EDEXCEL FUNCTIONAL SKILLS

ICT

Study Module 1

Making the most of your computer

Published by Pearson Education, Edinburgh Gate, Harlow CM20 2JE

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First published 2008. This revised edition published 2010.

Typeset by Oxford Designers & Illustrators, Oxford

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1 Making the most of your computer

By the end of this module, you should be able to:

- customise the desktop
- adjust system settings
- choose the best tool for the job
- resolve straightforward problems

Introduction

It pays off to spend some time getting to know a computer before you start to use it for work. What software applications are installed? Which printer is set as the default? Is the screen display to your liking? Is the time correct? Is there an internet connection? Is it running off the mains or a battery? If the latter, is the battery fully charged?

This module will show you how to make the most of the features, facilities and applications your computer has to offer. By knowing how to customise the computer to meet your needs, you will be able to get things done more quickly and produce better quality outcomes.

Skill Standards covered

At Level 1, you can...	At Level 2, you can...
2 Interact with and use ICT systems to meet requirements of a straightforward task in a familiar context	**2** Select, interact with and use ICT systems safely and securely for a complex task in non-routine and unfamiliar contexts
2.1 Select and use software applications to meet needs and solve straightforward problems	2.1 Select and use software applications to meet needs and solve complex problems
2.2 Select and use interface features effectively to meet needs	2.2 Select and use a range of interface features and system facilities effectively to meet needs
2.3 Adjust system settings as appropriate to individual needs	2.3 Select and adjust system settings as appropriate to individual needs
	2.4 Respond to ICT problems and take appropriate action

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A In control

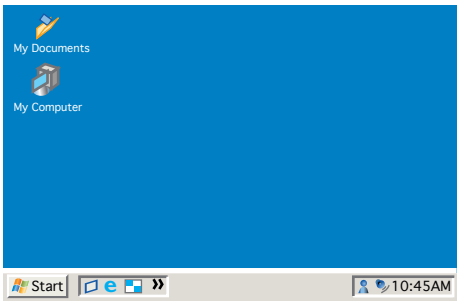
Interface features

How long does it take you to find and open a software application or locate a file? How do you tell the computer when you want to print a document? How do you know when the battery needs recharging?

Interface features such as windows, icons, pointers, drop-down menus and dialogue boxes are designed to make computers quick and easy to use. The more familiar you are with the interface, the easier it will be for you to make the computer do what you want and the faster you'll be able to get tasks done!

The desktop

The desktop is your personal work area. You can change the 'look and feel' of the desktop by customising features such as font size and style, background and colour scheme.



Icons on the desktop provide shortcuts to frequently used software applications, files or websites. It is much quicker to click on an icon on your desktop than to navigate a series of menus to get to where you need to be.

You can increase the size of the icons to make them easier to see, or make them smaller so they don't take up too much space on your desktop.

The **quick launch toolbar** holds a list of shortcuts to frequently used software applications which helps reduce the clutter on your desktop. It is found to the right of the 'Start' button. It takes just a single click to start an application from the quick launch toolbar.

Test Tips

Having a tidy desktop makes it easier to find what you are looking for quickly. Take time once in a while to unclutter your desktop.

Skill Builder 1.1

Right click on the desktop and try:

- changing the size of the icons on your desktop
- re-sorting the icons
- changing the 'look and feel' of your desktop
- adding another shortcut to your desktop
- adding another shortcut to the quick launch toolbar.

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Windows

A window is an area on the screen that displays information. A window may fill the whole screen or only part of it. You can have several windows open at once and you can move, re-size and layer them (place one above another).

Skill Builder 1.2

- Use the quick launch toolbar to open a software application.
- If the window fills the entire desktop, click on the *Normal* button to reduce its size.

- Put the cursor over the title bar. Press and hold down the left mouse button and drag the mouse to another position. The window should follow the mouse.
- Release the mouse button to drop the window into its new place.
- Put the cursor over the border of the window at one of the corners. The mouse cursor will change to a double-ended arrow.
- Press and hold down the left mouse button and drag the mouse. The window should change size as you do so.
- Click on the *Normal* button once more to restore the window to maximum size.

The mouse

The mouse controls the position of the pointer on the screen.

Pressing the left button is called a 'left click'. Pressing the one on the right is called a 'right click'. By default, the left button is used for common tasks such as selecting objects. The right mouse button is often used to open contextual menus that change depending on where you click. Try it and see.

Skill Builder 1.3

Interaction between you and the computer is not just one way. The computer uses a variety of methods to communicate with you.

- Locate the system tray in the bottom right-hand corner of the screen. What does it tell you?
- If there are any unwanted icons in the system tray, find out how to remove them.
- What other methods of providing system information does your computer use?
- Why is it important to keep an eye on what it is telling you?

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System settings

Go to the 'Control Panel' to adjust the computer's system settings to suit you. For example, you might want to increase the display settings when you are working with images, or adjust the click-speed of the mouse to give you better control.

Note: Sometimes you will have to restart the computer if you change a system setting.

Screen

The picture on your computer screen is made up of tiny dots called 'pixels'. The more pixels used to make the display, the sharper and clearer the picture will be and the smaller everything will look on your screen. This is called screen resolution.

The latest LCD (liquid crystal display) and plasma screens give you a sharper picture than older monitors.

Reducing the screen resolution will make things bigger on the screen, which can be of benefit to people with poor eye sight. However, the drawback is that fine detail is lost.

A common screen resolution for general work is 1024×768 pixels, but resolutions can vary from 800×600 to 1920×1080. The only way to find the resolution that suits you best is to experiment.

There are also settings that determine the number of colours that are displayed on the screen. There can be anything between 256 and 16.7 million colours. It helps to have as many colours as possible when carrying out tasks such as photo editing.

Sometimes you may need to use a data projector to show an audience what is displayed on your computer screen, for example when you are giving a presentation or running a scrolling display. Data projectors vary in specification. The maximum image quality and range of colours they can produce might be lower than what you see on your computer screen. Test-drive the projector beforehand to avoid disappointment.

Skill Builder 1.4

- Find out what resolution your screen is working at and how many colours it displays.
- Change the resolution. What do you notice? (It will help to open an application that you know well.)
- Experiment with using a data projector to display your work on a big screen.

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Audio

Computers have built-in audio systems. As well as being able to play music tracks and sound files, this means that your computer can use sound to communicate with you. This is especially important for people who are blind or visually impaired.

There is a volume control on the screen that lets you adjust the sound level. You may have to do this if you are working in a noisy environment or sitting in the 'quiet coach' of a train.

Skill Builder 1.5

- Find out how to adjust the volume setting on your computer.
- Set it at a level that suits you best.

The mouse

You might want to change the double-click speed of the mouse or, if you are left-handed, switch the mouse buttons over to give you better control.

Skill Builder 1.6

- Experiment with the mouse settings.
- Change the 'double-click' speed to the slowest setting and then the fastest setting. What difference does it make?
- Set it to a speed that suits you best.

Tip

If you are left-handed, but share the computer with someone who is right-handed (or vice versa), be considerate and reset the mouse buttons when you finish using the computer.

Printer

If you are working on a network, you may have more than one printer to choose from. You do not want to waste time hunting for your printout or waste ink printing in colour when black and white will do. So make sure your default printer settings are correct.

Date and time

Make sure the computer's calendar and clock are correct. If they are not, you could end up inserting the wrong date and time into your documents. Can you think of any situation when this could cause problems?

Tell your computer which **region** you are in and it will format currency, numbers and dates to match. You should be able to change the language option too. When might this be useful?

Power

Concerned about the environment? Have a look at your computer's power use settings. When does 'system standby' kick in? You don't want the computer to power-down when you are half-way through giving a presentation.

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B Smart working!

Which software application should I use?

Although software applications are generally designed to perform one type of activity really well, most of them can do more than one thing. For example, a word processing package will probably include some simple drawing tools and let you carry out some numeric calculations on fields in a table.

So how do you decide which one to choose? Ask yourself:

- Is there an application you know well that will do the job effectively? If yes, use it.
- Is there a tool designed specifically to do the job? If yes, that might be the best one to choose.
- Is the application installed on the computer's hard drive? A web-based application may be free to use but it is dependent on the availability of the internet.

Skill Builder 1.7

Open digital asset SB1.7.1. The table contains a list of tasks which you can complete with different software applications. In each row of the second column, show which application you would use for the task (in some cases you might want to use more than one application).

Task	Application
a Write and print a letter	
b Store details of all the videos available for hire in a video shop	
c Create a simple poster	

Tip

Tips for choosing software

- Use word processing software to combine words, images and tables.
- Use spreadsheet software to work with numbers and structured data, and to produce graphs.
- Use presentation software to create presentations and scrolling displays.
- Use web authoring software to produce web pages.
- Use a web browser and search engine to find information on the internet.
- Use email to communicate.
- Use graphics software to edit photos and images.

Keyboard shortcuts

Any idea why users with good keyboard skills often prefer to use keyboard shortcuts rather than the mouse?

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Skill Builder 1.8

- Open a software application.
- Look at one of the menus. You should see that some of the letters are underlined, e.g. F on the 'File' menu. The underlined letter is an 'accelerator key' and is a way of using the keyboard to open a menu. You can open the 'File' menu by pressing and holding down the Alt key, then pressing the letter F.

File Edit View Insert Format

- Use this way to open a menu and then one of its sub-menus.
- Which of these keys (Ctrl, Alt, Shift) is used to create a shortcut? Are there any mouse actions that cannot be made by a keyboard shortcut?

- Choose an application. Find five 'keyboard shortcuts'. (A good place to look is in the 'Help' file.)
- Find out what Ctrl and Z does.

Troubleshooting

There's nothing more frustrating than encountering an ICT problem that prevents you from completing what you set out to achieve – especially when you are under time pressure. It is worth your while to learn how to troubleshoot. But if you don't feel confident about dealing with a problem, ask a more experienced person for help.

Paper jam

A paper jam is when the printer stops printing because one or more sheets of paper get stuck. The printer may display a message. A jam can happen with even the most reliable of printers and is often a problem with the paper rather than the printer. Switch off the printer before attempting to clear the jam.

Skill Builder 1.9

Get permission to explore a printer. Find out how to load paper and how to remove jammed paper safely.

Application not responding

Sometimes, for no apparent reason, a software application will stop responding to the mouse or keyboard. This is known as a 'software freeze' or 'lock-up'. When this happens, clicking the mouse on a menu or other control has no effect and text cannot be entered using the keyboard.

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Once an application has frozen, it is not possible to save work. This is a very good reason for saving work frequently.

The operating system can also freeze, so that the mouse or keyboard does not respond at all. If this happens, you have to restart the computer. Make sure the computer really has frozen and is not just taking a long time to complete an operation, because all unsaved work will be lost when it is restarted.

Tip

Should a software application freeze, you can close it down in the 'Task Manager' by right-clicking on the task bar.

Unplugged?

No monitor display? Perhaps the power lead is unplugged. Check both ends! No network connection? Check if the network cable has come out. Check both ends!

No sound?

Check if the speakers have been muted. If you use headphones, are they plugged into the correct socket? Do they have a volume switch? Make sure it is in the 'on' position, but not set to maximum!

Are you sitting comfortably?

When you sit down to work at a computer, make sure you are sitting comfortably. If you don't, you risk getting repetitive strain injury (RSI), eye fatigue, back ache or neck ache.

Did You Know?

Hygiene matters – a computer keyboard is likely to be home to many germs. If not cleaned regularly, a keyboard can have more germs than a toilet seat!

Tip

Tips for working safely

- Adjust the position of your chair so you are comfortable and all your joints are naturally in line.
- Check the position of the keyboard and mouse, and try to have wrist rests to support the hands and wrists.
- Place the monitor at a height and distance that gives you a good viewing angle.
- Make sure that you place the monitor where the lighting is not too bright and where it will avoid glare and reflections on the screen.
- Take regular short breaks if you are working for long periods of time on a computer.

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C Wrapping up

Skill Check – make sure you know how to:

- ✓ work with windows and toolbars
- ✓ customise the desktop
- ✓ adjust system settings to meet your needs
- ✓ choose the best software application for the task in-hand
- ✓ use shortcuts to improve efficiency
- ✓ resolve problems

Test Tips

- You will not be expected to change system settings in the test, but spending a bit of time getting to know what your computer is capable of and customising it to meet your needs will help you work efficiently and complete all five tasks in the time allowed.
- Have a look at the mark schemes for the Level 1 and Level 2 sample tests. Where and how many marks are awarded for (i) use of interface and system facilities and (ii) the selection of appropriate software to carry out a task?

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