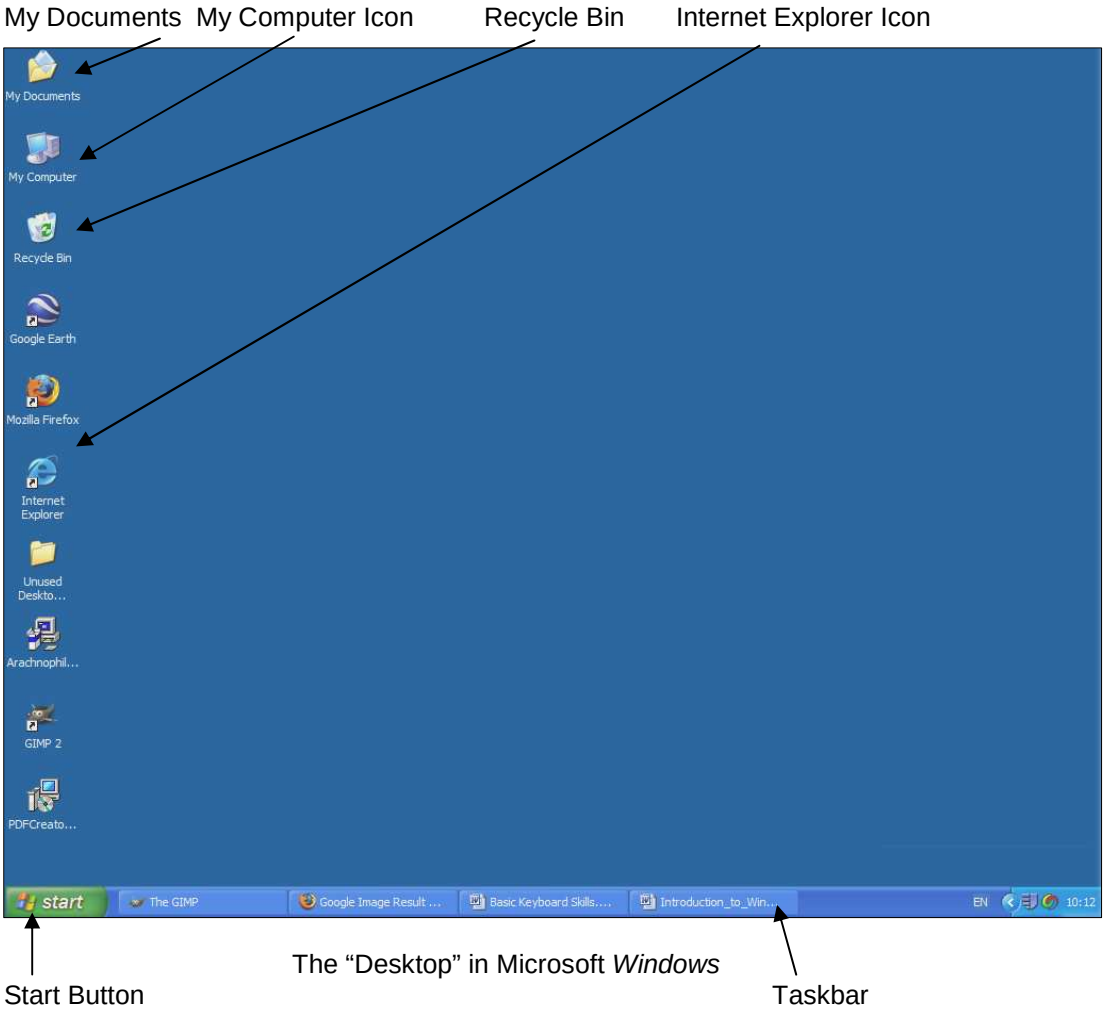
Introduction to *Windows*

Naturally, if you have downloaded this document, you will already be – to some extent anyway – familiar with Windows. If so you can skip the first couple of pages and move on to the other sections. Otherwise please read from the start: you'll find it helpful if you work through this document along with a computer.

Windows Operating System

Microsoft *Windows* is a **Graphical User Interface** (GUI). This is a screen that appears when you start a computer, containing all the choices available to you. You interact with the GUI using a **mouse** to move an on-screen **pointer**. You choose an option by clicking the left mouse button once, sometimes twice in quick succession (a **double-click**). You can also use the pointer to mark bits of text or graphics that you want to copy, move or delete, to draw diagrams or pictures, to move items on the screen, and carry out various tasks in different **applications** (i.e. programs).

Microsoft Windows is the GUI used by most IBM compatible PCs. It does not run on the Apple Macintosh, which has its own, quite similar, GUI. The version you are most likely to come across at the university is *Windows 2003*.



The "Desktop" in Microsoft *Windows*

Usually to begin with there are only a few icons on the desktop, which point to

programs. Clicking on these, or on the **Start** button (at the bottom of the screen, on the Taskbar), allows you to run programs. A button appears on the **Taskbar** each time a program is started or a window opened.

Some of the common icons (shown above) include:

Double clicking on this icon opens a window, displaying information about the structure of your computer. This will be discussed in more detail later.

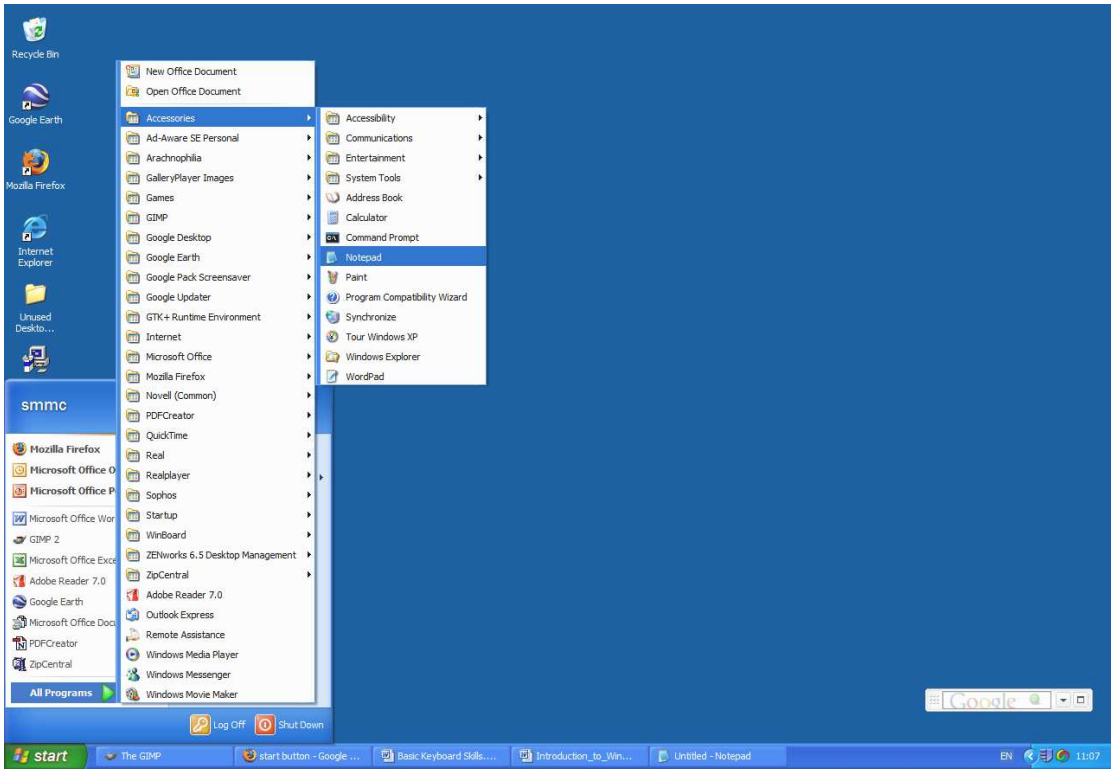
Internet Explorer is a web browsing program, which comes with the *Windows* operating system. A web browser is a program that allows you to find and view web pages on the internet.

As you delete files from the computer hard drive, to begin with they are put in a 'holding place' called the **Recycle Bin**. They are not actually removed from the computer until you have 'emptied' this Recycle Bin.

This button is very important as it is used to open up a **Start** menu, which has various options including running programs and shutting the computer down.

Starting Programs

To start programs click the **Start** button and point to **Programs**, and then to the particular application that you want. In this illustration the *Notepad* program, has been selected from the **Accessories** folder.



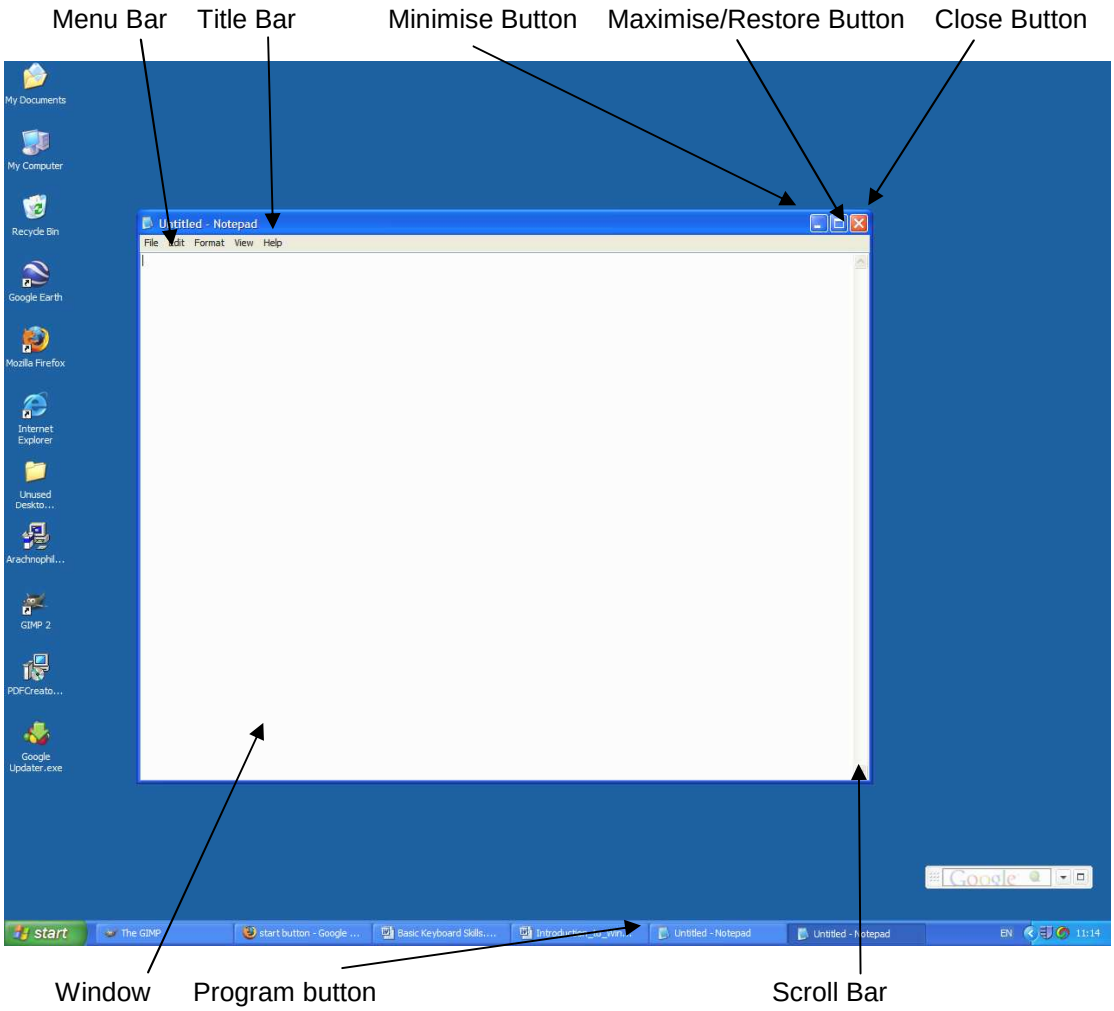
Starting the *Notepad* Program

Some of the **Start** menu items can be accessed directly but others, like *Notepad* are in folders containing groups of related programs.

Windows

When you start up a program, it appears on the desktop in a **Window**, and a button also appears on the taskbar representing that program. You can use these buttons to switch between programs by clicking on them with the mouse. When the program is closed, the button disappears.

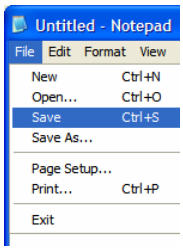
Every program window has a **title bar**, and a **menu bar**. The **title bar** identifies the contents of the window: it may be the name of a program running, or a file you are working on within a program (like a word processed document). If it is coloured, it shows that the window is **active**, i.e. that it is the one you are using right now. If it is grey, it shows that the window is inactive. You can also use the title bar to move windows on the screen. Put the pointer in the title bar, hold down the mouse button, and move the mouse, and the whole window will move.



At the right end of the title bar there are three buttons, a **minimise** button, a **maximise/restore** button and a **close** button. The minimise button will reduce the window to a button on the taskbar. To change this button back to a window, click on the taskbar button. The maximise/restore button switches between a maximise button,

which expands the window to fill the whole screen, and a restore button which returns the window to its original size. The **close** button closes the window, and quits the running program.

The **size of windows** can be changed. When you place the pointer over the border of the window, it will change shape to a double-headed arrow; then the window border can be moved, by dragging (i.e. holding the left mouse button down and moving the mouse).

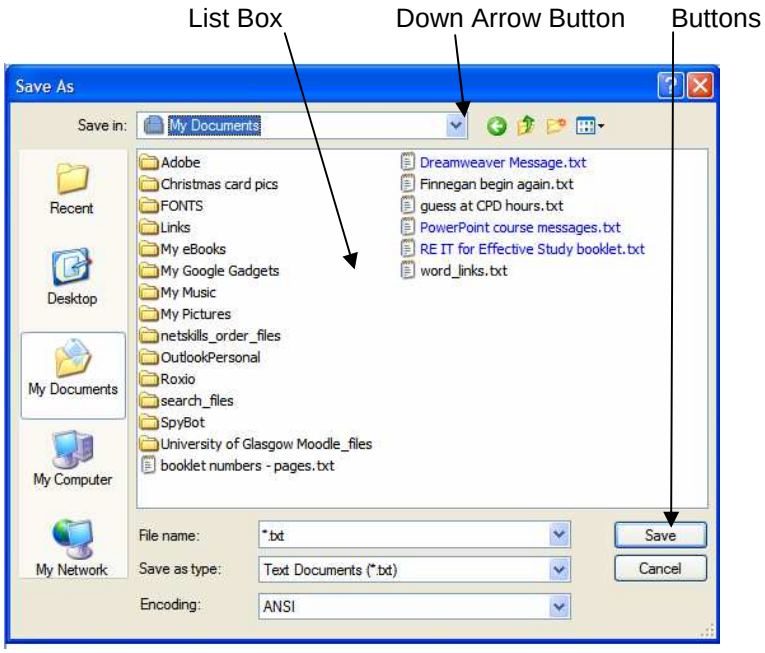


The **Menu Bar** shows the headings for menus that will appear if the heading is clicked. A typical menu (**File**) is shown here: its options include **Open**, **Save** and **Exit**.

If a window contains more information than can be displayed, a **scroll bar** will appear either at the side or bottom of the window, or both. The bar has arrow buttons at each end; clicking these will move the full contents of the window up and down or from side to side within the window, allowing all of it to be viewed. There is also a movable block on the scroll bar, which can be dragged to achieve the same end.

Dialog Boxes

Windows applications frequently have to ask the user for further information to complete an operation. Thus if you want to save a new file, you will be asked to supply a filename and to indicate the drive and directory where the file will be located. To make these requests, *Windows* applications use a **dialog box**.



The **Save As** dialog box in *MS Word 2003*

Dialog boxes contain **list boxes**, showing items, which can be selected by clicking on them. There are also **pull-down menus**, e.g. for selecting drives and file types, which are opened by clicking on the down arrow button. By default, in the **Save As** dialog box, the **My Documents** folder is selected for saving files but you can choose to save

in another location. *Note, however that on campus PCs, the **My Documents** folder is placed on your network drive, so you can access it whatever computer you use.*

The box requiring a file name can be filled by clicking on the list above, or by typing in from the keyboard. (Be careful when you wish to save a new file – with *MS Word*, the default name is taken from the initial text in the file and this can lead to very long filenames being allocated!) In this example, to leave the box when responses have been made, click the **Save** button. More often, it is the **OK** button that must be clicked.

Buttons with an ellipsis (...) following the name will take you to a further dialog box where more specific decisions can be made if necessary. Some dialog boxes can be quite complicated, with a variety of tabs, tick boxes, radio buttons, drop-down menus and other options. Some dialog boxes are very simple, the simplest consisting only of a message and an **OK** button.

Managing Files

There are two common ways of managing your files using *Windows*. The first way is to use *My Computer*, which you can access by clicking the *My Computer* icon on the Desktop. The second way is to use *Windows Explorer (*by right-clicking click the **Start** button with the **right mouse button** and then choosing **Explore**). These programs enable you to carry out many basic housekeeping operations with your files. You can create directories, move files, copy, rename or delete them, format discs, and many other essential operations. These tasks are described in more detail in the accompanying download, *File Management with Windows*.

Help Systems

Help about general usage of the computer and how to use the features of *Windows* is built into the computer, and it is available by clicking the **Start** button and choosing **Help and Support**.

Whilst using additional programs you will see that the headings on the menu bar in most *Windows* applications look similar. The heading on the extreme left is usually **File** and the one on the extreme right is usually **Help**. Most applications have a **Help system**, which you can access through the **Help** menu, and which explains in detail how to use the application. This is very useful when you have forgotten how to do something, or when you want to try something you have not done before. Some Help systems take you through the operations required stage by stage. Some include tutorial programs, which will help consolidate and revise skills you already have and take on board new elements. Most *Windows* help systems look similar, and work through a hypertext system where different pages of information are linked together.

Accessories

Windows offers a number of useful little programs that can be helpful. To see what is available, point to **Programs** on the **Start** menu, and choose **Accessories**. These include *Paint*, which is used to create pictures. Some of the others are:
Calculator: an on-screen calculator which you can use, if you have **Num Lock** on,

with the numeric keypad at the right of the keyboard. Or you can use the mouse.
Notepad: a basic text-editing package.
WordPad: a simple word processing package.

Switching between Applications

When you are using *Windows*, you can have a number of applications open at the same time, and switch between them very rapidly. There are three simple ways of doing this:

a. Click the button on the taskbar will bring that window to the front.

b. If application windows are overlapping on screen, all you need to do is click on the visible portion of the inactive window you want. This will bring its window to the front, and it will become the **active window** – the title bar will change colour to indicate this.

c. Hold down the **Alt** key and tap **Tab** to circulate through *program icons* of open applications. To stop at the one you want, release the **Alt** key.

Getting a Screen Dump

Sometimes you may want to **capture** an image from the *Windows* screen, i.e. save it as a graphic image, which can be inserted into other documents. You capture the image (known as a **screen dump**), by pressing the **Print Screen** key. The image will be stored in the clipboard, a special area of memory where material, which is copied or cut, is stored. It can then be pasted into another application. If you want to edit a screen dump, paste it into *Paint* or another graphics application. You can then make changes to it, and save it as a file which can be inserted into a word processed document or other file.

Copying between Windows Applications

It is often possible to copy data between *Windows* applications. Any major application will be designed so that this is possible. Data can be copied using two techniques:

Copy-and-paste. Copy from the first application by highlighting the data and selecting **Copy** from the **Edit** menu. Then switch to the second application, using one of the methods described above. Position the cursor where you want the data to be inserted, and choose **Paste** from the **Edit** menu. Alternatively, you can hold down the **Ctrl + C** keys for copying and **Ctrl + V** for pasting.

Inserting a file. Most applications have a menu option to **insert** or **import** a file.

Finally

This is only a brief introduction to *Windows*. Get as much practice as you can, as that's the best way to consolidate what you've learned. As mentioned earlier there is help available from the **Start** Menu, which often takes you through tasks on a step-by-step basis. Versions of software are always being changed as the capabilities of computers are constantly improving. However you will not find it difficult to use new versions of *Window*s if you are familiar with the topics covered here, as most of the functions will be the same or very similar.