

For virtually any Operating System (OS) that utilizes a Graphical User Interface (GUI), for user interaction, will have a desktop. The desktop is the focal point for all user interaction; the desktop gives the user easy access to both user programs and system tools, and at the same time it manages all of these programs in a way that optimizes user productivity (at least that is the goal). Below is a picture of a Windows XP desktop in "Classic" Mode. The Classic desktop has the look and appearance of the older Microsoft operating systems, but still has all of the new features that are included with Windows XP. Below, the key features of the desktop are explained in greater detail.



A Windows Desktop

#### Desktop Icons



The *My Computer* icon is the access point to all of the files on your computer. The screen that immediately appears shows all of the Local Drives (Hard Drives), Optical Drives (CD-ROMs, DVD-ROMs, CD-RWs, etc.), Removable Drives (Floppy Drives, Zip Drives, Portable Hard Drives, Digital Cameras, etc.), and Mapped Network Drives. If you ever need to find a file, select a medium, and then use the "Search for files and folders" utility on the left, or use the Start Button, select Search, and then choose the appropriate item.



The *My Network Places* icon is a shortcut to a location in the *Explorer* hierarchy that shows all of your *Network Places*, which are places within your network that you have visited. On the left there are four tools under "Network Tasks" that any user which is connected to a network should be familiar with.

- **Add a network place** - This option allows you to add places indiscriminately. Using this tool allows you to specify a location in your network, a Web Site, ftp address, etc. These places are all like the Favorites in Internet Explorer, merely shortcuts to make your time more productive.
- **View network connections** - Your computer can have multiple connections to different networks which could consist of dial-up locations, wired network connections, wireless network connections, etc. Clicking on any of these items displays the properties for that connection. If the connection is active it displays a window that displays connection statistics, and if you click on the Support tab, there is a useful "Repair" button. If you ever have any network problems, you should click on this button first.
- **Set up a home or small office network** - Although most experts would not choose to use this feature to set up a network, people who do not know or do not want to know how to set up a network will find this tool invaluable, as it requires almost no knowledge of networks or their policies to set up.
- **View workgroup computers** - This option allows you to browse through computers in your workgroup and/or domain. Only computers that are sharing resources on the network will be visible, and then you will be only be able to browse those resources if the *Administrator* of that computer has given your account permission.



The *My Documents* icon is, by default, a shortcut to the folder:

*Windows Volume\Documents and Settings\User Name\Documents\*

Since the folder is dependant upon the current user that is logged in, every user's *My Documents* folder is different. Depending upon the version of Windows XP you are using, and your user classification, no other user can access any of the files in this folder. The *My Documents* folder is the default location to save all of your documents, downloaded files, pictures, and music.



The *Recycle Bin* is the place where all of the files you delete from your system immediately go by default. This is a safety feature which prevents you, or a third party, from accidentally deleting important files from your computer. The *Recycle Bin* is actually a hidden folder on your hard drive, on which a certain percentage of it's disk space is dedicated to this folder. Once the contents of the *Recycle Bin* reaches its limit the oldest items are permanently deleted to make room for any new items you delete. Some find the *Recycle Bin*, as a whole, an annoyance. It is possible to bypass the *Recycle Bin* on individual occasions by holding down *Shift* while deleting your items, or permanently, by right-clicking on the *Recycle Bin* and altering the properties.

### The Taskbar

The *Taskbar* is a portion that takes up the largest portion of the whole; in the classic Windows theme it is gray, but blue in the XP theme. The vast majority of the programs that you launch will immediately show up here as a rectangular box with corresponding title and icon. Windows includes this feature in order to allow the user to easily switch between programs. In newer versions of Windows, there is a feature incorporated into the *Taskbar* that stacks multiple windows of the same type on top of one another in the same rectangle when the *Taskbar* becomes full. Clicking on one of these grouped items will show you a sub menu of windows instead of bringing a program to the foreground. Another, alternative, method of switch programs is to hold down *Alt*, and then push *Tab*.




The *Taskbar* contains four items: 1) the *Start Menu* (explained later), 2) the *System Tray*, 3) the *Quick Launch Bar*, and, 4) for lack of a better word, the *Taskbar*. Both the *Quick Launch Bar*, and the *Taskbar* as a whole can be resized to your preference. If it seems that you cannot resize these items, simply right-click on them, and make sure that "Lock the Taskbar" does not have a check next to it.



The *System Tray* is, unfortunately, an often overlooked portion of the desktop. The *System Tray* is, by default, the rightmost portion of the *Taskbar*, and is a holding place for programs which are running in the background, almost always, anonymously. Good management of the *System Tray* is essential for a smooth running computer since it is an indicator of how many programs are launched at start-up; as common-sense suggests, the more icons that are present, the more resources are being consumed. Most of the programs that appear in here are worthless and do nothing more than slow down your computer. Most multimedia applications such as Real One Player, Quicktime, Winamp, etc. all launch needless programs at startup and you could free up valuable resources by disabling them. With that being said, the *System Tray* is an invaluable place to have programs run that would otherwise clutter your *Taskbar*. Many

programs have an option to hide in the *Taskbar* when minimized; you should consult the documentation of your program for information on how to accomplish this. Windows XP has a feature that hides InActive icons in the system tray.

Quick Launch Bar 

Windows XP, by default, has the *Quick Launch bar* turned off. I, however, find this feature invaluable since I do not like the new XP style *Start menu*. To turn it on, simply right-click on the *Taskbar*, and alter the relevant settings in the properties dialog. The *Quick Launch Bar* is a place to store shortcuts to your most commonly used programs and/or documents. With the shortcuts here, you can launch the programs without minimizing your currently running programs, or browsing the *Start Menu*. You can add shortcuts here simply by dragging them from an existing location, and you can delete unnecessary items by right-clicking on them and selecting delete.

The Start Button 

The *Start Menu Button* is located on the *Task Bar*, which is most commonly found on the bottom half of the screen. The *Start Button* launches the *Start Menu*, which is the main access point to both the user programs that are installed on the system, and the system resources which control the behavior of the OS. If you are looking for a program or a system setting, this is the best place to start.

### The Start Menu

There are two different version of the *Start Menu*, a "Classic" and a "XP" version. Unlike all of the other differences we have seen this thus far, the differences between these two versions extends beyond their look and feel. The "Classic" *Start Menu* is similar to those found in the previous version of Windows, and is thus probably more comfortable to use for those who have upgraded from earlier versions. To switch between these two versions, right-click on the *Taskbar*, select properties, then click on the "Start Menu" tab.

Regardless of the version you choose to use you will want to be familiar with the *Programs* tab. The *Programs* tab is the default location that installers place program execution shortcuts. You navigate the menu by moving your mouse over the appropriate icon or folder. The folders expand to reveal another sub menu, allowing you to navigate further into the hierarchy, and the icons launch programs when you click on them. You can place additional shortcuts by creating additional folders or shortcuts in the *Start Menu* folder in your user settings. I suggest only altering objects beneath the *Programs* level since the "XP" version of the *Start Menu* will reflect these items below the *Programs* level regardless.

To get to the appropriate folder:

1. Launch *My Computer*
2. Select the volume in which Windows is installed on (C: by default)
3. Navigate to *Windows Volume:\Documents and Settings\User Name\Start Menu\*

Your *Start Menu* is representative of the folders and shortcuts that are found in this folder, and any changes you make to this folder will affect your *Start Menu*. You will note that all of the folders and shortcuts in the *Start Menu* will not be in this folder. The rest of the icons that you are looking for are in the folder:

*Windows Volume:\Documents and Settings\All Users\Start Menu\*

You should note that any changes that you make in this folder will affect all of the other users on the system.

Two other options on either *Start Menu* are *Help and Support* and *Run*. *Help and Support* is the first place to go if you are looking for information on how to do something in the OS; if you are looking for information on how to do something within a program you should consult the program's help file, which can usually be found on the toolbar at top. *Run* is a tool that can be used to execute programs, specifically system programs such as *msconfig*, or *cmd*. *msconfig* allows you to configure windows startup options, and *cmd* launches a command line interface similar to an old OS known as DOS.

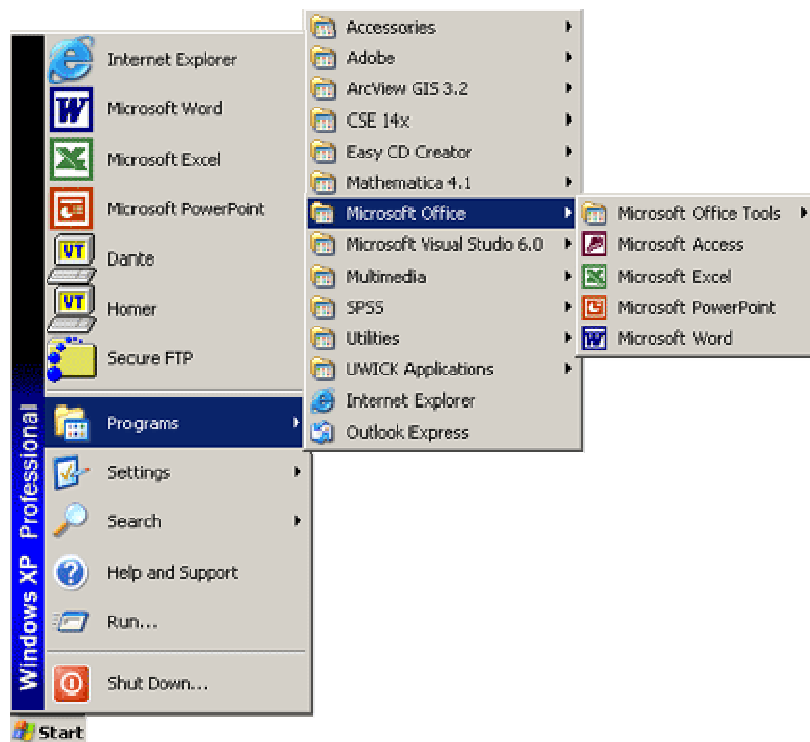
There are many of options that can make your *Start Menu* fit your personal style. To look at these options right-click on the *Taskbar*, select properties, click on *Start Menu*, and then click on customize.

### Classic Start Menu

The Classic *Start Menu*, is a far simpler design than the version found in the XP theme. This version is much more tree-like, with very few options at the base level; most everything found here is a branch that expands into other areas. A few components that any Windows user should be familiar with are:

- **Settings** - Contains the *Control Panel*, which will be discussed in detail on the next page, and other individual settings that you can choose from in the customization options such as Printers and Network Connection; these items themselves are components of the *Control Panel*
- **Search** - This is the fastest way to find files on your computer. It can also be used to search the internet, and 3<sup>rd</sup> party programs often install other options in here that are program specific.
- **Windows Update** - This option is a quick link to the Microsoft web site that is used to keep your Windows Operating System up-to-date with all of the latest patches and upgrades. It is always a good idea to make sure that you check for updates since security updates are released constantly.

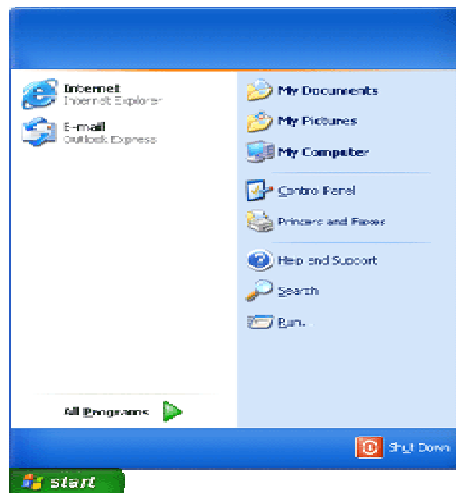
One particular customization option that you should take a look at is the "Personalized Menus" option. With this option on, programs you don't use that often are not displayed immediately when you browse through *Programs*, and you have to click on the double arrows located at the bottom of the menu to display all of the programs. This option is on by default, but can often hide programs that you installed on your computer.



An example of browsing the *Start Menu* in the Classic mode

The XP Start Menu

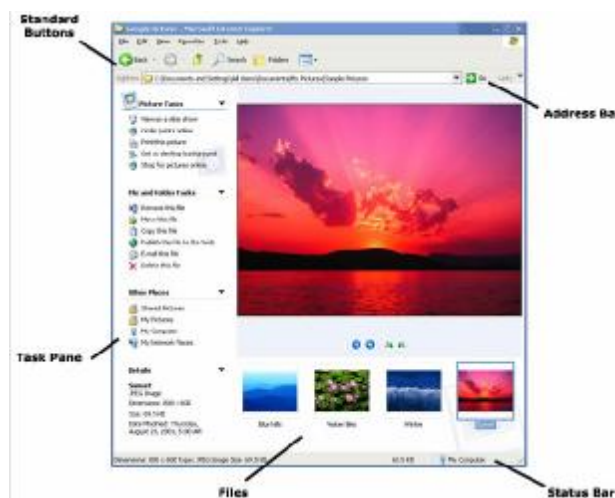
The XP *Start Menu* may look very different than the Classic *Start Menu*, but it is very similar in many ways; many of the features have just been moved around. The XP *Start Menu* is very flat in the sense that it has no layers by default except for the *Programs* tab. On the right side of the *Start Menu* are the programs and system controls that would normally either be found on the *Desktop* or in the *Settings* tab. You can, by editing the *Taskbar and Start Menu* control panel, make these icons expand into sub components. The left side of this *Start Menu* is much more interesting. The top two components are whatever shortcut is registered with *Windows* as your default Internet Browser and Email Application. Although there are none pictured on the *Start Menu* below the rest of that space would be dedicated to the programs that you use most frequently; the number of which can be altered through the *Taskbar and Start Menu* control panel. The last item found is your full listing of programs.



The XP Styled Start Menu

### Explorer

Windows Explorer is the Desktop Manager, File Browser, and Internet Browser all rolled into one package. Explorer is so integrated into the Windows framework that it was once the subject of a lot of controversy from competing internet browsers, who claimed that Microsoft was involved in unfair business practices. That being said, if you want to be able to use Windows well, you will need to learn the details of this program.



### The Task Pane

The Task Pane is an advent of Windows XP, and is very useful to those who do not know keyboard shortcuts for completing certain tasks or jumping to certain special locations within your computer. You can minimize/maximize any of the Tasks by simply clicking on the arrow to the right of the heading.

### File/Folder Specific Tasks

These tasks appear when you have entered a folder which has a defined type other than "Documents". The tasks that will appear here are suited for completing tasks on the given type; such as:

- View a slide show for a picture folder
- Shop for music online for a music folder
- Play all for a video folder

You can customize your folder types by right-clicking on the folder and selecting the Customize tab. In this tab there is a drop down menu which will allow you to change the type of files this folder contains. Many other options may appear here when you are in special locations such as the Control Panel, the root of your Windows Volume, the Program Files directory, and the Windows directory.

#### File and Folder Tasks

These tasks are those for which you would want to perform on any file or folder such as: sharing, renaming, moving, copying, and deleting. This is also where you would want to go if you needed to create a new folder.

#### Other Places

If you need to jump to a place quickly in the Windows Infrastructure you could do so quickly by using these shortcuts. The shortcuts that appear here are: My Computer, My Documents, and My Network Places.

#### Details

This is less a group of tasks, and more a tool for displaying file/folder specific information. When displayed this part of the Task Pane will display file details similar to those found in the Details view mode. The information displayed here consists of File Name, File Type, Size, Date Modified, Document Specific Information, and, if available, Preview Information in the format of a thumbnail.

#### Status Bar

The Status Bar, by default, has been turned off in Windows XP, and in Microsoft fashion, I fully expect it to disappear by the next rollout of the Windows Operating System. However, we should always take advantage of things while they are still around; one can turn on the Status Bar by going to View -> Status Bar. This bar is useful to Windows users not only in Windows Explorer, but in Internet Explorer as well. In Windows Explorer it shows you rudimentary file details which are specific for your file type. In Internet Explorer the status bar shows you useful messages such as: page load progress, page messages, and page errors.

#### Address Bar

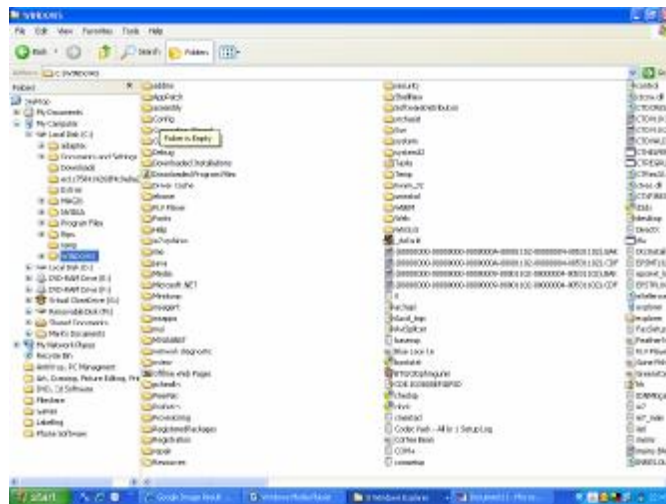
The address bar allows the user to type in a url or directory and move straight there without any further navigation as well as letting the user know where they are currently on the internet/file system. The wonderful thing about the address bar is that it allows you to seamlessly go between the two flavors of explorer; if you are on the internet type in "c:\", or type in "[www.washington.edu](http://www.washington.edu)" to go to the UW home page.

#### Standard Buttons

The standard buttons operate the same way in both Windows Explorer and Internet Explorer. The common buttons are:

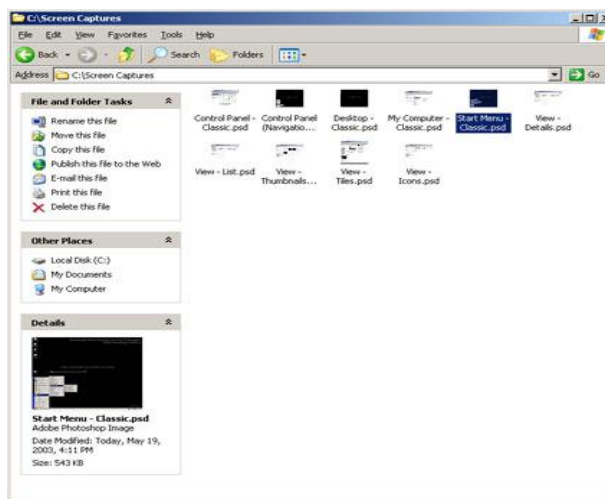
- Back - Navigates to the last page/folder that you were viewing.
- Forward - If you have browsed backwards using the back button you may use this button to move forward through the views you backed out of
- Home - Only available on Internet Explorer; takes the user to their home page as specified in the Internet Options. If this button is used in Windows Explorer, it will still take the user to the homepage.





Icons View

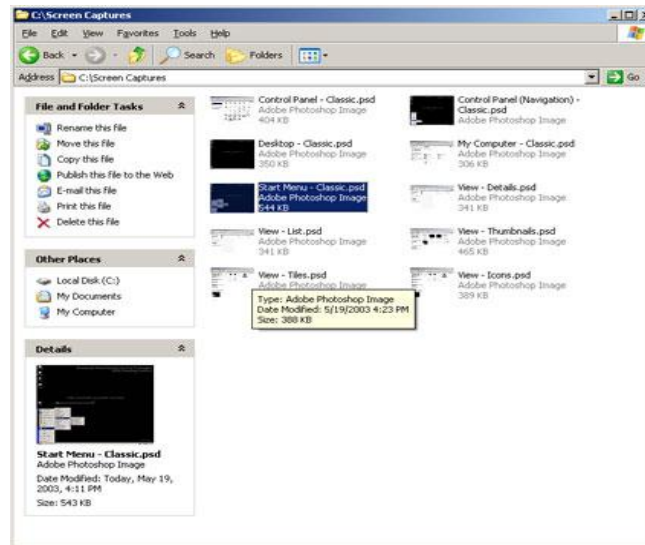
The Icons View displays icons, which are based on their associated program, and the file name. Some file types will display preview information; this, however, is a function of its associated program, and not Windows. Windows, by default, only shows preview information in the Thumbnail and Filmstrip View. An example of a program that displays preview information is Adobe Photoshop, which displays preview information for pictures as well as Photoshop Document (PSD) Files, an example of such is displayed below.



Explorer viewing files in the Icons Mode

Tiles View

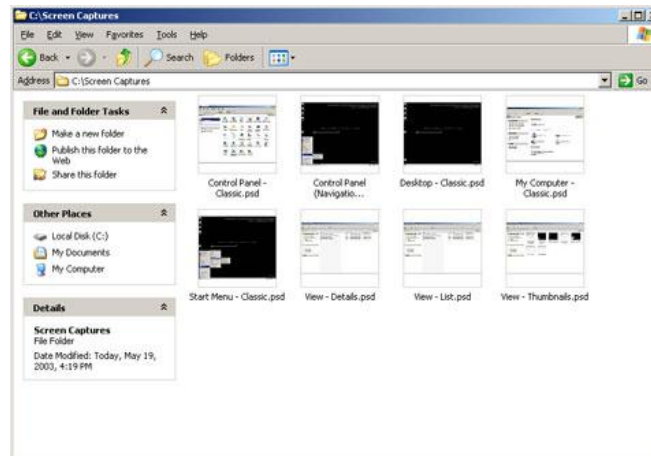
The Tiles View is the same as the Icons View with the exception that it displays some extra information along with the file name such as: File Type, Size, Picture Dimensions, and Music author and title.



Explorer viewing files in the Tiles Mode

### Thumbnails View

The Thumbnails View is the first view which Windows decides to display preview information of its own. This information is usually only displayed on files which contain multimedia content such as: Pictures (BMP, GIF, JPG, and PNG), and Movies (MPG, ASF, and AVI), but sometimes other documents such as Office Documents (DOC, XLS, and PPT) will display preview information as well.



Explorer viewing files in the Thumbnails Mode

### Filmstrip View

The Filmstrip View is excellent for browsing through multiple pictures at once. The biggest difference between this view and the other views which show you preview information is that a large preview is

generated above the thumbnails of the file currently selected. Also, this view gives the user primitive picture manipulation features below the large preview. Currently you are only allowed to rotate the image, but there will likely be more options in the next versions if windows.



Explorer viewing files in the Filmstrip Mode

You can change all of the folders in you computer to conform to the same viewing method by settings them all in the Folder Options control panel, or by going to Tools -> Folder Options -> View, and then clicking on the Apply to All Folders button. This will make every single folder display exactly as the one you are currently viewing.