Getting started

Equipment needed: A computer running the Windows 8 operating system, monitor screen, preferably touchscreen, keyboard and mouse or trackpad.

Skills needed: Enthusiasm and an open mind.

Let’s get started. This chapter is all about the basic mechanics of computer use. You will not be learning anything about day-to-day computing activities just yet but we all need to start somewhere when we learn a new skill, in the same way as the concert pianist has to learn the difference between the black and white keys and the learner driver has to learn the effects of the gear lever and clutch.

Having made the decision to plunge into the deep waters of computing, you now have your brand new machine sitting in front of you and are probably wondering what on earth you have let yourself in for. Don’t worry. This book will put you in charge.

About Windows 8

Windows 8 is a radically new concept in the field of computing. Those of you who have used previous incarnations of the Windows operating system will have to adjust the way you think in order to adapt to the new system. On the other hand,
beginners will have no previous concept of the use of Windows and may find the whole learning process easier. Windows 8 relies heavily on touchscreen technology, although it still allows you to use the familiar mouse and keyboard controls.

**Turning the computer on**

First of all, we are assuming that the following things have been done already: your guardian angel has set up your machine for you; all the necessary cables have been attached to the correct sockets; you have an Internet connection (even if you don’t know what that is at the moment); and your computer is connected to the power supply.

Now we have to turn the thing on. Every machine has a power button — it’s usually on the front of a desktop computer or above the keyboard of a laptop. It is typically identified by the power symbol (see Figure 1.1).

![Figure 1.1](image)

You will find a similar symbol on other equipment, such as additional screens, printers or scanners, so if you have any of these devices, switch them on at the same time. Such devices, as well as separate keyboards, mice and external storage discs, are known as *peripherals*. There is no separate power button for the integrated screen of a laptop. Press the button once and wait. A few lights will begin to flicker as the machine gets going. The screen may flash on and off a few
times and you may see the computer manufacturer’s logo. Within a few minutes or less, you will see the initial screen, known as the Lock screen (see Figure 1.2). This shows a pretty picture showing the date and time as well as a few small symbols along the bottom of the screen that show your computer’s status — you don’t need to know about these at this stage.

![Figure 1.2](image)

Your Lock screen may be different from the one illustrated — and the date and time will probably be wrong until your guardian angel has entered the correct settings.

Unlock the screen either by dragging the mouse pointer in an upwards direction or, if you have a touchscreen, by placing a finger on the screen and swiping upwards. The use of the mouse and finger gestures will be explained in a moment. If the computer has been set up with a password, the next screen will ask you to type it into the box. Press the Enter key and you’re in!

**The Start screen and Desktop screen**

Windows 8 has two interfaces — the Start screen and the Desktop screen.
The Start screen or interface

The Start interface (see Figure 1.3) is the opening screen that is displayed when you have removed the Lock screen, so you should see this once you’ve input your password. This screen gives you access to everything you can do on the computer. The tiles on the Start screen are shortcuts to the various programs (called apps or applications) installed on the computer. To activate a tile, simply tap or click on it with the mouse button. We will be showing you how to use the Start interface in Chapter 2.

![Start screen]

Figure 1.3

The Desktop screen or interface

The Desktop interface (see Figure 1.4) shows the shortcut icons, taskbar and a number of other control icons, all of which can be activated by tapping or clicking on the relevant icon. Those of you familiar with previous operating systems will
recognise the layout. You will rarely see apps on the Desktop screen; one of its functions is to display shortcuts to larger programs (such as the full version of Internet Explorer to browse the web, Microsoft Excel to create spreadsheets, video editing software and home accounting systems). We explain how to use the Desktop interface in Chapter 3.

![Figure 1.4](image)

**Figure 1.4**

**Apps and applications**

What are *apps*? Are they the same as applications? And how do they differ from programs?

Apps are small (but often very powerful) computer programs on the Start screen that perform a specific task, such as finding a hotel, ordering from a store, accessing a particular newspaper or playing a game. Examples of apps would include Calendar, People (which gives you access to your address book) and Maps.
Programs are accessed from both the Start and Desktop interfaces, and tend to be much larger than apps. Confusingly, programs are also known as applications—not to be confused with apps! Programs (or applications) tend to offer a much broader range of options and include, for example, Microsoft Word (for creating letters and other documents), Microsoft Outlook (for emailing, calendars and contact lists) and Internet Explorer (for browsing the Internet). Where a photo manipulation app will remove red-eye from images or crop an image to a more suitable size, a photo manipulation application can refine and develop images in thousands of different ways. Similarly, you can use an app to post a short message on your Facebook page but will need a comprehensive word processing application to compose a detailed report, design a poster or write a novel.

Microsoft now uses the word ‘application’ to mean a ‘program’. Both apps and applications appear as tiles on the Start screen, but the Desktop only shows the larger applications. In this book, we use the term ‘apps’ for the smaller programs and use the term ‘applications’ for the larger programs. In practice, you do not have to appreciate the finer differences between the two terms.

Controlling the computer

We have mentioned ‘tapping’, ‘clicking’, ‘swiping’ and ‘dragging’ and before we go any further you need to learn a little about controlling the computer. Windows 8 uses a number of methods of issuing commands to the computer. Commands can be given by using the touchscreen, mouse, trackpad and keyboard.

Touchscreen commands

Although Windows 8 can be operated by using the mouse and physical keyboard, it has been designed to use the emerging touchscreen technology already in use on mobile phones, tablets (such as the iPad) and netbooks. The touchscreen is operated using the following gestures. (Don’t worry about what they do at this stage — it’s enough just to be aware of what the gestures are.)
Swiping

To move the pointer using a touchscreen, drag a finger across the screen.

Tapping

To issue a command on a touchscreen, simply tap at an appropriate point on the screen. This may be a tile, a text box, an icon or a link to a web page.

Tap and hold

You may wish to move a tile to a different position on the Start screen. In this case, tap the tile but hold your finger against the screen while dragging the tile to its new position.

Flicking

You can scroll the screen both vertically and horizontally by flicking a finger up, down or across the screen. The faster the flick, the greater the movement across the screen:

- Flicking from the edges of the screen has different effects. To achieve this, place your finger on the edge of the screen frame and drag it quickly onto the screen.
- Flicking from the right edge reveals the Charms menu. (We’ll explain this in Chapter 2.)
- Flicking from the left edge recovers the previous application. Using this gesture, you can scroll through all the open applications.
- Flicking from the top and bottom edges displays other relevant menus.

Pinching and stretching

Screen images can be enlarged or diminished by using these gestures. To enlarge a screen image, place a thumb and one finger on the screen or trackpad and ‘stretch’ them apart. To reduce the image, start with the thumb and finger apart and draw them together.
The mouse

This small device comes in several different guises. Some are wired to the computer, as shown in Figure 1.5, while others are wireless; all have at least two buttons, left and right, and modern ones have a scroll wheel between the two. The purpose of the mouse is to move a pointer across the computer screen and issue commands at various points on the screen. You may have noticed the small white arrow pointer on the screen. This pointer is moved across the screen simply by moving the mouse across the surface of your desk. The action works best if the mouse is placed on a rubberised mouse pad. How well your mouse works will depend on the surface you place it on and the type of mouse. Some mice have a trackball that rotates as you move it whereas others have a red laser that controls the movement. It needs to be on a clean, level surface.

![Figure 1.5](image)

Clicking

When using a mouse, commands are given by placing the pointer at a certain point on the screen and pressing — or ‘clicking’ — the left mouse button while holding the mouse perfectly still with the palm of the hand. For example, you may have created an email that you wish to send. Somewhere on the screen will be the word ‘Send’. By moving the pointer to the word and clicking the left mouse button, you will give the command to send the document. This action is known as a ‘left-click’.

Although the iPad has a touchscreen, it uses a different operating system and does not work with Windows 8, although many of the commands may appear to be the same. For further information on the iPad, we recommend *iPad for the Older and Wiser* by Sean McManus, published by John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
The right button has a completely different effect in that it raises a menu that is context-sensitive. We discuss the use of the right-click in later chapters.

Try using the mouse to move the pointer around the screen. Like riding a bicycle for the first time, this will take a little practice but familiarity will come eventually. You can adjust the size of the pointer and the way it moves, and we will cover this in Chapter 5.

In certain situations, you may need to perform a double-click, using the left mouse button. This can prove difficult for beginners. This is because they tend to hold the mouse very rigidly with the result that the mouse moves imperceptibly between the two clicks leading the computer to interpret the command as two single clicks. Try steadying the mouse with the palm of your hand while operating the button with the forefinger. Double-clicking is much easier when using a laptop trackpad instead of a mouse. We discuss the trackpad in a moment. (Once again, the function of the double-click is adjustable.)

Practice exercises using the mouse and touchscreen gestures are explained in Chapter 7.

When this book instructs you to ‘click’, this always means the left mouse button. Similarly, ‘double-clicking’ always means the left button. The right mouse button always brings up a menu. There is never a double right-click. Dragging is almost always done using the left button.

**Dragging**

The second mouse action is known as ‘dragging’, which you can try now. If you still have the Start screen showing (as in Figure 1.3), place the mouse pointer at the bottom of the screen, hold down the left mouse button and move the pointer from right to left across the screen. This will have the effect of dragging further tiles across the screen, and will reveal more square and rectangular tiles. We’ll discuss the functions of these in Chapter 2.

The scroll wheel lying between the two buttons allows you to scroll a long document up and down the screen.
The trackpad

Laptop computers are more usually controlled by means of a trackpad, which is a touch-sensitive square that sits below the typing keys on the keyboard. The trackpad controls the pointer in much the same way as the mouse (see Figure 1.6). The screen pointer is moved by dragging a finger up, down, side to side and across and even diagonally across the trackpad. If you reach the side of the pad before you have finished moving the pointer, simply lift your finger and start again from the other side.

![Trackpad and Mouse buttons](image)

**Figure 1.6**

The control buttons lie below the pad and fulfil the same functions as the mouse buttons. Drag the pointer by holding down the left button with one finger while...
moving the pointer with a finger of the other hand on the trackpad. Only use a single finger when using the trackpad to move the pointer around the screen — using two fingers or more can confuse the machine. Many trackpads will also accept ‘stretching’ gestures to alter the size of a window.

The standard keyboard

So far, we have concentrated on commands that move or activate the screen tiles. However, much of your computer use will involve typing text and this is where the keyboard comes in. The keyboard simply gives commands to the computer. These commands may be as simple as typing the letter ‘a’ or inserting a paragraph in a letter, or as complicated as creating a photograph that looks like an oil painting.

Windows 8 allows you to use two different types of keyboard: standard and virtual. We’ll come back to the virtual keyboard later, but for now let us look at the standard keyboard that is attached to your computer.

Figure 1.7 shows a standard keyboard from a personal computer. Laptop keyboards are more compact and often don’t include a number pad, page command block (to the left of the number pad) or direction keys.

The layout of your keyboard will depend on the type and model of computer you are using but they all have a similar basic layout, based on old manual typewriters, known as the QWERTY layout (after the first six letter keys on the top row). The letters and numbers in this central section of the keyboard act in the same way as a typewriter.
Windows 8 for the Older and Wiser

The letter keys are surrounded by an array of additional keys, often with confusing labels such as Alt, Ctrl, PrtScr or F4. By exploring these keys in manageable chunks, their functions will become more understandable.

**The Enter key**

The Enter key (sometimes called the Return key) is found to the right of the letter keys (see Figure 1.7). When you’re typing a document, this key creates a new line below the previous text in the same way as a carriage return does on a typewriter. By pressing this key twice you will create a blank line. But there is more to the Enter key than this — it is one of the most important keys on the keyboard. It issues commands to the computer in many different ways, as we shall see as we progress through this book. As an example, you will often be presented with a number of options with one of the alternatives highlighted (this is known as the default action, which we will discuss later in the book). In Figure 1.8, the ‘Yes’ option is highlighted; this is the ‘default’ command that is activated if you press the Enter key.

![Figure 1.8](image)

**The Windows key**

You will find this key towards the left end of the lowest line of keys on the keyboard (see Figure 1.7). The Windows key has a very different function in Windows 8 to the one it had in previous Windows systems: now, hitting this key always returns you to the Start screen. Hitting the Windows key when the Start screen is already displayed will take you to whichever screen you had open previously. This feature is known as a toggle switch. We shall be making more use of this key in Chapter 2.

**The Tab key**

As on a typewriter, this key (see Figure 1.7) tabulates columns by moving the text entry point a set distance to the right, as shown here.
The computer also finds other uses for this key, as we shall discover in later chapters.

**The Backspace key**

This key is a relic of the old typewriter. On a computer, while it still takes the typing point back one space, it also deletes the character to the left of the typing point. This key can vary in position on the keyboard but is usually found in the upper-right quadrant of the keyboard (see Figure 1.7).

**The Delete key**

This key can be confused with the Backspace key. As its name suggests, it removes things from the screen, including text, but in this case, it removes characters to the right of the typing point. Once again, its position on the keyboard is not set in stone but it is usually found towards the right of the keyboard (see Figure 1.7).

**The Escape key**

The Esc key (short for Escape) is always found at the top-left corner of the keyboard (see Figure 1.7). It has many different functions depending on the situation but can be seen as the ‘get out of jail free’ key — sometimes! It does not always
work as you would expect. If you have initiated a computer process that seems to be running out of control, pressing this key will often bring the process to a shuddering halt with sighs of relief all round. It will not stop the computer, only the runaway process. However, it is not a good idea to rely too heavily on this key.

**Modifying keys**

Some keys (the Shift keys, Caps Lock key, Ctrl key and Alt key) are known as modifying keys. These are keys that do nothing on their own but are always used in conjunction with other keys to modify their action. These keys are

- **Shift keys**: There are two of these keys, one at each end of the letter keys (see Figure 1.7). They each perform the same function in that, when held down while pressing another key, they print the uppercase character (in the same way as the Caps key on a typewriter). Thus, pressing down the Shift key and hitting the ‘p’ key (normally written as Shift+p) will result in a capital P; and Shift+7 will produce the ampersand (&) character. Like many other computing keys, the Shift key is used in many different ways by more advanced computer programs but that need not worry us at the moment.

Most new computers no longer have the word Shift on the Shift key, but an upwards arrow.

- **Caps Lock key**: Why keyboard manufacturers persist in using the term Caps Lock when they have changed the Caps key to Shift is quite beyond us! The Caps Lock key sits with the Shift key on the left of the keyboard (see Figure 1.7), which sometimes leads to confusion among novice students. Unlike the Shift key, the Caps Lock is a ‘toggle’ key: if you press this key, all the letters you type will appear in capital letters. Press it again, and they will be in lowercase letters. It’s easier to use the Shift key if you only want to capitalise individual characters, and you always have to use the Shift key to use the uppercase symbols on the number keys.

- **Ctrl key**: No, it’s not a typing error — Ctrl is keyboard-speak for Control. This modifying key is used by many programs to issue commands. For instance, in many word processing applications, holding down the Ctrl key while hitting the
P key (Ctrl+P) will issue the command to print the document. Ctrl+Z usually reverses the action of the last command given. There are two Ctrl keys on the keyboard, one at each end, both performing the same functions (see Figure 1.7).

- **Alt key:** This key allows you to change (or alternate) the function of other keys in a similar way to the Ctrl key, and is used to issue keyboard commands. For instance, Alt Gr +C produces the copyright symbol © when using the Microsoft Word program.

The modifying keys can be used in combination with each other to give well over 300 command shortcuts, of which only about a dozen are of practical use to the average computer user. There is a table of the most useful keyboard shortcuts in Chapter 9 but don’t worry about remembering these combinations for now — it is just the principle we are trying to establish at this stage. You are probably having enough difficulty just locating the apostrophe key. (It is probably under the @ symbol to the right of the letter keys if you are still searching.)

Those of you with limited keyboards on smaller computers may notice that some keys carry a third symbol. A common one is the euro (€) symbol. These additional characters are produced by holding down the Alt key, the Ctrl key and the symbol key at the same time.

**The Function keys**

These are the keys labelled F1 to F12 that run across the top of the keyboard, as you can see Figure 1.7 (most laptop keyboards add additional symbols to these keys to extend their capabilities). Depending on the keyboard layout, you may have to use a further modifying key, the Fn key, to activate these keys. There is no need to go into the various uses of these keys at this stage except to mention that most computer programs use the F1 key to raise a help menu if you find yourself stuck with a problem. There will be more on the various Help facilities in Chapter 9.

**Try to break it!**

As we mentioned in the Introduction, beginners are often afraid that they might break the computer. Short of using a sledgehammer or pouring a cup of coffee
onto the machine, computers are remarkable robust. If you need reassurance about that, try this exercise. Press the palm of one hand on the keyboard several times. Did anything happen? Do it again, and again. Now use both hands. It’s possible that something may appear on the screen — in the case of Windows 8, most likely a meaningless jumble of letters or a menu (in which case, simply press the Esc key and/or the Start key and everything will revert to normal). Whatever happens, you will not have caused damage to the computer.

**The virtual keyboards**

Windows 8 offers an alternative method of entering text, by using keyboards that appear on the screen. There is not enough room to accommodate all the keys on one screen, so you may have to switch between different layouts to find the key you require.

Figure 1.9 shows the initial virtual keyboard, which is largely used for typing the letters of the alphabet. Type by tapping or clicking on the keys to produce the required lowercase characters. To produce a capital letter, tap or click either of the Shift keys followed by the letter key. Double tapping or clicking on the Shift keys locks the keys into uppercase mode. To exit the uppercase mode, simply tap or click one of the Shift keys again.
The Delete key functions as a Backspace key and as a Delete key while the emoticon key offers a selection of smiley faces and other symbols.

The keyboard layout key allows you to alter the appearance of the keyboard.

Access to different keyboards offering numerals and other characters is provided by the keypad toggle key labelled &123 (see Figures 1.10 and 1.11).

![Figure 1.10](image1.png)

![Figure 1.11](image2.png)

**Turning the computer off**

Unfortunately, Microsoft has made the process of turning the computer off using Windows 8 rather more complicated than using previous operating systems. Different computers will shut down in different ways, but don’t panic — there is one sure-fire method of doing it properly. You will need to use some of the skills described in this chapter to shut your computer down. Here is a step-by-step guide:
1. Either swipe your finger from the far right edge of the touchscreen or place the mouse pointer at the top-right corner of the screen. Either action will bring up the Charms menu (see Figure 1.12).

2. The Charms menu displays five alternative icons, all of which will be described in Chapter 2. For the purposes of this exercise we are only interested in the Settings option.

3. Either touch the word Settings or move the mouse pointer over it and left-click on it.

4. This brings up an additional menu (see Figure 1.13), which includes an option labelled Power. Tap this option or left-click on it and a further list of menu options will appear, including the option to Shut Down. Tap this option or touch it with your finger and the computer will shut down automatically within a few minutes or less.

There are easier methods to close the computer down but these involve setting your computer up to allow these actions. This will be covered in Chapter 6, which deals with setting up your computer to reflect your personal preferences.

That is quite enough for you to assimilate for now so I suggest you go and make yourself a strong cup of coffee before moving on to the specialised subject of the computer screen. Don’t try to learn everything at one sitting — this book and the computer will still be there in the morning.
Summary

- Windows 8 is a very different operating system to the ones that preceded it.
- Turning the computer on is very simple. It is more complicated to turn it off.
- You can give commands to the computer using a touchscreen, mouse or keyboard.
- Move the mouse with the palm of your hand and do not grip it too tightly.
- Laptops tend to use a trackpad rather than a mouse.
- The keyboard is simply an extension of the old typewriter layout with specialist computer keys added.
- The Enter key activates computer commands as well as adding additional lines to a text document.
- The modifying keys only act in association with other keys.
- Computers are very difficult to break.
- Don’t worry about making mistakes. They are valuable teaching tools.
Brain training

There may be more than one correct answer to a question.

1. **Which key should be used to start the computer?**
   - a) The Enter key
   - b) The Windows key
   - c) The power button
   - d) No key is needed, you simply have to attach the power cable

2. **What happens if you press the Shift key on its own?**
   - a) Nothing
   - b) It converts all the keys to uppercase
   - c) You move the power supply from mains to battery
   - d) The keyboard prints symbols instead of letters

3. **What is the action of the Windows key?**
   - a) It brings up the Charms menu
   - b) It toggles the screen between the Start interface and previous open window

4. **What is a trackpad?**
   - a) A pointing device on a desktop computer
   - b) An alternative to a mouse on a laptop computer
   - c) A device for recording your key strokes
   - d) A touch-sensitive area on a keyboard

5. **What happens when you use the Backspace key?**
   - a) You remove the previous line of type
   - b) It removes characters to the left of the typing point
   - c) It deletes characters to the right of the typing point
   - d) It creates more space at the top of a document

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**Answers**

Q1 – c  Q2 – a  Q3 – b  Q4 – b and d  Q5 – b