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Switch 101: Windows vs. Mac Navigation

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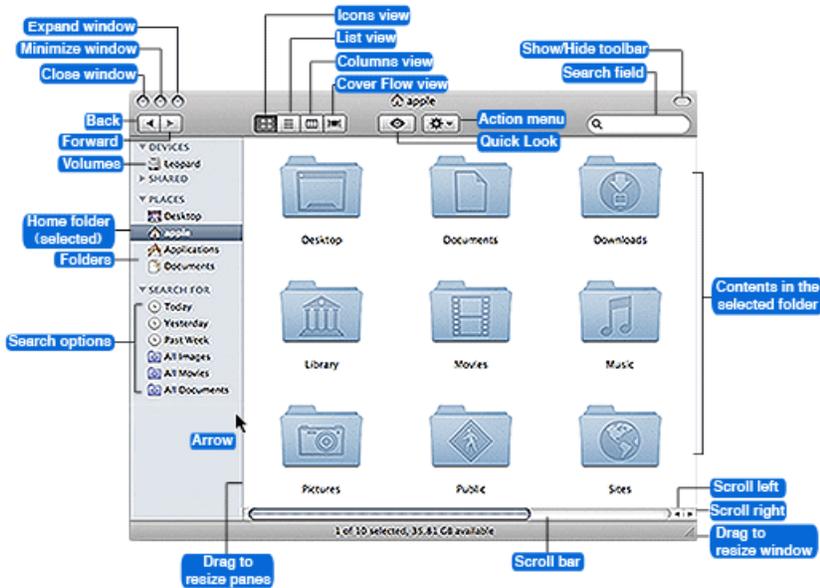**Article:** HT2512

Summary

Though it may feel like you're entering a brand new world on your Mac, you'll be happy to know that there are some interface elements that will be vaguely familiar. For example, you still have a desktop and windows, you will still access many functions from menus, you can still use keyboard shortcuts to accomplish tasks quickly, and more. Here's a guide to navigating the Mac OS X interface.

Products Affected
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The Finder

In Windows, you're used to clicking on the Start menu to get to what you want. On a Mac, you'll use the Finder to access what you need. Anytime you double-click the hard disk icon, which functions somewhat like My Computer in Windows, on the Desktop, you open a Finder window, which allows you to navigate through all the contents on your hard drive. You can also make the Finder active by clicking on the Desktop, clicking the Finder icon in the Dock, or selecting any application, folder, or file in a Finder window.

Here's what a typical Finder window looks like (shown in icon view).

The Finder functions somewhat like Windows Explorer. When you open a Finder window, you'll see a sidebar on the left that provides quick access to the Applications folder, your Home folder (your user directory, shown as a house icon in the sidebar), and several folders that it contains, including Documents, Pictures, Music, and Movies, in the bottom portion. You'll also see your hard disk volume and a Network volume in the top portion. When you mount a server or volume (such as connecting an external hard drive or iPod), or insert a disc or disk (such as a CD, DVD, or Zip disk), their respective icons will also appear in the top portion of the sidebar.

When you select (click) any icon in the sidebar, its contents display in the window's right pane. For example, if you select your Home folder (the house icon), you'll see eight folders in the right pane, some of which are shown in the screen shot above. If

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you select the Network volume, you will see the computers connected to your network. If you select, say, a CD in the sidebar, you'll see its contents in the right pane. Alternatively, you can also double-click a mounted volume, disc, or disk on the Desktop to open a Finder window that lists its contents too.
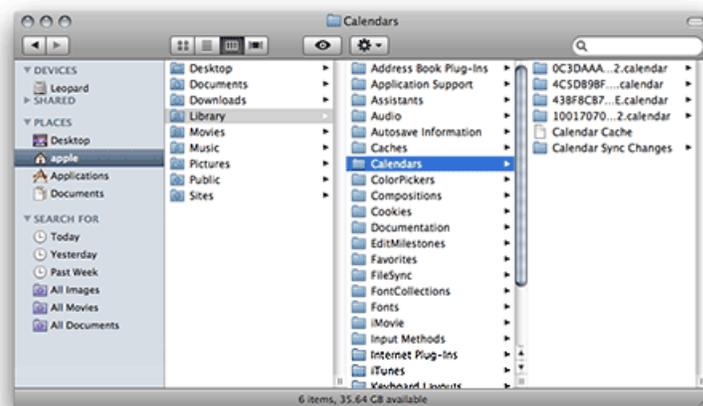
If you'd like to change how folder and volume contents appear in the right pane, click one of the view buttons in the toolbar. The Finder window, by default, displays contents in icons view. If you'd like to see more information about the contents in a selected folder or volume, click the list view button.

List view allows you to see more information about a selected folder's or volume's contents.

In list view, the Finder window displays some extra file and folder information, such as the last date the item was modified, the file size, and what kind of item it is. You can sort the list by name, date modified, size, or kind by simply clicking the respective column header.

If you'd rather see your stuff displayed in a more hierarchical fashion, click the columns view button. In columns view, the right pane splits into multiple columns to display your computer's file and folder organization, like this:

Columns view allows you to move quickly through your hard disk hierarchy.

Find Stuff Fast
Mac OS X features Spotlight, a new search technology that can find anything on your computer or any mounted volume as quickly as you can type (for more information about Spotlight, see "Mac 101: Spotlight"). If you need to find something, just type what you're looking for in any search field in any window—or click the Spotlight icon in the upper-right corner of your screen.

As soon as you start typing, Spotlight dynamically displays results that match your criteria in the Finder window. You can choose where you want Spotlight to look by clicking on an item in the header (such as Servers, Computer, Home, and more) that appears just below the search field in the Finder window. Spotlight will scour the location you select and organize its search results by kind.

The Finder window's search field uses powerful Spotlight search technology to find anything anywhere.

For example, if you wanted to find all the JPEG images on your Mac, type ".jpg" in the search field, and you'll immediately see results pop into the window. Click Computer in the header to find all JPEGs on your entire hard disk. Not only will Spotlight display thumbnails of your JPEG images, it'll also list other things that match your criteria, such as documents that contain the word ".jpg" in them.

The Menu Bar

Instead of appearing at the top of program windows, the Mac displays menus in the menu bar, which changes dynamically when you switch applications.

Unlike Windows, which places menus at the top of program windows, Mac OS X features a dynamic menu bar at the top of your screen. The menu bar's menus change according to the active application. Although they reside in a different place than what you may be used to, Mac menus function the same way as they do in Windows. (For more information, see "Mac 101: The Menu Bar.")

Speaking of menus...

You may be wondering how you're going to access the familiar shortcuts menu with an Apple one-button mouse. While you can't right-click with one, you can access the same menu by holding down the Control key and clicking an item (Control-click it). If you decide to get a two-button (or more) mouse, you can right-click items as you normally would.

The Dock

The Dock functions somewhat like your old Windows taskbar; you can fully customize some of its attributes too.

The Dock is that bar of icons that sits at the bottom of your screen, and provides easy access to some of the Apple applications on your Mac (such as Mail, Safari, iTunes, Address Book, and QuickTime Player), displays which applications are currently running, and holds windows in their minimized state like your old Windows taskbar. It's also the place to find the Trash. For your convenience, you can add your own applications, files, and folders to the Dock by simply dragging the icon to it.

To open an item that's in the Dock, just click its icon. For example, if you want to listen to some music, click the iTunes icon (the CD icon with blue music notes). When an application is running, the Dock displays a small black triangle beneath the application's icon. To make any currently running application the active one, click its icon in the Dock to switch to it (notice how this also changes the application menus in the menu bar).

The Dock keeps applications on its left side, while folders and windows are housed on its right. If you look closely, you'll see a vertical line that separates them. If you want to rearrange where the icons appear within their line limits, just drag a docked icon to another location on the Dock and drop it. (For more information, see "Mac 101: The Dock.")

The Desktop

The Mac Desktop functions pretty much just like your Windows one: You can put stuff on it, change its picture, and more (for more information, see "Mac 101: The Desktop").

However, one of the big differences is that it also provides access to all mounted disks (such as an external hard drive or Zip disk), mounted servers, and inserted discs (CDs and DVDs). Unlike accessing your computer's various drives like you did in My Computer, your Mac displays connected volumes, mounted disks, and inserted discs directly on the Desktop—you'll see the icons appear once you make the connection or insert the media.

System Preferences

On Windows, you used the Control Panel to customize various settings. On a Mac, you can use System Preferences to do pretty much the same thing. To open System Preferences, choose **System Preferences** from the **Apple** menu.

System Preferences is chock full of controls that let you tweak things in your system to how you see fit.

System Preferences displays the various components you can tweak to your liking. For example, if you want to set up a printer, click Print & Fax to display its preference pane from which you can add and configure your printer. Likewise, if you want to add another user account to your computer, click Accounts and create a new user. Need to configure your network settings? Click Network and change what you need. (For more information, see "Mac 101: Change My Preferences").

Tip: If you need more guided help, you may want to check out "Mac 101"—a special feature series written for new computer users.

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