



Learning at Your Fingertips

Improving Computer Literacy



In this module:

- Overview
- Getting Started
- Learning Basic Computer Commands
- Connecting to the Internet
- Basic Troubleshooting



Overview

There's a lot you can do with a computer, and if you're just getting started it can seem pretty daunting. Luckily, computers have gotten simpler over the years, and you can be up and running in just a few minutes. From setting up your new computer to safely browsing the internet and installing your favorite programs, see the guides posted below to start using your computer like a pro.



Getting Started

1. Set up your computer. If you are setting up a new desktop computer, there are a few steps you will need to go through before you can start using it. After finding a place near your desk to put the tower, you will need to connect your monitor, keyboard, and mouse, as well as plug the tower into a power source.



Getting Started

- These are the only things required to be connected to the computer in order to use it. You can add more peripherals and accessories later.
- If you are using a new laptop, you will have significantly less to set up. Plug your laptop into a power source to ensure that it is charged, and then power it on to begin.



Getting Started

2. Create a user account. If you are using the computer for the first time, you will likely be asked to create a user account when you turn it on. This account will hold all of your documents, pictures, downloaded files, and any other files that you create.



Getting Started

- If your computer is in a public setting, you should create a strong password to protect your personal information. This is highly recommended, even if your computer is a home computer.



Getting Started

3. Get familiar with the desktop. The desktop is the main work area of your computer, and will likely be the most visited area of your computer. Your desktop appears every time you log into your account, and contains icons and shortcuts to your most used programs and files. The desktop will look and function differently depending on which operating system you use.



Getting Started

- Windows operating systems (except Windows 8) are characterized by the Start menu in the lower-left corner of the desktop. The Start menu allows you to quickly access your installed programs and settings.



Getting Started

- Windows 8 has replaced the Start menu with the Start screen. It functions much the same way, but is fundamentally different in the way it displays information.



Getting Started

4. Learn mouse and keyboard basics. The mouse and keyboard are your primary means of interacting with your computer. Take some time to get familiar with how they work and how you can interact with your operating system and programs.



Getting Started

- Learn how to use a mouse to navigate. Your mouse allows for pinpoint navigation and control, and is necessary for a wide variety of activities. Getting familiar with how to use the mouse will go a long way towards making you a more proficient computer user.



Getting Started

- Practice some keyboard shortcuts to improve your work flow. Keyboard shortcuts are combinations of keyboard keys that perform a function in the program or operating system you are using.



Getting Started

5. Launch some preinstalled applications.

Even if you built your computer yourself, there will be some preinstalled applications and utilities that you can use without having to install anything additional. If you are using Windows, click the Start menu and browse through your available programs. If you are using a Mac, check your Dock and Applications folder.



Getting Started

6. Install your first program. Installing software is a very common task on a computer, no matter what kind of computer you are using. The process is usually very straightforward, as most installers give clear instructions for each step.



Getting Started

- Installing Microsoft Office is a good place to start if you are using a Windows computer. Having access to a word processor is invaluable, and is one of the main purposes of many people's computers. Many Windows computers come with a trial version of Office already installed.



Learning Basic Computer Commands

1. Select files and text. You can use your mouse or keyboard shortcuts to select files on your computer and text on documents and website. Click and drag the mouse across the text you want to select. Once you've selected files or text, there are several different actions you can take.



Learning Basic Computer Commands

2. Copy and paste. Copying and pasting is one of the most common actions taken when selecting text or files. "Copying" a file or text leaves the original intact, while creating a copy on your computer's clipboard. You can then "Paste" the file or text elsewhere.



Learning Basic Computer Commands

3. Save and open files. Many programs such as word processors, photo editors, and more allow you to create and save documents and files. When working on a computer, it is wise to save often. You never know when the power might go out, costing you hours of unsaved work. Get in the habit of saving often, and if you are making major revisions to a file it might be wise to create a new copy.



Learning Basic Computer Commands

- If you have a lot of important files on your computer, consider setting up a backup system. This will ensure that you have at least one extra copy of all your important files should something happen to your computer. Windows and Mac OS X both have backup systems built into the operating system.



Learning Basic Computer Commands

4. Find and sort your files. As you use your computer more and more, your personal collection of documents, media, and files may start to get a bit out of control. Take some time and organize your personal folders. You can create new folders to help create a directory of easily-accessible information.



Connecting to the Internet

1. Set up a connection. In order to connect to the internet, your computer will need to have access to an internet connection. This may come in the form of a wireless network, or you may need to connect your computer directly to your network's router or modem. All of this depends on how the network at your location is configured, and the capabilities of your computer.



Connecting to the Internet

- Connect your computer to a wireless (Wi-Fi) network. If your home, office, or school has a wireless network set up, you can use your computer to connect to it. Most laptops can connect to a wireless network without any fuss, while some desktops will need to have a wireless network card installed.



Connecting to the Internet

- A wired network connection can be faster and more stable. If your computer is physically close to your internet access point (router or modem), you might want to consider using an Ethernet cable to connect your computer to the network. This is much more viable with a desktop, since they are typically immobile.



Connecting to the Internet

2. Open a web browser. The web browser is the software that allows you to view webpages, watch online videos, download files, and do essentially everything else internet-related. All computers come with a browser installed by default (Internet Explorer on Windows, Safari on Mac, and Firefox on Linux), but there are several popular alternative options.



Connecting to the Internet

- Google Chrome is one of the most popular alternative browsers available, and allows you to connect and sync with your Google account. Chrome is available for free from Google.
- Firefox is another very popular free browser. It is very customizable and contains a lot of powerful security options.



Connecting to the Internet

3. Install an antivirus. Before exploring the internet, it would be wise to install an antivirus program. These programs protect your computer from viruses and other malicious software, and are practically required when connecting to the internet. Most computers come with trial antivirus software installed, but there are plenty of powerful free alternatives.



Connecting to the Internet

4. Browse safely when online. There is a lot of bad stuff on the internet, so be sure to stay safe while browsing. This means avoiding giving out personal information, only downloading from trusted sources, and steering clear of viruses, scams, and other illegal and dangerous activity.



Connecting to the Internet

5. Send an email. Emailing is one of the most common forms of communication these days, and knowing how to send an email is now an essential computer skill. You can set up a free email account with a variety of different services, and can be composing an email in just a few minutes.



Connecting to the Internet

6. Download a file. The internet is chock full of different types of files that you can download to your computer. Popular types of files include images, music, and programs. There are thousands of places to find files to download, and a variety of different ways to do so.



Basic Troubleshooting

1. Learn basic troubleshooting tips. Like anything electronic, your computer will occasionally encounter problems. Knowing some basic troubleshooting tips can help save you a lot of time and potentially money. You don't have to be an expert, but knowing what to try first can be very beneficial.



Basic Troubleshooting

- The first thing you should try whenever you are encountering a problem is resetting your computer. Believe it or not, this will resolve a large number of issues you are having with a program or function.



Basic Troubleshooting

- If you are having connectivity problems when browsing the internet, resetting your connection may fix your problem.



Basic Troubleshooting

2. Know how to recognize a virus. Viruses are destructive and invasive files that can pose a serious threat to your information and files. Viruses can slow a computer to a crawl, or cause you to lose everything you have stored. Most viruses can be avoided by practicing smart internet behavior.



Basic Troubleshooting

- Besides viruses, adware and spyware can cause serious problems for your computer and your security. These are often installed alongside other programs, and can be very difficult to get rid of.



Basic Troubleshooting

3. Uninstall troublesome programs. As you add more and more programs to your computer, you'll find that there are some you use more than others. If you have old programs installed that you no longer use, they're taking space on your computer that could be used for other things.



Basic Troubleshooting

Certain programs may be running in the background as well, even if you're not using them, which can significantly impact your computer's performance. Regularly uninstalling programs you no longer use is a good way to maintain your computer's health.



Basic Troubleshooting

4. Reinstall the operating system if necessary. Sometimes, when nothing else seems to fix your problems, reinstalling the operating system may be the only solution. Installing the operating system is less daunting than it sounds, and can provide a big performance boost.



Basic Troubleshooting

What puts most people off is the thought of saving all of their old files and reinstalling programs. If you've been backing up your files regularly, the first complaint isn't a problem. As for reinstalling your programs, you might find that you use a lot less than you thought you did.



Basic Troubleshooting

5. Clean out the dust to keep your computer running cool. Heat is your computer's worst enemy, and as it gathers dust it will start building up more heat. You can keep your computer running cool by regularly cleaning out the inside of the case with compressed air and a vacuum. Try to clean your computer at least two times a year, more if you have pets or are a smoker.



Basic Troubleshooting

6. Replace or upgrade your hardware.

Sometimes your hardware will fail, or simply won't be up to the task you want. In cases like these, upgrading your desktop may save you from having to buy a new computer. Most desktop PCs can be heavily upgraded, allowing you to install new drives and more memory, as well as increase the processing and video power.



Basic Troubleshooting

- If you have a laptop, you may be able to upgrade the hard drive or install more memory. Most laptops don't offer upgrades beyond that



Summary

Whether you're using a computer at home or at work, you'll first need to learn some basic computer skills. The basics covered above are designed to make you more comfortable with everyday tasks to help you get the most out of your computer.

