

Chapter 5 – The Computer Screen

Equipment needed:

A computer, Windows operating system, monitor screen, keyboard and mouse.

Skills needed:

Enthusiasm and an open mind

The Computer Screen or Desktop:

OK, so you are sitting in front of this strange machine and wondering what on earth to do with it. This chapter will take you through the very basics of turning it on, turning it off, what you should see and what some of it means.

Turning the computer on:

Before turning the computer on, switch on all the extras like the screen, printer, scanner and loudspeakers. These extras are called the peripherals. Most of them will have buttons which, when pressed, cause a small light to appear on the machine.

All set? Then press the main power button on the front of the computer itself. Again a light will appear and various whirring sounds will be heard – this is perfectly normal. If none of the lights appear then the chances are that you have forgotten to turn it on at the wall socket. Some computers have a main switch on the back which is thoroughly inconvenient. It should be switched on and left switched on.

Why do you turn on the peripherals before the computer? Because when the computer starts up it needs to identify the peripherals before it can work with them.

Now – **leave it alone!** It has got a lot of work to do to get everything up and running and if you are trying to press keys or wave the mouse around you may confuse it. Be patient!

What can you expect to see while the computer is getting itself sorted? This will vary slightly between different computers but they all follow a general sequence. You may see an advertising logo or picture at first that may or may not be followed by a black and white screen listing a range of computer values. Ignore this completely as well as any other sudden, inexplicable blips on the screen.

After a couple of minutes – the time depends upon your type and speed of computer – the black and white screen will be replaced by a colour image. The screen may change to black from time to time but eventually the screen look very much like Fig. 5.1.

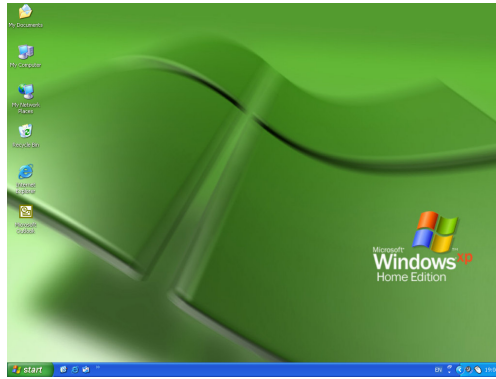


Fig. 5.1

This screen is called the Desktop because, as we shall find out, it can contain almost everything found on the top of an office desk – a typewriter, a telephone, fax machine and copier, calculator, diary, pens, pencils, crayons, notepads, files, paper clips, letters – everything except the cup of coffee.

Throughout the time of warming up you may have noticed a small white arrow or an hourglass shape on the screen. This arrow is the mouse pointer that changes to an hourglass shape when the computer is actively performing a task. Once the computer has established the desktop (Fig. 5.1) on the screen and the hourglass no longer shows try moving your mouse about on the mouse mat beside you. If everything has worked properly the arrow should move about following the direction of your mouse movements. You use the mouse to point the arrow at various areas on the screen.



The hourglass



The mouse pointer

The Desktop screen:



Fig. 5.2

It is perfectly normal to feel totally lost up an uncharted creek at this stage – don't worry, I have a number of paddles to get us into clearer waters.

Let us take a closer look at this screen of confusion. The labelled symbols, usually on the left hand side of the screen, are known as 'icons'. The two top icons in the left-hand column are entitled My Documents and My Computer. We will deal with these later. The grey or coloured bar running along the bottom of the screen (now called The Desktop) is called the Task Bar (Fig. 5.3) at the left-hand end of which is the Start button (Fig. 5.4).

You should also see a pointed arrow – if not move your mouse around on the mouse mat or table and it will follow your movements. By moving this pointer around with the mouse you can navigate your way around the Desktop.

The Task Bar:



Fig. 5.3

Reading from left to right we have the Start button; a group of 4 small icons; 2 rectangular labels; a further group of small icons and the time of day at the right-hand end.

The Start button is your first point of communication with the computer at this stage.



Fig. 5.4

Move the mouse pointer so that it lies over this button and press the left button once. This will bring up the Start Menu that may vary in appearance as in Fig. 5.5

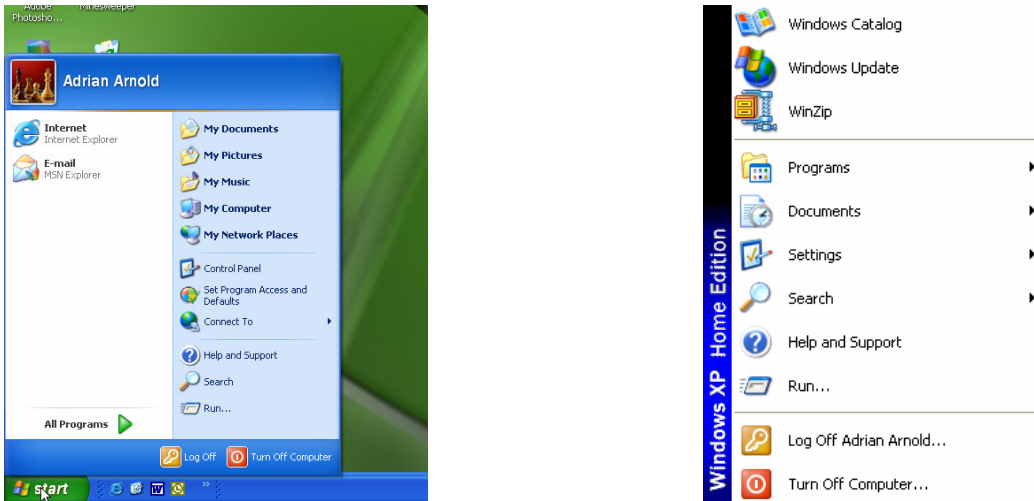


Fig. 5.5

We will return to the Start menu later in this chapter but let us continue to identify the other elements of the Task Bar. You can remove the Start menu by moving the pointer anywhere on the screen away from the menu and tapping the left button.

The Quick Launch Bar:



The next group of icons shown is the Quick Launch bar (Fig. 5.2)—immediately to the right of the Start button. These are shortcuts to frequently used programs such as word-processing, e-mail, the Internet and accounting files.

It is possible that this bar may be hidden from your screen due to the current screen set-up. Not to worry we can sort this out later in Chapter 10.

Minimised icons:



Fig. 5.6

These are the icons of programs you have opened, cleared down from the screen but running in the background waiting for you to return to them. In Fig. 5.6 the task bar shows that I have three programs open – my calendar, a BBC web page and the word processor file of this book. I can click on any one of them to restore them to the screen.

Since we have not opened any programs yet this area of your task bar **will be blank**.

Startup Bar:



This is at the very right hand end of the Task Bar. These are the icons of programs initiated by the computer when it started up such as the clock, the speakers, anti-virus programs and video controls among others. The number and position of the icons depends upon your own initial set-up.

Icon Identification:

Your first reaction upon viewing a computer screen is probably one of complete confusion – this is perfectly normal. These obscure icons are staring at you with supercilious smiles on their faces but you can identify them quite easily.

Place the pointer over one of the icons and press the left mouse button once. Once the colouring of the icon changes move the pointer until its tip is over another icon and leave it there. Within seconds a small box appears identifying the icon.

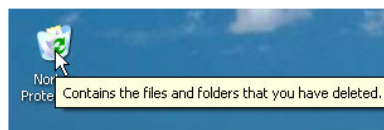


Fig. 5.7

Turning the computer off:

Is your brain beginning to swim yet? Is more information going out than coming in? When I am teaching a pupil for the first time this point usually arrives between one hour and an hour and a half. I notice a glaze beginning to spread across the eyes and I know it is time to stop. It is time to take a break and turn off the computer.

No! You don't switch it off at the wall, press the computer button or pull the power cable out – all methods that have been tried by beginners in the past. Such activities constitute computer abuse. Do it properly and you will avoid a lot of heartache later. So place the mouse arrow pointer over the Start button and click the left mouse button. It seems illogical to use the Start button to 'stop' the computer but then life can be like that. You will find yourself back at Fig. 5.4

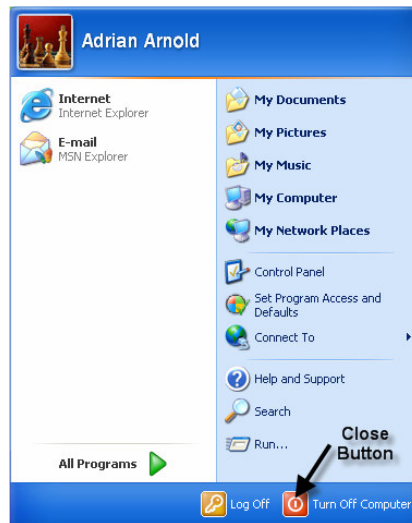


Fig. 5.4

The Start Menu

At the bottom of this list (or menu) is the option Shutdown or Turn Off. Move the arrow over the Shutdown block and left click again which brings up the Shutdown menu (Fig. 5.5) which will offer the Shutdown option. Click on the OK button and the computer will turn itself off.

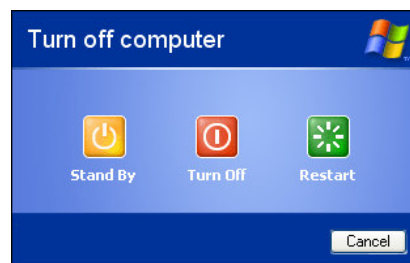


Fig. 5.5

When everything has died down, switch off the peripherals – the screen, printer etc. – and you have successfully negotiated the first basics of computer use.

Congratulations! But what if it went wrong? What if there had been a power cut while you were using the computer or you pressed the computer button for any one of several reasons? We are now going to create such a scenario to show you what happens and how to retrieve the situation.

First, turn the computer on, having switched on all the peripherals as before, but this time, when the screen has settled down, switch the computer off at the wall. This is not normally recommended but it will be safe in this training situation. The screen is blank, the computer has completely died and all is apparently lost. In fact what you have done leaves the computer like the little boy who didn't put his toys away at bedtime. When he wakes up in the morning he can't find his favourite car. The computer's toys or "programming" is all over the place and they have to be sorted out before it will work properly again. Fortunately computers are really quite forgiving in many respects and they can sort this mess out by themselves.

The reason why switching the computer off in this way is safe is that we have not started to use any programs yet. If you did this while composing a letter the chances are that you would have lost all or part of your work

Switch the computer on again at the wall; check that the printers etc. are turned on and restart the computer by pressing the power button. Windows XP takes this kind of abuse in its stride. The only difference being that it may take a little longer to start.

Write down this simple step-by-step guide –

1. Put the tip of the pointer over the Start button and press the left mouse button once.
2. Put the pointer over the "Turn Off", "Shutdown" or "OK" button and press the left button.
3. Wait until everything shuts down then turn off the screen using the power button on the front.


This brings us to the next chapter and the use of the keyboard where your patience will be rewarded by using a program at last and composing a letter.

Revision:

There may be more than one answer to a question.

Question 1 – What do you find at the left-hand end of the task bar?

1. The Start button
2. The Microsoft logo
3. The clock

Question 2 – What does the presence of the hourglass pointer () imply?

1. The computer is working on a task.
2. The computer has stalled.
3. You need to press the Enter key.

Question 3 – How would you move an icon on the desktop?

1. Left click on the icon then left click at the required position.
2. Right-click on the icon and use the resulting menu
3. Drag and drop with the left mouse button.

Question 4 – To turn the computer on you press the power button but what do you do to turn it off?

1. Press the power button again.
2. Use the Start button.
3. Turn off the screen.
4. Turn of the power at the wall socket.

Question 5 – Where do you find the clock on the Desktop?

1. There isn't one
2. Under the Start button
3. You have to find the Clock program
4. At the bottom right hand corner

Question 6 – Where do you find the Task bar on the Desktop?

1. At the bottom of the screen
2. At the top of the screen
3. It is an icon called Task
4. To one side of the screen

Question 7 – If you switch off the computer at the wall socket, what will happen?

1. You will blow the fuse on that circuit
2. You may lose a lot of your hard work
3. The computer will take longer to start next time
4. You will damage the printer irretrievably

Answers:

Question 1 – **1.**

Question 2 – **1.**

Question 3 – **3.**

Question 4 – **2.**

Question 5 – **4.**

Question 6 – **1.** (Although some cleverclogs might have answered 1 & 4 because it is possible to move the task bar to the left of the screen)

Question 7 – **2 & 3.**