

First things first.

DON'T PANIC.

Everyone panics when they are plopped in front of a computer. You're scared of looking stupid; you're scared of breaking it; you're scared of being patronised and then being 'taught' how to use it in a garble of words that you can't make sense of; you're scared of being 'hacked' and everything being stolen and you're scared of it spontaneously blowing up.

You are not going to break the computer.

Take a deep breath. I want you to take a deep breath every time that ideas and words start to get all mish-mashed up in your head.

One deep breath.

Go and make a cup of tea if you want.

It'll still be here when you get back. A clear head is better for getting used to computers than a foggy one.

No-one likes being confused and feeling stupid but bear with me – struggle becomes part of your understanding once you see how all the pieces fit together and you can then see how they didn't before.

So stop worrying, don't panic, take that deep breath and make that brew.

Computers are wonderful things and, when you can get your head around them, you will see why they have made such a tremendous impact on society and culture. They make so many more things possible and will save you time when you can avoid the pitfalls that come with technological confusion.

Because we want you to understand the joy of computers, Bluezome is publishing a Guide to Computer Use. This guide is for everyone; from those who haven't touched a computer in their lives, to those with a bit more experience and want to learn more about exactly what it is they are doing and can do.

During the course of this multi-part guide, we'll cover things like:

- The parts of a computer and how they work.
- How to buy the right computer for you.
- How to set up your computer.
- The kind of programs you absolutely need for your computer and the kind of programs you might want to get because they will be useful.
- Understanding how and where files are stored on the computer and the ways of navigating around them.
- Keeping yourself and your personal information safe on your computer and when out and about on the internet.
- How to use your computer to keep in touch with friends and family – where-ever in the world they might be!
- How to tell which things to download safely without being scammed or getting a virus.

And most importantly: What to do when it all goes wrong!

To get orientated properly, you first need to understand what all the different bits are, when you use them and a little bit about how they work. The different parts we shall cover are the keyboard, the screen, the mouse and the printer. We'll also talk about what a 'desktop PC' is, what a 'laptop' is and the difference between using the two. Don't feel you have to read all of it – it's fine to just visit the sections you want to learn about the most!

The desktop PC and the laptop

During this guide, I will use the word 'computers' as a catch-all term for a desktop PC or laptop. Both are computing machines but they are designed a bit differently to cater for different needs.

Desktop PC

First, PC stands for 'personal computer'. This differentiates it from the very advanced computers that do complicated things like help to fly aeroplanes. If we're going to be very literal, a PC can refer to a desktop computer or a laptop but, in common usage, a PC is likely to mean a non-portable desktop computer.

So, a desktop PC is the type of computer you put on your desk at work or home and then is not moved about. It's big, heavy and the main computing unit is a largish and (usually) grey or black box that the screen, mouse, keyboard, speakers and printer all connect to with cables. The cables are very, very important. These are how the pieces of your computer get electricity and 'talk' to each other (in other words; transmit information about what you are doing on the computer).

The other pieces of the computer (often known as 'peripherals') like the screen, keyboard and mouse also need to be connected with the correct cables. Sometimes, they have power cables too. Some models will draw their electricity through the main box. These cables may all be different colours and lengths and the connective ends may be different. Do not ever force cable ends into sockets – if it doesn't fit fairly simply, it probably isn't meant to go in. Be gentle!

Laptop

A laptop is a compact computer that can be carried around. It is made of two hinged parts that fold together to make a flat and thinnish rectangular box. One part is the screen and the other is the keyboard. It has speakers and a mouse-like track-pad built in – often, there is a DVD reader too. Laptops are useful machines precisely because of their portability. You might have encountered them at work if you or your colleagues need to travel a lot. Other people like to use them for leisure because you can use them in bed, on the sofa or take them round to cafes and other people's houses. This flexibility makes them really nice to use.

Keyboard

The keyboard is one of the two main ways you can tell your computer to do things. You'll use it predominately for typing things in; whether it's an address to visit a website, an email to your daughter or putting data into an invoice for work. Much like a typewriter, pressing keys tells the machine to write letters. However, in this case, instead of striking a mechanical lever, the keys have

rubber pads underneath that hit electronic pressure sensors to tell the computer what to do.

The main keys are the QWERTY layout in the body of the keyboard. They are exactly the same as a typewriter with one exception – you need to treat them gently! Unlike a typewriter, you aren't driving any mechanisms so don't bash it. This will wear the keyboard out quicker than it would normally. Some keyboards have 'clicky' keys, some feel a bit rubbery and some are back-lit to be seen more easily. You'll discover what you prefer soon enough.

The other two really vital keys are the **Enter** key (sometimes called Return) and the **Space Bar**. The Enter key works in two main ways. Its main function is to carry out a written command. For example, if you want to visit a website, you can type the address in and then hit Enter to tell the computer, "Now go to that address". If writing in a document, it will move your cursor to a new line. You can find the Enter/Return key on the right of your keyboard. It often doesn't have its name written on it and instead has a small arrow pointing to the left.

The space bar is the long, horizontal bar in the middle on the bottom row. This is for creating spaces between words or letters. Pretty simple stuff!

Further straight-forward keys are the arrow keys towards the right of your keyboard. These let you scroll up and down documents or websites.

You'll notice around the main body of the alphabet keys that there are a myriad of others too. Most are for punctuation, numbers and you'll have noted the Function keys (Those at the top running from F1 to F12). You don't need to worry about the Function keys too much, just remember that F1 can often be used to open the 'Help' menu in programs. There are also keys for moving around more quickly when using the internet or writing text:

Pg Up, Pg Dn (short for Page Up and Page Down), Home and End;

- **Page Up and Page Down** allow you to 'jump' up and down the text or website you are reading – a 'page' is considered roughly the area you can see. **Home** and **End** allow you to 'jump' to the beginning or end of a line of text. Really simple computer use doesn't demand you learn these keys but the more typing you do, the more you'll see how useful they are!

The Shift, Caps Lock (Capitals Lock), Delete, Backspace, Insert, Tab, Ctrl (Control), Alt and Fn (Function) keys;

- The **Shift** key produces capital letters when you hold it down whilst pressing alphabet keys and **Caps Lock** allows you produce capital letters without having to hold down Shift constantly (you turn this function on and off by pressing it once to turn it on and then again after you finish needing to use it).
- **Delete** does exactly what it sounds like with each press removing one character to the right of your cursor. **Backspace** moves your typing cursor (the blinking vertical bar that shows you where you are typing) one space to the left. Both will remove any character present in their respective areas and, if there is no character, it just removes the space.
- The **Insert** key (sometimes marked as INS) changes how your typing is entered. If it is pressed once to be turned on, your original writing will be replaced by the new things you are typing (also known as overwriting). If it is turned off, the new things you are typing will instead be added into wherever your typing cursor is. The first time you accidentally turn Insert on is really alarming ("Where did all my writing go?!") but now

you'll know what's going on when it happens. Just press Insert again and text insertion should go back to normal.

- The **Tab** key is named for 'tabulating'. It comes from typewriter use and is designed to save time for when you want to enter information in a table format. Today, we mostly use it to ensure uniform paragraph indents. When you get more comfortable with your keyboard, you can use Tab to move about between programs and between menu options by holding it down Alt and tapping through your open programs – it's really useful !
- **Ctrl, Alt** and **Fn** are all used in similar ways; when you hold them down and press other keys, certain actions will take place. You'll see on your keyboard that some keys have more than one symbol on them – sometimes, up to three! This means that, if you hold down any of these three, you will produce a different character or effect when pressing that key. You'll already be familiar with this way of doing things if you've used a typewriter to type capitals by holding down the Shift key.

On computer and laptop keyboards, however, there are extra interesting and useful functions. The smaller laptops generally need to miss out the number pad (that you'll see to the right on a standard desktop PC keyboard) to save space. Instead, you can use **Fn** on the bottom row - short for function. Although Fn is short for Function, it is not in the same family as the Function keys at the top. It doesn't make sense, I know, but it's just the way keyboard design has evolved. So, for instance, on my laptop, holding down the Fn key and pressing others allows me to change the brightness of the screen, open the DVD drive, put the laptop to sleep and access the number pad – very useful!

Again, this kind of keyboard use is a bit more advanced but totally worth learning! We'll cover this in later articles.

The slightly more technical Num Lk (Number Lock) and Prnt Scrn (Print Screen) keys.

- **Num Lk** affects your number pad on the right of your keyboard (if you don't have one, don't worry). It's a bit of a hang-over from older style keyboards but is sometimes still needed. When it is turned on, you'll see a little light and the number pad will function as number keys; when it is turned off, the keys work as direction keys and sometimes as PgUp, PgDn, Insert, Delete, Home and End too.
- **Prnt Scrn** doesn't actually, literally print your screen despite the name. It used to, on really old-fashioned computers but now we use differently.

What it does do is take a sort of picture of what is showing on your screen that shows everything from all your open documents to the mouse cursor, the bar with the time, date and volume on it – everything!

This picture is quietly stored on your computer and if you want, you can put it into a document. Often, it will seem like nothing happened when you pressed it but if you then choose to 'paste' (more on this in later articles), you'll get the screen shot. If you want to print it afterwards, you can



1. A 'Prnt Scrn' capture of my screen as I write this document.

choose to do this but it does not happen automatically, despite the name!

It is also very likely that your keyboard will have a key with a logo on it on the bottom row towards the left. If you have a Mac, it will be the ⌘ symbol; if you have any other computer, it is very likely to be the Windows logo (⊞). This key is known by lots of names – the menu key, the command key, the start key, the meta key – and is very useful once you really get to know the keyboard. It truly opens up the way you can command the computer and will make your life much faster and more efficient! Again, we will cover this more advanced keyboard use in a later article.

Mouse

The so-called ‘mouse’ is a pointing device that tells the computer which part of the screen you want to interact with when you move the on-screen cursor to the relevant place to click there. It’s called a mouse because they look a bit like the animal with their ovalish body and long cable ‘tail’! You might also control your laptop with a mouse-pad or track-pad that is a touch-sensitive rectangle at the front. Very occasionally, laptops have little coloured rubber nubbins for control inlaid to the keyboard that can be moved from side to side and tapped.

Computer mice have changed over the years but the basic functions include two buttons on the top and a rubber ball or light-based sensor underneath to note the direction you are moving it in. If you have bought a Mac, you will only have one button. It is debatable which is preferable – definitely an individual case!

Many mice have a small vertical track wheel in between the two buttons and some have extra small buttons on the side. The track wheel generally allows you to move up and down documents and web-pages simply (without using PgUp or PgDn) and any further buttons are generally customisable.

However, for the moment, we’ll assume that you have a two-button mouse and cover how these two most important buttons work.

These buttons are usually talked about in terms of their function - left-click and right-click – and the two ways you can click them – a single click and double-click. Read this part carefully because understanding how single, double, left- and right-click work will make computers so much more intuitive and understandable!

Left-click is a commanding action and is generally just called ‘clicking’. If you left-click on something, you are telling the computer you want it to interact with that area. This could be a link to a website or a command to move your typing cursor to another area of the page. If someone more knowledgeable is helping you to use the computer and tells you to click on something, they will always mean left-click.

Right-click is an ‘option menu’ action. If you right-click on something, the computer will bring up a list menu that shows you all the different ways you might want to interact with something. For instance, right-clicking now on these words as I type gives me options for things like changing the colour and position of the words, using an online dictionary or the Microsoft Word translation tool. To right-click on a Mac, you hold down Ctrl as you click.

A single click is your usual, habitual click on either side. It is a standard command movement and means either ‘do this now’ on the left or ‘bring up my list of options I can do here’ on the right.

Double-click is used in certain situations. It's used almost entirely for opening folders and starting programs. It can take a little getting used to – you need to click fairly fast so the computer understands that you are 'double-clicking' and not just doing two single clicking twice. A lot of people have trouble with this to begin with. If you are having trouble because you have co-ordination or movement issues, you can change the speed at which the computer understands two clicks to be a double-click. Be careful not to use double-click all the time. Mostly, this will tell your computer to do things twice and confuse it.

Another very important and useful mouse function is that of **click-and-drag**. This is the computer equivalent of picking something up to move it around. You'll use it for organising files, moving them between devices and for putting files in the 'Recycle Bin' once you don't need them. To click and drag, move the mouse pointer over the file you want to move and then press and hold down the left button. If you now move your mouse around, the file should travel with you. To put it down again, release the button. If you release it over the Recycle Bin, it will be 'thrown away'; if you release it in another folder window, you will copy or move the file.

Computer Screen

The computer screen is the display part of your computer; it shows what you are working with. Older computer screens are CRTs (cathode ray tubes) – like older televisions – and newer computer screens are made of LCDs (liquid crystal displays), LEDs (light emitting diodes) or a plasma panel. In special situations, your laptop might have a touch-screen which looks like a flat-screen but allows you to control it with your fingertips. It is unlikely you have one on your computer or laptop but it is possible.

Newer screens are a bit more delicate and must be treated accordingly. Don't bash them around, put too much pressure on them or clean them as if they are made of glass (they are not!). When you clean them, wipe them gently and if you are struggling to get the dirt off, don't press harder. Instead, use a cloth lightly dampened (not tissues – too abrasive!) with distilled water.

Printer

Your printer is a separate machine that can be connected to your computer to print documents, pictures and photos. Newer printers might have a photocopying ability or are able to 'scan' in documents and make an electronic picture record of what was scanned. Some have docking areas to plug cameras in directly and some even use wireless technology so you don't have to use cables to transmit what is to be printed.

Running a printer will also require you to buy printer paper. This will be loaded somewhere vertically at the back or in a drawer at the front. Printers cannot work without paper or ink. If you want to print photographs, you can buy special photograph paper.

Take what you've learnt and try it out!

We really hope you found this helpful and that your computer now seems simpler and more sensible. We wrote this to make your lives easier and more enjoyable so take what you've learnt and try it!

If you're still finding you have questions, comment below and ask away. Alternatively, take a moment to tell us about how this guide made your life easier and any new things you've discovered after reading – we'd love to hear your stories. Further parts will be published in due course so do make sure you check back. Happy computing!

