical panel where you see the operating system interface, the applications you run, the websites you visit, and the data files you create, such as documents, spreadsheets, and messages. When a display is a separate unit from the computer, it's often referred to as a *monitor*.

A *printer* is another popular output device. A printer turns onscreen data to a paper copy that you can share with others. Chapter 3 covers printers in detail.

Yet another output device is a *speaker* (or a set of speakers). A computer speaker works basically the same way the speaker on your stereo system works — it enables you to hear the sound effects your computer generates as it operates, such as dings and beeps that accompany error messages. It also enables you to listen to music and watch videos that include sound using your computer. Chapter 16 explains how to play music on your computer.

## What Is Software?

*Software* is what makes computer hardware work and lets you get things done, such as writing documents with Microsoft Word or playing a game of solitaire. A computer uses two types of software: operating systems and applications.

All computers have an *operating system* (OS), which is system software that starts up the computer and keeps it running as you use it. Examples for desktop and laptop computers include Microsoft Windows, macOS (for computers made by Apple), Linux (a free operating system popular with techie-types), and ChromeOS (for low-cost computers designed primarily to access the Internet).