

The taskbar (overview)

The taskbar is the long horizontal bar at the bottom of your screen. Unlike the desktop, which can get obscured by the windows on top of it, the taskbar is visible almost all the time. It has four main sections:

- * The Start button Picture of the Start button, which opens the Start menu. Show the Start menu.
- * The Quick Launch toolbar, which lets you start programs with one click.
- *The middle section, which shows you which programs and documents you have opened and allows you to quickly switch between them.
- *The notification area, which includes a clock and icons (small pictures) that communicate the status of certain programs and computer settings.

You're likely to use the middle section of the taskbar the most, so we'll discuss that first.
Keep track of your windows

If you open more than one program or document at a time, you can quickly start piling up windows on your desktop. Because windows often cover each other or take up the whole screen, it's sometimes hard to see what else is underneath or remember what you've already opened.

That's where the taskbar comes in handy. Whenever you open a program, folder, or document, Windows creates a button on the taskbar corresponding to that item. The button shows the icon and name of the item. Open two programs and show that each has its own button on the taskbar. Notice how the taskbar button for one of the programs appears pressed in. That indicates that this is the active window, meaning that it's in front of any other open windows and is ready for you to interact with. To switch to another window, click its taskbar button. In our example, clicking the taskbar button for the other program brings its window to the front.

Minimize and restore windows

When a window is active (its taskbar button appears pressed down), clicking its taskbar button minimizes the window. That means that the window disappears from the desktop. Minimizing a window doesn't close it or delete its contents—it merely removes it from the desktop temporarily.

In the picture below, Calculator has been minimized, but not closed. You can tell it's still running because it has a button on the taskbar.

You can also minimize a window by clicking the Minimize button, in the upper-right corner of the window:

To restore a minimized window (make it show up again on the desktop), click its taskbar button.

How the taskbar groups similar items

As you open more windows, you'll see existing taskbar buttons shrink in width to let new buttons squeeze in. However, if the taskbar becomes too crowded with buttons, then the buttons for the same program will be grouped into a single button.

To see how this works, suppose you have three Paint pictures open on the desktop. If the taskbar has enough room, it displays the three Paint windows as separate buttons:

But if you have many programs and documents open, the taskbar collapses these three buttons into a single button that shows the name of the group (Paint) and the number of items in the group (3). Clicking the button displays a menu listing the files in the group:

Clicking one of the items in the menu activates its window so you can see it.

To close all of the items in the group, right-click the group's taskbar button, and then click Close Group.

See previews of your open windows

When you move your mouse pointer to a taskbar button, a small picture appears that shows you a miniature version of the corresponding window. This preview, also called a thumbnail, is especially useful if you can't identify a window by its title alone. And if one of your windows has video or animation playing, you'll see it playing in the preview. When you point to a grouped taskbar button, you'll see a stack of previews, but only the topmost preview will be visible.

Taskbar window previews won't work unless your computer is running Windows Aero, the premium visual experience of Windows Vista. Aero is not available in Windows Vista Starter or Windows Vista Home Basic.

The Quick Launch toolbar

To the immediate right of the Start button is the Quick Launch toolbar. As its name implies, it lets you launch (start) programs with a single click. For example, click the Picture of the Internet Explorer icon to start Internet Explorer. You can customize the Quick Launch toolbar by adding your favourite programs to it. Locate the program in the Start menu, right-click it, and then click Add to Quick Launch. (If you don't see this option, you can also drag the program's icon to the Quick Launch toolbar.) The program's icon now appears in the toolbar. To remove an icon from the Quick Launch toolbar, right-click it, click Delete, and then click Yes.

By default, the Quick Launch toolbar also contains two special buttons. Click the Show Desktop button Picture of the Show Desktop icon to temporarily hide all open windows and show the desktop; click the button again to show all windows again. Click the Switch between windows button Picture of the Switch between windows button to switch between open windows using Windows Flip 3D. If you don't see icons that you've added to the Quick Launch toolbar, and you see double chevrons Picture of double chevrons on the Quick Launch toolbar instead, it means that the icons won't fit in the toolbar. You can click the double chevrons to access the hidden toolbar programs, but it's better to resize the toolbar to preserve one-click access to them.

To resize the Quick Launch toolbar

1. Right-click an empty area of the taskbar, and then click Lock the Taskbar to clear the check mark and unlock the taskbar.

2. Move the toolbar sizing handle to the right (see picture) until you see all of your icons.

If your computer isn't running Windows Aero, clicking the Switch between windows button won't open Flip 3D. Instead, you'll see the same window as you would if you pressed ALT+TAB on your keyboard.

The notification area

The notification area, on the far right side of the taskbar, includes a clock and a group of icons. These icons communicate the status of something on your computer or provide access to certain settings. The set of icons you see depends on which programs or services you have installed and how your computer manufacturer set up your computer.

When you move your pointer to a particular icon, you will see that icon's name or the status of a setting. For example, pointing to the volume icon Picture of the volume icon in the taskbar notification area shows the current volume level of your computer. Pointing to the network icon Picture of the network icon in the taskbar notification area displays information about whether you are connected to a network, the connection speed, and the signal strength.

Double-clicking an icon in the notification area usually opens the program or setting associated with it. For example, double-clicking the volume icon opens the volume controls. Double-clicking the network icon opens Network and Sharing Centre.

Occasionally, an icon in the notification area will display a small pop-up window (called a notification) to notify you about something.

Click the Close button Picture of a close button for a notification in the upper-right corner of the notification to dismiss it. If you don't do anything, the notification will fade away on its own after a few seconds.

To reduce clutter, Windows hides icons in the notification area when you haven't used them in a while. If icons become hidden, click the Show hidden icons button to temporarily display the hidden icons.

Customize the taskbar

There are many ways to customize the taskbar to suit your preferences. For example, you can move the entire taskbar to the left, right, or top edge of the screen. You can make the taskbar larger or have Windows automatically hide it when you're not using it, and add toolbars to it.

Unlock and move the taskbar

Once you unlock the taskbar, it's ready to move to any horizontal or vertical edge of the desktop.

To unlock the taskbar

Right-click an empty space on the taskbar. If Lock the Taskbar has a check mark next to it, the taskbar is locked. You can unlock it by clicking Lock the Taskbar, which removes the check mark.

To lock the taskbar back into place, right-click an empty space on the taskbar, and then click Lock the Taskbar so that the check mark appears.

To move the taskbar

Click an empty space on the taskbar, and then hold down the mouse button as you drag the taskbar to one of the four edges of the desktop. When the taskbar is where you want it, release the mouse button.

Add a toolbar to the taskbar

A toolbar is a row, column, or block of buttons or icons representing tasks you can do within a program. Some toolbars, such as the Quick Launch toolbar, can appear on the taskbar.

1. Right-click an empty area on the taskbar, and then point to Toolbars. A list of toolbars appears.
2. The toolbar names with check marks beside them are already on the taskbar. Click any item in the list to add or remove it.