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COMPUTER BASICS

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View our full schedule, handouts, and additional tutorials on our website:
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GETTING STARTED

Class Overview

This is a class for very beginning computer users. You are not expected to have ANY experience with computers. If you've never touched a computer before, this is the right place for you.

We will be using PC laptop computers running the Microsoft Windows operating system. You may have heard these words before, but if not, don't worry. We'll cover their meanings later in class.

Don't get discouraged! Remember: Practice makes perfect and everyone starts out as a beginner. Using the keyboard and mouse may be challenging at first, but it will become easier the more you use them. **Note:** The mouse is intended for you to use with your right hand, regardless of whether or not you are right-handed. This shouldn't be an issue in class, but if the mouse is uncomfortable for you, let your instructor know.

Please let the instructor know if you have questions or concerns before the class, or as we go along.

You Will Learn How To:

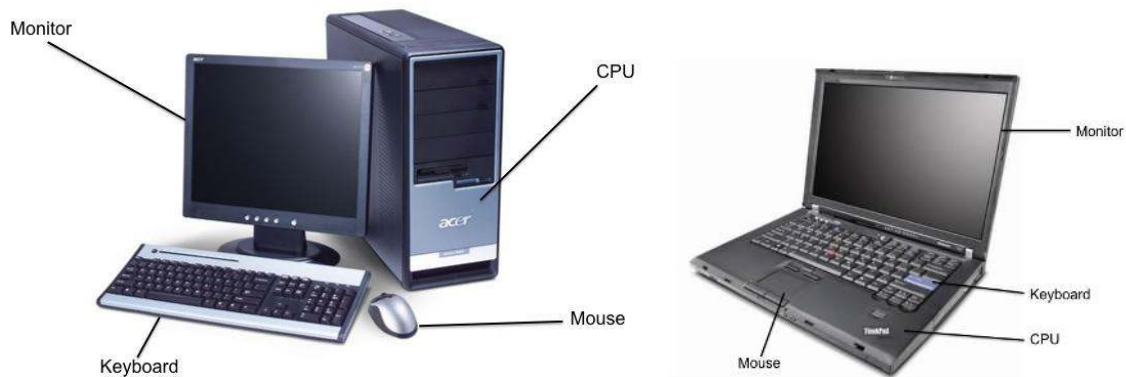
Identify major computer components	Understand the basics of how computers work	Differentiate between software and hardware
Turn a computer on	Log on to a computer	Identify the computer desktop
Change the appearance of the desktop	Use the keyboard	Use and understand the different functions of the mouse
Basics of the Microsoft Windows operating system	Utilize the Start Menu in Microsoft Windows	Utilize the Taskbar in Microsoft Windows
Buy a computer	Buy other software and programs	Differentiate between logging off and shutting down
Shut down the computer	Find more help	

BASIC COMPUTER SKILLS

On any given day, you will encounter computer systems in much of what you do, even if you don't realize it. The television channels you watch, the radio stations that you listen to, the car that you drive in, and even the cash register at the local grocery store are all controlled in some way by computer systems! They help us perform tasks, keep track of information, and even control the airplanes that fly above us. During the course of this class, you will learn about how computers work, how to perform simple tasks, and more.

Anatomy of a Computer

As with most products, computers are designed in a variety of ways. There are, however, major similarities regardless of the brand (e.g., Dell, Apple, Acer, HP, Lenovo) of the computer. There are two main types of computers, desktops and laptops. However, all computers have the following components:



THE MONITOR

The monitor looks like a television screen and is where you see what is happening on your computer. By using shadows and graphics with over a million different colors, much of what you see will appear 3-dimensional. Think of this as the 'face' of the computer.

THE CPU (Central Processing Unit)

The CPU houses the machinery that allows your computer to work. Think of this as the 'brains' of the computer. This component looks very different in desktops and laptops, but it works the same.

THE KEYBOARD

The keyboard is one of two ways to interact with your computer. The keys should mostly mimic a traditional typewriter.

THE MOUSE

This is the other way to interact with your computer. Most mice have two buttons—a right and a left button—and a scrolling wheel.

How Computers Work

Hardware / Software

Computers use both hardware and software to perform their work. Think of hardware as the physical pieces of a computer—the monitor, the CPU, all the pieces and parts inside the CPU, the mouse, the keyboard, etc. Software, on the other hand, consists of programs that we use to interact with the computer. You can't physically touch software like you can the keyboard, but you can still interact with it. A word processing program like Microsoft Word is a piece of software that you could use to type a grocery list. Games that you play on your computer are also considered software—it doesn't have to be work-related!

Information / Data

Computers are designed to work with a type of information commonly referred to as "data." Data comes in many forms, whether it is written data (such as a letter to a friend), audio data (like a song), video data (like a popular movie or DVD), and more. Certain types of software programs work with different types of data. For example, the iPod works primarily with audio data, while Microsoft Word, a word processing program, works primarily with written data.

The keyboard is just one of the ways in which you can create, interact with, and modify data. There are many ways to get data off of the computer, such as printing it out on paper, copying it to a CD or flash drive, or publishing it to the Internet.

"My Computer is Possessed!"

It is a common misconception that computers have "a mind of their own." Although computers can perform certain tasks much more easily and faster than humans (like counting, performing mathematical calculations, etc.), they are, in the end, machines and can't think for themselves. It is safe to say that the computer cannot do anything that you do not tell it to do. Remember that you are in control of the computer, in the same way that you are in control of your car. Your car won't move until you press your foot on the accelerator, and it won't stop until you press the brake. Computers work in the same way.

Keeping Your Computer Healthy

In the end, computers are machines just like any other. Sometimes, although not often, they may malfunction, become stuck (or "frozen"), or may have a part that breaks and need to be replaced. Just like your car or lawnmower, computers need to be maintained. Keeping your virus software up-to-date, installing updates for your operating system (Windows updates), and refraining from installing unnecessary programs will keep your computer running smoothly and efficiently for a longer period of time. Consider it like an oil change.

Key Facts About Computers

- A computer does *not* need to access the internet in order to run properly.
- The internet is a way of connecting to other computer users. You can connect to the internet using a phone line, a cable connection, or by using a wireless connecting device (wi-fi). For most home computer users, this is a paid service, though you can use the Internet for free in some public locations, like the library or a coffee shop.
- A computer will be able to perform most common functions (play music, type documents, edit pictures) and run programs without an internet connection. However, to view a web page or send an email, you will need an internet connection.
- A computer needs an Operating System in order to work, though any new computer that you purchase will come with an operating system already installed. The most common operating systems are Microsoft Windows and Macintosh OS X.

Turning On the Computer and Logging On:

Turning the Computer On

Let's get started! As you sit down at your desk, you can assume that your computer system is one of three states:

- **OFF:** This is exactly what it sounds like: The computer is off, and no parts are running or working. The monitor is black (no images), there is no “whirring” sound from the CPU, and the computer is unresponsive to mouse movements or pressing keys on the keyboard. The power button (if it lights up) should not be lit up.
- **ON:** When a computer is on, you should see images on the monitor, possibly hear a “whirring” noise coming from the CPU (hopefully not too loud!), and the pointer on the screen (the small white arrow) should respond when you move the mouse.
- **SLEEP MODE:** Most computers have a mode called “Sleep,” in which the computer is on, but has assumed an energy-efficient, minimal power mode. To “wake” the computer, simply move the mouse around or press the space bar on the keyboard, and it will “wake up” and return to the exact same place that it was when it went to sleep. In other words, if you were using a word processing program and the computer went to sleep, it would return to exactly what you were working when it wakes up.

To turn a computer on, simply press the power button once (no need to hold the button—just press and release). We will go over how to turn a computer off later in this handout.

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