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Windows[®] 95

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Paul McFedries



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**COMPLETE
IDIOT'S
GUIDE™** TO

Windows® 95

Second Edition

by Paul McFedries

que®

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To Karen, of course.

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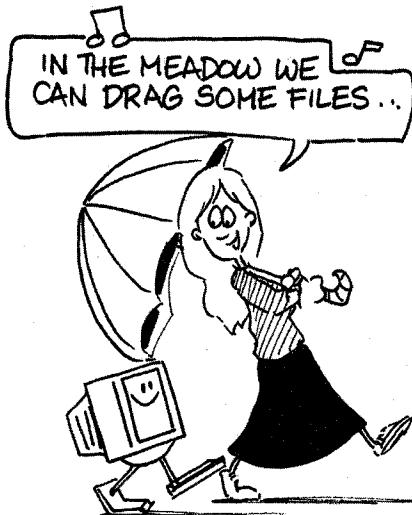
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Walking in a Windows Wonderland

In This Chapter

- What Windows is and what you can use it for
- How Windows makes your life easier
- Why you can still keep your old DOS programs
- What's new with Windows 95
- A leisurely amble through the Windows landscape

As strange as it may sound, I was actually at a baseball game when I first realized Windows was a Big Thing. Where I live, we have one of those state-of-the-art baseball stadiums with all the modern-day amenities: artificial turf, a McDonald's, and the main attraction: a huge 110-foot TV screen (the biggest in the world, I hear) that tells everyone when they're having fun.

Of course, with tens of thousands of people as a captive audience, you'd better believe this monster TV is going to show commercials. So there I was, shelling peanuts and waiting to root root root for the home team in the next inning, when on comes a commercial for (wait for it) Windows. Whoa! Here I am sitting with 50,000 of the faithful, and we're all watching a Windows ad. The specifics of the ad have faded from memory (although I *do* remember some slinky blonde getting unrealistically hot and bothered in

front of a PC), but I recall thinking that if Microsoft (the publisher of Windows) was willing to shell out megabucks to peddle this new software at a major league baseball game, something BIG was happening.

Actually, with Windows now selling over a million copies a month, “humongous” might be a better word. Windows is, truly, a phenomenon unlike any other in the world of personal computers. This chapter explores the Windows mystique and attempts to answer no fewer than five questions:

- What’s with all this Windows hoopla?
- Is Windows really as easy to use as everyone says?
- I have Windows; now what the heck do I do with it?
- Do I have to toss my DOS programs?
- What’s new and improved in Windows 95?

What’s with All the Windows Hoopla?

Windows ads don’t appear only on 110-foot TVs. You see them on normal-sized TVs, inside newspapers, and on billboards, sandwich boards, bulletin boards, and ironing boards. (Yeah, I made up that last one; but hey, with Microsoft, you never know.) You name it, Windows is there. Computer magazines (and even some real magazines) are stuffed full of articles with titles such as “57 Cool New Ways to Make Windows Bark Like a Dog!” and “He’s Hot and You’re Not—How Windows Can Help!” Everywhere you go, people are talking about Windows. So why all the fuss?

Well, in a nutshell, Windows represents an entirely new way to get things done with a computer. The old way (that is, the DOS way) involved typing commands on your keyboard and waiting (or more likely, praying) for the computer to respond. There are two major drawbacks to this approach:

- Most of us are pathetic typists.
- Most of the things you have to type bear only the slightest resemblance to the English language. I mean, imagine having to type—or even *remember*—a command like this:

`xcopy c:*. * a: /d:04/15/95 /v`

Gag me! Using DOS is like going to a fancy French restaurant where you have to write down your order. If you get anything wrong—like spelling *crème* as *crême* (or is it the other way around?)—you don’t eat.

Windows changes all that because it works the way human beings work: visually. Your programs and all the commands or options you need to choose are represented visually on the screen (or they're a few mouse clicks or keystrokes away). Just think: no more convoluted commands and snagged syntax to remember. In fact, Windows may be the first computer application that doesn't require you to remember anything!



Well, When I Was a Kid...

Although using the keyboard may not be the best way to operate a computer, things used to be worse. In the old days, intrepid users had to enter information through a series of toggle switches on the front of the machine. I think it took about three days just to enter your name.

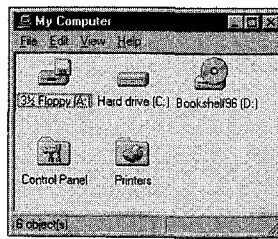
Is Windows Really as Easy to Use as Everyone Says?

Well, yes and no. I mean it's not like you're boiling water or anything (yes, bachelors, boiling water *is* easy). On the other hand, it's not exactly brain surgery, either.

When you get right down to it, Windows, like just about anything else, is as easy or as hard as you make it. This is a fully loaded piece of software that comes with a veritable cornucopia of bells and whistles. It's possible to sink into its mired depths and never be heard from again (except possibly as a story on "Unsolved Mysteries"). If that's what you want, you're reading the wrong book. My goal is to show you just how easy Windows is to both learn and use. The secret, as you'll soon see, is to learn just what you need to know—not what everyone else thinks you should know.

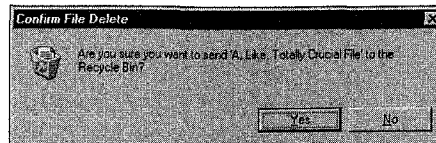
How does Windows make it easier to use a computer? Well, as I said before, images are the key. When you start up a Windows application, most of what you can do with the program is laid out visually in front of you. Carrying on with the French restaurant example, using Windows would be like ordering from a menu that has nice pictures of each of the dishes. You point to the selection you want, and voilà: your meal is served up piping hot. Windows 95 even maps out your entire computer (floppy disks, hard drives, CD-ROMs, printers, and all) in a nice, neat visual display like the one shown on the following page. (The program you see is called My Computer. I'll tell you all about it in Part 3, "Navigating Your Computer with Windows 95.")

This box gives you a visual representation of all the components of your computer.



Of course, cute little pictures are only part of the story. Another feature that makes Windows easy to use is the *dialog box* concept. Although you'll learn about these in detail in Chapter 6, a brief introduction here won't hurt. As the name implies, a dialog box is simply a means by which you and Windows communicate. Now don't expect long philosophical discussions that last into the wee hours of the morning. Windows is good, but not *that* good. No, you'll see a dialog box anytime Windows needs more information from you or needs you to confirm that what you asked it to do is what you actually want it to do. Here's an example of a confirmation dialog box.

This Windows 95 dialog box asks you to confirm a file deletion.



It's a What?

Windows is an example of what computer nerds call a GUI—a *Graphical User Interface*—which is pronounced "GOO-ey." (No, I did not make that up.) Personally, I think PUI—*Pictorial User Interface*—would have been better, but I suppose the pronunciation "POO-ey" would turn people off.

The third key to Windows' ease-of-use is consistency. Certain operations such as opening and saving files are implemented the same way in almost all Windows applications, and most Windows applications look more or less the same. These consistencies from program to program mean that you have much less to learn with each new program you use. (This is a real benefit to those of us whose brain cells are the innocent victims of our misspent youth.) Check out Part 2, "Workaday Windows 95," to find out about many of these consistencies.

Okay, I Have Windows; Now What the Heck Do I Do with It?

I'm not here to be an evangelist for Windows, so I'm not going to tell you that Windows can do everything except wax the cat. And I'm certainly not going to tell you that the only limit to Windows is your imagination. This is bunk. Computers and the programs that run on them (including Windows 95) are big, dumb galoots that exist only to do your bidding. They are pack animals—mere beasts of burden born only to handle the grunt work that the rest of us don't want to bother with. If you're new to computers, please tape this statement to your forehead now: *you are infinitely smarter than your computer will ever be*. This, of course, does not mean you've just wasted several thousand dollars; it just means there's a limit to what one can reasonably expect from a machine.

However, donkeys live useful, productive lives, and so can Windows. For one thing, Windows will still allow you to do what people have been doing with personal computers for years: write letters, mess around with numbers, draw pictures, and play cool games. Windows, though, brings a number of advantages to the table:

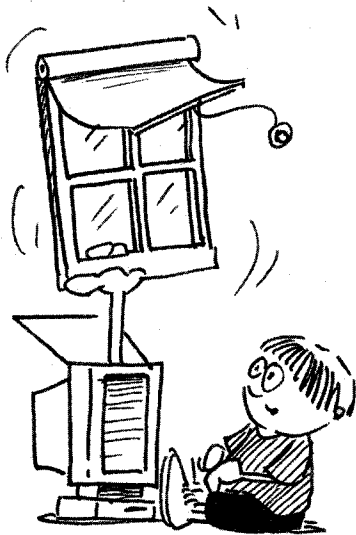
- Once you're comfortable with the Windows way of doing things (which won't take you very long), you can do all those normal computer tasks more easily and quickly.
- Your finished product is, generally speaking, more professional-looking.
- Windows lets you work on multiple projects at once (called *multitasking*). For example, while a letter or report prints, you're free to muck about with a completely different program. (So you can, for example, reward yourself with a couple of rounds of FreeCell—one of the games that comes with Windows 95.)



Geekspeak: Multitasking

The capability to run several programs at the same time (more on this seemingly amazing feat in Chapter 4).

Windows by itself is easily worth the price of admission (especially if it came bundled with your new computer), but there's actually a lot more fun stuff lurking in the Windows box. The Windows programmers—bless their nerdy hearts—have included, at no extra charge, a hatful of small programs (they're called *accessories*). With these programs, you can do all of the following things:



The “Windows” in Windows 95

In This Chapter

- Activating windows
- Moving and sizing windows
- Maximizing and minimizing windows
- Lots of fascinating windows lore

In ancient times, long before glass was in common use (and long before summertime air conditioning became *de rigueur*), people built their homes with holes in the walls to let in air and light. (Flintstones fans will know exactly what I mean.) Because these holes allowed the people to see out and allowed air in, they were called “wind eyes.” Over time, people began covering these holes with glass and cheesy chintz curtains and the phrase “wind eyes” turned into the modern word “windows.”

I tell you this seemingly pointless story by way of introduction to the subject of this chapter: the windows in Windows 95. In a sense, the old meaning of the word “window” fits quite nicely here. In Windows 95, you can “see through” a window to look at what’s on your computer. But these windows also “let in” your input in the form of keystrokes and mouse clicks. It might help to keep all this in mind as you work with Windows 95’s windows. Just remember that each window on the screen is a view of something on your computer and that you can “reach through” the window to make changes to what you see.

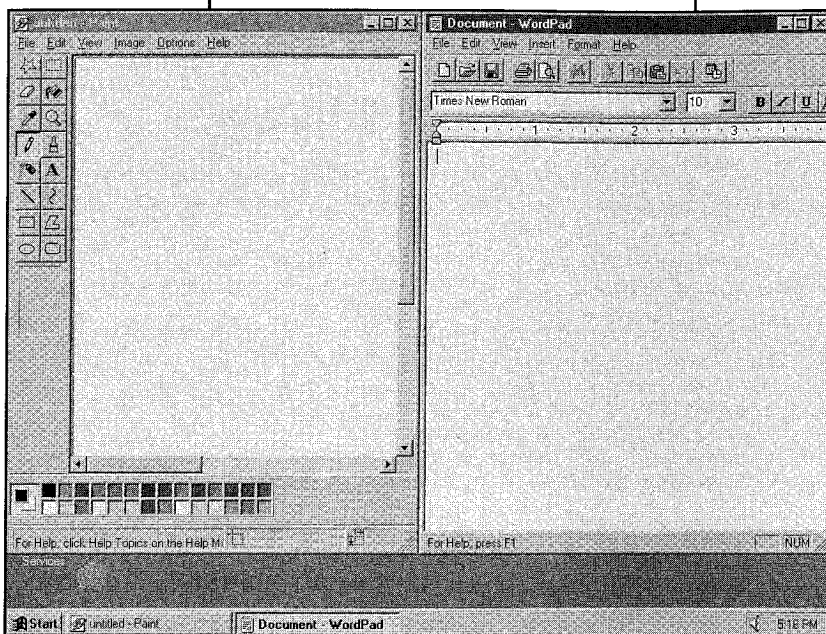
Which Window Is Active?

With this in mind, the first stop on our window management tour will be to learn how to make a window active. How will you know when you succeed in making a window active? There are a few clues to watch for, and they’re all illustrated in the next figure.

- The most obvious clue is the window’s title bar. If the window is active, its title bar displays the title in white letters on a blue background. If it’s an inactive window, the title appears in light gray letters on a dark gray background.
- The active program’s taskbar button appears “pressed.”
- You’ll see an insertion point cursor or some other marker to tell you where you are in the program’s document.

The title bar of an inactive window shows light gray text on a dark gray background.

The title bar of an active window shows white text on a blue background.



How to tell the difference between an active and inactive window.

The active window displays (in this case) an insertion point cursor.

The active window’s taskbar button appears pressed.

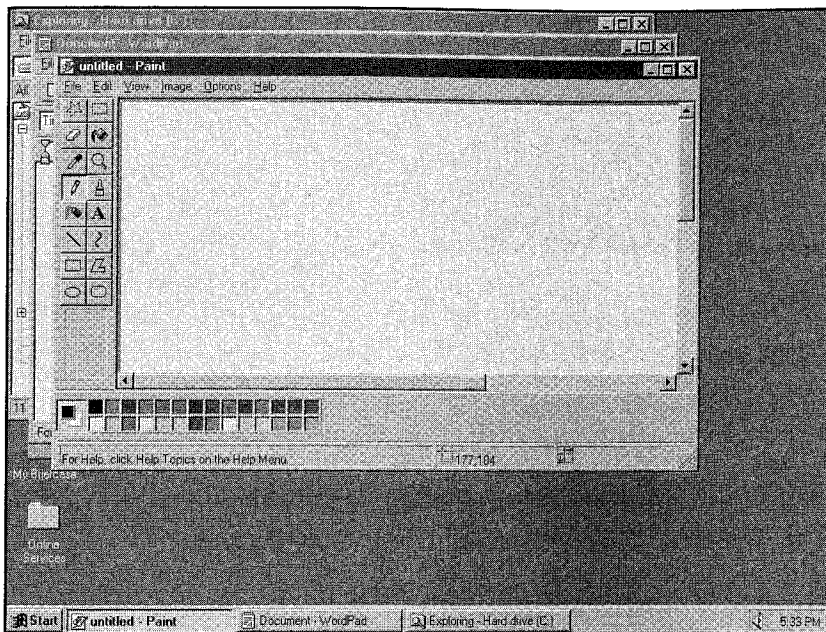
I explained how to switch between open windows in Chapter 4, so you might want to head back there if you need to review the basic techniques.

Activating a window is important, but it’s only the first step toward gaining full control over how your windows appear on the screen. The rest of this chapter shows you a number of basic Windows 95 window-control techniques.

Letting Windows Do the Work: Cascading and Tiling

All this moving and sizing stuff is fine for people with time to kill, but the rest of us just want to get the job done and move on. To that end, Windows 95 has cascade and tile features that will automatically arrange your windows for you.

To cascade your windows, right-click an empty section of the taskbar and select the **Cascade** command from the shortcut menu. This tells Windows 95 to arrange your open windows in a cool waterfall pattern, as shown in the following figure. This is good for those times when you want things nice and neat, but you don’t need to see what’s in the other windows.

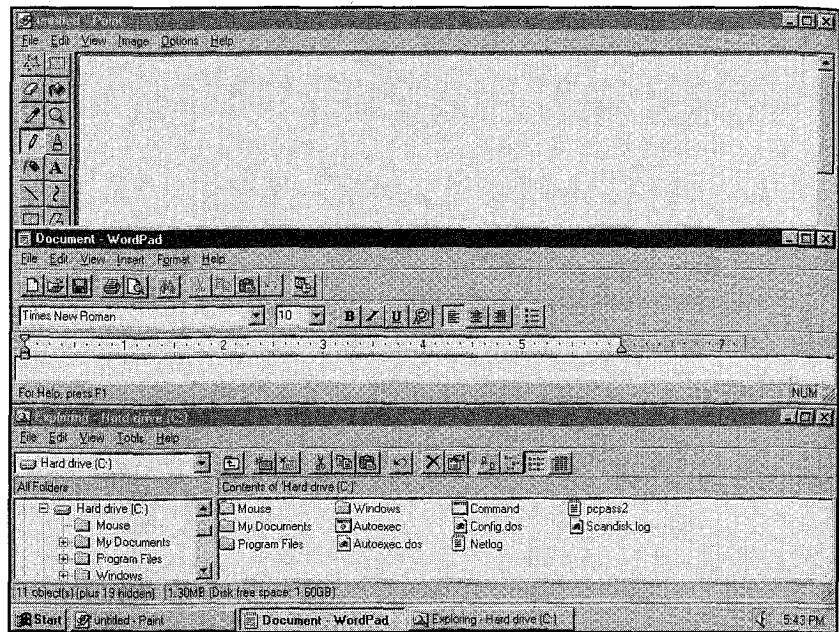


What the Cascade command does.

Tiling divides up your screen and gives equal real estate to each window. To try it out, right-click an empty part of the taskbar and select either **Tile Horizontally** (to arrange the windows in strips across the screen, as shown in the following figure) or **Tile Vertically** (to arrange the windows in vertical strips). Either pattern enables you to work in one window and still keep an eye on what’s happening in the other windows (you never know what those pesky devils might be up to!).

If you’d prefer to clear off your desktop completely, you can minimize all of your running programs in one fell swoop by right-clicking an empty part of the taskbar and selecting **Minimize All Windows** from the shortcut menu.

The Tile Horizontally command gives each of your open windows an equal amount of screen space.

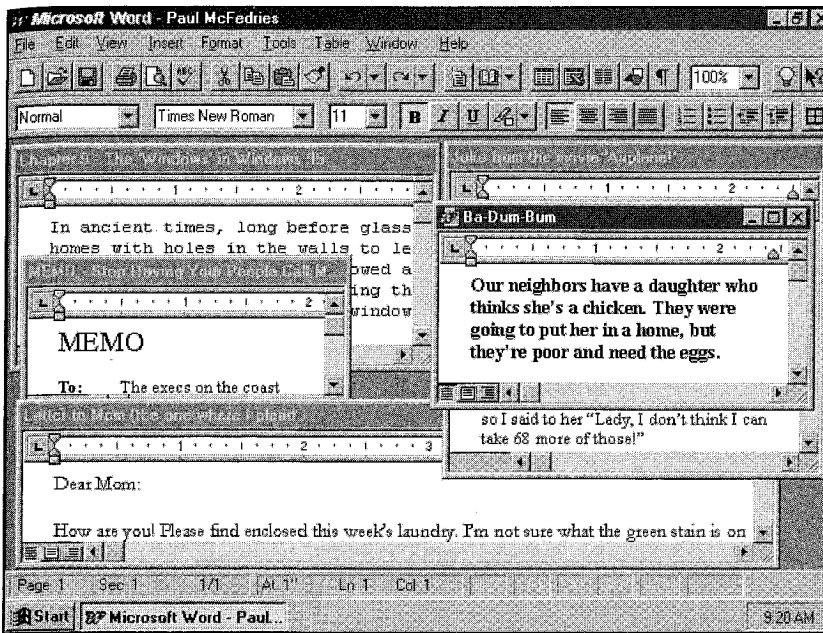


Arranging Windows from the Keyboard

Arranging open windows is a breeze if you have a mouse, but what if you're stuck with just a keyboard? Well, it's possible, but the method you use is a bit obscure (and way more work). First, press **Ctrl+Esc** to display the Start menu, and then press **Esc** by itself to get rid of the Start menu (see, I told you this was weird). Now press **Tab** and then press **Shift+F10** and, lo and behold, the taskbar's shortcut menu shows up! Now use either the up or down arrow key to highlight the appropriate command for cascading or tiling, and then press **Enter**. Ooh, my aching fingers!

Some Notes About Document Windows

So far in this chapter, we've concerned ourselves only with program windows. But lots of Windows 95 applications let you open multiple document windows, and this can also cause window clutter and navigation headaches. For example, the following figure shows how messy Microsoft Word can become with multiple documents on the go.



Opening multiple documents in a single application can quickly get out of hand.

The good news is that most of the techniques you learned earlier for program windows apply equally well to document windows. In particular, you can move them, size them, minimize them, and maximize them. (Note that keyboard users access a document window's Control menu by pressing Alt+—.)

Virtually any Windows 95 application that lets you open multiple windows will have a Window menu. If you pull down the Window menu, you'll see a list of the open document windows at the bottom. To activate a window, simply select it from this menu. (You can also just click the window if you can see it.) The Window menu will also probably have a few commands for arranging the document windows. Look for commands named Arrange, Cascade, or Tile, and try them out.

The Least You Need to Know

This chapter gave you the lowdown on the windows that give Windows 95 its name. The emphasis was on gaining control over how your windows appear on your screen so you can reduce clutter and get more work done.

That ends our look at the various workaday Windows techniques. You now have all the know-how you need to successfully negotiate any Windows program, big or small. From here, most of our time together will be spent examining specific features of Windows 95.

minimize To remove a program from the desktop without closing it. A button for the program remains on the taskbar.

multitasking The capability to run several programs at the same time. Figuratively speaking, this simply means that Windows 95, unlike some people you may know, can walk and chew gum at the same time.

option buttons Dialog box options that appear as small circles in groups of two or more. Only one option from a group can be chosen.

point To place the mouse pointer so it rests on a specific screen location.

port The connection into which you plug the cable from a device such as a mouse or printer.

program files The files that run your programs. See also *data files*.

pull-down menus Hidden menus that you open from an application's menu bar to access the commands and features of the application.

RAM Stands for random-access memory. The memory in your computer that Windows 95 uses to run your programs.

repeat rate After the initial delay, the rate at which characters appear when you press and hold down a key.

scalable font A font in which each character exists as an outline that can be scaled to different sizes. Windows 95 includes such scalable fonts as Arial, Courier New, and Times New Roman. To use scalable fonts, you must have a software program called a *type manager* to do the scaling. Windows 95 comes with its own type manager: TrueType.

scroll bar A bar that appears at the bottom or on the right of a window when the window is too small to display all of its contents.

system resources Two memory areas that Windows 95 uses to keep track of things like the position and size of open windows, dialog boxes, and your desktop configuration (wallpaper and so on).

taskbar The horizontal strip across the bottom of the Windows 95 screen. Each running application is given its own taskbar button, and you switch to an application by clicking on its button.