The Microsoft Windows Operating System

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	WHAT'S COVERED

Without a doubt, Microsoft's Windows operating system is the most common of all the available GUI-based operating systems. Every software application on a Windows-based computer has a similar user interface. Users with experience using any software application on Windows should have no problem using other applications. The GUI, as implemented by MS Windows, has become the standard for applications and operating systems. The graphical user interface (GUI) incorporates icons and a mouse to make using a computer easy for experienced and inexperienced computer users. Users can simply point to and click on a file, folder, or software application that they want to use. In fact, the presence of a GUI is one of the most important requirements in properly characterizing an operating system. In this tutorial we will cover the Microsoft Windows operating system.

Our discussion will break down as follows:

1. Microsoft Windows

In 1985, Microsoft released the first version of Windows. This version of Windows was not an operating system, but instead was an application that ran on top of the DOS operating system, providing a graphical environment. It was quite limited and had little commercial success. It was not until the 1990 release of Windows 3.0 that Microsoft found success with a graphical user interface. Since then, there have been a multitude of Windows versions, but it was the release of Windows 3.0 that enabled business users to begin using a graphical user interface, ushering us into the graphical-computing era. Each release adds the ability to process more data at once and access more memory. Features such as multitasking, virtual memory, and voice input have become standard features.

2. Elements of the Microsoft Windows OS

The Windows OS is one of the most commonly used operating systems available. Due to its relative uniformity across releases, users who learn and understand how to use one version of MS Windows can typically make the transition to another (newer) version. Every version of Windows OS contains the same basic elements.

These elements can be grouped in two categories: system configuration and user interface elements.

2a. System Configuration Elements

- **Control Panel**: Gives the user the ability to change basic system settings. Users may also add hardware components, as well as add or remove software. The control panel also provides users with control over user accounts.
- **Device Manager**: Gives the user the ability to display and control computer hardware.
- **Windows Mobility**: Provides the user with information related to mobile computing.
- **Security and Maintenance**: Provides the user with information related to the security components within the operating system.

2b. User Interface Elements

- **Windows Shell**: Provides the main mechanism through which the Windows GUI is presented. All dialog boxes, menus, taskbar, start button menu options, and Windows Explorer are contained within the Windows Shell.
- **Windows Explorer**: Gives the user access to files and software applications, while allowing the user to launch applications and perform tasks.
- **File Folders**: Provides users with a visual way in which to view files that are contained or stored in a particular location.
- **Windows Search**: Provides users with a way to explore all files on a hard disk.
- **Start Menu**: The launch point for all software applications loaded into the Windows OS. All software appears in this menu as a nested list.
- **Taskbar**: Application bar used to launch and monitor software applications.
- **Icons**: Small graphical representation of a program or file that, when clicked on, will be run or opened.
- **Desktop** — A system of organization for icons and file folders on the computer screen.

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3. Key Windows Applications

Microsoft Windows today is the most widely used OS on personal home computers and laptop computers, as well as on business machines. Microsoft popularized the idea of the office-software productivity bundle with its release of Microsoft Office. This package continues to dominate the market, and most businesses expect employees to know how to use this software. These applications, called **productivity software**, allow office employees to complete their daily work. Many times, these applications come packaged together, such as in Microsoft's Office Suite.

Below is a list of some common productivity software applications.

- **Word Processing**: This class of software provides for the creation of written documents. Functions include the ability to type and edit text, format fonts and paragraphs, and add, move, and delete text throughout the document. Microsoft's word processing application is Microsoft Word.
- **Spreadsheet**: This class of software provides a way to do numeric calculations and analysis. The working area is divided into rows and columns, where users can enter numbers, text, or formulas. Microsoft's spreadsheet application is Microsoft Excel.
- **Presentation**: This class of software provides for the creation of slideshow presentations, which can include tables, charts, images, and text. Typically, presentation software allows the user to include notes

on the slides that are not visible to viewers when projected onto a larger screen. Microsoft's presentation software is Microsoft PowerPoint.

- **Electronic Mail**: This class of software provides for the sending and receiving of email messages.
- **Graphics**: This class of software enables users to create pictures, diagrams, charts, and graphs.

Some office suites include other types of software. The professional version of Office also includes Microsoft Access, a database package. Users can also purchase Visio, a program that is used to create models, diagrams, and charts. The graphics that are used in Visio are standard images used in flowcharts, decision diagrams, playbooks, and even network diagramming.

⊙ WATCH

Check out the video below to learn more about key Windows applications.

📄 TERM TO KNOW

Productivity Software

Software that allows people to complete daily work; typically utilized in business or organizational settings.

✓ SUMMARY

Microsoft Windows has become one of the most popular and widely used operating systems for personal computing and business, primarily due to the fact that users who can use one version of Windows OS can easily transition to other versions without the need for added learning or training. In this tutorial, we defined the core **elements of Windows OS**, as well as the **productivity software** that comes prepackaged with MS Windows.

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📄 TERMS TO KNOW

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