

A Beginner's Guide to Using a Laptop

This friendly guide is designed for people who may have little or no experience using a computer but are interested in learning. It is particularly suited for learning groups such as U3A where members support each other while developing new skills.

The guide uses simple language, clear steps, and suggested illustrations that can be shown on screen during group sessions or added as screenshots in printed copies.

1. Getting to Know Your Laptop

A laptop is a portable computer that contains everything you need in one device.

Main parts:

- Screen – where information is displayed
- Keyboard – used for typing
- Touchpad – moves the pointer on the screen
- Power button – switches the laptop on and off
- USB ports – connect accessories such as a mouse
- Charging cable – powers and charges the laptop

2. Turning the Laptop On

Step-by-step:

1. Open the lid of the laptop.
2. Find the power button.
3. Press the button once.
4. Wait while the computer starts.

This usually takes about 30 seconds to a minute.

3. Understanding the Desktop

When the computer finishes starting you will see the Desktop.

Think of the Desktop as the top of a desk where tools and documents are placed.

Common items on the screen:

- Icons – small pictures representing programs
- Taskbar – usually along the bottom of the screen
- Start Menu – the main place to open programs

4. Using the Mouse or Touchpad

The arrow on the screen is called the pointer.

The pointer moves when you move the mouse or touchpad.

Common actions:

Single click – select something

Double click – open something

Right click – show extra options

Practice exercise:

Move the pointer around the screen and click on different icons to see what happens.

5. Opening the Internet

The internet is accessed using a program called a web browser.

Examples include Chrome, Edge, and Firefox.

To open a browser:

1. Move the pointer to the browser icon.
2. Double-click the icon.

Illustration to include:

Screenshot showing a browser icon on the desktop.

6. Searching the Internet

At the top of the browser window is the address bar.

You can type a website address or search for something.

Example searches:

- Weather in London
- Gardening advice
- Local history

7. Setting Up an Email Account

Email allows you to send messages electronically.

One of the easiest services to use is Gmail.

Steps:

1. Open your web browser.
2. Go to www.gmail.com
3. Click 'Create account'
4. Enter your name and details
5. Choose a password

8. Sending Your First Email

Once you are signed in:

1. Click Compose.
2. Type the recipient's email address.
3. Add a subject.
4. Write your message.
5. Click Send.

9. Staying Safe Online

The internet is extremely useful but it is important to stay safe.

Safety rules:

- Never share your password
- Do not click suspicious email links
- Always check the website address
- Look for the padlock symbol in the browser
- Ask someone you trust if unsure

10. Online Banking

Many banks allow you to manage your account online.

You can:

- Check balances
- Pay bills
- Transfer money
- View statements

Important safety rule:

Always type your bank's website address directly into the browser rather than clicking links in emails.

11. Saving Files

To save a document:

1. Click File
2. Choose Save As
3. Select a location such as Documents
4. Type a file name
5. Click Save

12. Shutting Down the Laptop

When you have finished:

1. Click the Start Menu.
2. Click the Power icon.
3. Choose Shut Down.

Wait until the screen goes dark before closing the lid.

13. Common Problems and Simple Solutions

Problem: The computer will not turn on.

Possible solution:

- Check that the charging cable is plugged in.
- Press the power button again.

Problem: The internet is not working.

Possible solution:

- Check that Wi-Fi is turned on.
- Restart the laptop.

Problem: The pointer will not move.

Possible solution:

- Try moving your finger on the touchpad again.
- If using a mouse, check the cable or batteries.

Problem: You forgot your password.

Possible solution:

- Use the password recovery option.
- Ask a trusted family member for help.

Problem: A strange message appears on screen.

Possible solution:

- Do not click anything immediately.
- Close the browser or restart the computer.

14. Practice Activities

Try practising the following:

- Search for a news website.
- Look up a hobby you enjoy.
- Send an email to a friend.
- Save a document.

Confidence with computers improves quickly with practice.

15. Final Thoughts

Learning new technology later in life is an achievement.

Computers help us stay connected, learn new things, and manage everyday tasks. Modern tools such as artificial intelligence assistants can also help with writing, research, and planning.

These technologies work best when they support human knowledge and experience rather than replacing it.