

Moving on to Windows 8

Windows 8 was released to a mixed reception. Although reaction towards its improved support for touchscreen devices was positive, the new user interface of the operating system was widely criticized for being confusing and difficult to learn (especially when used with a keyboard and mouse instead of a touchscreen). Then came Windows 8.1. It addresses some aspects of Windows 8 that were criticized by reviewers and early adopters and incorporates additional improvements to various aspects of the operating system. The following discusses how to use a Windows 8.1 machine in the familiar desktop mode.

Starting in Desktop Mode

For someone familiar with earlier versions of Windows, the easiest way to start using a desktop or laptop computer with Windows 8.1 is to work with the familiar desktop screen. Windows 8.1 gives you the option to start out in the desktop environment instead of landing on the tile-based Start screen when the computer boots up, but the setting is not the easiest to find. Here is how to do it:

- If you are not there already, switch to desktop mode by clicking on the desktop tile (at the lower left of the Start screen).
- Right-click on the taskbar and choose Properties.
- In the Taskbar and Navigation Properties box that opens, click the Navigation tab.
- In “Start screen” area, turn on the checkbox next to “When I sign in or close all apps on a screen, go to the desktop instead of Start.”
- Click the “Apply” button, then the “OK” button.

The Start Button

In the desktop screen, you'll find a start button in the bottom-left-hand corner, but it doesn't function in exactly the same way as it did in earlier Windows systems. Clicking it will return you to the tile-based Start screen of Windows 8, rather than launching the traditional Start menu. (You can get the same result by pressing the Windows logo key on the keyboard.) From the Start screen, you can get back to the desktop screen by clicking on the start button, clicking on the desktop tile, or pressing the Windows logo key on the keyboard.

If you right-click on the start button, you'll get a pop-up menu that provides access to tools like the control panel, task manager and shutdown/restart. There are also other utilities, including Programs and Features, where you can uninstall or change desktop apps and Power Options for customizing your battery settings.

The “Charms”

A special menu called the charms bar can be made to appear by moving the mouse cursor to the upper right corner of the screen. (This works in either the Desktop or Start screen.)

When the Charms bar appears, lingering along your screen's right edge, it sports five icons, ready to be clicked. Here's what each icon does:

- **Search:** Choose this, and Windows assumes you want to search through what you're currently seeing onscreen. To expand your search, choose one of the other search locations: Apps, Settings, or Files.
- **Share:** This fetches options for sharing what's currently on your screen. When viewing a web page, for example, a click of the Share button lets you choose Mail to e-mail the page's link to a friend.
- **Start:** This simply takes you back to the Start screen.
- **Devices:** Choose this to send your current screen's information to another device, such as a printer, second monitor, or perhaps a phone. (The Devices option lists only devices that are currently connected with your computer and able to receive the screen's information.)
- **Settings:** This lets you quickly tweak your computer's six major settings: Wi-Fi/Network, Volume, Screen, Notifications, Power, and Keyboard/Language. Not enough? Then choose the words Change PC Settings along the bottom to open the Start screen's mini-Control Panel.

When you move the mouse cursor out of the Charms bar, the bar disappears.