GETTING STARTED

Living a life means making choices, and you'll be making plenty from the moment you log into Second Life for the first time.

There is a third-person view and a first-person view. There are pull-down menus at the top of the screen and a button menu at the bottom. Should you stay on Help Island for a while, or dive into the action on the mainland right away? And once you've arrived on the mainland, what should you do next?

This chapter will help you sort out those and other issues that appear the moment you begin your virtual existence. It is intended mainly for new SL denizens, but it can also be very helpful to anyone who impatiently dived headfirst into Second Life. If you've ever wished you could return to Help Island, if only to grab some of the new freebies that have become available there, this chapter's for you, too.
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Being familiar with the *Second Life* interface enriches your virtual experience: almost every button, menu, and options panel is a doorway to new possibilities. The following sections synthesize the main interface info for your convenience. You’ll find some extra information and how-to instructions in the *Second Life* Knowledge Base (http://secondlife.com/knowledgebase).

### FIRST STEPS

If you intend to become a new *SL* resident, begin by checking whether your system allows you run the viewer software. At the time of writing, the system requirements are as follows. (Please note that this book is written with the assumption that you’re using a PC as the portal to your second life. If you’re using a Mac, please refer to http://secondlife.com/corporate/sysregs.php.)

- **High-speed Internet connection:** DSL, cable, wireless, etc.
- **Operating system:** Windows Vista, Windows XP (Service Pack 2), or Windows 2000 (Service Pack 4)
- **Computer Processor:** 800MHz Pentium III or better
- **Memory:** 256MB or better
- **Video/graphics card:** NVIDIA GeForce 2, GeForce 4mx, or better or ATI Radeon 8500, 9250, or better

### ADDITIONAL INFO

**KEYBOARD SHORTCUTS**

To obtain a list of *SL* keyboard shortcuts, visit http://wiki.secondlife.com/wiki/Help:Keyboard_shortcut_keys. It’s a good idea to print the list and keep it handy until you’ve memorized the shortcuts you use. The camera-control shortcuts are particularly helpful.

**VISTA COMPATIBILITY**

Note that while *SL* has been upgraded to support Windows Vista, there are unique system requirements for Vista users. See the system-requirements URL on the next page for details.
To view the very latest system requirements, please visit http://secondlife.com/corporate/sysreqs.php.

If you’re running a firewall, note that Second Life needs to connect to ports 443/TCP, 12035/UDP, 12036/UDP, and 13000-13050/UDP. You should configure your firewall to allow outbound traffic on those ports, and related inbound traffic.

Upon launching the Second Life software, you’re presented with a login screen that contains an important button: Preferences (Figure 2.1). Many new SL citizens are so eager to enter the virtual world that they never check it out. If you’re one of them, click it the next time you log in. It opens the Preferences panel, which contains 12 tabs:

- **General** offers basic SL options such as avatar name and title display, notifications of friends online and of money spent or received, etc.

- **Input and Camera** lets you adjust mouse sensitivity in mouselook (first-person view) and a quality called camera springiness. If you’re after precision, use the sliders to reduce mouse sensitivity and camera springiness to 0.

- **Network** is where you configure settings if you’re logging onto Second Life from inside a LAN. You can also lower maximum bandwidth if you have a slow connection (the default of 500 kbps is comfortably in excess of actual available bandwidth). Disk Cache Size determines how much
of the Second Life world is streamed and stored in your computer’s temporary memory; people with computers several years old might improve their performance by lowering this, and also clicking Clear Cache.

- **Web** determines performance of the web browser that appears in your avatar profile (more on that later) and elsewhere in your viewer.

- **Graphics** presents basic graphic settings such as screen resolution and draw distance. Draw distance determines how far you can see in the virtual world. If you have a relatively slow system or an old video card, lowering draw distance and screen resolution can improve performance.

- **Graphics Detail.** This lets you adjust the amount of detail visible in the virtual world. Lower settings improve performance on slow systems/old video cards. Note that some options, such as Enable Ripple Water, may be disabled if your system or video card is not up to par.

- **Adv. Graphics** presents more graphic-detail choices; their effects are explained in the submenu. Generally, lowering the displayed default values improves performance on your PC but decreases graphic vividness and realism.

- **Audio and Video** contains options you’ll definitely want to review. They include audio muting, playing streaming music and videos, SFX volume, etc.

- **Text Chat** lets you switch chat bubbles on and off, change the color and size of displayed text, and adjust miscellaneous chat settings.

- **Voice Chat** configures and adjusts your voice-communication feature.

- **Communication** adjusts the way you interact in the world. Go here to determine whether you’d like your online status to be publicly known, how you want your chat and IM logs saved, and more.

- **Popups** lets you choose which messages you want to see displayed in the world.

Take the time to review the default settings in the Preferences panel, and adjust them as appropriate for your system and Internet connection. If you’d like more info on what individual options can do for you, visit the Knowledge Base in the support area of the Second Life website.

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**THE STATISTIC BAR**

To get detailed info on how well Second Life is running on your computer, activate the Statistic Bar by pressing Control-Shift-1. Visit the Second Life Knowledge Base to find out more.
Second Life’s main screen features a top bar and a bottom bar. Both are packed fairly tightly with features. Many of these, though not all, are discussed in the SL Knowledge Base in the Support area of the Second Life website. The following sections review what is what.

The top bar includes a set of Windows-style pull-down menus (Figure 2.2). Some of the commands available through the pull-down menus are not accessible through any other menu or shortcut. You’ll find a full list of pull-down menu commands and an explanation of their functions in Appendix F.

To the right of the pull-down menus, you’ll see icons showing whether any activities are disallowed in your avatar’s present location. If you are unsure what an icon means, hover your mouse cursor over it to bring up a tooltip. Your avatar’s location—name of region, map coordinates, area rating, etc.—is shown right next to the icons.

Moving farther right, you’ll see a clock displaying Pacific Standard Time. Residents call it “SL time.” Money comes next: the little round Linden-dollar icon lets you buy SL currency through the LindeX (Basic members should note this requires credit card info). Your current L$ balance is next: it’s updated instantly following every financial transaction. Finally, at the extreme right of the top bar, you’ll see packet-loss and bandwidth indicators, represented by two vertical bars. Pay attention to these; high packet loss and low bandwidth may mean it’s wise to cancel that planned visit to a busy nightclub.

THE BOTTOM LINE

The bottom bar features a row of buttons. From left to right, here’s what is what:

- **Communicate** opens a panel listing all the SL residents who’ve agreed to be your friend and tells you which of them are currently online. It acts as a small administrative center for common SL actions, such as sending IMs, paying residents, offering teleports to your current location, etc.
Chat opens the Chat box for typing text to residents in your vicinity. Pressing the Enter key is much simpler and has the same effect.

Fly toggles the Fly mode and is quite useful despite the convenient keyboard shortcuts (Page Up/Page Down is the default). Clicking it while in midair makes you stop flying; your avatar flails and falls into a semihard landing (depending on how high you’ve been soaring around).

Snapshot opens the Snapshot Preview panel for taking snaps of the virtual world. Set all the options, such as snapshot size, resolution, image quality, emailing screenshots, etc. here.

Search brings up a panel where you search for upcoming events, popular places, land sales, people, groups, and more. Enter a keyword in the Find slot and click Search.

Just as this book was heading to the printer, we were extending our in-world search mechanism to improve the search experience and results for all Second Life residents. The primary goals are to make it easier to find places to go in-world and to make it simpler to find interesting and relevant things to do and make it easier to locate objects to purchase. The Search All dialog box has been dramatically changed and improved, and search results have been greatly expanded to now include land parcels, resident profiles, groups, Second Life wiki articles, events, and even objects present on public parcels.

“The search results will be available both in-world and from the Second Life website (and may eventually be picked up by external search engines, such as Google and Yahoo!). While search-result information isn’t tied to residents’ real-life identity (it’s the same info anyone with a free Second Life account could see), residents have the ability to exclude their land, profiles, groups, and objects if they so desire.

“To find out more details, please visit the official Second Life website (https://secondlife.com/support).”

—Jeska Linden

Build opens the Build panel, which is active only if the land you’re on allows building, such as a sandbox area or your own land.
Mini-Map opens a small, directional map in the upper-right corner of the screen. It can be useful when trying to orient yourself by the compass, or when finding your way somewhere, especially in crowded areas such as malls and entertainment complexes.

Map is, hands down, the most powerful button of them all. It opens a resizeable, rescaleable map of the SL world that’s much more than a map. It includes search functions and is also an interface for instant travel: double-clicking on any spot teleports your avatar to that location. In the virtual world, activities such as walking or driving a vehicle are entertainment choices, not necessities. Now you know why most of the roads and streets in Second Life are empty!

Inventory opens the Inventory panel (Control-I is the shortcut).

**Views and Movement**

The standard SL view is the “follow” mode, with the camera behind and slightly above your avatar. However, some people find the mouselook or first-person view more convenient when moving around. If walking down a street and keeping to the pavement proves a comically difficult exercise using the standard view, switch to mouselook. Mouselook is also great for flying: you’ll fly in the direction indicated by your mouse cursor. Thus, you can turn, ascend, and descend by moving your mouse—it looks and feels as if you were flying a plane.
You cannot access the onscreen menus in mouselook, but you can still use shortcut keys to execute commands: for example, open your Inventory by pressing Control-I (Figure 2.3). Keeping the Alt key depressed lets you move the mouse cursor without changing the view; when the cursor is over a panel, you can let go of the key and proceed to do what you wanted to do (for example, rearrange Inventory items). The Alt key also lets you move the camera around and zoom in and out while in the standard “follow” view.

The SL marketplace features all types of aircraft as well as many models of “flight packs.” These can be very sophisticated and very affordable—see the “Flying High in Second Life” sidebar for a few examples of aircraft for sale. Chapter 3 discusses Abbott’s Aerodrome, a popular place to purchase aircraft.
As mentioned earlier, “ordinary” movement—walking, flying, driving a vehicle, or taking the streetcar—is a source of entertainment and an opportunity to socialize; it’s not a practical necessity. The introduction of instant teleporting, free of charge, any time and to nearly anywhere, has made all other modes of movement unnecessary except when inside small, confined spaces. But a drive in a virtual car, a stroll around a shopping mall, or a visit to a nightclub can be entertaining. Walking and flying are definitely the preferred movement modes when you’re sightseeing. The SL world contains more interesting places to visit than most tourist hotspots in the real world; you’ll find more details in Chapter 3.
**LEARNING ABOUT SECOND LIFE**

*Second Life* offers you almost as many choices as real life does, and many more that the real world doesn’t. Visit the *Second Life Knowledge Base* [http://secondlife.com/knowledgebase](http://secondlife.com/knowledgebase) at the start of your new existence, if only to review the topics covered—it will help you get an idea of what’s possible. The Knowledge Base is updated constantly as new features become available, so it’s a good idea to revisit it on a regular basis. The guides and how-to articles featured there are a great way to find out more about how things work in the virtual world. It’s complemented by the *Second Life Wiki* [https://wiki.secondlife.com/wiki/Main_Page](https://wiki.secondlife.com/wiki/Main_Page). These two sources contain invaluable information, regardless of whether your interest is in running a virtual business, making movies, or socializing and role playing.

**SEARCHING THE KNOWLEDGE BASE**

Puzzled about something? Enter the appropriate keyword into the *SL Knowledge Base* search box. Chances are you’ll find a whole series of articles, guides, and tutorials related to your chosen subject.

If you need a little personal guidance, acquire a mentor. Mentors are volunteers who are longtime *SL* residents. Most often, they specialize in a particular skill or knowledge area—for example, creating new virtual objects with prims. You’ll encounter some mentors on Help Island. And if you don’t come across one in the arrival area on the *SL* mainland, use the search function: enter “mentor” and pick the Groups tab on the Search panel. You can refine your search further to find a mentor who is knowledgeable about a topic you’re interested in.

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**SETTING LANDMARKS**

Set landmarks on the *SL* map to move quickly between your favorite places, or to arrive in specific spots, such as a venue for an event you want to attend. Visit the *Second Life Knowledge Base* for detailed info on navigation and movement in *Second Life*. 
“Learn how to take snapshots early on and capture memories of your second life. Your in-world ‘firsts’ will not just be remembered fondly, you’ll always have something precious to look back on as you continue living your second life. This is especially true when making new friends during those seminal early days and weeks.”

—Torley Linden

**Orientation Island and Help Island**

Your virtual existence begins on Orientation Island. The short tutorial offered there will teach you a few basics, but not more than that. Your next stop is Help Island (Figure 2.4), and this is where you should stay awhile. In addition to snapping up the freebies from the Freebie Shop, you should definitely visit the tutorials and demo areas. If you don’t understand something clearly, ask the mentors on duty in the Help Island arrival area.

**BE A SHUTTERBUG**

“Learn how to take snapshots early on and capture memories of your second life. Your in-world ‘firsts’ will not just be remembered fondly, you’ll always have something precious to look back on as you continue living your second life. This is especially true when making new friends during those seminal early days and weeks.”

—Torley Linden

**RETURNING TO YOUR ROOTS**

Your avatar cannot return to Orientation or Help Island once it has arrived on the mainland, but you can. There is now an “Orientation Island (Public)” and “Help Island (Public)” on the mainland—exact copies of the two islands you go through when you enter the world. Just use the Search > Places function to find them. So you can always revisit those when you want. You can also start a new Basic account and revisit the two original islands. In any case, creating a second or alternate avatar is a wise step, since it lets you back up your inventory (see Chapter 7).
Make sure you collect and keep all the notecards from Help Island; you’ll be seeing and experiencing too many new things to remember everything. In particular, the Explorer Guidebook (which tells you where to go on the mainland if you want to repeat Orientation Island tutorials) and Real Life Education Places notecards are worth keeping when you’re doing your first big Inventory cleanup prior to departing for the mainland.

Once you’ve arrived on the mainland, use the Search function to find out where you can learn more about various aspects of Second Life. Choices range from attending classes and courses at one of the many schools and universities to learning how to be a good servant to an SL master. The classes and courses available aren’t limited to Second Life subjects; you may pick up valuable real-life skills!

**Mainland Choices**

Once you’re on the mainland, your priorities are shaped by the kind of virtual life you want to live. A big part of that will be choosing to become part of specific communities (or if you prefer, none). It’s generally a good idea to at least consider where you might fit into the wide variety of social networks out there, because you’re bound to feel at home in at least some.

**Forming and Joining Groups**

Any two SL residents, regardless of membership plan type, can form a group (right-click on your avatar and choose Groups from the pie menu, then Create). The resident who initiated this process becomes the group’s founder and enjoys special privileges. The creator can designate different members with various levels of power and access, and choose to run the group as a democracy (there is a feature for conducting group votes) or as a benevolent dictator. You’ll find more details at http://secondlife.com/app/help/new/groups.php. The robust group structure promises to be helpful to the long-term survival of many organized SL communities who want more control over their land and experiences.

"It’s easy to get lost in the vastness and think ‘There’s nothing here.’ And yet, there’s almost certainly something here that will engage you in ways you hadn’t even thought about before. Try seeking like-minded people rather than places."

—Morpheus Linden
Organized communities greatly enrich the virtual world (Figure 2.5). There are no restrictions on community size or the degree of their organizational development, and some even resemble micronations. However, many communities—and estate owners—have goals other than expansion (see the “Groups and Communities” sidebar). If you look around, you’re sure to find many groups whose goals or activities appeal to you. You can belong to as many as 25 different groups, including those that you started yourself.

“Title to the entire sim is actually ‘owned’ (licensed from Linden Lab) by an avatar known as ‘Estate Owner.’ This status allows the treasurer to deed land to ownership groups and to reclaim land from those groups. For its convenience, Neualtenburg has chosen to appoint the ‘alt’ of its treasurer to accept title to the land as estate owner on behalf of the municipality.

“In return for a one-time payment, resident’s ownership groups receive grant deeds to particular parcels, allowing them rights to use specific parcels of virtual land as long as they conform to the city’s land use regulations and payment of monthly land use fees in the nature of

(Continued)
Community Land

A group is an association of two or more residents sharing common aims and/or interests. However, groups may and frequently do own land that is purchased from Linden Lab by the estate owner, or donated by individual group members.

property tax. Residents’ rights may be terminated and their virtual property reclaimed by the city for breach of the various covenants and agreements. Residents in good standing may sell their virtual land rights to third parties approved by the city."

—from “The Neualtenburg Projekt Summary” by Frank Lardner

[Editor’s note: In late 2007, the Neualtenberg group profile reads: “After a coup in the city on 1 June 2006, the project forked, and the private sim changed its name and theme. The Projekt continues its experimentation, participating in the drafting of founding documents for external groups and forging ahead with the next phase of the Projekt.”]

“Earlier today I have formed the Second Life chapter of the Socialist Party. In doing this, I hope to provide an alternative way for individuals to commune, interact, and produce. I also hope to utilize Party membership to launch some in-world political activism. Our goal isn’t to overthrow the free market of Second Life or anything like that, as most people seem to enjoy virtual capitalism, we just want there to be options. If anybody is interested in helping out with SPSL, then instant message Lenin Camus.

“Also, for members in need, I’m offering some free rent homes.”

—Lenin Camus

“Caledon is a small, windswept forested country at a temperate latitude. Wild creatures, country estate life, sights and sounds that were common well over 100 years ago are the hallmark of the land.

“Technology is approximately that of the 19th century, though some astonishing breakthroughs have provided for incredible wonders. Ground vehicles, airships, and even a device known as a Telehub are made possible through the power of exotic material properties and the wonders of steam technology. (The Steampunk community has a strong presence in Caledon, including The Manor, headquarters of the Steampunks group.)

“The government is an expansionist monarchy, supported by a strong aristocracy (i.e., residents). Caledon offers the opportunity for residents to take their turn at ‘Stewardship,’ a post which can involve answering questions, restarting sims, banning obvious griefers, etc.”

—from SL History Wiki: The Independent State of Caledon
Land ownership in Second Life does not require a Premium membership plan when the land in question is purchased from an estate owner. The intricacies involved are explained in detail in the Second Life Knowledge Base: just keep in mind that becoming an estate owner—purchasing land from Linden Lab—does require Premium membership and can carry significant extra costs.

Owning Virtual Land

Owning land in Second Life carries land-use costs too. Your Premium membership includes land-use costs for up to 512 square meters of real estate. If you want to own more, the costs increase. Table 2.1 displays land area/associated land-use costs at the time of writing.

Table 2.1: Land-Use Costs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Additional Land (Over 512 Square Meters)</th>
<th>Maximum Area (In Square Meters)</th>
<th>Monthly Land-Use Fee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1/128 Region</td>
<td>512 sq. meters</td>
<td>US$5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/64 Region</td>
<td>1,024 sq. meters</td>
<td>US$8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/32 Region</td>
<td>2,048 sq. meters</td>
<td>US$15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/16 Region</td>
<td>4,096 sq. meters</td>
<td>US$25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/8 Region</td>
<td>8,192 sq. meters</td>
<td>US$40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/4 Region</td>
<td>16,384 sq. meters</td>
<td>US$75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/2 Region</td>
<td>32,768 sq. meters</td>
<td>US$125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entire Region</td>
<td>65,536 sq. meters</td>
<td>US$195</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Land Use Fees are always charged monthly and are determined by peak land ownership within the period for which they apply. So, for example, if you’re a real-estate speculator beginning and ending the month with 512 square meters but hitting a peak 10,000 square meters midway through the month, you’ll pay Land Use Fees for 1/4 Region (US$75). Note that donating land to a group does not absolve you of carrying its Land Use Fees. However, a Basic membership plan holder who buys land from an estate owner does not have to pay land-upkeep fees unless this is specified in the land covenant. Owners of land in organized communities often make periodical payments such as land “taxes” that defray Land Use Fees to the estate owner or administrator.
If you look at the table data carefully, you should notice a pattern: the more land you own, the less it costs per square meter. This is unlikely to change even if the fees do. This can have important implications on trading for profit in the land market. Chapter 13 discusses more ways to make money in Second Life.

There is no limit on your virtual land holdings. If you like, you can order and purchase your very own made-to-order island from Linden Lab. Second Life islands cannot be smaller than a single region (65,536 square meters). At the time of writing, the two island sizes on offer are one and four regions. Note that regardless of the island’s starting size, extra land in the form of additional islands may be added to the island at a later date (if there is room around the island on the map). Additionally, recent changes to the land ownership/management system (including group covenants, powers associated with land managers versus land owners, and so on) are important to consider; check the official site for the latest details on these.

Unsurprisingly, owning a little personal empire is not cheap. At the time of writing, island-setup fees are US$1,675 for a one-region island and around $5,000 for the four-region model. In addition, island owners pay standard Land Use Fees. Visit http://secondlife.com/community/land-islands.php for up-to-date island-ownership info, and http://secondlife.com/whatis/landpricing.php to check on current Land Use Fees.

Before you commit to joining any groups or buying real estate, it’s wise to get an idea of the lay of the land (so to speak) and have a comprehensive picture of what goes on where. Accordingly, the next chapter takes you on a tour of the SL mainland.
Right-click on land you own and select About Land to open a panel with many land-management options (Figure 2.6). These include restricting access, issuing permission to run scripts, playing music, banning specific residents, etc. Note that when you buy land from an estate owner, land-management options may be modified in accordance with the land covenant.

**Figure 2.6:** You rule your land through the About Land panel.