COMPUTER BASICS FOR ADULTS

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW TO BUY AND SETUP A COMPUTER, WITHOUT THE HELP OF YOUR CHILDREN

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ComputerBasicsForAdults.com
Contents

Why Should Adults Learn Basic Computer Skills? 3
Learning the basic Components 4
  The Car Analogy 4
Choosing a Computer 5
  Screen Size 6
  CPU – Central Processor Unit 6
  Hard Drive – Hard Disk 7
  Memory – RAM – Random Access Memory 8
Operating Systems – Windows or APPLE COMPUTERS 9
Why a Laptop over a desktop 11
OTHER OPTIONAL FEATURES 11
Go out and buy a laptop 13
  Where to Buy a Laptop 13
  What about the extended warranties? 14
The Computer is Home, Now What? 15
  The Initial Boot 15
Pre-installed software 15
Connecting the computer to a Network 16
  Basic Networking 16
  Why a Router? 18
Wireless (WIFI) or Cabled Network 19
  CABLED 19
  WIRELESS 20
What to do First with Your Computer 22
  Accessing the Internet 22
    UPDATES AVAILABLE 22
    INTERNET BROWSERS 22
AN INVITATION TO JOIN A COMMUNITY 24
Permission To Use 25
About the Author 25
WHY SHOULD ADULTS LEARN BASIC COMPUTER SKILLS?

People can go through life without ever learning to drive a car, but this places great limits on the person’s mobility. When a person does learn to drive a car, they do not need to learn how to build and repair a car. They only need to learn the basics of how to operate the car and some basic rules to do so safely. Learning to use a computer is just as easy as learning to drive a car… except the ‘crashes’ that you may have with computers are much less expensive and life threatening!

Consider some of the common reasons people use computers…

- Communication with family and friends via email and social networks
- Composing letters, flyers, and other documents for business
- Finding directions and printing maps
- Accessing information mentioned on TV or on paper bills
- Paying bills and banking online - saving postage
- Using digital cameras and viewing/storing family photos
- Researching family heritage/lineage
- Reference materials: Dictionaries, Phone Books and Encyclopedias
- Joining groups with common interests
- Finding romance!

Given the increase in personal devices such as cell phones, iPads and tablets, Nooks and Kindles for reading, digital cameras, and new televisions… it is impossible to avoid computers. Yet many adults avoid learning more about computers due to a real fear of the unknown. This fear can lead to an unnecessary isolation.

This guide attempts to teach you by explaining the computer concepts through non-technical analogies… addressing the unknown with the known. Establishing the basic understanding of all computers is the first step in the learning process. Almost all cars have common basic components; a steering wheel, an accelerator pedal, a brake pedal, and a way to start it. The basic components of computers are as simple to understand as those of cars.
LEARNING THE BASIC COMPONENTS

The Car Analogy

The Engine – What makes the computer go is a set of components ‘under the hood’ that determine how it will perform. Like a car, there are several different gizmos attached to the engine that effect performance. In a computer, the main engine part is the processor - also called the CPU (Central Processing Unit). Just like in cars, there are different types that run faster or have more towing power.

Advanced: When you hear someone talk about the ‘cores’ related to CPUs, just think of it as ‘cylinders’ in an engine. A four-cylinder vs. an eight-cylinder engine has more power. But a beginner does not need to worry about this as we will discuss buying a computer later.

The Steering Wheel (and other controls) – The keyboard and mouse are the primary controls used to control the computer. Tablets and telephones have touch screens that display a keyboard and require a movement of the finger on the screen much like with moving the mouse.

Movement – The output that you get from your car engine is basically the ability to move you from one point to another. A car takes you someplace. The output of a computer engine is to bring you something. What you get out of a computer is presented visually through a screen or a printed sheet of paper. The audio output of a computer is similar to the car radio in that depends on the quality of the speakers and equipment. The computer also has a trunk full of things that you can do when you are not on the road (see the following). You have your photos, games, word processor, and video player.

The Road – The car cannot go anywhere without a road and some roads are better than others, allowing you to go faster. A computer network allows your computer to travel to other locations to bring back information. The Internet is the interstate highway system for computers. Depending on where you are going, you may need to take smaller roads to get to the faster Internet roadways. Sometimes those roadways are also being used by a lot of other people and all the traffic starts to slow down. In the worst cases such as an accident (hardware failure),
traffic can stop. Some people forget that slow performance, while browsing the Internet, can be a result of traffic congestion and not necessarily their own computer.

**CHOOSING A COMPUTER**

Selecting a computer should not be a complicated and stressful task. When you buy a vehicle, you start out by determining how you will use it in order to determine what type of car or truck makes sense. Because this will likely be your first computer, we will assume that you simply need a ‘getting-around-town’ car. You want one that is reliable and gets good gas mileage. But you won’t be hauling construction materials or trying to win races.

The good news is that you do not have to deal with a car dealer and you generally get what you paid for. Buying a ‘used computer’ is not recommended for the first time computer buyer. You can get a new basic laptop computer with warrantee and support for $300-$400. If you do end up with a used computer, find a nerd to restore it to factory defaults. A new computer that might be last year’s model will still have five or more years or more of good use.

We will explain the difference between a desktop and laptop computer, but we will assume a laptop will be purchased. Tablets and smart phones are selling more in quantity than laptop computers and some debate the need for laptops. But consider that the smaller screen size and the lack of a physical keyboard make smart phones and tablets more difficult to use for those with challenged eyesight. It is generally accepted that generating or creating information is done at a computer with a full sized screen and keyboard.

Before we can talk about buying a computer, you should understand the four main components that determine the value/usability of the computer. Then we can talk about the different operating systems of computers and cell phones.

- The four main components of all computers
- Screen (Size)
- CPU – Central Processor Unit
- Disk – Hard Drive Size
- Memory (RAM)
Other items such as printers and speakers are *options* that usually can be added later. So we will focus on these four main items that will most directly affect the cost. Some will say that the screen is also an optional component, but since we will most likely be talking about laptop computers, we are including screens as a main component.

### Screen Size

The most important consideration is the size of the screen that you need. Our aging eyes will be what is used most to interface with the computer, so you should not scrimp on the screen size. If you are going to carry the laptop around often, you may want to consider buying a laptop with a smaller screen to keep the weight and size down. You can attach an additional desktop monitor (screen) to a laptop when you are at your desk. These larger monitors can usually be bought for $100 to $200 and are well worth the money, especially if your eyesight is poor. You will never be unhappy that you bought *too big* of a screen. Size matters!

### CPU – Central Processor Unit

The CPU is the brain. It does the thinking. It directs the information to the screen or out to the speakers and takes your feedback from the keyboard and mouse. There are many different types and models of these brains. Some run faster than others. Some have multiple brains so they can do more work. Most computers will have a special video handling brain that only works on sending information to you screen. The good news is that you really do not need to worry about this. If you are buying a new computer, it has likely been built in the past year and has modern hardware. You will normally get what you pay for, but asking the question when comparing two computers will keep a sales person honest. Knowing a little about cars, I can still assume that a Mazda 6 runs faster than a Mazda 5. But I am not sure how they compare to a Toyota Camry without doing a little research.

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**Advanced:** As of 2013, only older computers will have a 32-bit CPU. All new systems should have a 64-bit CPU. This should only come into question if you are buying a used computer. The 64-bit CPU computers still run all 32-bit applications, but not the other way around. Ask the salesperson to show you the *System Properties* screen.
Hard Drive – Hard Disk

Think of a hard drive as a box where you store all your email, photos, documents, and any information you generally keep. The hard drive is normally one or more spinning metal disks that store information magnetically so that when the power is turned off, the data does is not forgotten. Any new laptop you purchase will have a large enough hard drive to support the beginner user. Even with a lot of photos, music, and personal documents you will likely have more space than you will ever use. We will discuss how information is stored and how you access it later. But for now you should just understand that bigger is better, but it should not be a deciding factor when making your first purchase.
Advanced: Smartphones and Tablet computers do not normally have a classic hard drive for storing the information while the computer is off. They will use more expensive computer chips called NVRAM (non-volatile random access memory). We discuss regular memory chips in the next section, but just remember that standard memory chips forgets what is stored in them when the power is turned off. You may find a laptop that is using what is known as an SSD (Solid State Drive). Instead of a physical spinning disk drive, the SSD uses a form of NVRAM chips that pretends to be a hard drive. There is less chance of damage due to shaking or shocking the computer without the moving parts and the performance is usually much faster.

You will hear the sizes of things for computers discussed in MegaBytes, GigaBytes, and Terabytes. This is the equivalent of one million, one thousand million, and one million million. Does anyone want to guess what a KiloByte is? (1000 Bytes). These sound like very large numbers, but for now you just need to remember which one is larger than the other. Most of the non-photo files you deal with are a couple of hundred KiloBytes in size. And your average email is no more than 16 Kilobytes (16K). And the 15 MegaPixel cameras normally compress a photo to a third of that size (5M). Understanding photo and video compression is a whole different subject.

**Memory – RAM – Random Access Memory**

In a computer, the brain does not retain the information. It has a separate area where it stores information that it is actively using. Data that cannot fit into memory is stored to the hard drive. This is important to understand because storing and getting information to the hard drive is often the slowest part of your computer. For example, if you can’t remember a phone number… you have to go look it up. It takes more time to go to your address book and look it up.

You can also think of a computer’s memory as a table or desktop. Your CPU brain can sit at the small TV-table sized table and stack photos that it is displaying for you. If you ask it to go to the Internet to read the news or your email, it may have to make room for that information by moving the photos off the table to ‘the box’ (hard disk) which takes extra time. The CPU will
get more information from the box that lets him access the news and the email from the Internet. But guess what, everything you access on the Internet gets put on that table. When the table fills, it is back and forth to the box. This slows things down.

If you want to avoid being slowed down by having to get up and go to the box as often, you need to get yourself a larger table. If you have a large card table or full sized desk, you have a lot of space to set stuff but still get to it quickly. This is why adding memory to a computer can speed it up.

Some computers may still come with a smaller table size (memory) of 2 GigaBytes. You should look for a table size (memory) of at least 4 GigaBytes. Because some laptops do not allow you to upgrade or add to this memory later, it is important to pay attention to this during the initial purchase. Costs have come down so much that you will be seeing 8GB as a standard.

Information in standard computer memory chips will be lost (forgotten) when the power goes out. This is why people were always reminded to ‘save your work often’. Now most programs will automatically save what you are working every 10 to 15 minutes.

There is new memory component that will retain information after power is turned off, but this is a special ‘non-volatile’ memory and is slower and more expensive. You will find this type of memory in mobile phones, tablet computers, USB sticks and devices where a spinning hard disk would not make sense. (Refer to the advanced note about NVRAM and SSD in the previous hard drive section.)

**OPERATING SYSTEMS – WINDOWS OR APPLE COMPUTERS**

All computers, including mobile phones and tablet computers, have the same basic components. But some of the CPUs run a different ‘operating system’ than others. The operating system is nothing more than a base program that all the other programs rely on to run. Think of the operating system as a language. A Windows computer speaks English while an Apple computer speaks French (OS X/10, previously known as MAC OS). To be fair, both operating systems were developed in the good old U.S. of America.
Programs written for one language cannot be understood by the other language unless it is translated, which is known as porting. Your mobile phone also runs its own language. If it is a smartphone, it is likely running IOS (from Apple) or Android (owned by Google) or Windows Phone (from Microsoft). Note that Apple’s OS X/10 operating system runs on their laptop computers and Apples IOS runs on their iPhones and iPads (tablets). Microsoft has confused the issue by adding a tablet-type interface to Windows 8. But they ran into confusion with customers when they released a tablet computer called “the Surface” that ran Windows RT on a special CPU. It looked like Windows 8, but was really a different version of the operating system that would not run normal Windows applications. The Windows Surface Pro (now Pro 2) runs the real Windows 8 operating system. The latest news is that Microsoft will discontinue the RT version. Aren’t you glad you read all this detail? Probably not.

The decision on what type of computer to buy is pretty straightforward for the beginner. English is the most commonly used language, even though it may not necessarily be the best language available, English - in this case is the Windows operating system by Microsoft - is the least expensive and most widely used. The French speaking computers, made by the American company - Apple, are normally of higher quality and much sexier. But they also cost a great deal more than the computers that run Windows. More programs speak ‘Windows’ than any other language, so you will have access to more programs at lower cost. The days of the Apple computers being easier to use than Windows computers have gone away since the release of Windows 7 and later.

Unless you specifically have an application/program that only runs on an Apple computer, stick with the more economical Microsoft Windows system. You will likely find many passionate people that swear by the Apple computers, but we are focused on adult beginners and not college computer nerds. If you work for a company that uses Apple computers and they have the people to support you, by all means get the best Apple laptop you can afford.
WHY A LAPTOP OVER A DESKTOP

A ‘desktop’ computer has a separate box holding the computer, a separate monitor/screen, and a separate keyboard and mouse. A ‘laptop’ computer has all of the components in a single unit that you can sit on your lap. Ok, that should be obvious, but I had to say it. There may be a few disadvantages to laptops over desktop computers, but the simplicity and portability of a laptop will be much more appealing for 99.5% of the beginner adult computer users. Many people feel that the Desktop Computer will be ‘dead’ in a few years except for special uses such as gaming or other highly graphic and computational tools. The cost of laptops has dropped to where you cannot save much, if anything, by buying a desktop computer and the individual components.

You can attach external keyboards, screens/monitors, speakers and mouse/pointer devices to a laptop when you have it at a desk. Most people buy a wireless mouse to overcome the hassles of using the touchpad that is built into most laptops. Spend a little time at a computer store and look at the different types of keyboards the laptops have. Most laptops have flat keys, some have raised keys, and some have larger keyboards with separate keys for numbers (known as a ‘10-key’ configuration.) On the lower end laptops, your selection may be limited, but it is a good idea to get a laptop that ‘feels good’ so that you can type comfortably. If you are going to do a lot of daily work on the laptop, it is common to have a full-sized keyboard and mouse at your desk where you use it the most. These can be bought at any time and range greatly in price and features.

OTHER OPTIONAL FEATURES

CD/DVD Drives – Most laptops will have an internal CD/DVD in the side so that you can load new software, watch DVD movies, and play music CDs. Most will have a burn or write capability for writing to blank media. It is likely that a beginning computer user will have little use for the CD/DVD Drive other than copying their music CDs to the computer and playing a DVD movie. So do not be afraid to give up the internal CD/DVD drive if smaller and more portable computer is important. You can buy an external CD/DVD drive that attaches to the
USB port for the occasional times you need one. But most software that you will want can be downloaded directly from the Internet instead of going to the store and buying a box with a CD.

All the other optional ports -

- **USB** – all laptops will have them. The more the better.

- **VGA** – the port for connecting an external monitor or projector. Some newer laptops have newer smaller video ports to save space. If so, you will need a small adaptor cable to hook most standard VGA monitors.

- **HDMI** – this port can hook directly to most flat screen hi-definition televisions. This can be helpful if you want to watch movies from your laptop on your TV or present a slideshow of your photos. The sound is also sent through this port, unlike a VGA connector. There is a small version of the HDMI port that may require an adaptor. This is not an essential option for a beginner computer user unless you have a serious vision problem and want a really large display.

- **Firewire and other specialty ports** – The Apple computers are most often the ones with these newer specialty ports. Most people will generally never require them.

- **Memory card slots** – Most people will use a *memory stick* that plugs into the USB port on the computer. They are sometimes called; *Thumb drives, Flash drives,* or
a manufacturer specific name such as SanDisk. Digital cameras and other smaller devices may utilize memory cards that are thin and small. Some laptops have memory card slots that will directly accept these cards. However most people do not require them as the digital camera or device will come with a USB cable to connect them to the computer.

- Webcams – It is almost impossible to get a laptop without a little camera built in above the screen. Don’t worry about it. You will likely use this for video calls with your family. (Skype is the most commonly used service.)
- Docking ports – Some advanced business models of laptops may still have this feature, but most people find plugging in a power, video and USB cable easy enough when returning to their desk.

**GO OUT AND BUY A LAPTOP**

You know everything you need to know in order to buy a computer for the average person. We will talk about selecting and setting up printers after we get you laptop home and connected to a network. But let us not get ahead of ourselves.

**Where to Buy a Laptop**

For the first time computer user, it is recommended that you find a local computer store having a sale on laptops. Most of the office stores will have only 3-5 different types on hand, but there are a few stores that allow you to browse a dozen or more types of laptops. Otherwise, make sure you check a couple different stores so you see a good enough variety of models and sizes. We will assume that you do not have the ability and knowledge to check out multiple store adds online for the best price since this is your first computer. But ask a computer savvy friend to help if you can. Remember that you will generally get what you pay for now that entry level laptops are a commodity product. Preferred brand names and better customer support service are something that changes over time. Here again, you can check out Consumer Report magazine at a library or reviews online reviews with your computer savvy friend.
The reason that we do not recommend the online ‘mail order’ process for beginners is that you will likely benefit more from having the local assistance a real store provides. You really should be able to touch, see, and hold the computer you are going to invest your money and time in. It is also much easier to get help if you have faulty equipment out of the box, which does happen all too often. With assistance, after you find a laptop that that you like in a store, you can go online and search for pricing on the same model. Many stores will price match for the next week should you find it cheaper. When looking online, remember the additional shipping charges and that some advertised units may be ‘refurbished’ (previously returned) laptops.

**What about the extended warranties?**

There is much to be debated concerning the need for extended warranties. Stores make a lot of money selling extended warranties for many electronic devices. If you plan on setting your laptop on a desktop and occasionally moving it to the kitchen table, you probably do not need an extended warrantee. If you are going to be throwing it in a computer bag and traveling around with it, you might want to get an extended warrantee that covers broken screens. The truth is that most electronics that last a year will run three or more years just fine as long as you do not overheat them or drop them. You will have to use your best judgment, but do not feel pressured by the sales person but they are required to ask. The less expensive laptop you are buying, the less likely you should invest in the additional warrantee.

No matter what you decide, repairs for laptops will most likely require shipping them through the mail for repair and going without them for several weeks. So don’t drop it! And most importantly, back up your computer files… which will be explained later.
THE COMPUTER IS HOME, NOW WHAT?

The Initial Boot

Here is your first technical term, “boot.” When you turn your computer on, you say it “boots up.” Boot is short for bootstrap, which in olden days there was a strap attached to the top of your boot that you could pull to help get your boot on. Hence, the expression was to "pull oneself up by the bootstraps." Similarly, bootstrap utilities help the computer get started by loading the operating system. Don’t you already feel smarter?

The first time you start your computer, it will do some steps that you will only see on the first boot. The operating system will ask you a few questions and ask you to provide a user name and password. This can vary depending on how the computer was setup by the computer manufacturer. There may be a request for a license key for the operating system, found somewhere in the paperwork for the system. You will also be asked to register and setup networking, but you can ignore this and do that later if you want.

If the store is not too busy and you have a good salesman, ask them to let you power it up and go through the initial setup in the store. You can make sure everything is working well and that there are no manufacturing flaws (bad areas) in the screen. On a black screen, look for lit pixels (dots). On a white screen, look for black pixels. It is rare that there are problems, but depending on how far you have to travel, it may be worth a quick review. Remember that the sales guys are not paid consultants, so do not abuse them.

PRE-INSTALLED SOFTWARE

All computers come installed with ‘free’ or ‘trial’ software. We will discuss later how you can save money and get truly free software. But understand that most of the software that you will find installed on the computer initially will require that you eventually pay somebody something. You may get 6 months of anti-virus protection free. The Microsoft Office applications may work for 30 days before asking for a license key you need to purchase online.
There may be icons on the desktop for Netflix and other programs or services that have paid to be included on your computer. But the general rule that you should remember is, “If it is free, it is likely too good to be true.” We will discuss the exceptions to free software later, but that is why you are taking the time to read this guide.

The good news is that you can uninstall the software, if need be. Most of the time, you can just leave it on the computer and not use it. Most programs take little space on your hard drive and do not slow down the computer unless they are running. All of this can be easily explained later.

**CONNECTING THE COMPUTER TO A NETWORK**

You do not need to understand how networking works in order to use it. Just like a telephone, if you plug it into the right hole/jack, it will simply work. If you have ordered an Internet service and have a box and a network cable to go from the box to your computer, simply plug it in and it will start to work. In order to understand how to use the wireless network with your laptop, we need to understand the basic components of a network.

**Basic Networking**

Do not let the complexity of computer networking and the Internet intimidate you. It is very much like your normal telephone line coming into your house. But this computer keeps the telephone ‘off-the-hook’ (on) anytime the computer is running. This leads people to be concerned that someone can access their computer from outside of their house and do all sorts of bad things. The truth is that most of the risks come from you, the user, accessing something bad on the Internet and bringing it into your house. But we will teach you how to avoid these risks and put them into perspective.

The term ‘the Cloud’ is currently all the rage. This is a cute term that describes how most people think about using ‘the Internet.’ Like saying a prayer, it magically floats up to God in ‘the Cloud’ yet we do not know where he is. Likewise, when you send an email or post your photos to Facebook over the Internet you really have no idea where they are! Your computer is a
member of ‘the cloud’. There are simply larger computers that are always sitting out there waiting for someone to contact them. Just like every cell phone has a phone number that you need to dial, every computer on a network has a number that is used to make the connection. We simply use the name of the computer and the correct number is found in a directory for you.

To get on the Internet, you need to pay an ‘Internet Provider’ to provide you your own Internet number. For a telephone, you have a number looking like, “612-555-1234”. For the Internet, you will be provided a number that looks like 207.46.232.183. This is known as an I.P. address.” The good news is that you do not need to remember or even know your own I.P. address. Just understand that the first electronic device that is connected to the line coming into your house will get this number. This device is most often called “the router”. Your computer does not directly connect to the Internet. This is done for security and to allow you to use multiple laptops and devices that will talk to the router and in turn the router routes the information to the Internet.

You have four possible options for Internet providers, depending on your location.

1. Cable TV Company
2. Telephone (land line) Company
3. Cell/Mobile Phone Company - wireless
4. Satellite Provider – long distance wireless

The Internet service you get over cell phone towers and especially satellite service will be slower and much more costly than the cable or telephone companies. The information travels faster and more cost effectively across physical cables/wires into your house than a wireless signals. For the beginning computer user, you do not need more than a basic broadband connection. So don’t spend money on more than 10MB or 15MB high speed Internet services until you know you will need it. They are always more than happy to sell you more speed.

The Internet service provider will provide you a device that will connect to the incoming phone or cable line. Mobile phone companies provide a little box that wirelessly contacts a nearby cell tower and a satellite provider will connect the device to a dish on your roof. It is important that you ask the provider if they will be providing you a “Wireless Router”. Some providers can still offer a simple router or ‘Modem’ that will connect a single computer to the Internet, but will not provide a wireless “WIFI” connection. If you have one of the older
devices, you can attach it to your own “Wireless Router” that is sold separately. But this adds complexity and a simple call to your provider to threaten to cancel the service will normally result in them shipping you a new unit.

**Why a Router?**

A router is a device that attaches to the Internet and creates a totally independent network for your home. The best part is that it has a built-in security feature known as a “FireWall”. This prevents most attempts to access any of your home computers by anyone on the Internet. There are also many additional features that can be used to limit access to the Internet if you have children that should be doing their homework instead of ‘surfing the web’. These routers will create a private network with local I.P. addresses starting with “192.168.x.x”. The router acts as a “Gateway” to route traffic to the Internet. As you spend more time on a computer, you will hear many of these terms and unfortunately may need to know how to reset (turn off and on) the router/gateway in order to get the network to start working again. It happens to the best nerds.

Although they come in many shapes and sizes, you will likely have four Ethernet ports for directly attaching a computer. Be careful not to confuse the port that is meant to be connected to the cable coming into the house. Sometimes it is the same port type as in the picture above. Your provider should set this up for the first time.
WIRELESS (WIFI) OR CABLED NETWORK

CABLED

Start with a wired connection if you know nothing about wireless networking. This will require an Ethernet cable that should have come with the router, but can be purchased cheaply. Even if you plan on using a wireless connection, it is good to have one network cable around for when you run into problems with your wireless WIFI.

Your new laptop has a cable port for a network cable. The technical cable type is CAT5 or CAT6 Ethernet cable, but all you need to know is that if it fits you have it in the right port. They look like larger phone cables and you really cannot put them in the wrong port on your computer. A green and/or yellow light normally lights near the port when both ends of the cable are connected.

The lower right ‘system tray’ on the computer screen will show some form of network status icon. Sliding the cursor over the icons will usually provide you some text as to what they mean. It will take a few seconds for the computer to ask for and get an I.P. address from the router, providing the local connection. Then it will check with the router/gateway to make sure it can get out to the Internet. If you see ‘local only,’ it usually means that your router is not connected to the Internet. But it could be an issue with your laptop, so a reboot may fix it.

You may see some notifications that wireless networks are being detected. If you want to stay connected through the cable, you can skip the wireless section until later and jump to the section discussing your first steps to using your new system.
Using a wireless connection, known as a “WI-FI” connection, will allow you to take your laptop all over the house and even into your front yard and still access the Internet. But the range of your wireless network is limited. This wireless connection can send a lot more information faster than when sending data over a cell phone tower. (Assuming your router is not connected to the Internet through a cell phone provider as mentioned previously.) This is why most smart phones have a WIFI capability to route their information over the cheaper and faster broadband land-line connections.

Your “Wireless Router” should have at least one antenna, although some have internal antennas. The standard symbol for WIFI looks like an antenna with broadcasting waves. Most Internet providers will provide a router with a default configuration including a password for connecting. For this discussion, we will assume that the password is already setup and known or written on the bottom of the router. It is not very critical that you reconfigure your wireless router if it is ‘unsecured’ without a password. The risk comes from people within range of the wireless network, which is limited and therefore limits the risk.

Caution: When connecting to a public WIFI at a McDonalds or Panera that do not offer a secured connection, there is less encryption involved and others sharing that network could scan for information. Most websites use secure connections when sharing important information, so the risk is minimized. It is still recommended that you do your online banking from home.

Your laptop will have a built-in wireless WIFI antenna. There is a chance that the WIFI antenna may be turned off, which is required when you fly on airplanes. If you are getting prompts for wireless networks in the lower right part of the screen when you move your mouse over one of the symbols/icons, WIFI is on. If not, you must look for an antenna symbol similar
to the symbols discussed above. It should appear on one of the top rows of keys and can be pressed to toggle the wireless antenna on or off. You may need to hold down a function key, often “Fn” on the key, before you press the key with the wireless symbol. The laptop may have a separate small light somewhere that will turn on and off, but others simply show the symbol on the screen for a moment. The Windows 8 operating system has several ways for enabling the WIFI antenna, but this can depend on the laptop hardware. There is likely a small instruction pamphlet included with your laptop packaging that shows these controls.

Once the indicator is lit, the network indicator on the lower right corner of the screen should change. The first time you turn the wireless network on, you will need to select your own home WIFI network. The neighbors probably already have their own wireless router setup, so don’t be surprised if you see more than one in the list. Simply click on the network icon in the system tray and you should be presented with a list of detected WIFI networks. Select the network that has the strongest signal, normally signified by having the most bars. This will likely be the closest and therefor your own WIFI router. A sticker on your router should have both the SSID (name) for your wireless router and also a password. You can later rename the SSID (name) for your WIFI network and change the password to something simple to remember, but we will stick with the defaults for now.

If security has been setup, you will be prompted for a password. Enter the password for your network that you found on your wireless router sticker. If all works well, you should connect. Most of the recent operating systems will also pop up a window that asks about enabling network sharing. One version asks if this is a ‘Home’ network or a ‘Public’ network. If you are connecting to your home router, turn on sharing. If you are connecting to WIFI at a hotel, restaurant, or anywhere except your close friend’s place… do not enable the network sharing options. Do not worry too much if you click on the wrong one. By the time it matters, you will have learned enough to find out what to do to correct it.

Make sure that you do not have the physical network cable attached to your laptop and are connected to WIFI. Unplug the Ethernet cable or turn off the WIFI to prevent possible confusion. Your Internet provider should be able to walk you through these steps and get you to the Internet with the Internet Browser. They can also remotely access your router if you think you are having problems.
WHAT TO DO FIRST WITH YOUR COMPUTER

Hopefully things worked like they should and you are ready for your first trip on the Internet. If you are already a basic user of the Internet, you may still learn something by reading through this. Most importantly, the last chapter points you to additional free information.

Accessing the Internet

UPDATES AVAILABLE

Before you do anything, your computer may already have gone out to the Internet on its own. This is a good and critical step for new computers. The operating system, assumed going forward to be Windows 7 or Windows 8, needs to go out and download updates. These are simply small programming fixes that are released almost weekly. Some address security and stability issues that are very important. There were likely many updates since the time your new laptop was originally built and put in the box. So when you are prompted to download and install updates, say ‘yes’. When you come across the configuration options, make sure they are set to download and install automatically. Then leave the computer running through the night at least once a week to make sure you get these updates. A reboot is often required to complete these updates.

INTERNET BROWSERS

The first thing you need to learn is how to access the Internet using a program called an “Internet Browser”. The default browser loaded on all Windows operating systems is the Microsoft Internet Explorer (IE). There are several other browsers that you can download and install such as Firefox or Chrome. It is not a bad idea to have a second browser loaded even if you use the default IE, but that can be done later.

Simply think of the Internet browser as the program you use to talk to other computers. You have other programs on your computer that can run without a network connection, but the Internet Browser is for the most part useless without it. The remainder of this guide is intended
to teach you how to get to the Internet where you can find the resources and additional information to make the most of your time and money.

**STARTING INTERNET EXPLORER**

You should normally find the symbol/icon for Internet Explorer on the desktop. Other browsers will have a similar look and feel as well as functionality. But we are going to work with the Microsoft Internet Explorer (IE) browser. Double click the icon on the desktop or go through the Start Menu. Window 8 has a new Start Menu, so you may need to select ‘desktop’ to get to the environment familiar to XP, Vista, and Windows 7 users.

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Advanced: We will direct you to more information on working with Windows 8 on a laptop because most people will want to use the desktop applications on a laptop. The new Windows 8 start menu and special tablet applications are meant for use with a touch screen and are often more limited. We will instruct you as to how to install a free application called *Classic Shell*. Even with the latest 8.1 update adding back a start menu button to the desktop, I strongly recommend configuring this great tool. You can make the desktop start menu work like XP, Vista, or Windows 7. Fear not, this is part of the next steps found online.
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When you open your browser for the first time, it will likely automatically go to one or more websites automatically. This is known as the ‘home page’ setting in the browser. You can reset this later, but there are usually default pages configured. The browsers themselves can be highly customized by turning on/off ‘toolbars’ and features. There are also toolbars that are actually programs that are provided by other companies. Your new computer may have already installed one or more of these so you cannot expect every browser to look the same, even if they are both IE.

When you are done looking at the default screens that came up, locate the “Address Bar” at the top of the program window. They no longer title the input box, but you should see some text
starting with “http://” or “https://” already in the box. This is where you will type the name (address) that you want to visit. Understanding how these addresses are used is important to avoid confusion and to keep you from getting into trouble. We have used the analogy of every computer having a phone number. That number is known as an I.P. address. Remembering numbers is nearly impossible, so a system is in place to maintain a master directory where the numbers are associated with a ‘host’-name.

The good news is that the lookup of the number is automatic, and most browsers will help you find the hostname if you type something close. For example, if you want to go to read the news on CNN’s website, all you need to do is type ‘cnn’ in the address box and hit return. Because you did not have a recognized URL address, it automatically used your default search engine to offer you options. The first link on your screen should be one for CNN.com. If you click on it, it will take you to http://www.cnn.com. Now play. Type anything. But don’t download or install any applications. When in doubt, close the browser by clicking on the ‘X’ in the upper right corner and start over at your home screen. There are still important things you should do to protect yourself and avoid problems. But take little steps so as to not get overwhelmed.

If you are completely new to computers or simply get confused by the new Windows 8 interface, go to the Microsoft website and watch some videos. http://windows.microsoft.com/en-us/windows-8/meet

**AN INVITATION TO JOIN A COMMUNITY**

There are a lot of good people that have made a lot of good information available on the Internet. Even with the search capabilities of the Internet, the amount of information available can be easily overwhelming and often outdated. For years I have been helping other adults purchase and configure computers, only to see them go under-used due to a fear of having to ask too many questions. So I have created a free website for adults whom only have a minimal knowledge of computers so they have a safe environment to start out in. May I suggest that you carefully type the URL address of the site shown below in your Internet browser and bookmark it for regular reference?
We will address important next steps for your new computer…

- How do I setup virus protection on the computer?
- How do I setup and access an email account?
- What can I do instead of spending over $150 on Microsoft Office?
- How can I do all these things without spending a lot of money?
- How do I setup a Facebook account so I can see my family’s pictures?
- How can I use Skype to do free phone calls and video chats?
- What are the free programs available to have online meetings and share my computer screen for support?
- How do I make sure my important data is backed up?
- What type of printer should I buy and how do I set it up?
- What do I need to know in order to be safe on the Internet?

As the community of people grows, you will find that people can help each other solve problems. More importantly, the next steps that you need to take with your new computer can be found here.

ComputerBasicsForAdults.com

Note: Capitalization does not matter. Spaces are never used.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Find out more about the author by going to PaulKruschwitz.net.