

Table of Contents

<i>Introduction</i>	1
About This Book	1
And Just Who Are You?	2
Icons Used in This Book	2
Where to Go from Here	2
<i>Part 1: Understanding the Whole Ordeal</i>	3
Chapter 1: Buying a Computer (Step-by-Step)	5
The Five Steps to Buying a Computer	6
Step 1: Figure out what you want to do with your computer	7
Step 2: Look for software	8
Step 3: Find hardware	10
Step 4: Shop for service and support	11
Step 5: Buy your computer	13
Don't Sit Around Waiting to Buy!	13
Chapter 2: Basic Training	15
Basic Parts	16
Console	16
Monitor	17
Keyboard	18
Beyond the Basic Parts	18
Mouse	18
Speakers	19
Modem	20
Printer	20
Scanner	21
Network options	22
Peripherals and other expansion options	22
Chapter 3: Computers from A to Z	23
What Is a Computer?	23
The traditional desktop computer	24
The Macintosh option	25
Laptops for every kind of lap	28
Palmtop computers	30
Gaming consoles	30
Workstations and servers	31
Mainframes	33
"How Much Will This Cost?"	33

Chapter 4: Introduction to Hardware and Software 35

Hardware: The Hard Stuff	35
The microprocessor (the main piece of hardware)	36
Basic hardware	37
Software, the Other Hard Stuff	38
The operating system	38
Applications and other programs	39
Putting It All Together	40

Part II: Hardware and Software Overview 41**Chapter 5: All about Mr. Microprocessor 43**

The Microprocessor Rules	43
The name game	43
Families, names, and flavors	44
The measure of power	46
Zooooom! (Microprocessor speed)	46
Some Microprocessor Q&A	47
“What does ‘[blank] or greater’ mean when talking about a microprocessor?”	47
“Are all Pentium processors the same?”	48
“Should I buy an upgradable microprocessor option?”	48
“What’s the cache?”	49
“Is the Celeron a good Pentium compatible?”	49
“Should I buy a non-Intel CPU if it saves me money?”	49
“What is Socket 7?”	50
“What’s the ‘heat sink’?”	50
“What is ‘hyperthreading’?”	50
“Do computers with dual processors run faster than computers with single processors?”	50

Chapter 6: Memory Stuff (Temporary Storage) 53

Say Hello to Mr. Byte	53
Memory Madness	55
Behold the chip!	55
The size of the thing (capacity)	56
Fast memory and faster memory	56
Goodbye, Mr. Chips!	57
Some technical memory terms	58
Main Memory versus Video Memory	60
Banks o’ Memory (RAM)	61
How Much Memory Do You Need?	62

Chapter 7: Disks of Every Type (Permanent Storage)	63
Why Disk Storage?	63
What is a disk, and what is a drive?	64
Types of drives	65
Capacity	66
Hard drive speed	67
CD-ROM drive speed	68
Cache or buffer memory	69
Fixed or removable?	69
The mystical drive controller	70
Disk Driving Your Computer System	71
Picking a hard drive	72
Your shiny, removable storage	73
Gotta have a floppy drive too	74
The Zip disk alternative	75
Chapter 8: Monitor and Graphics Stuff	77
The Graphical System	77
The Monitor Part	78
CRT or LCD?	79
Judge me by my size, will you?	81
I'll take two, please	82
The Graphics Adapter Part	83
Video RAM	84
The 3-D thing	84
How it plugs in	85
Read them labels!	86
Chapter 9: Keyboard, Mouse, and Joystick	87
Keyboards	88
Mice and Other Nonfurry Pointing Devices	89
Joysticks and Game Controllers	91
Chapter 10: Expansion Options	93
Connecting Stuff by Using Ports	93
The USB port	94
The Firewire port	95
The printer port	95
The serial port	96
Mouse and keyboard ports	97
The joystick/MIDI port	97
A Full House of Cards	98
Why you may need expansion slots	98
Types of expansion slots	99



Chapter 11: Modems, Networking, and Sound 101

Say Hello to Mr. Modem	101
Modems are measured by their speed	102
Your typical, everyday dial-up modem	103
Faster modems: Cable, DSL, satellite	104
Networking Computers	105
Networking hardware to get with the computer	105
Networking hardware to buy after the purchase	106
Sound Off!	107
The bleeping circuitry	107
Tweeting and woofing	108
Adding a microphone	109

Chapter 12: Special Issues for Notebook and Laptop Computers 111

Laptop Considerations	112
Special (expensive) microprocessors	113
Disk drives	113
A battery of issues	114
The skinny on laptop weight	115
The anti-mouse	115
Laptop communications	116
Security issues	116
Laptop Expansion Options	116
“I’ve seen these ports before!”	117
The PCMCIA port	117

Chapter 13: Your Computer’s Operating System 119

Understanding Operating Systems	120
Working with you	120
Controlling the software	121
Controlling the hardware	122
Operating System Survey	123
Windows XP, Home, and Professional	123
Mac OS	124
Linux	125
Palm OS	127
The antique, the immortal, and the dead	127

Chapter 14: Everything You Wanted to Know about Software (But Were Afraid to Ask) 129

Doing the Internet	130
Browsing the Web	130
Getting your e-mail	130
Productivity Software	131
Word processing	131
Databases	132

Home-budgeting software	132
Spreadsheets	133
Graphics	135
Recreation and Education	136
Games	136
Education	136
Utility Programs	137
Programming	138
Software for Nothing and Almost Free	138
Public domain software	139
Freeware or open source	139
Shareware	139
Demo software	140
Beware of illegal or pirated software	140

Part III: Finding Your Perfect Computer 141

Chapter 15: Shopping for Software 143

How to Buy Software	143
Taking a test drive	144
Other sources for test-driving	145
How Helpful Is the Software?	146
Types of help you find in software	146
Don't forget support!	147
After You Find What You Want.	148
Stuff you find on the software box	149
Filling in the form: Example 1	150
Filling in the form: Example 2	151
At last: The software worksheet	154

Chapter 16: Matching Hardware to Your Software 157

The Hardware Worksheet	157
Filling in the worksheet (step-by-step)	159
Choose an operating system	159
Pick a microprocessor	159
Calculate your memory needs	160
Calculate your hard drive storage	161
More storage decisions	162
Other hardware stuff	163
A Sample for You to Review	164

Chapter 17: Surveying the Shopping Landscape 167

Reading a Computer Ad	167
Finding computer advertisements	168
Dissecting an ad	168

Recognizing common tricks used to make an advertised price look really cheap	170
The myth of the free (or almost free) computer	171
Some Q&A Before You Rush Out to Buy	171
“Should I get a quote?”	171
“Can I haggle?”	172
“Should I get a discount off the manufacturer’s suggested retail price?”	172
“Isn’t there any way to get a deal on a computer?”	172
“Is it better to buy from a noncommissioned salesperson?”	173
“What about buying a used computer?”	173
“What about refurbished stuff?”	173
“You didn’t say anything about the swap meet”	174
Where to Buy	174
Your locally owned and operated computer store	175
National chains	175
The megastore	176
Mail-order brand names	177
Mail-order pieces’ parts	177

Chapter 18: Tips for Online Shopping 179

Buying on the World Wide Web	179
Finding a place to buy	180
Placing your order	181
Comparison shopping	183
Sleazy tricks used by online retailers	183
Tracking Your Order	184

Chapter 19: Searching for Service and Support 185

How to Find Service and Support	185
Service Questions	186
“How long is your warranty?”	186
“Do you fix the computers at your shop?”	186
“Can you fix my computer at my home or office?”	187
Support Questions	187
“Can I phone someone to ask questions?”	188
“Do you offer classes?”	188
Support Issues for Buying on the Internet	189

Chapter 20: Buying the Computer 191

A Review of the Five Steps	191
What to Spend “Extra” Money On	192
When Do I Get My Computer?	193

Don't Ever Put a Deposit on a Computer!	194
Hey, Bud! You're Ready to Buy	194
A few last-minute buying tips	195
The final step is to	195

Chapter 21: Helpful Hints for Computer Setup 197

Check the Shipment	198
Setting Up the Computer	198
Open the boxes	198
“What can I toss out?”	200
“Should I keep the boxes?”	200
Putting It Together	201
Where will Mr. Computer live?	201
Preparing to plug things in	202
Setting up the console	202
Attaching the mouse and keyboard	203
Attaching other devices	203
Setting up the monitor	203
Plugging in other stuff	204
Finishing up	205
Turning the Thing On	205
What to turn on first?	205
Turning it off	206
Breaking It In: The Burn-In Test	206
What's Next?	206
Dealing with software	207
Dealing with other hardware	207
Understanding Your System	208

Part IV: Living with Your Computer 209

Chapter 22: Time to Get a Printer 211

Different Printers for Different Printing	211
Printer speed	212
The print quality	212
How much?	213
Laser Printers Go “Fwoom Pkt Shhh!”	214
Ink Printers Go “Thwip, Sft-Sft-Sft, Clunk!”	214
Buying the Printer	215
What does your software say?	216
Printer shopping	216
Printers do not come with cables!	216
Printers don't come with paper, either!	217
Buy some extra ink	217
Setting Up the Printer	218
Printer pieces' parts	218
Connecting the printer cables	219
Telling your computer about the printer	219

Chapter 23: Moving to Your New Computer 221

Moving Over Hardware	221
Antiques: Don't bother	222
Monitors	222
Disk drives	222
Memory	223
Expansion cards	223
Printers	224
Modems	224
Other peripherals	224
Transferring Your Software	225
Reinstalling applications	225
Moving over data	226
Eliminating the preinstalled bonus crap	227

Part V: The Part of Tens 229**Chapter 24: When to Buy, When to Sell,
When to Upgrade 231**

Unlike Wine and Cheese, Computers Don't Age Well	231
Should You Upgrade?	232
Which hardware to upgrade first	232
My \$.02 on upgrading your microprocessor	233
Upgrading software	234
Upgrading your operating system	234
Should You Sell Your Beloved Computer?	235
Buying a Used Computer	236

**Chapter 25: Ten Common Mistakes Made
By First-Time Computer Buyers 237**

Buying Hardware before Software	237
Dropping Brand Names	238
Shopping for the Cheapest Computer System	238
Being Unprepared for the Sale	238
Forgetting Some Extra Items	238
Not Paying by Credit Card	239
Not Reading the Setup Manuals	239
Forgetting That Software Is Expensive	239
Buying Too Much	239
Not Counting Learning Time	240

Chapter 26: Ten Warning Signs 241

Industry "Standards" versus the Ads	241
Out-of-Date Stock	242
Money Down Required	242

Missing Pieces	243
No Address in the Mail-Order Ad	243
Salespeople Too Busy to Help	243
Salespeople in the Store Ignore You	243
No Classroom	244
No Software Documentation	244

Chapter 27: Ten Other Things You Should Buy 245

Mousepad and Wristpad	245
Power Strip	246
Surge Protector	247
UPS	247
Printer Cable	248
Printer Paper	248
More Inky Stuff	248
Removable Disks	249
CD Caddy	249
A Roll of Paper Towels	250

Chapter 28: Ten Tips and Suggestions 251

Your Computer Has a Clock	251
Get a Second Phone Line	252
After a While, Reread the Manuals	252
Put a Timer on That Internet	253
Get Antivirus Software	253
Subscribe to a Computer Magazine	253
Join a Computer Users' Group	253
Buy a Great Book	254
Remember That You Are in Charge	254
Don't Let the Computer Run Your Life	254

<i>Index</i>	<i>255</i>
---------------------------	-------------------