Basic Computer Skills:
An introduction to the PC, Windows and the Internet

Prepared by Sam Ladner
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About this document

This document is a curriculum guide that is designed to assist for Vancouver Community Network seminar leaders in teaching a one-day, basic computer course to students who will one day assist others in using computers.

This curriculum offers the basics of computer and Internet use, but it also offers an introduction to *technology training itself*. These twin goals may, at times, seem at cross-purposes. Seminar leaders should keep in mind as they teach this seminar that the students will eventually train others.

The Curriculum

Beginning the seminar: introductions

At the beginning of the seminar, it is important for everyone in the room to introduce themselves and their reasons for coming. There is a very specific purpose to this process, beyond simply breaking the ice. Seminar leaders need to know what students will expect over the day. It's a difficult day if all the students have different expectations.

Moreover, the seminar leader can set the tone for the entire day in the first moments of the class.

Introductions

Students introduce themselves, explain their reasons for coming, and what they expect to learn that day

Seminar overview

The seminar leader gives a brief overview of what will be covered during the day. It is important here to address any specific student expectations that are sure *not* to be met during the day. For example, a student may expect to learn how to install a hard drive in their home computer. The seminar leader should manage the students' expectations and offer them a reasonable idea of what they will learn that day.

Module 1 – Introducing the computer

Talking about technology

This section is particularly important for new computer users. Technology training is not easy. Many students experience **tech anxiety** when dealing with computers. They sometimes say they are afraid of computers and have often experienced frustration when trying to use them on their own. A technology trainer's job is not to simply teach students how to perform tasks on a computer. Rather, the technology trainer should **demystify technology** and **create a sense of comfort** for the students.

In order to create a comfortable, non-intimidating atmosphere, the seminar leader should take a few minutes to talk about the students' experience with technology.

Let's go around the room and share who we are, why we're here and some experiences we've had with technology. So what are some words that we've brought up here with technology?

(Note to trainers – summarize these words on white board. Words like "confusing," "scary," "frustrating" are often used. Writing these words down on the white board and discussing them as a group will set the stage for a supportive, non-intimidating environment.)

Turn on the Computer

➤ You'll all notice that the computers are turned off. This is our first lesson. Reach down and find the round button in the middle of the beige box. Press it in once. Congratulations, you've just turned on the computer!

➤ Notice how long it takes to get ready. This process is called "booting up." Booting up can be confusing to new users because they think it should take less time. Be patient.

Turn off the Computer (optional)

Note to trainers – VCN computers are often very slow on boot-up. Turning off the computer may take too much time. Use your better judgment.

Module 2 – Using Windows

The language of this curriculum for Modules 2 through 4 will be written for seminar leaders to read out to their students. Notice the straightforward language and the conversational style.

Introducing the desktop

This section is a brief overview of the desktop. The purpose behind this is to familiarize the students with the language and look of the Windows desktop.

Wallpaper

This is the background image on the desktop. When you have a chance on your own, you can change this image to customize your computer.

Icons

These are the small logo-like pictures on the desktop.

Shortcuts

These look like icons, but with an important difference: shortcuts have a small arrow on the bottom left-hand side. Shortcuts are exactly that – a short way to get to that file or application.

The mouse

Single Clicking

Take hold of your mouse with your right hand. Just move it around the screen and watch the arrow move. Get used to the feeling. When you're ready, go ahead and click once on one of the pictures you see on the screen. Make sure you use the left mouse button. These are called icons. Go ahead on click once on one of them. What happens?

Notice how the icon changes colour? This is called "selecting." When an object changes colour, it is selected. When you want Windows to do something to an object, you must first select it.

Now click away onto a blank piece of screen. What happens?

Double Clicking

Now that we know how to select using a single click, we're going to use something called the double click. It's a fast double click. (Note to trainers – demonstrate the speed of the double click with your finger on a desk).

Go ahead and try to double click, again using the left button, on an icon and see what happens. You launched an application. So single click selects, double click *activates a program.*

Double clicking can be frustrating at first. Go ahead and try to get the rhythm just right.

Right Clicking

So now we're going to use the right mouse button. Go ahead and click on an icon with the right button. Notice you get a menu.

So, single click selects, double click activates a program and right click gives you a menu. Some software programs do special things with these types of clicks, but you just find that out by experimenting. Let's try experimenting right now.

Known problems

This section will be offered in each of the following three modules. It is intended as a guide for the seminar leader to point out to students where they, and the people they may help in the future, might go wrong in this module. Known problems are essentially a set of "coaching points" to assist students.

Double-click rhythm problems

New computer users are often unfamiliar with the rhythm of the double-click. Seminar leaders can direct students to tap the desk with their own fingers until they learn the rhythm.

Right and left mouse buttons

Students might be confused by the two buttons on the mouse (this is especially true for Mac users). Point out to students that there is a difference between the right and left buttons.

Exiting Windows

The "start" menu

Here is an important part of learning how to use Windows – the start menu. Take your mouse and click once on the word "start" in the bottom left-hand corner of your screen. Notice the menu that comes up. Explore it.

Shut down

Now for those of you who want to learn how to shut down a computer properly, we're going to go over that. We're not actually going to do it right now, just to save time, but we'll go over it quickly. Click on the start menu. See the word "shut down" as the first line? Click on that and take a look at the menu.

Known problems

Cold shut down

For new computer users, it's natural to just turn off the computer using the switch. It's important to remember that the proper shut down procedure is better for your computer.

Using the windows in Windows

Windows v.s. windows

We are using what is called an "operating system," which is called Microsoft Windows. An operating system is the big software program on this piece of hardware that organizes all the other software programs. There is another operating system you may have heard of – Mac OS. Today I'm going to talk about Windows the computer program and windows the little boxes on the screen. When I say "Windows doesn't like it when…" I'm talking about the operating system. When I say, "Open the window to a new size…" I'm talking about the little box. If you get confused, just ask me and I'll tell you which one I'm talking about.

Launching an application using a desktop shortcut

Now we're going to use the little boxes on the screen, remember these are also called windows. So I want you to activate one of the applications on the screen. Remember how to do that? By double-clicking on a shortcut.

Okay, now that you've got a window open, notice the three boxes in the top right-hand corner, a little bar, a couple of boxes, and then an X.

Minimize the Window

Try clicking on the little bar. What happened?

Notice that your window did not disappear but is down at the bottom of the screen. This gray line is called the task bar. So by clicking on the little bar in the right-hand corner you have "minimized" your window. You can bring your window back up by clicking on it.

Go ahead and send it to task bar, or minimize it, and then bring it back up a couple of times.

There's another way to "minimize" a window, not by sending it to the task bar and getting rid of it completely, but by making it smaller. Click on the middle box in the top right-hand corner of the window and see what happens.

Maximize the Window

So now that we've made it small, let's make the window big. Make sure that your window is not the full screen. Now click on the middle box in the top right-hand corner of the screen. This is maximizing.

Move the Window

Everyone minimize their window and make it not the whole screen. Okay, now we're going to move it around the screen. Notice the blue bar at the top of the window? This is called the title bar. We can drag the window around by clicking on the title bar and holding down the left mouse button. Go ahead and do that and then move the mouse around and see what happens.

Resize the Window

Now we're going to make the window a particular size. Hover the mouse over the edge of the window. Notice how it turns into a skinny line with two arrows on either side of it. You can hold down the left mouse button to play with either the width or the length.

Now hover the mouse on the exact corner of the window. This is somewhat tricky. Notice that you've got now a diagonal line with two arrows on either side of it. You can hold the left mouse button and drag. See what happens to the window when you do that.

Now you've got several ways to clean up your screen: sending the window to the task bar, making it less than the whole screen, or closing it completely.

Switch between Windows

Using the task bar

Make sure that you've got at least two windows open. How can you tell if you do? Take a look a the gray bar at the bottom of your screen. See how there are little boxes with names on them? These are your open windows. The one little box that's pushed in is the window you're using right now. The others that look like they're pushed out are the windows you're not using. But all of them are open.

You can switch the window you're using my clicking on these little boxes in the task bar. Go ahead and try that.

Using ALT-TAB

Here's another way of switching between windows that is really tricky. Hold down the ALT key with your thumb and at the same time, click on the tab key with another finger. Watch what happens.

Optional: using the Start Menu to open a new window

Now we're going to learn another way to open a window or "start an application" as they say. Click once on the start menu. Go up to the word that says "Programs" and slide your mouse over. You can select one of those programs with your mouse to open another window. Take a moment to give that a try.

Known problems

Exiting instead of minimizing

Users often click the "X" in the top right-hand corner of the window, particularly if they have novice mouse skills. Caution students to watch out for this. If they do click the X, they often have to wait for the application to start again. This delays the pace of the class.

"Losing" a window

As students become comfortable in opening windows by double-clicking on icons, they frequently open many windows. The task bar is not an intuitive place for them to look to keep track of all the windows. Point out that each time they open a window, they will see it listed in the task bar.

Finding, storing and moving files

This section is critical for students' understanding of how Windows stores its files. Microsoft's "folder" metaphor is useful and can be built upon. Explain to students that the computer is like a drawer in a filing cabinet. The drawer is actually the c drive, or the "hard drive" or, c:\ as it's known in windows. Inside the drawer, there are folders and inside the folders are files. There folder isn't a file itself, just a place where files are kept. When files aren't inside a folder, they sit just loose inside the drawer (or the c drive).

Introducing Windows Explorer

Now that we've played with windows on the screen, let's take a look inside the computer and see what's filed there. We do this by looking in Windows Explorer.

On the start menu, you can go up to programs and then over and down to Explorer, or you can right click on the Start menu to get a menu. Then select "explore."

Once you've got Explorer open, let's look at the components. On the left-hand side you have a listing of all the folders. Click once on one of the folders and watch what happens on the right-hand side of the screen.

Create a folder

Okay now that you've had a chance to look around in Explorer. We're going to create a folder. I want to you to make a new folder. Go up to the File menu and choose "new," glide your mouse across and then choose "folder."

Notice how the new folder doesn't really have a name yet. It's blue or selected and the cursor is blinking inside it. That means Windows is waiting for you to name it. Go ahead and name your folder whatever you want.

Now when you put your mouse back in the left pane of the window, your folder gets sorted alphabetically with the other folders.

Rename the folder

Renaming the folder is pretty easy but it does take some motor control. To rename the folder you need to click once on the text part of the name the folder. But it's a *long* press of the button. (Note to trainers – demonstrate the long button push for the students, contrast it with the quick single click and the quick double click).

When you've pressed it at the right speed, the name should be selected and the cursor should blink inside it, just like before.

Copy a file into the folder

Now we're going to take a file and put it inside our new folder. Everyone click on the c:\ and select (note to trainers – have students select a text-only file on the c:\. There should be at least a log file on the c:\ that is harmless to copy and paste into a new folder).

View file details

Now we're going to use Windows Explorer to tell us more about the file we just put in our folder. In windows, Files have three components:
  ➤ Name
  ➤ Location
  ➤ Type

Name is pretty obvious. Location is where it's stored on the computer. Sometimes this can be called the "path name" if it's written out in Windows language. For example: c:\finance\royalbank\statement0801.doc. This is a file that sits inside the folder called royal bank, that's inside another folder called finance.

File type refers to what program you used to make the file. There's a tricky shorthand for understanding why kind of file it is. Notice the three letters after the name of the file? This is called the "file extention" or just the last name of the file. Each last name tells you what kind of program was used to make that file. In the statement example, .doc means "made by MS Word."

On the view menu, choose, details. You should be able to see the name of the file that includes its last name or file extension. It should also tell you the file's type, size and the date

it was created. You can even sort the list according to name, type, or by date. Notice how the file extension corresponds to the file type.

Find a file without using a file extension

Okay, now that we've learned a little bit about how Windows files its files, let's try and find a file. Remember: files have three components:

➢ Name
➢ Location
➢ Type

Using these three file attributes, users can more easily: In the tools menu, choose find files. Just type in Netscape and see what happens. How many search results did you get? How do you know which one you're looking for?

Find a file using a file extension

Okay, now let's pretend we want to find Netscape the program, with its last name or extension of .exe. Try searching for netscape.exe instead of just Netscape and see what happens.

Now that you've found Netscape, can you remember how to activate the application? Go ahead and double click.

Known problems

Mouse problems

Novice mouse users may notice difficulty in this section because of the advanced mousing skills required. Encourage students to continue to practice and just take it slow.

Remembering a file's three components

Remind students often about name, type and location. This will solve common problems such as "losing" a file (not knowing the location) or having multiple copies of a single file.

Module 3 – Introduction to the Internet

<u>What is the Internet?</u>

This section requires some explanation from the seminar leader. Below is an explanation, complete with a diagram that seminar leaders can draw on a white board, that will show what the Internet actually is. Showing students what the Internet is and how it works goes a long way for their conceptual understanding of how to use it. This is an important section. Seminar leaders are encouraged to take the time to offer this brief explanation.

The Internet was created in the 1970s as a way of connecting university-based and military computers. The "internet" itself is actually the cables that connect big computers, called servers, to each other. When we go "on the Internet" we are connecting our little computer to these cables.

Client/Server Architecture – clients are little computers, like the ones we're working on right now. They are connected, using a big cable or maybe your telephone line, to big computers called servers. These big computers are connected to each other.

Servers are designed to "serve up" files and documents to the clients. So using your client, you can contact the VCN server and say, "Serve me up the CBC's Web page." The VCN server goes to the CBC's server and says, "Give me that Web page."

Client Server Architecture
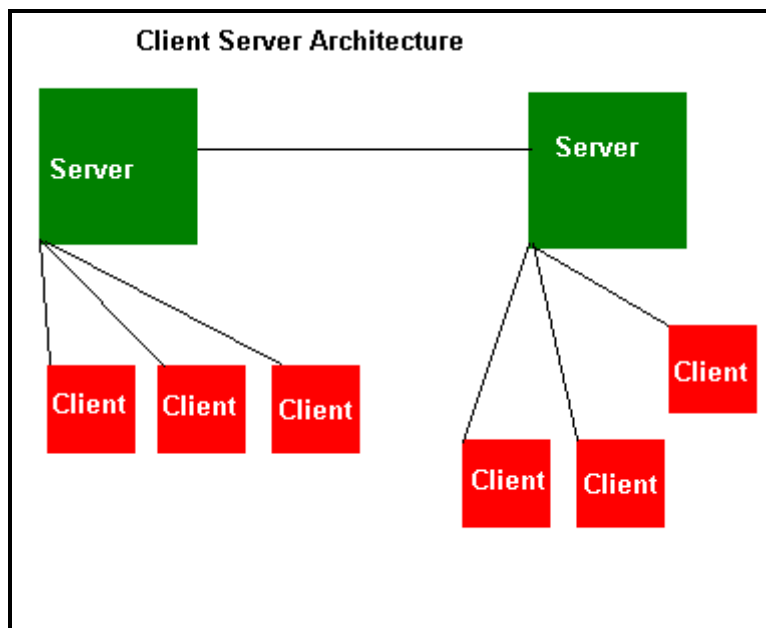
The Internet – based on the client/server architecture, the Internet is actually the cables that connect the servers. You get on the Internet by using a cable or your phone line to connect to a server.

Introduction to Internet browsing

Browse a Web Page in Netscape
Now that we know how to find Netscape, even if it's not on our desktop, let's use Netscape to browse the Internet.

Everyone start Netscape. Go to the desktop and find the shortcut. Or you can find it through the Start menu. Notice that it shows you a page for the Vancouver Community Network. This is a Web page. Now we're going to navigate around the web page. There are a few ways to navigate around a web page. These may seem familiar to you if you've used a word processor.

Use the scroll bar
First, use your mouse on the scroll bar. You can click on the up arrow or the down arrow, or your can click and drag the block in the centre of the scroll bar either up or down.

Use the arrow keys

If you don't want to use the mouse too much (some of don't for ergonomic reasons) you can also use the arrow keys. But for those to work, you must first click on the inside pane of the Netscape window. Now you can scroll up or down using the arrow keys on the keyboard.

Follow a link

Now here comes the exciting part. See the blue underlined words? These are called "hyperlinks" or just links. On the Internet, you don't need to double click, just single click.

So click once on one of the links and see what happens. Now do you want to get back? You can either use the back button or the "Go" menu. The back button is pretty simple to use, but can take a long time to get back where you started if you've clicked through a lot of links.

The Go menu will remember where you've been and you can skip back to exactly where you want to go. Use the back button, the go menu and click on links to go places. This is your chance to surf the Internet.

Perform a Simple Web Search

So how do you find anything on the Internet? There are Web sites called "search engines" that catalogue other sites on the Internet. Has anybody heard of a search engine? Some examples are:

- Yahoo! Canada
- Google.com or Google.ca
- HotBot.com

Now we're going to use one of these search engines to find something.

Searching Using Google

In the location bar of Netscape, type in www.google.com. Notice that you don't need the http:// part. You can skip that and your server will still find google's server.

Now in Google's search box, type in "custody law" and let's all take a look at the results.

Evaluate Your search results

What do you think of your search results? Which one of these sites would you trust to give you correct information?

The same skills you use to judge information in other media apply here on the Internet too. Remember a lot of sites on the Internet are in it for advertising or they're trying to sell you something. And unlike radio, TV and newspapers, just about anybody can put up a web site. They could have all sorts of motives.

The clues you want to look at are:

- The domain name – where does the site come from? Is this a reputable name or place?
- Site appearance – what does it look like? Does it look professional or amateurish? Is it hard to use or figure out? If so, it's probably not done by a professional organization.

Known problems

Double clicking on links

Novice Web surfers often assume that the clicking patterns for Windows and the Internet are the same. There is no real harm in double-clicking on Web links, but learning to single click makes Web surfing a more efficient and enjoyable experience.

Information overload

People who are new to the Web often feel overwhelmed by the amount of information out there. Learning some simple search strategies, as listed above, can help but it won't necessarily solve the problem. There *is* a lot of information on the Web. The only solution is to have realistic expectations about what the Web can and cannot offer, and to practice surfing.

Module 4 – Introduction to Email

This module includes a section on signing up for a VCN email address. This is an optional section that seminar leaders can choose to leave out. Students may prefer to sign up for a Yahoo or Hotmail account. It's up to the seminar leader to decide what kind of email address they will choose.

Seminar leaders will need to ensure that the students' lab terminals are equipped with temporary email addresses for this module. Each terminal in the 411 Seniors' Centre has temporary addresses.

Introduction to email

In this section, seminar leaders can offer a brief introduction to email. Like the introductory section on the Internet, this introduction is very important. It will give students a conceptual understanding of how email actually works.

What is email?

Email is actually electronic text messages that are sent from server to server. Remember the client/server architecture that we talked about earlier? Clients can download the mail that the server holds for them if they have a password.
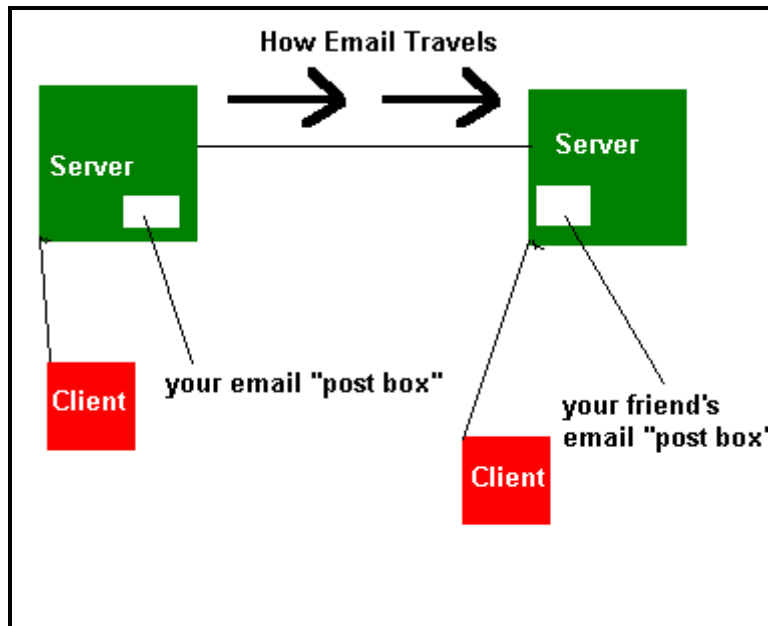
Attachments are files that are "piggybacked" onto the text email message and sent from server to server, but attached to a particular email message.

Registering for a VCN Email Account

Okay, now that we know what email is and how it works, let's up for an email address. An email address has two components:

➢ The username: this is everything *before* the @ sign
➢ The server name: this is everything *after* the @ sign. This is sometimes called *the domain name*.

To get your very own email address, let's launch Netscape and go to this page: http://www.vcn.bc.ca/register/

And now, let's follow the steps.

Seminar leaders can go into as much detail here as needed, depending on the group of students.

Composing a new message

Now let's compose and send an email. Click on the "New Message" button on the tool bar. Now you've got a little email window. You can make this any size you want, but sometimes it's less confusing if you make only part of the screen and not the entire screen.

Type in the address of someone in this room. Remember, each address has the "username" which is the part before the at symbol. Then there's the at symbol, and then the domain name.

The CC line is "carbon copy" – a leftover from analogue days. It means send it to this person to. The BCC means "blind carbon copy." This means that you can copy someone else, without the original recipient finding out.

Make sure you put something descriptive in the subject line. This is what you see when you receive the email so make sure people will understand what's inside the email.

Okay, once you're done, go ahead and press send.

Reply, Forward

Now that you've received an email, you can reply right away. Open the message you received by double-clicking on it. Now click the "reply" button in the tool bar. Notice how you get a new message with the person's address already filled out.

You can do the same by using the "forward" button. Explore these options by sending and receiving email with your neighbours.

Address Book

Open a new message. Now instead of writing in the blank "to" address line, click on the address book button. Have you got anybody in your address book? If so, double click on a name and then click okay in the bottom of the address book window.

Adding an entry to your address book

If you don't have anyone in your address book, you can add a person's name and email address just once. From then on, you won't have to remember their address. It's kind of like speed dial on a telephone.

Go back to the main screen by either minimizing or closing your message that you were composing. Under the communicator menu, choose address book.

Now choose "new card." Notice this dialogue box that comes up? You can enter a bunch of information about people in this and Netscape Mail saves it all for you. There are similar functions in other address books for other programs.

Now finish your new entry and close the address book. Now we're going to find that new entry with a new message.

Known problems

How do I know my email has been received?

New email users often ask for confirmation of their email having been received. Unfortunately, there is no way of knowing. You can keep track of what you have sent by looking in the "sent items" folder, but you can't know for sure if your email has actually been received.

Attachments

Attachments are covered in the Level 2 training.