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Getting Acquainted with Your Mac

by Charles Doe

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One of the latest in Apple's never ending saga of changes and new machines is that new machines available through various teacher buy programs are coming with no documentation or backup system disks. They can be purchase for an extra \$75.00. I had read that this would be done, but was startled by how limited the documentation was. Teachers who've purchased these Macs with little or not previous Mac experience and/or little or no experience with color Macs or System 7.x are really going to experience problems learning the Mac without help. If you didn't purchase the documentation or are waiting for it, here are some notes about the software that came on your hard drive when you got your Apple as well as comments about a few pitfalls to avoid and some Menu Bar helps.

These comments are based on a list of what came on my MAC LC III. If you purchased a different model, especially a Powerbook or some top end models, there will be some differences although many of the following comments will still apply. Also, Macintoshes available through retail outlets come in different combinations with different software, especially Performas.

One of the problems writing an article of this nature is that so many teachers approach the Mac with so many levels of expertise. I've tried to write this article assuming the reader knows little or nothing about the Mac, but have used lots of headings so you can skip and/or skim the sections you don't need.

The Bare Minimum

1. Take The Tour - This will teach you a lot about your Mac. Just open the folder by double-clicking it and double-click the program.

2. Leave The System Folder Alone - until you get more information.

3. Shut Down or how you turn your computer off is very important!
You should select "Shut Down" from the "Special" menu on the menu bar for reasons we won't get in to here. Select it and there will be a pause and the computer will tell you when you can turn it off. Doing this any other way may result in loss of information from your hard drive, damage to it or damage to programs in your system folder.

4. Double-Clicking - refers to pressing the mouse button twice, rapidly. Most programs and folders are opened by touching them with the point and "double-clicking." A single click will turn them dark.

5. Dragging - refers to moving a file (folder, icon, whatever), by clicking once on it and holding the mouse button down. That action "holds" the file and you can move it around as you move your mouse. "Dragging" is also used in the senses of "dragging down" a menu (the black highlight bar moves down as you move your mouse until you get to the command you want to highlight) or dragging across a phrase to highlight it. Basically "dragging" is whenever you hold your mouse button down and move the mouse so something (highlight or file) is moving on your screen.

6. Folders/Icons/Applications - MacIntoshes are very visual...they have visual symbols for many things. These visual symbolslittle pictures... are called icons. Some of these are standard. A picture of a file folder represents a container, just like a real file folder. It can contain, programs (often called applications) or documents of various kinds as well as other folders.

Programs are often called applications and are represented by a wide variety of icons. Programs will often come with more than one file, only one of which is the actual program. Your MacIntosh tour is one of those.

Your hard drive is represented by the little rectangular box in the upper right corner with the words "Macintosh HD" under it. The "window" (More information below.) you saw when you turned on your computer represents the hard drive. If the window should be "closed", double-click the hard drive and it will come back.

If you put a floppy in your disk drive, it will produce a disk icon. Double-click that icon and a "window" will open representing the disk with icons representing whatever is on the disk. Chances are, when the disk window opens, it will be smaller than your disk drive window. If you click once on your hard drive window, the disk window will disappear behind it. Get it back by closing the hard drive window or double-clicking the disk icon again.

Note: Don't confuse a "floppy" with a hard drive or hard disk because it has a hard plastic cover. The actual disk is a very thin sheet of plastic between the hard plastic covers.

7. Trash - this icon of a garbage can with the word "Trash" in the lower right corner, actually represents a program which erases things.

Drag the icon of your disk to it and it will eject the disk.

Drag the icon of a file from your disk or hard drive to it and it will eventually erase the file. Be careful dragging the icon of a file from the disk to it. A lot of people unintentionally erase files from disks. Newer Macs do not automatically flush files as soon as old ones do. You will want to select "Empty Trash" from the "Special Menu" in the menu bar to empty it.

8. Hard Drive - The hard drive is made of an aluminum disk and other materials (larger ones are made of two, three or more of these) which is constantly spinning in your computer (unless you've shut it down properly). The forty or eighty or more megs of "hard drive space" is permanent storage in your Mac. Once you transfer a program to it, you can put the floppy disk your program probably came on away. You won't need it unless you inadvertently erase or damage the program on your hard drive. Putting programs on your hard drive makes them faster and more convenient to use. Unlike the 4 or so megs of RAM (Random Access Memory) your computer came with, the contents won't be lost when you turn your computer off. (RAM is kind of temporary memory that you use when your computer is on.)

9. Windows - are another set of "symbols" for various information and processes. Basically, a "window" can be opened through which you can view the contents of a disk, whether a hard disk or a floppy. If the window isn't open when you insert a floppy, just double-click its icon. If the window which will show you the contents of your hard drive isn't open, just double-click it.

Windows can be

closed - Point to the little box in the upper left hand corner and click it.

moved - point to the window's title bar at its top (the horizontal lines are best), click and hold your mouse button and move the mouse to move the window. Release the mouse button when you stop.

resized - point at the little box in the lower right hand corner, click and hold and move you mouse. The window will be resized. Release the mouse button when you have it the size you want it.

enlarged - point at the "zoom box" in the windows upper right hand corner, click and release it. The window will expand to the full size permitted by your screen. Click the "zoom box" again and the window will return to its previous size.

scrolled - windows can contain more than is visible. The scroll bars, located at the bottom and right sides, darken when you click them if more folders than can be seen are contained. The bar at the bottom scrolls to the right and left, the one to the right scrolls up and down. Clicking one of the arrows at either end scrolls the bar slowly and clicking the bar itself scrolls rapidly.

made active - you can have more than one window open at a time, but only one is "active". The horizontal lines in the title bar are visible in an active window.

10. Menu Bar - the white strip at the top of your screen which contains the names of menus available to you and other material. (Menus are a list of actions you can choose from. You choose by clicking the Menu title in the menu bar, dragging down until the command you want is highlighted (you'll see a black bar on them) and your mouse button released.

Initially, the only commands you need to worry about are "shut down" command in the "Special Menu" and perhaps the "New Folder" command in the "File Menu."

On the left, you will see an Apple, referred to as the "Apple Menu" which contains a number of programs you will need to work with. See more detailed discussion below.

On the far right you will see the "Finder Icon." New Macs (with system 7) can work with more than one program. Some times the program window is inadvertently closed, but the program is still active, causing some confusion. If you will click on the finder icon in the far right corner, you'll see a list of open programs. You can move back and forth between the programs by selecting one or the other at the bottom of the menu that pops up when you click and hold your mouse button down.

11. Balloon Help - Next to the finder icon is a ballon with a question mark. This is the "Balloon Help" menu. This is useful but limited. Turn on this help by selecting "Show Balloons" from the menu. When that is done, a little balloon with brief explanatory remarks will pop up for nearly everything you point at. Many programs "support" that, which makes supply "balloon" help when that is turned on. MicroSoft Works is one of those.

The disadvantages are that the comments are necessarily short and they slow down the works. You may want to turn them on until you've learned all they can show you in a given situation, then turn "Balloon Help" back off.

12. Dialog Boxes - Occassionally, you will see a "dialog" box pop up in the middle of the screen. Sometimes, you'll hear a beep when that happens. No actions are possible until you "answer" the dialog box. Sometimes you just have to click it. Sometimes, it contains a horizontal thermometer device which shows the progress of an action in progress and you just wait for it to finish. Sometimes, you will have to click on a "Yes" or "No" or some equivalent. When you perform the required action, the Dialog box will disappear and you can proceed.

When you turn on your new Mac LC III, you will probably see

in addition to the menu bar and hard drive and trash icons:

The Window which represents your hard drive will be open and labeled with the same words you see under your Hard Drive Icon (probably Macintosh HD, but you can change that.) and icons representing the following files:

Read Me - This is a text file with a few comments. Double click it to read.

TeachText -This is a limited word processor which makes reading the "Read Me" file possible. This program is very useful as a lot of software comes with notes which can be read with this faster and easier than with your word processor. Create a "Utilities File" and put this and other utilities you will acquire in it.

Macintosh Basics (Folder) - This is a huge program. When you open the folder, you'll see the program and a bunch of film icons. These are actually little movies which are played by the program during its presentation. This is the only documentation you may have gotten and it is good, especially if you're a beginner. By all means, use it. After you and whoever else who'll be using your computer has learned what this program has to teach, you may want to move it to a floppy disk (actually, two HD disks will be needed) and remove it from your hard drive to save the space.

HyperCard (Folder) - HyperCard is an outstanding program which used to come complete on all Macs. This is more of Apple's cost cutting measures. What used to be free now costs between \$130 and \$300, depending on what you get.

HyperCard generates a wide variety of files called "stacks" which cannot be used or "played" unless you have HyperCard on your HardDrive. The HyperCard Player on your Hard Drive allows you to "play" stacks but doesn't allow you to make any.

Home-This is essentially HyperCard's "table of contents".

HyperCard Player

Read Me-some explanatory notes about HyperCard.

If you double-click any "stack" created with HyperCard, you'll go directly to it. If you double-click "HyperCard Player" or "Home", you'll go to what's called the "Home Card"

System Folder

This folder is without a doubt the most important folder on your Hard Drive as its contents enables your computer to start from the Hard Drive, print, create the pictures on the screen, contains all the programs

under your Apple, and does lots of other chores necessary to the operation of your Macintosh. Be very careful that

1. nothing unnecessary is put in the System Folder.
2. nothing is removed and trashed by accident. Some things can be removed, (in fact some things probably should be) but some must not. See comments below.

If certain files are removed from your system folder and placed in the trash so they are lost, you may find yourself unable to start your computer or unable to print. See the following notes. But as a general rule of thumb, if in doubt, don't throw it out!

If you are just beginning, you can skip this section. You don't need to know anything about it to begin successful operation of your Mac except to be sure it doesn't get thrown away.

Absolutely essential items from the following list of items that came in the system folder on your hard drive will be starred (*).

Optional items can be removed and trashed to save space, but read all of this article first and don't trash it if in doubt. You don't really need to trash them until you start running out of hard drive space. Also, don't trash anything from this folder if you haven't make a back-up. See notes below.

System Folder Contents

Apple Menu Items (folder) (actually most of this is optional to the running of your computer, but it contains many useful items.) You never run these items from your system folder. Choose them from the "Apple Menu".

Alarm Clock-useful, but optional. A small program called SuperClock is better.

Calculator - very useful but also optional.

*Chooser (folder) This is essential and must be in the Apple Menu items folder. (This is actually an alias of the real thing, but that's another topic.

Key Caps - shows you some of the many letters and shapes that can be formed with various fonts (much more than just letters and numbers). Best when used from within a word processor. Optional

Note Pad-useful, but optional for writing quick notes to yourself.

Puzzle- fun if you like this sort of thing, but optional.

Scrapbook-a very useful utility. Scraps of text and graphics can be pasted in and saved. This is optional but don't toss it unless you have one of several new and improved models.

AppleShare - This has to do with networks and may be involved in some printing jobs. I'm still checking this out.

AppleTalk ImageWriter - This is a printer driver (makes a certain kind of printer work) and you definitely don't need it if you don't use your computer with an ImageWriter on a network.

*Control Panels (Folder)

Most of these are essential to the operation of your Mac. If you look carefully, you will find this folder in your system file and an alias of it in your Apple Menu Items folder. That enables you to access the control panels from your Apple Menu....a lot more convenient.

You can double-click the icon of all of these and experiment except where otherwise noted, without causing any problems.

*Color - allows you to work with the color of highlight and folders.

*Date & Time - Lets you modify the way these are displayed.

Easy Access - Optional and appears to be for handicapped users.

File sharing Monitor-This has to do with networks and is not necessary unless your computer is networked.

*General Controls -sets time, date, desktop color and pattern, and more.

*Keyboard - no need to modify this, but don't toss it.

*Labels - Lets you reset the names and colors of the labels in the "Label" menu on the Menu Bar. (Double-click it, then double-click the color box to see what happens.

Map - just what it says and entirely optional.

*Memory - Contains things you may want to change later, but definitely an advanced topic. Don't modify until you're sure of what you're doing.

*Monitors - Also you to change from B & W to four, sixteen, or 256 colors. Comes set at 256 which is fine for most purposes. Also allows you to switch monitors if you have more than one.

*Mouse - allows you to change mouse and click speed.

*Numbers - modifies the way numbers are displayed.

Sharing Setup - This is for use if your computer is on a network, and is otherwise unnecessary.

*Sound-Allows you to change the volume and sound used in some situations. If you have a mic plugged in the back, you can record and save sound here as well. (Previous LCs came with a mic, but this is another cost cutting measure.

*Startup Disk - Used if you have more than one hard drive. Otherwise, don't modify or experiment.

Users & Groups - This is also for use on a network and is not needed if you're not hooked in with other computers.

*Views - changes the way files and other items are viewed.

File Sharing Extension-This has to do with networks and may be involved in some printing jobs. I'm still checking this out.

*Finder - Absolutely crucial.

*Finder Help - The source of Balloons help.

*Fonts (Folder)

This folder contains a basic collection of great fonts your computer relies on to print and display text. You may eventually decide you don't need some and you will almost certainly add to it, but for the time being don't change a thing. (Double click one of these in your system folder and see what happens.)

Chicago
Courier
Geneva
Helvetica
Monaco
New York
Palatino
Symbol
Times

ImageWriter - This is a printer driver (makes a certain kind of printer work) and you definitely don't need it if you don't use your computer with an ImageWriter.

LQ AppleTalk ImageWriter - This is a printer driver (makes a certain kind of printer work) and you definitely don't need it if you don't use your computer with an LQ (Letter Quality) ImageWriter on a network.

LQ ImageWriter - This is a printer driver (makes a certain kind of printer work) and you definitely don't need it if you don't use your computer with an LQ ImageWriter on a network.

LaserWriter - This is a printer driver (makes a certain kind of printer work) and you definitely don't need it if you don't use your computer with a LaserWriter.

Network Extension -This has to do with networks and may be involved in some printing jobs. I'm still checking this out.

Personal LW LS - This is a printer driver (makes a certain kind of printer work) and you definitely don't need it if you don't use your computer with a Personal LW LS.

Personal LaserWriter SC - This is a printer driver (makes a certain kind of printer work) and you definitely don't need it if you don't use your computer with a Personal LaserWriter SC.

*Preferences (folder)

This has to do with the operations of various programs. Some programs automatically install their "preferences" here. No need to modify this.

Finder Preferences

Users & Groups Data

*PrintMonitor - Crucial to printing.

*QuickTimeTM - A relatively new addition to the system folder. This allows "movies" to be played in some situations. Don't remove.

Scrapbook File - Contains graphics and text pasted into the scrapbook under the Apple Menu. If you toss this, you will lose anything saved and the program will generate a new, blank file.

Startup Items - Is empty, but leave it here. You will eventually use it.

*System - absolutely crucial.

*System Enabler 003 - absolutely crucial.

StyleWriter - This is a printer driver (makes a certain kind of printer work) and you definitely don't need it if you don't use your computer with a StyleWriter.

****End of System File Contents****

When You Need More Space

It may not seem like it at first, but eventually, you will run out of space on your hard drive. When that happens, one way to get more is to remove unessential and unused files from your system folder. This won't save enough memory, but it will help. Before I make any recommendations, let me repeat, If in doubt, don't trash!

1. The first files I removed were the Printer Drivers. Your computer came with printer drivers (programs to operate them) for a variety of printers. You only need the driver for your particular printer and the others just take up space. Remove any of them from your system folder (after backing up) which don't go with your printer or any printer you are likely to use. You'll save some memory that way. Remove printer drivers by putting them in the trash.

Your system probably came with the following eight drivers. If you have a StyleWriter, you can remove the first seven. If you have a LaserWriter of some sort and are unsure of which to remove, remove the other five, but leave the three drivers which refer to LaserWriters.

AppleTalk ImageWriter
ImageWriter
LQ AppleTalk ImageWriter
LQ ImageWriter
LaserWriter
Personal LW LS
Personal LaserWriter SC
StyleWriter

2. If your computer isn't on a network of computers, remove all files relating to networking. Other than printer drivers, those include

AppleShare
from the Control Panel Folder
 File sharing Monitor
 Sharing Setup
 Users & Groups
File Sharing Extension
Network Extension

3. Remove unused Apple Menu and Control Panel Items. I've removed:

-from the Control Panel Folder
 Easy Access
 Map
-from the Apple Menu Folder
 Key Caps -not all that useful after a while.
 Puzzle - Cute, but it gets old after a while.
I've replaced other items in this folder with better versions.

Improvements (Things to add or replace.)

I've removed "Alarm" from the Apple Menu Items and replaced it with "SuperClock," which is much better and more useful. I've replaced "ScrapBook" with Scrapz which does the same and a lot more. "Note Pad" appears useful and for awhile, I replaced it with a better version, but in two years haven't used either. I'm thinking about removing both.

I've added Artisto, miniWriter 1.75 and lots of aliases to my Apple Menu. "Artisto" is the best of several graphics utilities I've used. Its not as useful with System 7 as with earlier systems, but still comes in handy. "miniWriter" is a limited word processor which is rapidly accessed from the Apple Menu (even faster than using an alias of a larger program). It comes in handy for writing quick notes and reading a lot of text files rapidly. A lot of programs have been created to allow you to manipulate the color of windows, frames, words, files, etc. Generally you should wait to try these until you are very comfortable with your Mac.

Aliases can be made by clicking on a program once to make the icon black and then selecting "Make Alias" from the file Menu. I then place them in the Apple Menu Items folder in my System File to make those aliases appear under the Apple. Sometimes, I place them in certain folders with other programs. Then all I have to do is go to the Apple Menu and select the Alias, or double-click the alias if its in a file, to start the Alias's program without opening and closing a lot of folders. This can be extremely useful.

I've also added a number of fonts for various purposes. The fonts that come with most new Macs are standard fonts which I think have come with Macs for a long time. Some of the LaserWriters came with

some new fonts specifically designed for printing on a laser which are great. I also like special effects fonts for various purposes.

Various programs will make additions to your system folder which you never need to worry about. Some programs make "preference" files which are very small. Some word processors install their dictionaries, thesauri and help files in the system folder. Desktop encyclopedias, accessed from your Apple Menu, add huge files to the system folder. Once installed, all of these should all be left alone.

Charlie's Note: This article is part of another project and is included here for those of you who may be beginners or may work with beginners. Print it out and use it as a hand out in your beginner Mac Classes. You may want to make some modifications (and have our permission) if you working in a lab with all b/w Macs for example , with networked machines, in a situations (with students in a lab) in which you want understanding but not modification, etc.

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