FEB 12, 2018 1:53 PM PT | **Preston Gralla**

The new Start menu

Windows 10 is the best operating system that's come along from Microsoft in a long time. It's a shape-shifter that changes its interface depending upon whether you're using a traditional computer or a touch-based one. It undoes the damage wrought by Windows 8, including eliminating the awkward Charms bar and bringing back the long-mourned Start menu. A lot more has changed as well, with a new default browser called Edge, the integration of the Cortana digital assistant, links to Microsoft's cloud-based OneDrive cloud storage service and plenty more.

Share this story: IT pros, we hope you'll pass this guide on to your users to show them the Windows 10 ropes. Also see our [printable PDF of Windows 10 gestures and shortcuts](#).

Whether you've upgraded to Windows 10 from Windows 8 or an earlier version of Windows, or if you've got it on a new PC, this cheat sheet will get you up to speed on it. I'll cover everything you need to know, and I've also provided quick-reference charts listing useful keyboard shortcuts, touchscreen gestures and touchpad gestures.

Keep in mind that there have been four major updates to Windows 10 since its initial release in July 2015. This story is based on the [Windows 10 Fall Creators Update](#), released in October 2017, so the features that are described here and the screenshots you see may differ from what you see on-screen if you have an older version of Windows 10.

[Further reading: [Top 30 free apps for Windows 10](#)]

Note: If you want to get the most out of Windows 10, you'll have to use a Microsoft ID as your user account. Without a Microsoft ID, you won't be

able to use a number of Windows 10 apps or sync settings among multiple devices. So when you set up Windows 10 for the first time, sign in with an existing Microsoft ID or create a new one.

Before we get started, a few words about some terminology you'll need to know. Microsoft has sowed enormous confusion with a set of lightweight apps that were originally designed for the Windows 8 touch-oriented Start screen interface. It first called them Metro apps, and then through the years changed their names to Modern apps, Windows Store apps, and then Universal Windows apps. Now it's settled simply on Windows apps, although at times the company also calls them Universal Windows apps, to get across the point that they will run on all versions of Windows 10, including for mobile phones. In this article, we'll refer to them as Windows apps.

What about apps designed for the desktop? Microsoft now calls them Windows desktop applications. In this article we'll call them desktop applications, for simplicity's sake.

The loudest complaint that desktop users had about Windows 8 was the death of the Start menu. In Windows 10 it's back with a vengeance. When you use Windows 10 on a desktop or laptop, you boot directly into the desktop. Click the Start button at the lower left of the desktop to bring up the Start menu — command central for traditional PC users. (Those who use Windows 10 on a tablet will instead see a Start screen; [more on that later](#).)
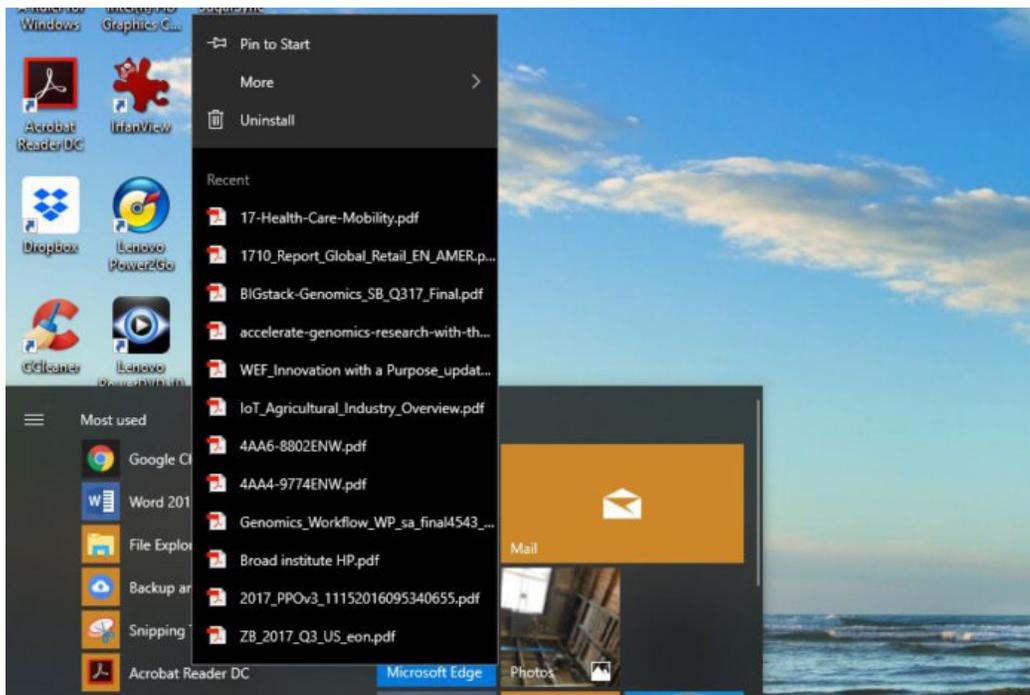
Preston Gralla / IDG

The Start menu is command central for Windows 10. (Click image to enlarge it.)

The menu is divided into two sections. Down its left side you'll find the following:

All Apps: Up at the top left of the screen is a "hamburger menu" (three parallel horizontal lines) that when clicked is a toggle for turning on or off a list of all Windows apps and desktop applications, in alphabetical order. (By default, the list is turned on.) Click any to run it.

At the very top of the All Apps list is a list of the apps and applications you use most frequently. Right-click any and you'll see a list of the files you've recently opened in it. Click the file to open the application or app, with the file loaded into it.

In some instances you'll see a folder with a down arrow next to it rather than an icon — that means there are several options there, for example, to run the Dropbox app or visit the Dropbox website. Click the folder to show all the options, then click the option you want to run. (Also note that in some instances, there will be a folder, but when you click it, you only get one option, to run the app or application.)

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The jump list for Acrobat Reader shows the PDFs you've recently opened. (Click image to enlarge it.)

Account: Down toward the bottom left of the screen is a set of stacked icons, starting with an icon for your user account. Click it to sign out of Windows, lock your PC or change your account settings. When you choose to change your account settings, you'll be sent to a screen that lets you change your account picture, your password, and a variety of other settings.

File Explorer, Settings, Power: These icons at the bottom left of the Start menu are no mystery: File Explorer launches the file-browsing app once called Windows Explorer; Settings brings you to the Windows Settings app (more on that later); and Power lets you put your PC to sleep, shut it down or restart it. Click any icon to run it.

The right side of the Start menu has tiles for Windows apps and desktop applications. They're grouped into two Microsoft-created categories — **Life at a glance** and **Play and explore** — and then, if you have more apps than fit in those two, they're grouped into unnamed categories below that. New tiles will be added to the unnamed groups as you install new apps and desktop applications. (Note that if you're using an enterprise edition of Windows 10, your IT department may have configured other groupings,

such as productivity applications or support tools, to appear on the right side of the Start menu.) Click any tile to run the app associated with it.

Some tiles are "live" — that is, real-time information gets piped into them. So the Mail tile, for example, shows your latest email, the Weather shows the weather and so on. Only Windows apps have live tiles. Desktop applications, such as Microsoft Office, don't. Each group of tiles is three columns wide, with most tiles taking up one column by default.

As shown in the video at the top of the page, the Start menu is highly customizable. To change its height, hover your cursor over its top edge until a two-headed arrow appears, then drag it up or down to expand or shrink it. On some Windows 10 installations you can do the same thing at the right edge of the menu to expand it to the right or shrink it back again, although this doesn't work for everybody.

To rename a group of tiles, click the group name and type in a new name for it. You can also move tiles around the Start menu by dragging them from one group to another, or, to create a new group, drag tiles to a blank area on the menu. You can name any unnamed group by clicking on the blank area above it and typing in a name.

You can also widen the groups in the Start menu so that tiles take up four columns rather than three. To do it, from the Start menu select Settings > Personalization > Start and in the "Show more tiles" setting, move the slider to On. The tiles will now take up four columns, but to take advantage of the extra space you'll have to manually drag tiles to the fourth column. You can personalize many other aspects of the Start menu from this Settings page, including whether to show your most used apps, have the Start screen run full screen and more.

When you right-click a tile, a menu pops up. Here's where things get a bit confusing, because not every Windows app and desktop application has the same pop-up menu, and depending on your installation you might have to click "More" to see some of these options. Most have some combination of these choices:

Unpin from Start: Select this and the tile vanishes from the Start menu.

Resize: As you would expect, this lets you resize the tile. You can choose Small, Medium or Large, and some tiles also have a Wide choice that makes it span two columns in its group.

Turn live tile off: This stops real-time information from streaming into the tile. If it's already off, you'll get a **Turn live tile on** choice.

Pin to taskbar: As it says, this pins the app to the taskbar. If it's already pinned, you'll get an **Unpin from taskbar** choice.

Uninstall: This uninstalls the app. Some Windows apps created by Microsoft, such as Weather and Mail, can't be uninstalled.

Rate and review: This option is available only for apps downloaded from the Microsoft Store. It brings you to a page that lets you rate the app on a one-to-five-star basis and write a review. The rating and review appear in the app's description in the Microsoft Store.

Share: This lets you share a link to the app using a variety of methods, including email, Twitter and others.

Run as an administrator: This lets you run the app or application as an administrator.

Open file location: Opens File Explorer to the folder where the application lives.

Some Windows apps have other choices as well, depending on their purposes. For example, right-click the This PC app and you get choices such as mapping or unmapping a network drive.

You can also right-click the icons for the "Most used" apps on the left side of the menu as well as the File Explorer, Settings and Power icons underneath them. (If you right-click All Apps, no menu appears.) Windows apps and desktop applications on the "Most used" app menu typically have similar choices to those already outlined (with some hidden under the "More" submenu). In addition, you might find these additional options:

Pin to Start: This moves the app from the "Most used" list to the right side of the Start menu.

Run as a different user: This lets you run the app as someone other than the person currently logged in.

Don't show in this list: Takes the app off the "Most used" list.

Cortana

Windows 10 introduces Microsoft's Siri-like digital assistant Cortana to computers. (It was first introduced on Windows Phones in 2014.) Cortana is a kind of a Jane-of-all-Trades and does everything from searching your computer and the internet for files and information to keeping track of your schedule, alerting you to upcoming events, tracking news and more.

> [Related: Cortana explained: How to use Microsoft's virtual assistant for business]

Cortana is automatically turned on when you start Windows 10 and has no on/off switch. (Before the Windows 10 Anniversary Update was released in August 2016, there was a switch that let you turn it on and off, available from Cortana's settings. Now turning Cortana off requires a registry hack.)

Whenever you have a question you want Cortana to answer or an action you want it to take, type it into the search box in the lower left of your screen, just to the right of the Start button. If you also want Cortana to respond to voice commands, not just typed text, you need to make sure that switch is turned on. To do it, click in the search box, then click the Settings icon (it's a gear) toward the lower left of the screen that appears. You'll be sent to Cortana's settings page. Click "Talk to Cortana" on the left side of the screen, and then in the "Hey Cortana" section, move the switch to On in the "Let Cortana respond to Hey Cortana" section. From now on, you can say, "Hey Cortana" and tell it what you want to do, or else put your cursor in the search box and type in your request.

The most basic thing you'll probably do is search. Cortana uses the Bing search engine to look through your files, your Microsoft OneDrive cloud storage, your videos and music, the apps on your PC, your settings, your

email and the web. When you do a search, by default three icons appear at
the top of the results: the leftmost one shows any app-related matches, the
middle shows documents that match the search, and the one on the right
shows web-related matches. When you do a search and click the web icon,
you'll then need to click a right-facing arrow next to the search in order to
see the results, which will be displayed in a flyout panel that appears on the
right side of the screen. The panel is essentially a mini-browser with the
same information that you'd get if you did a search from inside your
browser, including photos, links and so on.
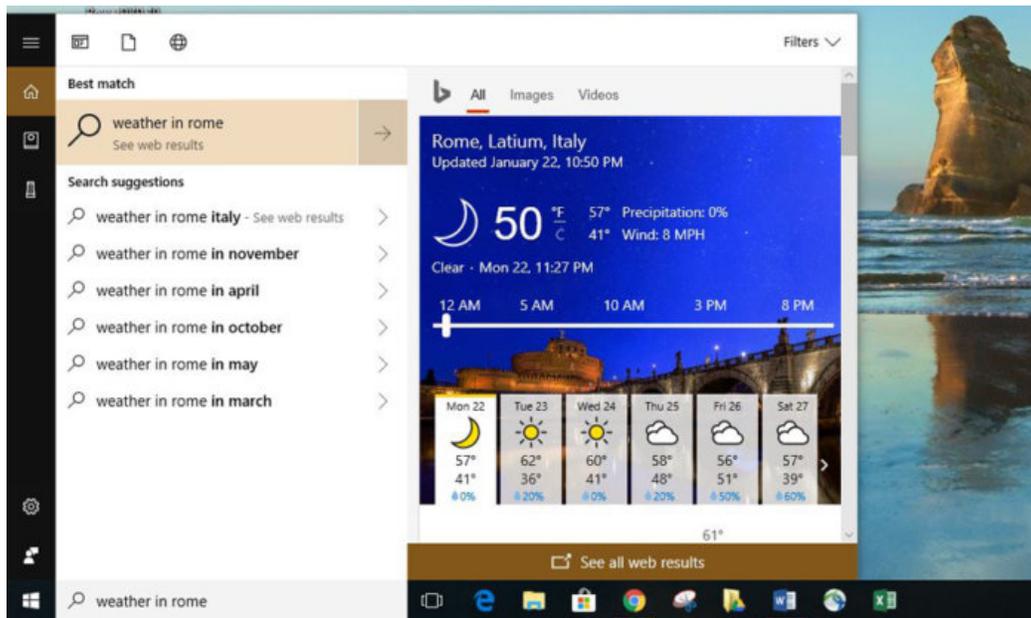
Preston Gralla / IDG

Cortana shows many results in a flyout mini-browser. (Click
image to enlarge it.)

One thing about Cortana is a bit confusing. Even though it searches through
many locations as I described previously, it doesn't show all those results
unless you tell it to. So, for example, it won't show you the results of
searching through photos on your PC unless you add a filter telling it to. To
add filters, after you've done a search, click the Filters drop-down on the
top right of the screen. You'll see a long list of types of content, including
emails, music, people, photos, videos and others. Click any content you
want Cortana to display when you do searches. The next time you do a
search, a new icon — for example, photos — will be added to the original
three at the top of the screen. To see Cortana's search results of photos on
your PC, click the icon after you do a search.
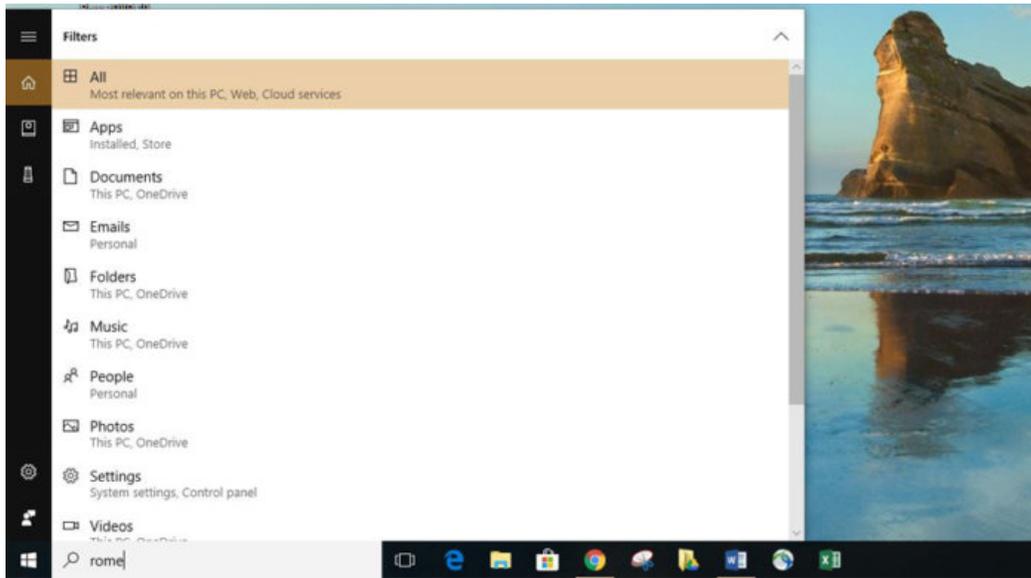
Preston Gralla / IDG

Cortana lets you apply filters to fine-tune your search results. (Click image to enlarge it.)

To make things even more confusing, sometimes Cortana shows results in a scrollable list just above the search box, categorized by content such as Documents, Folders, Photos and so on so that you don't need to click a filter icon to see results. Other times it doesn't do that, and above the search box instead it shows a list of suggested searches. In these cases, you only see results when you click a filter icon.

There seems to be no rhyme or reason when Cortana does one or the other. I searched for "Italy," for example, and saw a scrollable, categorized list, including thumbnails of photos and images on my PC. I searched for "Photos of Italy," and the categorized list didn't appear. So just be patient with Cortana, accept its shortcomings when doing searches, and use filters when you need them.

Getting the most out of Cortana starts with learning how to control it better. To do that, click in the search box and use the menu that appears on the left side of the screen, five icons that appear underneath the "hamburger" menu of three stacked horizontal lines. The five icons are divided into two sections, three at the top just underneath the hamburger menu, and at two the bottom, just above the Start button.

The top icon, Home, navigates you to Cortana's main interface — what you see if you put your cursor in the search box. Beneath that is the Notebook

icon. Here you can enter your home, work and other favorite locations; set preferences such as whether you want to get recommendations about places to eat or events to attend; change the name Cortana uses for you; and so on. The more information you enter, the more helpful Cortana becomes, because it knows more about you and your interests. Below the Notebook icon is one that looks like a speaker. If you have a speaker that incorporates Cortana, click here to set it up.

Down toward the bottom of the screen is the Settings icon, which we used above to ensure that voice activation was turned on, and beneath that is a Feedback icon that lets you provide feedback about Cortana.

It's worth going through all these settings, because part of Cortana's usefulness is not just answering your questions — it's sending you news, weather and alerts. After you customize the settings, when you click the Search box or say "Hey Cortana," it can show you the current weather, news you're interested in, daily events from your calendar and more, depending on what you've told it about your interests.

Cortana is tied to your Microsoft ID, so it has the same information about you on all the Windows devices you use, including smartphones. The more you use it on all your devices, the more it learns about you, and the more useful it'll be. But that means that Microsoft knows more about you as well. So when deciding what to tell it about yourself, you'll need to find the right balance between Cortana's usefulness and your privacy.

You can also tweak how Cortana appears on-screen. Right-click any empty portion of the taskbar and choose Cortana from the menu that appears. Select "Hidden" to hide the search box, "Show Cortana icon" to show an icon instead of a search box, or "Show search box" to show the search box. If you choose to show the icon, when you click it, the search box and the Cortana window both appear.
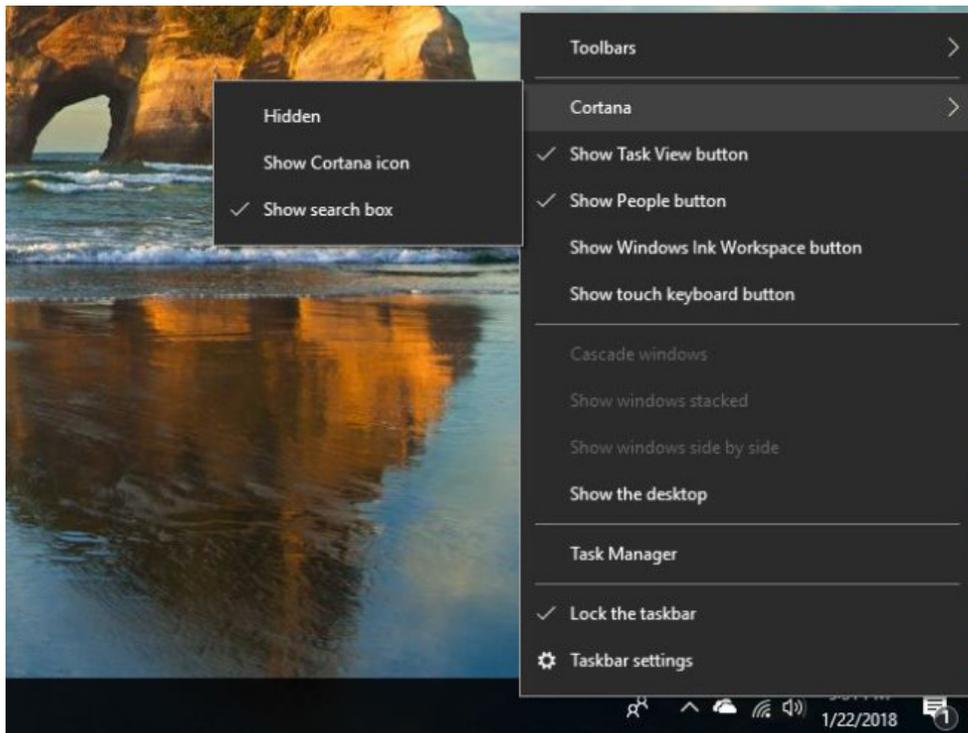
Microsoft

Customizing how Cortana appears in Windows 10. (Click image to enlarge it.)

The Windows 10 Fall Creators Update introduced a few new Cortana features, including using it to lock Windows, sign you out and shut down or turn off your PC. Say things such as, "Hey, Cortana, lock PC," and it will do your bidding. You can also do all this from the lock screen, without having to log into Windows. And you can do more with Cortana from the lock screen as well, including making notes to yourself and creating reminders.

The update also built more intelligence into Cortana. You can, for example, snap a picture of a poster for an event, and Cortana will detect the dates on it and ask if you want to create a reminder to attend it. There's no documentation for this kind of thing, and behind the scenes Microsoft is continually making Cortana smarter. So your best bet is to experiment and see what new tricks it has up its sleeve.

Windows apps

In Windows 8, Windows apps and the desktop didn't get along. Windows apps could only be run from the Start screen, not from the desktop. What's more, they didn't appear in traditional application windows; you could only run them full-screen or side by side with another Windows app (but not a

desktop application) so the two apps filled the full screen. That meant you couldn't have multiple Windows apps running in separate windows on the desktop alongside desktop applications. It was just one more way in which Windows 8 felt like two separate operating systems.

That's no longer the case in Windows 10. You can resize, minimize and close Windows apps in the same familiar way as desktop applications. Drag the edges of a Windows app to resize it. Use the familiar icons on the upper right of the app window for minimizing, maximizing and closing the app.
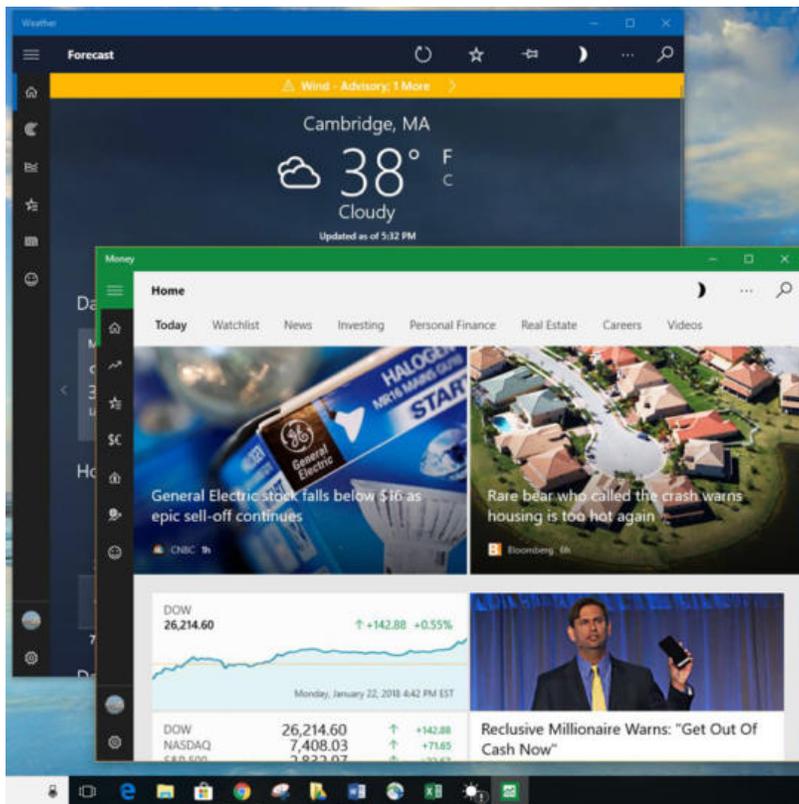
Preston Gralla / IDG

In Windows 10, Windows apps can be resized, minimized and closed in the same way as desktop apps. (Click image to enlarge it.)

Windows apps also get a better way to access all of their features. On the left side or bottom of the app window you'll typically see a series of icons for the different features in the app. The icons change depending on the app. For example, the Weather app has icons for news, maps, historical weather in your location and so on. And the Money app has icons for markets, currencies, a mortgage calculator, and a watchlist where you can track specific stocks, funds or indexes.

Most of the apps show useful information by default, but it's worth investigating the customization options for each app. To customize the News app so it shows exactly the kind of news you're interested in, for instance, click the icon that looks like a star with a row of lines next to it — it's just below the home icon. Once you do that, you'll be able to tell the app your news preferences — Top Stories, US, World, Crime, Technology, Entertainment and so on.

You can set up the Mail app not only to work with Microsoft's web-based mail service (currently called Outlook.com), but also with other web-based services, including Gmail. To add an account after you launch Mail, click Add Account, select the kind of mail account you want to add (Outlook.com, Google, Exchange, Yahoo, Outlook.com, POP and IMAP mail, and so on) and follow the prompts. For web-based accounts, it's straightforward. For POP and IMAP accounts, you'll need your account information ready, including POP and SMTP server names and passwords. You can also combine mail from multiple accounts into a single, unified inbox. To do it, click Accounts, and from the screen that appears, click "Link inboxes" and combine the accounts you'd like.

The Calendar app will connect to your mail accounts automatically and display their calendars. For example, if you set up both an Outlook.com account and a Gmail account in Mail, the calendars associated with them automatically appear in the Calendar app.

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