

Computer Basics

What's in this guide?

The purpose of this guide is to help you feel more comfortable using a computer. You will learn:

- The similarities and differences between laptop, desktop, and tablet computers
- The basic parts of a computer
- How to connect things to your computer, such as cameras or headphones
- How to turn a computer on
- How to use a mouse and keyboard

When you first start learning to use a computer, it's normal to feel intimidated or overwhelmed. Many people feel like there's too much to learn, and they don't know where to start. Luckily, you only need to know a little bit about computers to start using them. Plus, they're very hard to break.

Why learn to use a computer?

Take a moment to think about why you want to learn to use a computer, and write these reasons down. This will help you stay focused on your goals. Common goals for new computer users include:

- Keeping in touch with family and friends
- Finding or applying for jobs
- Looking up information on the internet
- Creating documents like resumes
- Accessing government websites
- Watching movies
- Playing games

Need more help?

Library staff members are available to help you reach your goals. Call your local branch to set up a 1-on-1 computer lesson.

We will work with you to help you develop the skills you need to use computers effectively. It doesn't matter where you start. We help learners of all levels enrich their lives through technology.

Types of computers and basic parts

Desktop computers:

The computer below is called a desktop computer.

A desktop computer is intended to be used in one set location. The public computers at the library are desktop computers.



Monitor

The monitor displays text and images, much like a TV screen.

Hard drive (or tower)

The hard drive holds the main parts of the computer that process information.

Most desktop computers have a separate monitor and hard drive. However, some desktops, called “all-in-one” computers, have these parts built into the back of the monitor.

Mouse

The mouse is similar to a TV remote. It lets you communicate with the computer and tell it what to do.

As you move the mouse around, you will also move a pointer that appears on the computer screen.

Keyboard

The keyboard lets you communicate with the computer and enter text and numbers.

Laptop computers:

The computer below is called a laptop computer.

Laptop computers are designed to be portable. They have all the same parts as a desktop computer, but the parts are arranged differently.



Turning on the computer

Locate the power button. If you’re using a desktop computer with a separate monitor and hard drive, there will be 2 power buttons: 1 on the monitor, and 1 on the hard drive.



The power button will be labelled with the symbol pictured at right—an incomplete circle with a line through it.

Press this button once and wait a few seconds. You may hear a grinding or whirring noise as the computer starts up. If you hear a noise from the hard drive but there’s nothing on the monitor, find the power button on the monitor and press it once.

Holding the mouse

Hold the mouse as shown in the picture to the right.

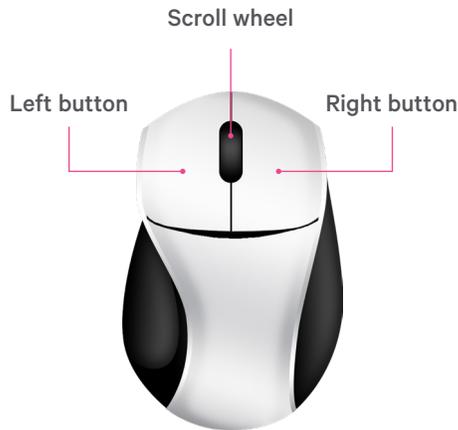
Place your whole hand on the mouse with your index finger on the left button and your middle finger on the right button.

Your remaining fingers rest on the side of the mouse to help move it.



Using the mouse

The mouse is a tool to help you move around different parts of the computer screen. As you move the mouse around, you will also move a corresponding pointer that appears on the computer screen. Once you have that pointer on something you want to do or select, you click a button on the mouse to tell the computer to do something.



Scroll wheel

The scroll wheel is used to quickly move up or down the screen.

Left button

The left button is the button you will use most often. You click this button to tell the computer to do something.

Pressing this button once is called single clicking. Pressing it twice in a row is called double clicking. We will discuss double and single clicking in the next section.

Right button

Right clicking will bring up a menu of options related to the location of your pointer.

You won't use the right mouse button very much in the beginning. If you press this button by accident, move the pointer to a different part of the screen and left click to make the menu go away.

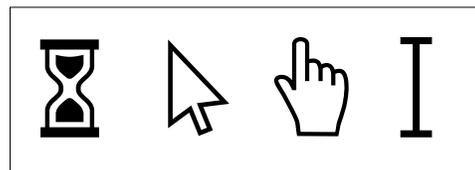
Single and double clicking

Most of the time, when you want to select something on the computer, you will press the button on the left side of the mouse. This is called left clicking.

Pressing the left mouse button once is called single clicking. You can use single clicking to select something or follow a link on the web. To open a file or a program, you click the left button twice in a row. This is called double clicking.

The pointer

The appearance of the mouse pointer on the screen will change depending on where you position it on the screen.



Hourglass

When the computer is busy thinking or completing a task, the hourglass will appear to signal that you need to wait. Also, the pointer will appear as arrows when you are resizing or moving windows.

Arrow

This is the default pointer shape. You will see the arrow when your pointer is just moving around the screen, or when it is pointing at something you can click to open.

Hand

You will see the hand when the pointer is resting on a link to a website, a button, or other click-able items.

I-beam

When the pointer is over click-able text, or a space where you can enter text, it will look like a capital I.

Drag and drop

To move something from one area of the screen to another,

1. Place your mouse pointer above the item you want to move.
2. Press down on the left button. (Don't let go.)
3. Keep holding the button down while you move the pointer where you want to move the item—dragging.
4. Once you have the pointer and the item where you want it, lift your finger off the left button.

The keyboard

The keyboard is one of the main ways to communicate with the computer. You can use it to enter text and numbers into the computer. It also has special keys that let you move around the screen and perform other actions. The keys are laid out like a typewriter with a few add-ons.

Before you use the keyboard, you need to position the “cursor”. The cursor is a black flashing vertical line. It shows you where on the screen you will be typing. Letters appear to the left of the cursor and it moves to the right as you type.

Sections of the keyboard

Main section

This houses the keys you will use most often, such as letter keys, the space bar, and more.

Number keys

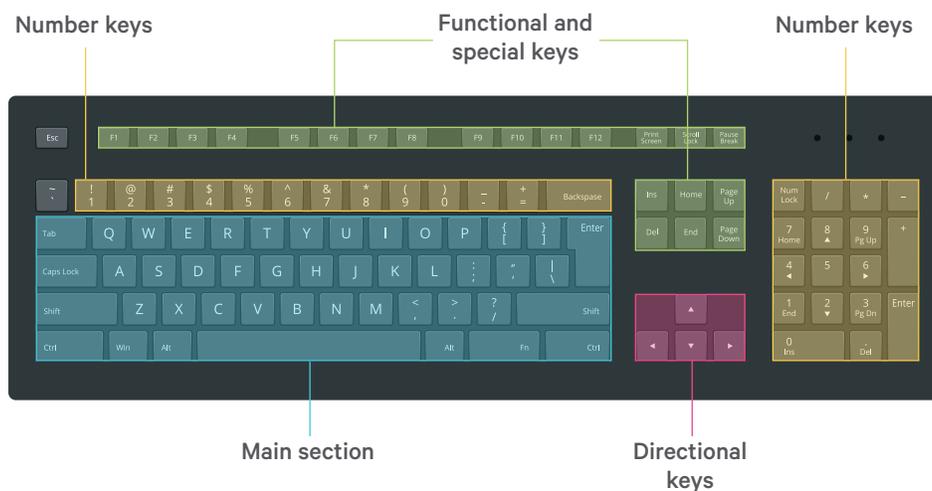
Numbers are located in 2 places on the keyboard. They are in the main section above the letters and in the number pad on the right side of the keyboard. The number keys located at right can either be arrow keys or number keys depending on whether the number lock key is on or off.

Directional keys

These keys help you move through a document or website using arrows. The number keys are located in 2 places on the keyboard.

Functional and special keys

At the top of the keyboard are the function keys and special keys, which have more specific uses. They often perform different functions depending on which program you are using.



Important keys

Space Bar

This bar adds a blank space between words.

Shift

This key is used for either capitalizing a letter or accessing the symbols above the number keys and punctuation keys. When you hold down the shift key, either the capital letter is typed or you are typing the icon that appears on the top left of the key.

Backspace

Use this button if you are typing something and you want to delete things.

Enter

Enter is the key that you press to submit something or go to the next step. For example, you would press enter to go to the next line in a word processing document or to go to a website after typing in the address.

Caps lock

When you press this button, everything that you type will be CAPITALIZED. To turn it off and go back to typing lower case letter, just press it again.

Directional keys

These keys allow you to move up, down, left, and right on a page or a menu (where possible).

Connecting other devices to your computer

Things you use with a computer, such as a mouse or headphones, connect to the computer through plugs we call ports.

These ports are often found on the front and back of the hard drive for desktop computers and on the sides of the keyboards for laptops.



USB Headphones

Two of the most common types of ports you will find yourself using are the USB, seen on the left in this image, and the headphone jack, seen on the right.

What is a USB?

Also called a flash drive or thumb drive, the USB is a common plug for things like a mouse or camera. It is also used for a storage device called a USB drive.

A USB is a great way to save your work if you are using a public or shared computer. It can be plugged into the USB drive of the computer so you can save documents, images, and other files to it.

Once you are done working, you can just take the drive with you and you will have all your work.

