Introduction

If you are new to Windows Vista or to Windows in general, this is the book for you. In easy-to-understand language and with step-by-step explanations, this book examines all the key tasks for using Windows Vista.

Windows is an operating system. You don't need to know the hows and whys of an operating system. You just need to know there is one, and that the operating system is like the behind-the-scenes manager who takes care of all the basic computing tasks, such as saving your work, printing a document, starting a program, and so on.

Therefore, you need only to learn how to perform these basic actions once. That is, after you learn how to print, you follow the same basic steps to print in all Windows programs. After you learn how to start a program, you can start any program. After you learn how to move or resize a window, you can perform this action for any window.

You'll find that learning how to use Windows is the same thing as learning how to use your computer.

Some Key Changes in Windows Vista

Introduced in 2007, Windows Vista includes a major overhaul to the interface from the desktop to the content windows (called Explorers). The programmers have attempted to make the interface easier to use, more consistent, and more intuitive.

Finding files has also been a big priority with this version. Starting with the Instant Search feature included on the Start menu and throughout Vista's Explorers, and including special Search Folders, Windows seeks to make finding documents and all kinds of information (music, movies, email messages, and so on) easier.

Security has also been enhanced and emphasized. Not to scare you off, but as computers become more popular the dangers and the need for caution have become more important. You need to protect against viruses, someone getting your personal information (called phishing), someone installing a program on your computer without your permission, someone spying and tracking what websites you visit, and more. Windows Vista includes features to address each of these security concerns; it also offers updates so that new threats are taken care of as soon as possible.

In addition to design changes and security upgrades, you find other fun and useful features built-in to Windows, including the Windows Photo Gallery, an updated Media Center, a partnership for online music purchases with MTV (called Urge), and more.

If you are entirely new to Windows, you don't have to worry about these changes. If you are upgrading, you'll find it easy to see and work with the many changes and upgrades.

Some Key Terms

To use Windows, you need to know the basic terminology used for common actions:

- *Point*—Move the mouse on the desk to move the pointer onscreen. The tip of the arrow should be on the item to which you are pointing. To open a menu or an icon, you point to the item you want.

- *Click*—Press and release the left mouse button once. You use click to select commands and toolbar buttons and perform other Windows tasks.

- *Double-click*—Press and release the left mouse button twice in rapid succession. Double-clicking opens an icon. (See the next section for exceptions or changes to double-clicking.)

- *Right-click*—Press and release the right mouse button once. You often right-click to display a shortcut menu.

- *Drag*—Hold down the mouse button and drag the pointer across the screen. Release the mouse button. Dragging is most often used for selecting text.

Some Things to Keep in Mind

You can personalize many features of Windows so that it is set up the way you like to work. That's one of the benefits of Windows. For consistency, though, this book makes some assumptions about how you use your computer. When working through steps and especially when viewing the figures in this book, keep in mind the following distinctions:

- Windows provides many ways to perform the same action. For instance, for commands, you can select a command from a menu, use a shortcut key, use a command bar button, or use a shortcut menu. This book covers one main method (the most common for that particular task) and also mentions other methods, usually in a tip.

- Your particular Windows setup might not look identical to the one used in the figures in this book. For instance, if you use a desktop image, you see that. (The figures in this book use a plain background.) Don't let these differences distract you; Windows might look different, but it works the same way.

caution

Some computer displays will not display Vista's new Aero interface; this interface gives Windows a transparent or glass-like look. If your computer doesn't support Aero, you'll see the same screens and dialog boxes only they will look slightly different from the images captured for his book. Virtually all of Vista's features still function in the same way (with the exception of Flip3D and live thumbnail previews), so don't worry!

■ Your computer setup is most likely different than the one used in the book. Therefore, you see different programs listed on your Start menu, different fonts in your Font list, different folders and documents, and so on. Again, don't be distracted by the differences.

The Basic Structure of This Book

This book is divided into six parts, each centered on a certain theme. The book builds on the skills you need, starting with the basics and then moving to more complex topics or lesser used features, such as accessibility. You can read the book straight-through, look up topics when you have a question, or browse through the contents, reading information that intrigues you.

This section provides a quick breakdown of the parts.

Part I, "The Basics," explains all the key tasks for using your computer. If you read only this section, you have enough skill knowledge to perform most basic computer tasks. This part covers understanding the Windows desktop and starting programs (Chapter 1), saving and print your work (Chapter 2), managing files (Chapter 3), and viewing and finding files (Chapter 4).

Part II, "Communication," includes six chapters, each devoted to a particular Windows communication feature, including getting set up for communication (Chapter 5), sending and receiving email (Chapter 6), browsing and searching the Internet (Chapter 7), ensuring security and privacy (Chapter 8), sending and receiving faxes (Chapter 9), and setting up Windows Vista on a home network (Chapter 10).

Part III, "Digital Media," centers on the various ways you can use Windows as an entertainment medium, including playing music and videos and working with photographs and movies.

Part IV, "Customizing Your Computer," explores the many changes you can make to how Windows operates. As you become more proficient, you'll find that you might want to change certain Windows elements, such as adding a desktop image (covered in Chapter 13 with other desktop customizing options), adding new programs (Chapter 14), customizing email and Internet (Chapter 15), and setting up Windows for multiple users (Chapter 16).

Although you don't need to know the ins and outs of computer maintenance (the topic of Part V) as a beginner, you'll find that you do need a reference and guide for the various maintenance tasks. Some tasks are especially key, such as securing your PC and your data (Chapter 17). Other tasks you use less often, but might want to refer to. Topics in this part including improving performance (Chapter 18), upgrading your computer (Chapter 19), and upgrading Windows (Chapter 20).

The final part, Part VI, "Windows Special Features," examines what the part's name implies: Special features for special situations. This part includes chapters on the

many Windows accessory programs (Chapter 21) and accessibility options for those with special needs (Chapter 22).

Enjoy your learning journey!

Conventions Used in This Book

There are cautions, tips, and notes throughout this book.

caution

A *caution* will tell you to beware of a potentially dangerous act or situation. In some cases, ignoring a caution might cause you significant problems—so pay particular attention to them!

note

A *note* is designed to provide information that is generally useful, but not necessarily essential for what you're doing at the moment. Some are similar to extended tips—interesting, but not essential.

tip

A *tip* is a piece of advice—a little trick, actually—that helps you use software or your computer more effectively. Tips can also help you maneuver around problems or limitations.