Windows 10 with a Screen Reader

1. Introduction

Windows 10 is an operating system that powers your computer. Typically, when you first start up your computer, you should be taken to the Windows Desktop. The Windows Desktop is made up of four components; desktop, start menu, taskbar, and system tray or the notification area. Because computers can be customized, each computer you interact with may look different. Some may have different icons on the desktop and some may have you login before you can access the Windows Desktop. Thankfully, the keyboard shortcuts introduced remain consistent.

2. The Desktop

Keyboard Shortcuts

windows + m: Minimizes all windows and moves focus to the Desktop.

arrow keys: moves through the icons on your desktop.

First letter navigation: hit the first letter of the icon you are looking for on your desktop.

Enter: opens the icon which is in focus or last spoken.

alt + f4: closes a program

Escape: closes a menu.

tab: moves between the components of the Windows Desktop. SHIFT + TAB will reverse direction.

insert + tab: Repeats the item in focus.

The desktop takes up the majority of the main screen of the Windows Desktop. The desktop contains icons which represent files, folders, or programs on your computer. You may hit windows + m to move to your desktop at any time. You may think of your desktop as home base. If you ever get lost on your computer, use windows + m, to return to a known location and begin finding your way. Once on your desktop you can move through the icons with your arrow keys. This method is not efficient because you do not know where icons are in relation to each other. A simpler way of finding an icon is to use first letter navigation. Simply press the first letter of the icon you are looking for and you will be taken to the first icon with that letter. If you have more than one icon which starts with the same letter, continue pressing the letter to cycle through all the icons. To open an icon, press enter. To close any open program, hit alt + f4. It is important to remember the difference between closing a program, with alt + f4, and minimizing windows, with windows + m. The former closes the program all together and the latter returns you to your desktop but keeps the program open.

From the desktop, you may press the tab key to move to the other three components of the Windows Desktop. While tab will move you forward, shift + tab will move you in reverse. It is also important to remember that you may hit modifier + tab (with JAWS) and (with Window-Eyes) to have the current item, in focus, repeated.

3. Start Menu

Keyboard Shortcuts

Windows: opens and closes the start menu

Tab: moves through the areas of the start menu

Enter: opens a program or menu

Escape: closes a menu

Up/down arrows: moves through the options within start menu areas

The start menu is used to open files, folders, and programs located on your computer. You may open the start menu, from anywhere, by hitting the Windows key. Once the start menu is opened, focus is put on the search area. Your screen reader will announce search box edit, type in text. This search box is used to search your computer for programs, files, folders, and settings. Begin typing the first few letters of what you are looking for and the search box will try to predict what you are looking for. For example, open the start menu and type int. Your screen reader should announce Internet Explorer. Hitting your enter key will open the option announced by your screen reader.

Pressing the tab key will move you through the other areas of the start menu. Your start menu may look a bit different depending on options configured. From the search box, pressing tab takes you to the microphone button, which allows you to use Cortana, or your voice, to search, open programs, or ask specific questions. The next press of tab takes you to the start menu navigation items. You may use your up/down arrows to navigate the options within this area. You will find your account options, settings, and power options. Press tab again to move to a list of applications. Use your up/down arrow keys to move through the options. The first section provides the most recently installed applications, the second section provides the most used applications, and the last section provides all programs installed. Press tab once again to move to a tile list. This is a list of applications that provide live updates without having to open the program. This section is navigated with the up/down/right/left arrows. One last press of tab brings you back to the search box from where you started. At any time, you may press your Windows key to close the start menu.

4. Task Bar

Keyboard Shortcuts

Windows + t: moves to the task bar

Right/left arrows: moves through the options on the task bar

Enter: opens an item from the task bar

Alt + tab: switches between open applications

You may press windows + t, from anywhere, to move to your taskbar. Use your right and left arrow keys to move through the taskbar button. The taskbar shows you all the open and running programs on your computer. Windows 10 may place items on your task bar and display them even when they are not open. Hitting enter on a taskbar button will open that option. This is one way you can move through open programs on your computer. A more efficient way to accomplish this is by using the alt + tab shortcut. To switch between open programs, hold down the alt key and continue to press the tab key until you hear the program you want to switch to and then release the alt key. The chosen program will then be open or in focus.

5. The System Tray or Notification Area

Keyboard Shortcuts

Windows + b; moves to the system tray

Right/left arrows: moves through the options on the system tray

Enter: opens an option

Escape: closes a menu option

The system tray contains the time, internet connectivity information, and other programs that are running, in the background, on your computer like virus protection. You may press windows + b to access the system tray. Use your right and left arrow keys to move through the options.

6. Reading with JAWS

Keyboard Shortcuts

Right arrow: Say next character.

Left arrow: Say prior character.

control + right arrow: Say next word.

control + left arrow: Say prior word.

Down arrow: Say next line.

Up arrow: Say prior line.

control + down arrow: Say next paragraph.

control + up arrow: Say prior paragraph.

end: Moves focus to the end of the line.

home: Moves focus to the beginning of the line.

control + end: Moves to the bottom of the document.

control + home: Moves to the top of the document.

 numpad 5: Say character.

numpad 5 pressed twice quickly: Say character phonetically.

insert + numpad 5: Say word.

insert + numpad 5 pressed twice quickly: Spell word.

alt + numpad 5: Say current sentence.

alt + down arrow: Say next sentence.

alt + up arrow: Say prior sentence.

control + numpad 5: Say paragraph.

modifier + up arrow twice quickly: Spell current line

insert + down arrow: Read all from cursor to end of the document.

control: Quiets JAWS speech.

The curser is a flashing line letting you know where text will be placed when you type. You can also use the curser to move around a document and have it read to you. Being able to move around a document is very important and will be utilized throughout the computer including; word processing, working with emails, browsing the internet, and working in edit fields. Take as much time as you need to get a firm grasp on how to move around using the command listed for your screen reader.

7. Dialog boxes and Controls

Keyboard Shortcuts

tab: Moves forward through the controls in a dialog box.

shift + tab: Moves backwards through the controls in a dialog box.

up and down arrows: Used to move through options in a radial button, combo box, and spin box.

Right and left arrows: Use to move character by character through text edit fields and adjust sliders.

home: Moves focus to beginning of list.

end: Moves focus to end of list.

spacebar: Selects a radio button, activates a command button, or select or deselect a checkbox.

escape: Closes a dialog box without saving the information. Equivalent to activating the Cancel Button.

insert + b: To get an overview of the dialog box.

insert + tab: Announces the control in focus.

Dialog boxes and their controls are found throughout the computer. Examples of dialog boxes include the save dialog box, the open dialog box, and the print dialog box. Many of the controls found in a dialog box will also be found on web pages. To move through a dialog box, press tab. Tab will move you from control to control while shift + tab will move you in reverse. The list of keyboard shortcuts includes what keys to use when you encounter specific controls in dialog boxes.

8. File Management

Keyboard Shortcuts

up and down arrows: Moves through the file list.

enter: Opens a folder or file.

control + shift + n: Creates a new folder

control + c: copy

control + x: cut

control + v: paste

control + z: undo

f2: rename a folder or file.

delete: deletes the folder or file.

applications: Opens a context menu with options specific to that folder or file including copy, cut, paste, rename, and new folder.

File management is very important to keep your files organized. For example, you may want to keep your documents folder organized so you may more quickly find files you are looking for. File Explorer is the program used to view folders and files on your computer. File Explorer displays folder and files in the same way. First, all your folders are displayed alphabetically. Then, all your files are also listed alphabetically. You can tell if something is a folder or file because a file ends with a file extension. A file extension is the period followed by three or four letters at the end of a file name. This tells the computer which program to use to open the file. Folders do not have file extensions.

Use your up and down arrows to move through your file list. You may also use first letter navigation to quickly jump to a specific file or folder. Once you find either a folder or file you would like to open, hit your enter key. If you open a folder and would like to close it and return one level back, hit your backspace key. You may also create new folders to organize your files. Hit control + shift + n to create a new folder. Type in the name and hit enter to create the new folder. You can now copy or cut files or folders into this new folder. Navigate to the file or folder you would like to move and either cut or copy it. Copy leaves the original in its location and also makes a copy in the new place while cut removes the original and only places it in the new location. When you have navigated to the new location, paste with control + v. You may also rename files or folders by opening your context menu or hitting f2. Type the new name and hit enter. You can also delete folders and files. Move to the file or folder and hit the delete key to remove it. Please remember, if you delete a folder, it removes all files and folder contained within that folder.

9. This PC

Keyboard Shortcuts

Windows + e: Opens the computer folder

Up/down arrows: moves through the options within the This PC folder

First letter navigation: pressing the first letter of the file or folder you are looking for jumps to that option

Enter: opens the location

Backspace: moves back one level

This PC folder shows you all the drives on your computer including local hard drives, DVD drives, USB flash, or network storage. This is a typical File Explorer window and the same keyboard commands work here. You may use your up and down arrow keys to move through the attached drives. The drives are categorized by type and the category will be announced as you move into it.

10. The Recycle Bin

The recycle bin can be found on your desktop. This displays any files which have been deleted from your computer. It is good practice to empty your recycle bin periodically. Navigate to your recycle bin icon and open the context menu. Down arrow to empty recycle bin and hit enter. There also may be times when you delete a file and decide it was a mistake. You may restore the file by navigating to and opening the recycle bin. Arrow or use first letter navigation to find the file and open the context menu. Arrow down to restore and hit enter. ? This will restore the file to its original location.

 11. Searching for Files

Keyboard Shortcuts

Windows + e: opens a File Explorer window.

F3: While in a File Explorer window, moves to the search box.

Enter: completes a search and also opens a file from the search results.

Up/down arrow: moves through the search results

As you begin using your computer more and more, you will create more and more files on your computer. Although organizing them via folders, learned in the file management section, is an effective way to keep track of files, there will be times when you cannot remember what you called a file or where to find it. You may use File Explorer’s search feature to find the file. At any time, press windows + e to open a new File Explorer window and press f3 to move focus to the search box. Type in your search terms and pause for a moment. Then press enter to complete the search. You may now use your down arrow to review the search results. Simply press enter, on a file, to open it. You may also search a specific folder by navigating to that folder and then press f3 to move to the search box. Follow the same instructions above to search this folder.